**BENIN EDUCATION FUND**

The Benin Education Fund (BEF) is a grassroots organization run primarily by volunteers. We provide scholarships and educational support to needy and under privileged, but promising students from rural and most under-served region of [Benin](http://benineducationfund.org/blog/?page_id=11). The majority of our scholars would have no access to education without the support of BEF. Our program covers secondary and university level studies. Basic secondary school fees and related expenses can exceed $150/year and university level can cost up to $2500/year, even though the average annual income is less than $700.

 **Our Impact:**

Since the founding of the Benin Education Fund in 1998, we have touched on the lives of over 6000 students. During the 2018-2019 school year alone, we sponsored 75 **high school students who** stayed in school thanks to BEF scholarships. About 2/3 are girls.  A typical scholarship includes tuition and fees, supplies, uniforms, and books.  We provide housing for students who must leave their villages to attend school elsewhere. Students preparing national exams, such as the BEPC or the French Baccalaureate (BAC), receive tutoring and additional financial support as needed.

We also supported **50 university students**.  All had received high school scholarships and excelled, so BEF decided to continue its support.

Helping students succeed means more than just paying school fees. BEF provides housing for those who must leave their villages to attend school. We arrange preventative health care and treatment for illnesses. Local mentors advise our students on critical issues like nutrition and wellness, AIDS prevention, and reproductive health. Other programs include tutoring, sports, theater, English, technology, and training in entrepreneurship.

**Benin’s Education Context:**

*Benin has recently embarked on education reforms under “Vision Bénin Alafia 2025”,which* was approved by the Government in June 2018, the new [Education Sector Plan (ESP) for 2018-2030](https://www.globalpartnership.org/fr/content/plan-sectoriel-de-leducation-2018-2030-du-benin) highlights the government's vision that: *"In 2030, Benin's education system ensures that all learners, without distinction, have access to the skills, entrepreneurial spirit and innovation that will make them full-blown/fulfilled, competent and competitive citizens, able to ensure economic growth, sustainable development and national cohesion"*.

One of the key pillars of the country’s education priorities, which are based on the policy options and principles, is to **develop a vocational training offer adapted to the needs of economic development with a focus on** partnering with the private sector through diversifying training programs; increasing reception capacities and improving the performance of technical and vocational education and training; and professionalizing higher education.

In line with the government ambitions, the Benin Education Fund (BEF) is looking to diversify its program offering to youth in Benin, especially young girls and women, ages 12 to 25, with a continued focus on northern Benin. With our 22 years’ experience in the education sector in Benin, we are well placed to continue creating impact in the country.

Our organization focuses on key priorities that we think are in line with the country’s ambitions to help build and/or improve capacity in the poorest region of the country.

We are thankful that the Benin government has recognized that secondary and higher education institutions in the country are not preparing their graduates for the workforce. On average graduates will spend 5 to 10 years searching for a job. Women in Benin are particularly underserved when it comes to both secondary and higher education and those in the north region are even worse off. Pressure to [marry early](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001902/190214e.pdf) and have children is among the barriers young women face daily. In the Atacora region of Benin, women have extremely limited access to education, a lack of female role models and opportunity, less access to financial services, entrenched patriarchy and restrictive norms. BEF can help deliver help to the poor families affected by COVID-19 and subsequently, post the pandemic, provide services to women to allow them to become self-sufficient and increase their participation in more formal economic development activities.

**The Proposed Project on COVID-19 Response:**

#### As the global COVID19 situation continues to evolve rapidly, many people in the developing world are already facing famine and starvation. Our goal is to raise funds to help feed women and families with young children. We are targeting women in the informal sectors that rely on micro and small commercial activities to feed their families; these activities are now shutdown due to COVID19. The families generally live day to day with money earned daily from their small businesses.

#### **The Problem:**

As the Coronavirus continue to spread around the globe, it is impacting severely the poorer communities in developing countries. The informal sector is predominant across Sub-Saharan Africa; in Benin, informal economic activities are particularly high and contribute more than 50% of the country's GDP. The informal economy constitutes a major source of employment for at least 40% to 60% of the population. The COVID19 Pandemic has forced nations to shutdown most commercial activities, taking away the life-line employment for poorer communities already susceptible to famine, especially women and children.

**Solution:**

Our COVID response through this project, targets families and individuals that rely on small informal sector economic activities to provide for their families. Our target group depends on the daily cash generation to feed the family. They often have no savings to fall back on in situations like these. 100% of the money we raise will go toward feeding this extremely vulnerable segment of the population in rural towns in Benin. The support will be in the form of food and/or cash transfers.

**Long-Term Impact**

The aim is to help families get through the months of the COVID19 Pandemic. As economic activities resume, most of the individuals can resume their informal economic activities and return to independence. We do understand that start-up capital may be required for some of them in order to be able to resume commercial activities after the COVID19 crisis, As such, BEF staff are looking to identify opportunities where the women can obtain funds through grant programs from the Benin government or small loans from the local Micro Finance Institutions. 100% of the funds raised will go directly to support the cause.

Following the COVID-19 crisis, the Benin Education Fund (**BEF)** intends to develop a vocational training offering adapted to the needs of economic development with a focus on partnering with the private sector through diversified training programs that will help some of the women, especially young women, build practical skills for better access to employment. BEF will enable at least 100 women, over a period of five years, from the poorest regions in Benin to access technical education and become successful professionals. This will offer to the women, an alternative to the informal commercial activities.

**Areas education interests:**

* + Electrician (specialized in renewable energy like solar installations)
	+ Carpentry (furniture – still a big market for this)
	+ IT and creating tech platforms for commercial activities
	+ Farming/agriculture – we are currently two students attending farming programs
	+ Nursing – In nursing for example, we have more demand than we can fill – we currently sponsor 5 nursing students in Burkina Faso.
	+ Tourisme activities

For those that chose or prefer to continue with their informal activities, BEF will offer a training program to teach the women to establish saving plans in case another crisis should disrupt their commercial activities in the future.