

**Report on the project “All girls to school”
at the secondary school of Assodè,
Municipality of Ouaké**

In 2019, we received an application requesting the construction of a school building with four classrooms for the secondary school of Assodè in the municipality of Ouaké. When we visit the school, as always we ask how many girls are enrolled at the school. In the academic year 2019/2020 189 students are enrolled, 83 of whom are girls. The decrease in the number of girls in the 10th grade is alarming. From the initial 37 girls, only 3 are now aiming for the first level of secondary school education called BEPC.

Sex	grade	7 th grade	8 th grade	9 th grade	10 th grade
boys		30	30	30	16
girls		37	28	15	3
total		67	58	45	19

We investigated the phenomenon. We hired 2 Muslims for this, one of them is a Koran scholar. We wanted to avoid that the difference in religion would hinder us in finding the cause. The two young men put together a questionnaire that was slightly modified depending on the group of respondents. Students, parents, teachers and religious leaders were interviewed. All gave the following reasons:

- **Poverty** - parents do not have the means to give their children money for meals, notebooks, pens. Families with 5 to 22 children per household are the norm. A maximum of 5 children per family can go to school. However, the family's money is not enough to support these children's learning.
- **Automatic Grade Advancement** – The new government does not permit students to repeat a grade at elementary level. The children are pushed on at primary school age, even if they have not reached the class target. The gaps finally become noticeable when they transfer to secondary school. The boys are a little better off. The girls have to help at home and often don't find time to study or do their homework. At secondary school level, school years have to be repeated if the final results don't allow to continue. But repetition is allowed only twice.
- **Marriage after pregnancy** - Until very recently, circumcision of girls was still common. Today we have the first generation of uncircumcised girls who are free to express their sexuality. The mothers do not understand their daughters and cannot give them advice. In addition, the girls see offering themselves as an opportunity to get lunch. If a girl becomes pregnant, she marries the person in question to protect her honor. The young man's family then decides whether the girl can continue to go to school.
- **Emigration to Nigeria, Niger, Togo or Cotonou** – boys often swap their school desk for a stay in Nigeria. They work there in the fields and after about 9 months they get a new motorbike and some money. With that they return to Assodè, where they are considered “rich”. When they return, the first thing they do, is look for girls to have fun with until one gets pregnant, who they then marry. Girls are often sent to Niger, Togo or Cotonou to work in households. The salary is paid to the parents, but when they return, the girls usually have accumulated a lot of clothes and other things. On this occasion, some girls are offered an apprenticeship instead of payment.
- **Help at home** - Girls often have to help their mothers with housework and looking after their younger siblings.

- **Doubts about the school education** – The parents observe that the teachers at the elementary schools often do not come to class or come very late. Your children are left unsupervised in the meantime. Some teachers sleep in the classroom and leave the children to their own devices.
- **Unemployment after school** – Some children of the village have studied at the university in Calavi. After completing their bachelor's degree, they returned to the village and have been unemployed ever since.
- **Parental Disengagement** - Some parents are not up to the challenges of raising children. They withdraw and leave the children to their fate.

Evaluation of the problems and accompanying thoughts:

- The first remark at the end of the survey is that the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming. This severely limits their purchasing power. Next, despite all the poverty, they have children too early and in large numbers. Once these children reach school age, most of them are enrolled without a minimum of funds. The children are left to themselves. The teachers are overwhelmed because they cannot provide schooling and education at the same time. Therefore, they are satisfied with the results of the gifted students. Repeated failure to reach the class goal results in abandoning schooling as a direct consequence.
- Some parents also do not feel obliged to enroll all their children in school because they need labor for field work and animal husbandry.
- Most parents agree that their children should go to school. This is well illustrated by the fact that at least the vast majority of children starts school before dropping out. The crucial problem is keeping the children in school. Parental withdrawal from school education encourages their children to make their way to Nigeria to work in the fields for about 10 months and then return to Assodé with an income of 300,000 FCFA (= 457 €) or a motorcycle, symbol of success. Young girls between the ages of 13 and 15 become the victims of their sexual gratification. When the girls get pregnant, the next step is marriage. The vicious circle of poverty begins with the consumption of the money they have brought with them. The behavior of these returnees and the tales of a life in paradise influence the teenagers who stayed in school. The returnees encourage those left behind to leave their classes to join them in the Exodus.
- As far as girls are concerned, it should be noted that female genital mutilation has only been abolished in recent years. The girls now live a completely free sexuality, which the mothers do not understand and thus cannot support their daughters. But the main problem is the region's poverty. The parents do not have enough money to buy their children notebooks, books and pens. It is also not enough for a breakfast money. From the age of 10, girls offer themselves to earn breakfast for about 300 francs (= 45 cents). Some girls are sent to the city as domestic help. However, their salary is paid to their parents.
- It should also be noted that girls from Assode and the surrounding area are married off too young, which does not give them the opportunity to finish school. Because of religious beliefs, some parents prefer to send their daughters to an apprenticeship to prepare them for running a household rather than continue schooling.
- In Assodé, young girls are proud when they marry early or become pregnant and find themselves under a matrimonial roof.

- Sex education as a taboo subject favors early pregnancies, which impede the education of girls. Children become sexually active very early without really being prepared for it. The parents demand abstinence as the only method, which the young people do not comply with. Regarding issues related to sex education, all parents agreed that there is a need to talk about it. The only exception was the Imam, who believes that school and sex education are actually the triggers for children's depravity.

Our attempts to find solutions:

- For the elementary schools of Assodè, Derla, Djouwè, Mankpassi, which do not have enough teachers, we hired teachers who at the same time check the attendance of the other teachers and the principals.
- We have employed 8 village teachers who supervise the homework of the children in each village.
- We have employed a mathematics teacher and a physics teacher for Assodè secondary school.
- We hired a teacher to supervise homework in the secondary school.
- We have hired an animator who meets with the parents once a week and sensitizes the parents
- We have employed a young woman who meets with the girls of the secondary school once a week and discusses women's problems with them.
- We arranged for a young woman to return to school.

Our attempts to find solutions have borne fruit in their small areas. But the problem of poverty remains. Machines to make shea-butter were donated to the women of Assodè and the surrounding villages. These machines could not be installed until now, since there is no building for them. The women asked us if we could help them. We are looking for financial means to be able to carry out this construction. **This would require €15,000.**



Exchange of thoughts with the women of Assodè



Discussion with female students of the Assodè secondary school



On the day of awareness-raising on the subject of “All girls to school” in Assodé, the girls of the village gathered around Astrid Toda.



The women of Assodé and the surrounding villages participated in large numbers in the awareness raising event.