In almost all of the villages I visit in Togo, we are greeted and hosted by the village chief, flanked by his most honourable counselors. After a round of introductions and greetings, the chief, dressed in his best African regalia, expresses his personal appreciation for all of the good things that ADRA is doing in the village. The words, spoken in the native dialect, are translated into French, the official language of Togo, by the local ADRA worker, and then passed on to me in English by the ADRA country director. Regardless of any words that may have been lost in translation, the message is clear. The warm expressions on the faces of the chief and his staff confirm their extreme gratitude that ADRA is transforming lives by working in their village.

This requisite protocol meeting, as colourful and delightful as it may be, can be a little frustrating to a photographer. Usually my time in a village is very limited and every minute eaten up by one of these meetings means that I go home with fewer photographs and video clips. However; here in Togo, the expression of appreciation is so warm and genuine that I find myself more than once moved to tears.

In one village, after a wonderful presentation of traditional music and dance, some of the ladies present a skit illustrating how many of the pregnancies in the village end with the delivery of a still-born child. The expression of grief and sorrow presented by the actress as she is handed her lifeless bundle, is so convincing that I suspect she has experienced this in her real life - possibly more than once. Though I am trying to film the skit, I find myself lowering my camera to brush away a tear.

Suddenly the tone of the skit changes - time has passed. ADRA has come to work in the village! Now with the education the women receive in health, nutrition and sanitation, with the new health clinic that ADRA Canada built in the village, babies are born in health and vigour! Everyone is happy and celebrating!

Perhaps the visit that leaves the deepest impression on me is the village of Kpedzi. As our ADRA vehicle pulls to a stop, we are approached by a man wearing a bright ADRA t-shirt. At first glance he appears to be a member of the co-operative group that ADRA organizes in the villages in which they work. But I quickly realize that this is the village chief! Laying aside his traditional regalia, this man has donned a simple white t-shirt to show his appreciation for and alliance with ADRA.

My initial surprise develops quickly to complete amazement as the chief greets me in fluent English. Togo is a former colony of France and this language skill, demonstrated by a rural village chief, is rare. In my honour, he has prepared a speech in English. I want to share it with you because I believe it encapsulates the emotions experienced by the people in so many villages around the world in which ADRA and other agencies of community-based development work.

www.adra.ca
Here is the speech verbatim:

“I have the honour, the most respectful, to welcoming you, on behalf of the peaceful population of Kpedzi and its surrounding villages. We, the entire populations, are indeed very glad to thank and congratulate your Excellency, for all the marvelous, gigantic and tremendous works carried on within our locality by your industrious Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Through your initiatives and your dynamic impulse, our communities will generate into happy, perfect, peaceful homes, and we are ready, eager and confident to join our efforts for the success of this noble ambition.

Our communities must re-organize to develop themselves and enable the populations to imitate ADRA progressively.

We wish your Excellency to extend our sincere greetings to ADRA wherever you meet them in every colour, White, Black, Yellow, Red and Brown. Please! Tell them on our behalf, how good you are, generous you are, lovely you are and so kind you are to all, without discrimination.

Long live Kpedzi, and long live ADRA!”

The speech is punctuated by the villagers themselves, with enthusiastic dancing, singing, clapping, and the beating of African drums. Once again I find myself brushing away a tear. In the future I must not be so intent on “getting the shot” that I miss the opportunity of hearing the expressions of gratitude.

So what is it that ADRA Canada is doing here in the villages of Togo that is bringing such a show of gratitude? Is this some multi-million dollar program of roads, bridges, hospitals, schools and water systems? Knowing ADRA Canada’s limited budget, and how it specializes in small projects for maximum efficiency, I know this is not the case. And yet, even though the project is small, it is being received as a comprehensive, life-changing program in every village that I visit.

“If I were to tell you all of the things that ADRA has done in my village, we would be here all day”, says one lady I interview.

Long live Kpedzi, and long live ADRA!”

The program, officially called “Rural Health and Income Generating Project” targets about twenty key elements of daily life in the village. ADRA workers actually move into the villages and live among the people they are instructing. Everyone in the village is invited to attend the “Life Skills” workshops.

Over the course of several months, often under a mango tree, the people learn for the first time some of the most basic life-principles that we take for granted. How diseases are caught and transmitted, the importance of cleanliness and sanitation, the value of balanced nutrition, how to grow, process, preserve, and cook new foods for healthier lives, and how to have peace and harmony in the family by breaking down traditional gender roles and incorporating a more equal sharing of the work are just a few of the life skills learned in the program.

Participants are encouraged to form a village co-operative where they come together to share their experiences one day a week as they work together on some income generating activity. Here they use their local knowledge or a new skill introduced by the ADRA workers to make simple products that can be sold in the local village markets. Some make baskets, brooms, or weave small ropes, others may do tie-dye, and still others may make simple medicines such as talcum powder or a vapour rub.

Over the course of a few months, the group fund accumulates and the villagers deposit the money with a micro-credit bank to be used as collateral for small loans for individuals in the group. These loans are used to accumulate the tools necessary to start income generating activities that effectively launch families out of subsistence poverty into a new life of income and commerce.

With this financial help, an individual is able to purchase small items for the home, expand and grow a small business, and finance a child’s education. Instead of sending their twelve-year old daughter to a nearby town to work in virtual bondage for another family, parents are able to keep her at home and hopefully have enough money to even send her to school!

One of the ladies I interviewed described how the program was helping her. She said, “It is true that before ADRA came, I knew how to make baskets. But back then, I would only make one or two baskets and take them to the market. Because I was so desperate for food for my family for that very day, I would agree to a small price for my baskets, just so that I could bring home a little food from the market. Now that ADRA has come to help our group, my business skills have improved. Now I am not so desperate. If
people are not willing to pay what the baskets are actually worth, I can bring them home and sell them another day. I now have a large inventory of baskets and people are paying the full price!"

What a nice program! Simple, inexpensive and effective!

One morning as I was filming the riverside activities of one of the villages where ADRA was working, I saw something that I had never seen before in all my years of photographing the work of development. What I saw was proof that even the instruction of gender equality was getting through and causing positive change. There, on a rock protruding out of the middle of the river, was a husky African man, doing the family laundry!

One of the stops on our schedule was a village where ADRA had not yet started working. The idea was to be able to show the contrast between a village where ADRA has had an influence and where it has not. We were running behind schedule and there was some debate as to whether or not we should take the time. It was thought that the differences might be too subtle for the cameras to pick up. But, the promise had been made and the villagers were waiting for us, so we decided to make the stop. I am glad we did!

Even if the camera could not pick it up, we could. The ADRA villages are always swept clean daily and the children seem happy and healthy. In this village, the children were sick and the ground was covered with trash and animal waste. The contrast in smell and sight was distinct and amazing. It made me proud to be affiliated with the work of ADRA and thankful for all that has been accomplished here in Togo. I hope that ADRA Canada will be able to expand its wonderful work here until all of the villages are “ADRA villages”.

When the chief of the village wears an ADRA T-shirt, you know you must be doing something right!

Frank Spangler has been visiting ADRA programs around the world since 1989 filming stories and doing photography. He currently lives in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, with his wife, Truc Khanh. You can read more of his stories at www.untotheleast.com
The social strife in southern Somalia continues to have catastrophic effects on the quality of, and access to, education. Even though the international community has increased its support to the education sector, chronic poverty, conflicts, and natural calamities continue to contribute to the rising number of idle youth and women - threatening the social fabric and security of Somalia.

Throughout Somalia, the average gross enrolment rate at primary school level is one of the lowest in the world at 27.9%. Even where children enrol in school, only 59.8% who begin grade one are likely to complete grade four.

Adult literacy rates indicate that over 80% of Somali adults are illiterate! Low adult literacy rates have a negative impact on promoting the provision of primary education, as illiterate parents are less likely to encourage their children to benefit from primary education.

Many rural people think that they will find better jobs with higher pay in the cities. This belief is causing them to move from the country to the city with dreams of improving their lives with better jobs and opportunities. Once in the city, they often encounter economic and social problems for which they lack adequate information and skills. This creates a rise in poverty, making it impossible for parents to support the education of their children and generating a new group joining the pool of illiterate youth and adults.

Although progress is being made in the more stable regions of Somaliland and Puntland, the situation in much of the country requires extensive support from the international community.

ADRA Canada, in partnership with ADRA Germany, ADRA Norway, ADRA Somalia, Relief International, and the European Commission, is working to improve both the access to, and the quality of education in Somalia.
WHAT IS FOOD JUSTICE?

Food justice would exist if everyone had sufficient food.

Food justice is the concept that society should arrange its relationships so everyone can have sufficient food.

If you’ve ever asked “Why are people hungry?”, you’re interested in food justice.

So - why are people hungry? Often, it’s a result of poverty. Many people living in poverty are unable to put anything aside for times when crops fail, jobs are lost, or the price of seeds, tools, and food rises.

Recently, the impact of globalization has meant that global rules play an increasingly important role in the lives of people everywhere, including small farmers in developing countries. These farmers have the potential to feed not only themselves, but many others. Without global rules that provide justice for all people, the prospects for long-term solutions to hunger are dim.

In the pursuit of food justice, the Foodgrains Bank joins with other voices, Christian and otherwise, in researching and promoting rules that provide long-term solutions to hunger and poverty.

ADRA Canada is a member/owner of Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Article provided by the Canadian Foodgrains Bank
A woman from Tannou in western Africa tells the following story that illustrates how knowledge saved the life of a vulnerable young girl.

“One day a young girl I didn’t know came and bought a pair of sandals in our store. As I asked her several questions, I realized that she came from a neighbouring village. She told me she was leaving with a woman for the city where she would work as a domestic.

I called my husband who is the chief of the village. He immediately called the lady in question, who repeated what the girl had told me.

The chief told the woman that what she is doing is child trafficking and that this is strictly forbidden by law. If she were stopped by the police, she would go to prison.

Initially the woman didn’t want to know anything about it. The Chief summoned the girl’s parents and threatened to throw them in prison. Panic-stricken they took back their daughter.

I called a sponsoring NGO in the community and explained the situation. They took the child into care and today she is in an apprenticeship. ‘Thanks to ADRA who trained us to recognize and defend the rights of children.”

FREE DVD!
Call 1-888-274-2372 or email pr@adra.ca to order your copy of “The Adventures of Super Toilet”. This entertaining and educational DVD takes a light-hearted look at the very important issues of sanitation and hygiene. For kids from 9 - 90