



Village Bicycle Project

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2007 YEAR IN REVIEW

VBP: STILL GROWING! QUALITY TRUMPS QUANTITY

While 2007 saw the project continuing to grow, we've focused a lot of attention this year on the results. With almost 4000 Ghanaians trained in repair and outfitted with bikes over the last eight years, we need to find out if our bikes are really helping people over the long term as we've hoped. Are the bikes still being ridden? Are spare parts available? Are people using what we tried to teach them?

The answers have been encouraging. We started and ended 2007 with women's workshops in remote areas of the far north. Present at both ends of the year, VBP Director Dave Peckham was surprised by how difficult and seemingly incomprehensible gears were to the rural women. So after the December programs, he went back to one of the villages served by our January classes to interview women about their bikes. Eight out of nine bikes visited still had operational gears, and the gears were being used!

In August and September, Women Programs Coordinator Liz Bageant and Women's Trainer Gloria Adoboe did some follow-up research in remote villages in the central Volta Region where VBP did programs in 2002 and 2003. The general picture is that some people benefit immensely from their bikes, depend on them, repair them themselves and more than half the bikes are in good condition even four or more years after the workshops. Meanwhile, other bikes are broken down with flat tires, damaged components or other minor problems and their owners don't seem too concerned with getting them running again. This highlights the consistent challenge we face to include people who will appreciate and benefit most from a bicycle and weed out those who will not.

One of the most striking discoveries has been a perceived shortage of key replacement parts for many of our bicycles. Many owners and village repairers claimed parts were not available, yet Liz and Gloria were able to find them in the main town, Hohoe. This confirms something Dave has suspected for some time, a surprising weakness in networking. "This suggests that we might actually accomplish more by helping connect Ghanaians than by doing the heavy lifting of bringing in yet more goods," he said.

Our follow-up work in 2008 will incorporate spare parts research, network building between local repairers and the urban center parts suppliers, as well as repair training and tools for those who want to keep up their bikes!

GROWING BICYCLES

Renowned bicycle frame builder Craig Calfee has teamed up with VBP to introduce a bamboo-framed bike capable of hauling over 400 lbs. of cargo. Calfee built a prototype in Ghana in July 2007 with VBP's Ghana Program Co-manager George Aidoo, and is returning to Ghana in February to work with our networks to build several more bamboo bikes in villages where VBP already has programs.

We are particularly excited about the bamboo bike because there is an important need for cargo bikes, and if bamboo can do it, all the better for local production! Bamboo frames are held together with local twine and imported epoxy, using regular metal components, including fork, handlebar, and wheels; except the rear wheel is radially reinforced with bamboo! More details, including photos, at Calfeedesign.com.



Ayi-Engiba got her bike in January and both she and her husband quickly learned to ride. Domestic unrest ensued as they quarreled over who would ride her bike to the farm, 13 km away! Tranquility returned to the household in December, when he got his bike. Her gears are working fine, and he removed the large front basket from this British Mail bike, as it is not harvest time, and he wants a rear carrier for balance when he does carry a load.

"This workshop and the service provided by the Village Bicycle Project is one of the most successful self-help programs I have encountered in Ghana", reports Peace Corps Volunteer Linda Atwater after hosting workshops in Tongo, near Bolgatanga.

TOOLS-KNOWING WHEN TO STOP

How does a development non-profit engaged in import and sales measure success? Not in the usual way we think of, by capturing markets and maximizing profits. When it comes to VBP's tool sales program, success is when we have competition.

Tools have always been one of our three key programs, along with bikes and education. Since 2000 we've brought more than 12,000 tools that few African bike mechanics had ever been seen before. These tools greatly simplify their work, no longer requiring them to pound parts off with hammer and chisel. The tools have built their confidence and self-esteem. Numerous mechanics have said, "my tools are my work, my tools are my life." Better tools mean better repairs, and Ghana's bikes are rolling around in better condition than before.

In recent years most of our tools have been wholesaled to 'big' distributors, several hundred dollars worth at a time, subsidized at about 80% of cost.

As Ghana's only provider of freewheel removers, chain tools, and crank pullers, VBP has been erratic with deliveries, so shortages are common. As a result, prices to the end user have sometimes more than doubled. The good news is that someone has ordered the tools themselves. When Ghana imports the tools themselves, that's sustainability, we've accomplished our goal, and can switch our focus to other needs.

Not so fast. Many mechanics in the outlying areas still don't know about the tools. Last summer in Bolgatanga, the second largest city in northern Ghana, only one out of six mechanics had ever seen the tools before. They were seven years behind Accra, at least.

Our challenge now is to move carefully and thoughtfully so as not to stifle this nascent competition. Reduce Accra subsidies, and don't flood the market. Fo-



Bikes in Accra



A Hohoe bike mechanic welded a freewheel remover on to an old crank arm, and when it spoiled, welded another one on the other side!

cus on reaching outlying areas at low introductory prices, while at the same time being careful to not undercut the new importer in areas where he or she is working. Now we are learning how to get out of the way.

BIKES & WORKSHOPS

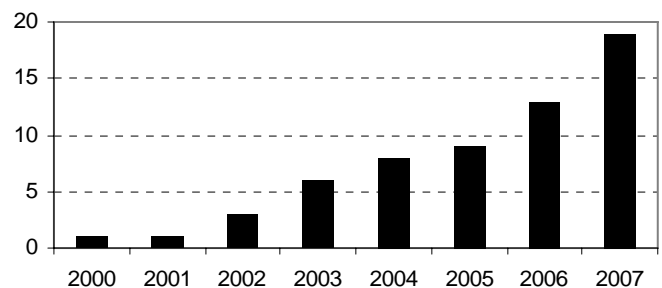
The number of containers of bikes we've sent to Ghana has increased steadily from one in 2000, the first year of VBP, to 19 in 2007, that is 8300 bikes. Our donor/suppliers are collecting more and more bikes, diverting them from the scrap metal heap, and sending them to VBP, and others. We expect even more bikes next year.

Our repair education programs nearly doubled in 2007, training more than 1,600 people to care for their bikes. We probably won't be able to grow much beyond that in the coming year as we had problems keeping up with the rigorous schedule we built in 2007. One of the limiting factors, enough bikes, seems to be resolved, as partners George and Samson are setting aside more bikes for our programs than in the past. Another factor is money, will we raise enough for more programs? Ironing out scheduling kinks will allow us to hold a few more workshops, maybe 85 in 2008 instead of 80 in 2007.

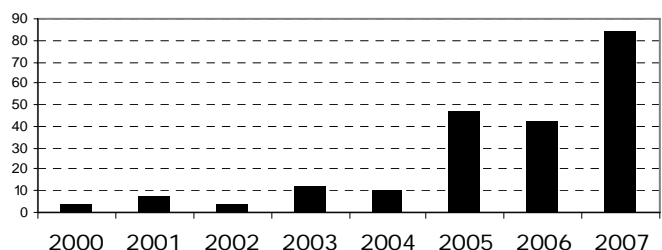
We want to pay more attention to follow-up by offering more advanced classes, maybe 18, up 50% from 12 in 2007. We will continue to prioritize women, helping them to be more comfortable, competent, and included in bike repair, riding and teaching. Finally, we will invest a special new effort in network building amongst Ghanaian bike owners, repairers and part suppliers.

To reach these goals we need to raise a minimum of \$35,000, and we need your support! Please donate to VBP by sending a check to the address on the back of this newsletter, or by visiting our website.

CONTAINERS SENT TO GHANA



WORKSHOPS HELD



WOMEN'S PROGRAM UPDATE

BY LIZ BAGEANT

New women's instructors are in training to replace Gloria Adoboe who left VBP at the end of 2007 to continue her studies. Mary Anoot and Maliba Affiah, two outstanding women from TAWODEP (Talensi Area Women's Development Project) in the Upper East Region were chosen as assistant instructors and toured with our programs during November and December.

Neither Mary nor Maliba speak much English, both are soft-spoken and are probably not leader/teacher type personalities. Still, they were helpful and responsive, both in terms of readying the bikes, and in helping the students with the practical experience side of the program, and they very clearly learned a lot about bikes during the two weeks.

While we don't see either one of them filling Gloria's void, we believe that what they have learned will be shared with other women in their home villages. Their connection to TAWODEP will give them opportunities to share their bike knowledge with other women in the 80 square mile community. With more than 600 members, the TAWODEP network is able to provide a lot of support to women who want more from their lives, including fixing bikes!

The woman we'd hoped would be our new instructor isn't available. She teaches pre-school, farms, has a small child, and is a seamstress. As difficult as it may be to find a good woman instructor, it seems we have a good model with temporary local assistants. The roughly \$200 that we spent to have Mary and Maliba along turned out to be a good investment in women's development. It was good for the program participants to have these female role models around, unassuming rural women like themselves, who happen to be competent with bike tools. Gloria on the other hand, from the other end of the country, and not speaking the language, probably came off as a bit of a glamorous young sophisticate.

In 2007 Gloria led twelve women's workshops, training over 200 women, and also led men's and mixed programs when we needed an Ewe language-speaking leader. Gloria has made an important contribution to breaking the barriers that keep women from learning bike repair, and she will be missed!

In November Gloria and Liz went to Songornya to initiate a different type of women's program, led by Sterling Lee, a Peace Corps volunteer. The workshop we developed incorporated confidence building, decision-making skills and goal setting around the common activity of learning how to ride bikes. About half the girls did not know how to ride, but by the end of the day, all were riding. "Sterling,

Gloria and I learned a lot and agree that the program has potential to be reproduced in some form in other places," says Liz. For program details, see www.villagebicycleproject.org/girlpower.

Teaching women to ride needs to be an essential part of VBP's work in Ghana. If women are unable to ride the bike they receive from VBP, what are the chances that they will learn to ride the bike once they take it home? Our follow-up work has shown that in some cases they do learn to ride, but in other cases the bike becomes a family bicycle. Furthermore, when a woman doesn't know how to ride, how applicable is the one-day repair workshop to her life? The next version of the women's workshop curriculum will incorporate riding skills. In 2008 we hope to serve 300 women in first time workshops and do follow-up programs with 150 from previous workshops.

Liz is an American volunteer working in Ghana since July with our Women's Programs



Learning to ride at the Binaba Women's Farmer Association in Upper East Region

Photo by Mary Jane Cassidy

AYAMYE* ON DVD

A film about the people served by VBP, Ayamyé* is now available for purchase on DVD. Ayamyé* toured 15 cities worldwide with the Bicycle Film Festival in 2007.

DVD sales will benefit VBP and Equal Chance, a non-profit formed to support outstanding yet needy students from the community where Ayamyé* was filmed. (EqualChance.org). Co-director/producer Eric Mathies had this to say, "We were really at the forefront of a tipping point in cycling culture - advocacy is huge in the industry now, though I fear much of it is misguided or poorly implemented. By reflecting the approach of VBP, Ayamyé* has really shown effective solutions." Log onto Ayamyé.org to get your copy & support good causes!



Melanie Lyons and Craig Lorch of Seattle's Bike Works shut the door on a load of 492 bikes, November 2007

Thank You to all the Bike Collectors from around the World!

Bikes Not Bombs, Boston: 5 cans, 2350 bikes
Re-Cycle, Colchester, England: 5 cans, 1900 bikes
Bike Works, Seattle: 3 cans, 1410 bikes
Bikes for the World, Wash. DC: 3 cans, 1380 bikes
Goodwill Bikes, Sydney, Australia: 1 can, 430 bikes
Working Bikes Co-Op, Chicago: 1 can, 420 bikes
VBP, Moscow, ID: 1 can, 420 bikes

PEOPLE & THEIR BIKES

In 2005 and 2007, VBP held programs in Songornya, where Ayame* was filmed, creating 160 new bike owners. Songornya comprises three villages along a very rough road two miles from the main road, and four more miles from town. Transportation to the main road is expensive and infrequent, and a two hour wait for public transportation is common.

Among the VBP bikes owners is a family hauling bread from the town by bike, for whom the \$2 transport fee is now profit, (national per capita income is \$1 per day). In Boamadumasi, rural volunteer health workers were sponsored for bikes by a British health care non-profit, Foundation Human Nature. The volunteers are serving remote areas, delivering health education, medicines, and even patients by bike.

Throughout Ghana school kids are getting to school on time, and are not exhausted by a three-mile walk each way or punished for being late. A furniture maker now has an extended customer base, as he can easily travel to a much wider radius

from his home. We've heard a hundred stories like this. If people who have to walk everywhere suddenly get a bike, they are more mobile and save lots of time and money.



This is how high the bread is stacked for the six-mile journey from the bakery to the shop in Songornya

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to Village Bicycle Project
c/o PCEI
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Give Online:
pcei.org/vbp/how2help.htm

All the news
that doesn't fit,
year round, tangential rants,
talkback:
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2008 Budget was not completed
by the printing date and will be
available soon on-line at
VillageBicycleProject.org/2008budget

Special Thanks
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This Work Would Not
Happen Without You!

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