



CEFAP / LADIES CIRCLE
Cercle des Filles et Femmes Actives
pour l'amélioration des conditions socio-économiques des jeunes filles et des femmes



IAW / AIF Project "Water and Pads for schoolgirls" **Report of activities in Ngaoundere 12-13 October 2021**

Acknowledgements

Our thanks go to the International Alliance of Women (IAW / AIF) and all those involved in ensuring the smooth implementation of this "Water and Pads" project in Cameroon, now in its third stage.

Introduction

The "Water and Pads" project is an initiative of the International Alliance of Women (IAW / AIF) and is coordinated within the organisation by Ursula Nakamura Stoecklin and Gudrun Haupter. I was honoured to see Cameroon chosen as one of the countries for the implementation of this project worldwide.

Menstruation is still a taboo subject in many countries, especially in Africa, due to certain beliefs, customs and myths:

- Girls lack sanitary pads especially in rural areas and do not go to school. When they can, they protect themselves with herbs, old cloth and anything else we can imagine. Due to the exposures they have genital infections. They are at risk of sexual violence when they go into the bush to look for herbs
- No toilets in most cases, and where they exist, no separation of girls and boys
- No hand washing facilities let alone a private area where girls can change their towels
- The implication is that the safe place so far is the home, Yet these girls need to go to school, and menstruation should not be a barrier to education.

This Water and Pads project is a very commendable and beneficial initiative. It has raised awareness in the communities that all women menstruate once a month for a good part of their lives and that this is a natural thing for which no girl/woman should be ashamed to have. On the other hand, through this project we are guiding the girls through this important period of their lives, enabling them to manage it in the best possible way and to stay in school.

Our organisation CEFAP-LADIES CIRCLE is at its third phase with this Water and Pads project in Cameroon. This year 2021, like 2020, is a bit complex because of the COVID-19 which restricts the movements on the field. But we have been able to reassure the administrative and educational authorities that the barrier measures will be respected during our activities in the field. We organised temperature checks for all pupils in all the schools where we worked. Protective masks were distributed. Hydro-alcoholic disinfectant gels were available to disinfect hands before accessing the work area with the students. It should be noted that in each of our activities in the framework of the "Water and Pads" project, we also take time to raise awareness against the Coronavirus.

It is important to specify that the decision to go to the Far North was taken with a lot of courage in view of the instability in this part of Cameroon. This is caused by the exactions perpetrated by the Islamic sect BOKO HARAM, which has resumed its terror with suicide attacks, kidnappings and ransom demands. It is above all a group of Muslim fundamentalists who are firmly opposed to the education of girls who, for them, must stay at home with their mothers to learn how to become a good housewife according to the Koran and to get married.

Detailed narrative report of the activities in Ngaoundéré in the Great North of Cameroon

The activities of the "Water and Pads" project in Cameroon aim to

- break down barriers and taboos around menstruation
- help young girls in local (rural) communities to stay in school during their menstrual period through good menstrual hygiene management
- promote health education while increasing girls' knowledge of their sexual and reproductive health rights
- relaunch advocacy for gender equality, hence our choice to involve male students in field activities
- develop girls' self-confidence from the time of puberty, which is an important transition for them in becoming a woman
- Involve other civil society organisations here in Cameroon, the media as well as the entire educational community (parents, teachers, etc.) in the activities for a wide dissemination of information in favour of a better management of menstrual hygiene by girls in rural areas.

In concrete terms, the activities carried out in Ngaoundéré took place from 11 to 14 October 2021.

With the support of six volunteers, we organised information, education and communication sessions in five schools for pupils with the participation of parents, teachers and the media.

List of schools and high schools :

Tike Ngaoundéré public school

Gada Dang Public School

Béka Hosséré High School

Technical High School of Ngaoundéré Mardock

Lycée Technique principal de Ngaoundéré

Our methodology consisted of sharing the knowledge with the students. We had a question and answer phase in the form of a quiz to ensure that the information had been well assimilated.

At the end, the students received prizes consisting of sanitary towels, T-shirts, hydroalcoholic gel and some school supplies. The students were also given refreshments.

The following books were distributed: La Puberté et l'hygiène menstruelle, Devenir une femme en toute sérénité, ABC of being a girl, Entering Womanhood

Findings from the field:

- Long distances between schools and homes, which exposes girls to regular sexual harassment and rape on the way to school
- No water in schools, let alone latrines
- Context of Muslim belief with strong resistance to the education of girls who must be married by the age of 13-15
- Excellent reception of the project by the educational community and the administrative authorities
- Successful advocacy with traditional leaders.

Conclusion and perspectives

In conclusion, I can safely say that the project has been very well received by the whole educational community. We are honoured and especially satisfied with the results and feedback.

Our team has been congratulated by the administrative and traditional authorities. The pupils who benefited from the project promised to put their knowledge into practice. The girls promised to be wise and to concentrate on their education. They want to be advocates for girls' rights to education and for healthy menstrual hygiene management in schools, all in their respective local communities. We have set up clubs in the different schools

We have set up "**IAW -Puberty and menstrual hygiene: let's talk about it**" clubs in the different schools.

We are convinced that we have once again contributed to addressing an issue that is well known to everyone: Menstruation and the transition from childhood to adolescence in young girls, which remains taboo throughout the country, with more emphasis on rural areas.

We feel that we have made our modest contribution to the promotion of sexual and reproductive health education for girls, with an emphasis on the prevention of early pregnancies, early marriages, bodily and menstrual hygiene among girls, the popularisation of their rights and gender equality by involving the whole community.

Thanks to this project, we have set up clubs in schools in Ngaoundéré for future actions. These are actions in favour of behavioural change for the reinforcement of education on menstrual hygiene and the education of girls in Cameroon, as well as the protection and defence of their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Perspectives

This "Water and Pads" project continues to have a real positive impact on girls' education in local communities, and there is much hope that it will continue to do so. As part of continuing this project we also have an initiative for clean sinks and toilets. This would help village girls in schools to be able to change their pads in a clean environment.

It was one of the main requests of the girls at the school and high school in Medjo, to have a water point with a sink and clean toilet.

In Ngaoundéré as well, there should be adequate toilets in the schools and colleges. This would prevent girls from going into the bush to change their towels and it would make them comfortable while at school.

From Ngaoundéré and Medjo we have also been informed of several cases of sexual assault on girls while they are trying to hide in the bush away from prying eyes because of the lack of latrines.

Another challenge: setting up the permanent production unit for washable and reusable sanitary towels.

To set up a factory of our own so that we can make washable and reusable sanitary pads on a permanent basis. This would help to train village women to sew the pads which would then be used in the factory.

As a result, these women can have another source of income, other than the crops they produce, which is not always satisfactory. They would be more autonomous and better able to take care of themselves and their families. Above all they would be less vulnerable to poverty with all its consequences in rural areas.

In Cameroon, women are the ones who carry the burden of families. We already have human resources, volunteer seamstresses from the association. They are ready to make themselves available for the permanent production of towels within the framework of an installed production unit. We already have premises that can house this production unit.

NB: We cannot limit our actions to awareness raising, distribution of books and a limited acquisition of pads. It is urgent to have a strategy for the permanent and sustainable production of sanitary towels to distribute to girls in rural areas, because they need them.

Otherwise, despite our deployment for awareness raising, they will not be able to stay in school during their menstruation because they do not have pads to protect themselves before going to school.

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