



CEFAP/ LADIES CIRCLE

**Cercle des Filles et Femmes Actives pour
l'amélioration des conditions socio-économiques
des jeunes filles et des femmes**
INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN
**ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES
FEMMES**



PROJECT WATER AND PADS

With the financial support of IAW

**Report on activities at Kribi High School, Lake Yaoundé School and Guider High School
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A-Acknowledgements

It is almost impossible for me and the team that has been accompanying me in the field for several years in the framework of the water and pads for schoolgirls project, to start writing this report without expressing our deep gratitude to the International Alliance of Women (IAW) for this beautiful project that contributes to the integral development of girls and helps them to prepare their future serenely through education, which plays a very important role in this project.

A very important element added to the project for this phase is the printing of brochures on the spot; this favours and facilitates enormously the deployment on the ground of the different organisations involved in the project, namely: **CEFAP, RENATA and BAWUFAG**. These 3 organisations received their brochures on time and are currently deploying in the field. I have had the honour of being responsible for the printing of the books here in Cameroon and I would like to thank the IAW through the Water and Pads Project team once again for the trust placed in me.

It is important for me to add here that the water and pads project is a success story with concrete results and a measurable impact on girls' education. This success is visible thanks to the involvement of all the people and organisations involved who are always there to guide us and make us move forward serenely: Ursula, Gudrun, Heidi, Pascale... THANK YOU. Thanks also to the President and the Board of IAW.

B-Development of the Water and Pads project activities for schoolgirls with CEFAP

At the outset, I must specify that the activities mentioned in this report are those normally planned for 2022 and for several reasons, we were not able to carry them out and there was a shift to 2023.

It was a question of going to 3 schools, namely : Kribi High School, Lake School and Guider High School. We were able to implement the activities between February and March 2023 with the usual help of our volunteers in the different localities and the collaboration of the head teachers and the teaching staff who assisted us during the education, communication- and information sessions with the pupils in the classrooms during our field trips.

Menstruation is still a taboo subject in our communities here in Cameroon because of certain beliefs mixed with customs, myths; but progressively, we are changing the perception that communities have on this subject by encouraging a change of behaviour in favour of a better management of menstrual hygiene of school girls.

Girls lack sanitary pads especially in rural areas and do not go to school. When they can, they protect themselves with herbs, old cloths, with all that we can imagine. They are exposed to genital infections and to the risks of sexual violence, when they are in the bush to look for herbs.

We undertook to initiate the production of **washable and reusable pads** to help these girls to protect themselves during their menstruation and to go to school easily because their future depends on it. Thanks to our volunteers, we have produced a textile section within our training centre for the socio-economic and professional integration of poor women with no income and young girls who have dropped out of school. We have a textile section, and the women we are training have made themselves available to get involved in the mass production of reusable pads if the materials and equipment is available to them for this purpose. We are keeping our fingers crossed that we can mobilise the financial resources through IAW to strengthen what is already there and set up this permanent production unit for reusable pads.

The facts:

- No toilets in most cases, and where they exist, no separation for girls and boys. It is also a medium/long term project to build clean toilets for girls in rural schools
- No hand washing facilities let alone a private area where girls can change their pads. It is also a medium/long term project to build water points with hand washing facilities for girls and boys
- It has been found that the safe place 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 that reinforces the 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. Through this project we are also guiding the girls through this important period of their lives, enabling them to manage it as well as possible and to stay in school.

Our organisation CEFAP-LADIES CIRCLE is in its 5th phase with this Water and Pads project in Cameroon with activities during our field trips to schools that have the following objectives

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

C. Implementation and results

This report concerns the activities carried out in schools in Kribi, Le Lac in Yaoundé and Guider in the Far North. These activities were implemented in the field thanks to a fixed budget allocation.

- The following booklets were distributed in the three schools: Puberty and menstrual hygiene, Becoming a woman in all serenity, ABC of being a girl and Entering Womanhood.
- Number of students we worked with in the 3 schools :
374 students distributed as follows: 300 girls and 74 boys in total, including 105 pupils at the Ecole du Lac, 122 in Kribi and 147 in Guider.

- **Methodology:** We organised these activities with the support of 14 volunteers in the 3 schools. Our methodology has always been to share knowledge with the students based on the very detailed information contained in the different project booklets that the students receive.

After a kind of lecture with the students, we move on to a question and answer phase in which the students speak openly. For most of them it's the first time they've ever talked about this subject, because it's very taboo, and even with their mothers it's impossible to talk about it. Then we do a quiz to make sure that the information has been understood and at the end the pupils receive prizes such as pads and T-shirts. We close the activities each time with a small cocktail of sweets and refreshments with the students, volunteers and teaching staff of the host school.

After our visit, the teachers are called and commit themselves to take over in order to institute moments of exchange possibly during their lessons with the pupils to talk about the subject. Thus we are reassured that "menstruation is no longer taboo" and that this is indeed one of the results of this magnificent project. We are transforming the mentality in each community after our visit. The students talk and share with each other about the subject and approach their teachers when they have questions. We have a lot of positive feedback because we keep in touch with the schools even after we have been in their schools to stay connected with them and continue to follow the schoolgirls.

Findings from the field:

- Long distances between schools and homes, same as in previous years, which exposes girls to sexual harassment and rape on their way to school
- No water in schools, let alone latrines
- Context of Muslim belief in Guider in particular, as we are in the North of Cameroon, a region that is 90% Muslim, with a strong resistance to the education of girls, who must be married by the age of 11-14 according to the latest surveys.
- Excellent reception of the project by the educational community and the administrative authorities. Successful advocacy with traditional leaders.

D. Conclusion and prospects

In conclusion, we will simply say THANKS to IAW for this initiative in favour of schoolgirls while underlining that the project is very well received in the field and that the provision of washable and reusable sanitary towels to schoolgirls is very topical and we are keeping our fingers crossed that it will become a reality.

I am honoured to make this brief conclusion to this beautiful experience with CEFAP in this wonderful project as a volunteer. I got involved in this cause because I was a victim. I did all my primary education and the beginning of secondary education in a rural environment. I know the difficulties of schoolgirls in these rural areas during their menstrual period because I had these same problems, and if I can today, thanks to my commitment to this water and pads project, make my modest contribution, I do so with all my heart. It is only through this type of initiative that we will be able to change the lives of schoolgirls in the rural areas of my country. Thank you to CEFAP for giving me the opportunity to get involved.

At the end of the implementation of the 2022 activities, I will continue the beautiful adventure for the 2023 activities planned in Bafoussam and Edéa.

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"When women and girls struggle together, what was once unimaginable, suddenly becomes possible"