

Ten Years of SET

Through the Eyes of the President, Don Barclay



*Don Barclay outside new SET school
(right) at Kati, 2017*

What does it take to keep on a journey for ten years in the tiny West African country – Togo?

Our answer: ***Passion and Commitment***

Passion comes from finding a need that resonates and a goal that addresses that need. In SET's case, the need for Togo's children to receive solid education has given us the conviction that we can help to provide it. Ten years ago, when four of us (Bob Barclay, Simon Carette, Anne Carette, and I) saw the potential in children of Togolese villages, we felt passionately ***Committed*** to help them.

Why does Togo need SET support? Togo is one of the poorest countries in the world: last on the UN's Happiness survey (2017) with most of the population under 30, yet it invests minimally in infrastructure and public education.

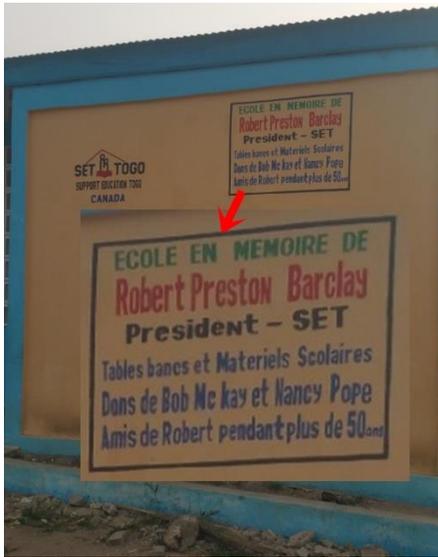
In 2011 Support.Education.Togo. (SET) became a Canadian charity with Bob Barclay as founding President. With steady guidance, Bob was able to see SET make meaningful change in the southern region of Togo, known as the Maritime. To honour SET, and to thank Bob for the love and energy he gave to the children of Togo he had been made an Honorary Chief of the Yoto District of the Maritime Region in May, 2014.

Where have passion and commitment taken SET over ten years? First, to build schools and second, to improve the quality of education through teacher support and development.



*Recently crowned as Honorary Chief of
Yoto District, Bob Barclay addresses an
audience of 1,000+ in 2014*

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SET's last school in Adokpoé, completed in 2018, named after Bob Barclay in honour of his leadership and dedication to the children of Togo

Schools

In ten years, SET has built 13 three-room primary schools and completed two renovations to existing schools. Of these schools in small villages, the newest in Adokpoé (2018) has been dedicated to the memory of Bob who passed away in 2018.

Togolese villagers have been involved in choosing sites, donating land, providing materials such as handmade bricks, and most importantly, building the schools themselves. The schools have always been theirs in every sense, not SET's.

SET's work has been to link enthusiastic, committed donors to the dream to educate more and more Togolese children. For five successive years (2011- 2016) SET held a gala at the Lambton Golf and Country Club. Individual contributions have continued from people moved by the SET mission.

Results in SET schools so far? Increased attendance especially among young girls; a more stabilized teaching staff; acknowledgement by the Togolese government of SET's efforts. For 15 communities, SET schools have made their children's education safer and steadier. But in its vision SET aims to provide more than bricks and mortar for primary students' education. Specifically, to have primary school children, "receive a quality education which will allow them to blossom in all dimensions of their lives." Such a goal has led to a concentrated focus on teacher development.



Soon to enter CP1 at a SET school, the children wear the gingham uniform of Togo kindergarten students



Angèle Aklah (top left) works with primary teachers in SET teacher training workshop, 2018

Teacher Development

The first step toward strengthening SET primary teachers involved a commitment to financially support intern teachers. Because these non-diploma teachers receive such low pay, they can easily be convinced to change schools for a little more money. By topping up their salaries, SET encourages intern teachers to stay in the SET schools. Greater financial stability allows the intern teachers to focus on excelling in teaching. It provides the students with a more stable environment for learning. We currently support 31 intern teachers.

The second step came about when two Canadian French-language secondary educators with Togolese backgrounds joined our team as volunteers. Serge Akpagnonite and Angèle Aklah evaluated some SET students at the end of CP1 (grade 1). Their assessment showed little learning related to literacy and math. Such an outcome changed SET's direction. Teaching teachers the most advanced and effective methods of pedagogy became a passionate commitment for SET.

We hired Jean-Paul Kodjo Mlope, an education professor at the Togolese Teachers' College to lead this program. With Serge's and Angèle's support, he is coaching teachers, holding workshops, and developing teaching materials for a six-school SET pilot project. This involves teachers, principals, and regional school directors as stakeholders. Meetings have been held with the Togo Department of Education senior ministers who express both interest in, and respect for, the program. Results from the pilot project will be measured in July 2021 with further student evaluation.

Passion and Commitment:

Our Team

Over the past ten years, SET has developed a strong volunteer team committed and passionate about the mission. Thanks to all of them.

Simon Carette and Anne Carette, SET's two other Directors, have contributed so much: visioning, fundraising, reviewing programs in Togo, participating in workshops.

Serge Akpagnonite and Angèle Aklah, the driving force behind teacher development: organizing SET-teacher workshops, evaluating students, and coordinating with Jean-Paul Kodjo Mlope.



Directors Anne and Simon Carette with SET teacher workshop participant Dotse A Delali. Dotse played an important part in inspiring the foundation of SET in 2011



Serge Akpagnonite (left) and Jean-Paul Kodjo Mlope during SET teacher training workshop (2019)

Jean-Paul Kodjo Mlope was recruited and hired by SET to work half-time on teacher development. His extensive background as a teacher, a school supervisor and an education professor give him irreplaceable knowledge. In combination with his own passion for education and his commitment to Togo's children, he is invaluable to SET's teacher development efforts.

Heather Barclay is SET communications officer, webmaster, and web content developer. She continues to work on finding new ways to communicate SET's work.

Wally MacKinnon is our critical behind the scenes person. He supports Heather in her website work and assists me in developing a system for keeping track of our donors.

Werner Schmidt, a retired partner in Ford Keast LLP (Chartered Accountants), has taken on the role of preparing tax receipts and annual financial statements. Thanks also to Dave Warner who helped make the transition of all accounting work, previously done by Bob.

In earlier years, Rob Porchak's skills as a designer and artist made SET's bi-yearly newsletter appealing and professional. Thanks to Denise Testa for design and Dawn Lyons for text of the original website.

The Future

In the next five years, we hope to see significant progress in teacher development. This means extending our reach beyond CP1 teachers in the six-SET school pilot project. This will require hiring colleagues in Togo to help Jean-Paul; committing funds for teacher support; increasing the number of teacher workshops; and gaining more support from teachers, principals, and the Togolese government.

SET will be investing in upgrading and repairing some schools which have experienced the effects of weather and time.

To carry on with passion and commitment to help some of the children of Togo make a different future for themselves, their communities and country. This will be what SET strives for in its next ten years.



A SET-built classroom with solid SET desks where primary students will go on receiving the benefit of SET's comprehensive support for teachers