

## News from Cameroon about the pilot project

### “Water and Pads” for school-girls

**Not having toilets and water at school puts girls' education at risk in my country**

**Our challenge with the project : Breaking the menstrual taboo, helping access to water and toilet in schools and providing reusable pads to keep girls in school**



Many school-girls in remotes rural areas in my country, Cameroon like other African or developing countries do not have access to clean water or decent toilets at school, putting girls' education in particular at risk. The cycle period is still a taboo in our society; this involves menstruation being perceived as unclean or embarrassing, inhibiting even the mention of menstruation whether in public (in the media and advertising) or in private (among friends, at home, or with men).

According to the first ever global assessment of water and sanitation in schools carried out by the World Health Organization and Unicef, 620 million children do not have decent toilets at school, and around 900 million cannot wash their hands properly. In my country Cameroon, 75% of schools in remote rural areas do not have toilets facilities and water.

CAN YOU IMAGINE GIRLS IN SCHOOLS GOING TO THE BUSH BECAUSE THEY WANT TO CUT SOME LEAVES OR CHANGE A DIRTY RAG THAT THEY USE AS SANITARY PADS? What are the consequences? Infections and risk of sexual assault. We also have so many victims of rape. Whenever there is a toilet in a school, which is very rare, then it is at the far end of the school compound, it is not clean and not sex separated. We can talk here of a lack of a basic standard of hygiene and sanitation, which is not encouraging for girls to stay in school.

Ensuring that school-girls in remote rural areas can attend school and complete their education is crucial for the development of a country. But a lack of decent hygiene facilities discourages pupils, particularly girls, from attending school and completing their education.

This pilot project carried out in MEDJO gave to 250 school-girls the opportunity to talk about a taboo in their community: the menstrual period.

The girls should have a space of privacy. The activities were carried out in Medjo with the support of 4 volunteers. At the end we had 54 news volunteers who got involved. They told us that they will always be at our disposition. Whenever we have a similar activity, they will help. Most of the new volunteers are women who were victims of the menstrual taboo, when they were teenagers. They don't want their daughters to suffer the same stigma.

We had to work also in some schools in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon. Demands came from schools to benefit also from some menstrual hygiene management lessons. So we went to College Jesus and Mary where we had an educative talk and interactive discussion with 215 students on the topic with the aim to break the taboo around the menstrual period. Some school-girls received some books, flyers and pads.

As concrete results of our pilot project in Cameroon:

- We have now about 400 school girls being able to manage their menstrual period.
- In Medjo, a remote rural area where this pilot project was implemented, the community is now aware of the consequences of not breaking the taboo around the menstrual cycle. We grasped the opportunity to advocate on women's rights and gender equality. We got parents and traditional people involved in raising their awareness for girl's education, the prevention of child marriage and a stop of all menstrual stigma.
- 250 school-girls now have reusable pads and will not stay anymore at home during their menstrual period.
- The project has contributed to the transformation of mindset in the community in Medjo.
- We have started it, and we are going on doing it in other cities and villages with clubs of volunteers for menstrual hygiene education, an empowerment of our girls. We now have 112 volunteers registered in 4 clubs engaged in it.



Our way forward and ambition...

- Keep on educating girls on menstrual hygiene, providing reusable pads as much as possible.
- Getting people involved around the world to support the project so that we can move ahead and build water point, toilets. With more funds we can gradually make sure that we have basic standard of hygiene and sanitation in schools. This enables the students to feel comfortable, and it encourages them to stay in school and complete their education. Our girls are our future!

We have IAW will be able to raise funds so that we can move forward. We are ready here in Cameroon. Just wait to get necessary resources to go on the field. Our girls are our future.

**By Anne Pelagie YOTCHOU – IAW member (Coordinator of the project)**