



SUCCESS STORY

ADVANCING PARTNERS & COMMUNITIES and U.S. PEACE CORPS

Helping local organizations maximize a computer program increases efficiency and improves outcomes

APC ENLISTS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER TO PROVIDE HANDS-ON TRAINING

BACKGROUND

APC/Benin surveyed USAID-funded, local NGOs that conduct health activities to determine what kinds of technical assistance they wanted. Almost everyone—from accountants to M&E advisors and directors—mentioned help with Microsoft Excel. Despite the fact that staff used the program every day, most weren't using it comfortably or to great effect.

Excel can track and illuminate data, improve efficiency, and facilitate a more organized approach to work in general and record keeping in particular. When she heard that staff wanted to get more from the program, U.S. Peace Corps volunteer Lydia Chicoine, who has been working with APC since March 2016 and with local agencies for more than two years, decided to develop an Excel basics training. Over the course of a few months, Lydia



Photos by: Kerry Ann Dobies

Peace Corps Volunteer Lydia Chicoine introduces the workshop

and a small team, including two fellow Peace Corps volunteers worked with GRADE NGO and other health and economic development NGOs in northern Benin to develop the training curriculum, presentation, and logistics.



INTERVENTION

The two-day training took place in the northern city of Parakou in November 2016. There were 22 participants—including APC’s Benin country director and home office program officer—from 10 different health and economic development NGOs in northern Benin. Workshop participants arrived with their laptops and a dataset provided by the trainers in advance. During the training, they learned about and practiced creating tables, formulas, and functions; importing and exporting



Mamantou, a participant in the workshop data between Word and Excel; creating and personalizing graphics, and various formatting and printing tips.

The dynamic training, which featured presentations by trainers and participants alike and was attended by five assistants circulating the room to provide individual help, kept participants stimulated and involved.

“The training was very useful to me. Before, there were several concepts in Excel that I didn’t understand, such as autofill, and skipping between lines. Now I know many more things,” said Mamantou, an accountant.

OUTCOMES

At the start of the workshop, participants took a test to assess their understanding of basic concepts in Excel. When participants took the same test at the end of the course, their knowledge had improved by 80 percent. Everyone passed the test, and more than a third got a perfect score.

More important than the numbers, however, was participant enthusiasm for the course. Serge, a finance and operations manager, said, “The training was very good because it strengthened our ability in Excel and equipped us with new tools for management. Now that we’ve done the training, we must put it into action.”

The organizers will see that they do. They are conducting periodic follow-up exercises with participants and will offer an advanced Excel training in early 2017.



Excel Workshop participants and facilitators