



**“Water and Pads for “Schoolgirls”
IAW project in collaboration with
the NGO LA COLOMBE, Togo**



ONG LA COLOMBE

Report on educational talks with young trade learners on personal development, gender-based violence GBV and sexuality



INTRODUCTION

As part of the implementation of the ‘Water and Pads’ project financed by IAW, an awareness-raising session was held on 28 October 2024 with young learners in the sewing and hairdressing trades in the Vo prefecture. The meeting took place at GIPATO in Vogan.

The session focused on personal development, puberty, gender-based violence (GBV) and menstrual hygiene management (MHM). Ninety (90) people took part.

It was found that the main reasons why young people drop out of apprenticeships are pregnancy and lack of awareness. Gender-based violence is also a recurring scourge in communities. Similarly, puberty, the menstrual cycle and its management are not well known. These situations are obstacles that stand in the way of learners' learning. That's why these activities are organised every year to raise awareness. The meeting was co-hosted by Mr Théodore TOSSAH and Ms Thérèse AKAKPO, Coordinator of the NGO LA COLOMBE.

I- RAISING AWARENESS AND DEVELOPING THE LEARNER'S PERSONALITY

The aim of this part of the talk was to raise the apprentices' awareness of their own responsibility for their future: The awareness-raising focused on their responsibility during their apprenticeship. The discussions were mainly on the behaviour these young people engage, which most likely would distract their attention from their apprenticeship: bad company can lead to cases of early pregnancy.

Questions:

- What are the obstacles that can prevent young people from progressing?
Answer: pregnancy.
- What should I do to avoid this?
Answer: Wear condoms or practise abstinence.



Photo 1 A hairdressing apprentice workshop manager



Photo 2 Mrs Thérèse AKAKPO, speaking to the learners

The discussions also focused on the concepts of self-confidence and self-esteem. These concepts were explained, and the girls gave examples to illustrate. They were invited to become aware of their value and to be able to enjoy it to the full.



Photos 3 and 4 : Mrs. Thérèse Akakpo during her speech



Photos 5 and 6 : The apprentices are answering during the debate.

II- VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Discussions focused on forms of violence, sexual violence and the consequences of violence.

After explaining what violence is, the learners gave examples of forms of violence, including

- physical violence (slaps, kicks, physical injuries, etc.)
- verbal violence (insults, verbal threats, etc.)
- economic violence (refusing to give his wife money)
- sexual violence (touching, forcing someone to have sex, rape, sexual harassment, etc.).

The discussions also focused on the places where sexual violence can be committed:

isolated places, the way to school, houses under construction, at home, at the mill, etc.

Finally, the consequences of sexual violence were discussed:

- You can get a sexually transmitted infection. An example was shared with the learners: a young boy raped a girl who had an STI; as a result, the boy caught the disease.
- Dropping out of the apprenticeship
- Unwanted pregnancy

Young boys were advised to avoid all forms of sexual violence; girls were advised to report any sexual harassment to their parents.

To conclude this section, we were reminded of the slogan written on the back of one of the participants' T-shirts: "Careful! it's my body".



III- MENSTRUATION

The aim of this third part of the discussions was to explain to the learners what menstruation is, where it comes from and, above all, how to manage it. Documents designed by the AIF and printed on site, namely 'Becoming a serene woman' and 'Menstrual hygiene booklet', were distributed to the young people, along with leaflets on GBV and the menstrual cycle (summary).

The content of these two documents was explained. Examples of children's and teenagers' behaviour and the changes observed and experienced by girls and boys were listed to help explain puberty.

To help explain ovulation and menstruation, an apron with an illustration of a female reproductive system was worn by the presenter. The key information was that ovulation results in an egg which, if unfertilised, rots and runs off in the form of menstruation. The egg is laid every month in every girl until the menopause. It is therefore a natural phenomenon for girls and women.

Every girl should understand that unprotected sexual intercourse is a risk of pregnancy.



Photo 8: The female reproductive system



Photo 9: An apprentice reading the explanations

Menstrual hygiene was discussed. Girls were advised to carry a bag of sanitary towels, panties and soap in their bag to replace wet towels (stained with blood). Also, single-use towels should be buried and not thrown out in the open. This pollutes the environment.

"I'm no longer going to make fun of girls when their clothes are stained with blood. I understand now that it's not up to them. It's natural." Apollinaire, aged 17.

I now understand where periods come from. I'm no longer going to worry when they come. I'm going to take care of myself from now on. Thank you so much." Testimonial from Dédé, aged 16.

CONCLUSION

The debate on the three themes has helped to raise the awareness of the learners about their responsibility towards their future. It was also an opportunity to acquire valuable knowledge about their bodies and how to take care of themselves. The meeting started at 8am and finished at around 4pm.

LA COLOMBE would like to express its deep gratitude to IAW for its life-changing financial support.

We will continue to count on IAW in the years to come.

APPENDIX :

Statistical table of participants

GIRLS			BOYS		
AGE			AGE		
- 20	21-25	+ 25	- 20	21-25	+25
55	24	4	4	1	2
TOTAL : 83			TOTAL : 7		

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