

# **Report on the Project “The Mobile Counseling Lab Initiative - Bringing University Dreams to the Doorstep in Northern Togo”**

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In the remote villages of northern Togo, ambition often meets a formidable wall: the digital divide. For years, our brightest students—those with the grades and drive to pursue higher education—found their dreams stalled not by a lack of intelligence, but by a lack of internet and technology access. They couldn't research universities, draft application essays, or submit forms online. Their potential was being locked away, not by their own doing, but by their circumstances.

This is the story of how the EDULCOD-Togo Mobile Counseling Lab Initiative began to dismantle that wall, one village, one school, and one student at a time. This report recounts our journey dedicated to ensuring that talent, not technology, determines a student's future.

Before our wheels hit the dusty roads, the situation was dire. We knew from a 2019 survey that only 20 out of 100 high-achieving students were even aware of the university opportunities available to them. A staggering 70 cited the lack of technology and internet as their primary barrier. Students faced impossible choices: spend precious resources on a long, uncertain trip to an overcrowded, noisy internet cafe in the city for just a few hours of frantic work, or simply give up. The system was designed for them to fail. We knew we had to flip the script and bring the system to them.

With the successful acquisition of the IACAC Opportunity Grant, we launched our initiative with a clear, student-centered mission. Our approach was built on two pillars: mobile technology and personalized guidance.

The project kicked into gear with the purchase of five robust laptops and a year of reliable mobile internet connectivity. This wasn't just buying equipment; it was assembling the keys that would unlock a world of opportunity. Simultaneously, our team reached out to five pre-identified schools in the most underserved areas, building partnerships with dedicated teachers and school leaders who were eager to see their students succeed.

The first true deployment of our mobile lab was nothing short of inspirational. Our volunteers traveled to each of the five schools, transforming classrooms into vibrant hubs of possibility. We conducted university application workshops for five hundred and twenty five students. For many, it was the first time they had ever used a laptop to explore university websites or learned the components of a compelling application essay. The energy was palpable—you could see the spark of understanding and hope ignite in their eyes.

From the wider group, we selected twenty five exceptionally talented and needy students for an intensive, year-long mentorship. Each of these twenty five scholars was paired with a dedicated EDULCOD-Togo volunteer counselor. Our counselors became a familiar and welcome sight, packing the laptops into our "mobile lab" and traveling to the students' schools regularly.

This was where the deepest work happened. In quiet corners of school and under the shade of trees, students worked one-on-one with their mentors. They crafted and refined their personal essays, researched scholarship opportunities, and navigated complex application portals. The laptops were not just tools; they were conduits to a future that had previously seemed unreachable.

The success of this initiative is best measured not in numbers, but in transformed lives.

- For the five hundred and twenty five workshop attendees, the project demystified the path to university. They gained critical knowledge and the confidence to believe that higher education was a realistic goal.
- For the twenty five intensively mentored students, the impact was profound. They submitted complete, polished, and standout applications to universities both within Togo and internationally. Early results are already coming in, with several students having received admission offers and scholarships.

Mr. Kpatcha, a school principal in one of the partner schools, commented: “EDULCOD-Togo did not just bring computers; they brought hope. They have changed the conversation in our school. Now, our students are not just asking “if” they can go to university, but “how” and “where”.”

The Mobile Counseling Lab Initiative has proven to be a resounding success. It demonstrated that with the right tools and targeted support, the digital divide is not an insurmountable barrier. We met students where they were, both geographically and in their educational journey, and walked alongside them.

The five laptops, now a permanent resource for EDULCOD-Togo, continue to serve students in our community when not on the road, maximizing the investment.

Our commitment is stronger than ever. The journey does not end here. We are now seeking partners to help us scale this model, to reach more schools, more students, and ensure that no talented mind in northern Togo is left behind. Together, we can continue to turn dreams of university into tangible realities.