



Let's Reinforce

Friendship as an **Ingredient**

for **World Peace**

Learn About
African Action on AIDS (AAA)



AAA : Brief description of its history, mission and purpose.

African Action on AIDS (AAA) was founded in 1991 in New York, by members of the African diaspora working at the United Nations together with friends of Africa from around the world. It was primarily to support children and local communities, mostly women affected by AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa.

AAA is a tax exempt non-profit organization registered in the USA and operating under section 501(c) 3 of the IRS code. It is also registered in Cameroon (auth. No00174/A/MINAT/DAP/SDLP/SAC). It has special consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC and the UN Department of Information.

AAA's work is based on 3 programmes:

➔ (1) **"JUST KNOW"** Campaign emphasizes "MA YEM, MA BO" or "I KNOW and I DO"

- Knowledge of one's body
- Knowledge that leads to behavior change
- Knowledge that helps to visualize a future without AIDS

➔ (2) **"Health before Wealth"** Concept that promotes:

- Testing for HIV
- Clean hands (hand washing stations)
- Water wells and Clean water (drinking stations)
- Dignified toilets
- Fighting against Malaria (treated mosquito bed nets)
- Vaccination
- Anti worms medicine

➔ (3) **"Women's economic autonomy"** through our Scholarship Programme.

This scholarship enables each teenage orphan girl to complete at least a secondary, general or technical education that will lead to financial and economic autonomy, greatly reducing the risk of being infected with HIV through sexual abuse and violence.

As is stated in AAA's mission: We believe that **no one is alone**. We succeed when the youth we serve become agents of their own change and use their knowledge to change their communities.

To fulfill our mission, the two main tools are:

- **Girl's Education**
- **Water and Sanitation in Schools**



A) Girl's Education



Before 2007, we indiscriminately sent orphans (boys and girls) of all ages to school in different countries hit by the epidemic (18 African countries), mostly through orphanages.

Ten years ago, we decided to focus on teenage girls who were most at risk. Furthermore, our previous experience had taught us a major lesson: **The importance of follow-up and monitoring**. Reason why we also decided to limit our activities for the moment in Cameroon.

It has therefore been 10 years since African Action on AIDS launched, with the kind support of Great Partners including **Batonga Foundation** (Africa/USA), **CPC** (USA), **CIFA** (Switzerland), **Soroptimist** (Vienna), **Association FEMMES d'EUROPE** (Bruxelles), **Fresh Bagel Farmers Market** (USA), **Individual members of AAA Board of Directors** and, last but not least, **Donors of the 21st Century** in Cameroon who give **10 francs CFA (2US cents) per day for 365 days**. This combined generosity has allowed us to steadily educate, each year, 26 vulnerable girls affected by HIV/AIDS in Cameroon, with the commitment to see them through secondary school and University, as long as each girl remains a full-time student, and demonstrates effort and commitment and maintains passing grades.

This important orientation was also based on the need to rapidly increase the pool of girls eligible for continuing their education into secondary school and University as a global goal for the African region. For the specific case of Cameroon, it was to also contribute to the reduction of the disparity that



still exists between the rest of the country and Northern regions.

- 1- Our PARTNERS have allowed us to sponsor **260 COMBINED SCHOOL YEARS** for vulnerable girls!
- 2- Our PARTNERS have helped us to move, from sponsoring only one University student, to sponsoring **10 University student girls per year**.
- 3- Our PARTNERS have allowed us to move from sponsoring one girl from Northern Cameroon, to 7 girls
- 4- Our PARTNERS have allowed AAA to add a blind girl on the list of its scholars.

CONCRETE RESULTS within the 260 School Years:

- a- **17 Girls graduated from Secondary Education** (Baccalauréat or GCE Advanced level) between 2007- 2016
- b- **13 Girls earned University degrees**, including tertiary level professionals :
 - 2 Master Degrees (in Banking and Nursing)
 - 1 Civil Engineer
 - 3 Bachelor degrees (in Biology/chemistry, Sociology, Human Resources Management,)
 - 2 State Nurses
 - 5 Brevets de Techniciens Supérieurs (BTS/DSEP), in Banking, Telecommunications, Bilingual Secretariat and Information Technology, Info - graph, Logistics)
- c- **4 Girls graduated from Professional schools at Baccalaureat level** (Primary school Teachers, Hotel Management).
- d- **Only 4 girls among our graduates are presently working** – 3 of them because of their Information Technology skills and practices gained from internships. Unfortunately, our Nurses and Engineer haven't found jobs yet!



CREATING GREATER AWARENESS

through Education:

Besides academic results that make us very proud, it has been a joy to establish a network for our scholars. This allows our girls to meet 4 times a year to build greater awareness of their individual and community rights, encouraging them to embrace community and give back! It also encourages older girls to mentor younger ones and help them to adjust, mostly at University and professional schools where many of them are first in their family history. This network was particularly proud when one of them (Benis), was selected among Young African Leaders to visit the USA in 2015! We do encourage anything that instill confidence and pride in who they are and can become!

Though we have had few accidents (pregnancy) and difficult cases (one early marriage just after success at GCE-AL), we have noticed greater awareness of their rights and greater mastering of community issues, like the impact of war displaced children in schools and community, including the need to be welcoming and friendly to those who are forced to live away from their homes. They also show great interest in Preventive Health. Through this network, we now invite few displaced children from neighboring countries to our END YEAR EVENT. This is the best way to create long term friendships within the sub-region and PEACE worldwide!



CHALLENGES ON OUR WAY:



- 1- **WARS' impact on School Attendance:** Female literacy in many of our 10 regions is still low. The improvement registered few years back is slowly disappearing, as local wars continue to cause many forms of violence and population displacements. This new and negative trend has caused low attendance, high drop outs, low completion rates and high repetition rates even among our scholars. For instance, we fear that one of our scholars may lose this whole school year – even though her total tuition, books and all school furniture were paid, because of the instability in the 2 Anglophone regions of our country.
- 2- **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRESS:** Wars, inflation, depressive world economy have increased the cost of living in Cameroon. Consequently, tuition and other school costs like books and transportation have gotten even higher. The high /uncontrollable cost of education might well bring back old discriminations against girls' education, leading to a re accumulation of old disadvantages over girls' life times!
- 3- **EDUCATION and UN EMPLOYMENT:** All the joy we feel every time one of our vulnerable girl graduates is almost immediately wiped out by the un-employment that particularly hits girls. Definitely, the relationship between girls' improved education levels and their participation in the labor force is not yet straight forward. This has had an impact on the guidance we presently give to their education, helping them to choose more professional courses that lead to graduation and allow them to create their own employment. This tailored strategy tends to be more expensive as costs seem to be higher in fields that offer more jobs. **But even with the above setbacks, we still believe that only higher education attainment will enable women to access better paid occupations and higher earning jobs in the future. This belief is doubly possible, only when girls bring up their own stroke of genius at work in all they do.**

On this special year, AAA wanted, not only to quickly review successes and challenges on the road leading to our common objectives, but also to reflect on best ways to keep increasing the pool of vulnerable girls for continuing education into secondary schools and University, as well as transforming their skills in actual employment.

If AAA had only one activity on its programme, it will be Education - ONE GIRL, FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE END AT TIME !

B) Water and Sanitation in schools



• Purpose

In Cameroon, the number of females attending school significantly lags behind that of males, mostly in rural areas. Girls orphaned by AIDS as well as other vulnerable girls experience marginalization and thus, are at an even greater risk of not continuing in school. The absence of educational opportunity makes it even more likely that they will fall into lifestyles that will perpetuate the spread of AIDS.

Moreover, attending schools that are not equipped with dignified toilets/ latrines and water equally impedes on girls' attendance to school, as they typically stay home one week each month during their menstruation for the same reasons.

A recent study has indeed shown that most children (boys and girls in Cameroon) miss school due to water borne diseases like diarrhea, cholera caused by the absence of water and dignified latrines. What the study does not mention is that open air toilets do not offer enough privacy for girls to change sanitary napkins and clean themselves. Also because girls fear boys' Indiscretion, they tend to wait until they get home to ease themselves, which has various negative medical consequences later in life.

One of AAA main activities is Women's Economic Autonomy through our Scholarship programme. It enables teenage orphan girls to receive a secondary general or technical, as well as university education leading to financial and economic autonomy. This greatly reduces the risk of being infected with HIV through sexual abuse and violence based on girls' economic needs.

One important ingredient to women's Economic Autonomy is self confidence and self esteem that must be developed through health education, gender and livelihood plans that include investments in safe water, improved hygiene and girls friendly toilets in schools. These combined actions are part of efforts to increase the number of girls enrolled and retained at all levels of education.

• Aims of our activities

- First, to include as many rural schools as possible in AAA Preventive Health Plan that highlights essential actions to avoid disease and exclusion while mobilizing members of our communities towards positive behaviour changes.
- Second, build a chain of girls' friendly toilets in as many schools and rural health centres as possible to retain girls in school, and encourage women to visit health centres.



GIRL'S EDUCATION

DRINKING STATIONS

WELLS

HAND WASHING STATIONS

TOILETS



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