



International Women's NEWS NOUVELLES Féministes Internationales

In publication since 1906

Journal of the International Alliance of Women

THE IAW WATER & PADS PROJECT

IAW member organisations in Africa and Asia are planning and organising events in their own countries

- Providing basic menstrual health education in poor rural schools
- Breaking taboos around the menstrual cycle
- Providing informed sexual health management for school-girls

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Ursula Nakamura-Stoecklin

I spent my childhood in Switzerland. After high school, a nursing diploma and specialization in surgery I wanted to experience new ways of life. In the 1960s I worked as an Operating Room nurse in Chicago and enrolled for some basic studies in psychology and sociology. Then I trained in midwifery in London. After my marriage in Japan I got to know a country completely different from Europe or USA. My new family and friends were all very open minded but I became aware of discriminations towards women in general. Back in Switzerland with our two small daughters I joined the Basel section of ADF Suisse – and ever since have been engaged with women's rights on the local, national and international level. But my main topic was always women's health, an everyday challenge in all my further education and activities in the health field, be it as manager of an operating theatre, a consultant in an out-patient psychiatric centre and finally as a long-term director of a Geriatric Nursing Centre in Switzerland. After retirement I was lucky to have more time for jobs within ADF Suisse. As well, through my involvement with IAW, I have seen how important it is to reach out and look at women's health on the global level. The "Water and Pads" project being shaped by ten IAW member organisations takes into account the needs of our colleagues in Africa and Asia. It is a wonderful example of intensive international cooperation, based on mutual trust and understanding.



Holly Herbert

Holly Herbert works in Sydney, Australia as a Music and Special Education teacher which aims to provide accommodated education that supports students with individual differences, disabilities and special needs. Learning and knowledge empower and this is why Holly has a passion for education and educational equality. Within IAW Holly is following in Pat Richardson's (her grandmother) steps, supporting Lene Pind with the membership process as Assistant Membership Secretary. She is also a current IAW Board member. As a volunteer, Holly gives time to a community service called Weave which has a diverse range of programs to support children, young people, women and families who face complex issues such as homelessness, family breakdowns, mental health and substance use. As well, many are impacted by intergenerational trauma and significant systemic disadvantage.



Anne Pelagie Yotchou TZUDJOM

Social Entrepreneur / speaker / coach / motivator/ (writer very soon)
Coordinator of CEFAP-LADIES CIRCLE CAMEROON
IAW Board Member
Membre du CA de Genre en Action
Director of WIN Conference Cameroon
Membre du CA de la Fondation Sommet Mondial des Femmes
2016 WWSF Award for Women's creativity in rural area

I love to introduce myself as a social entrepreneur and women's right defender. I have been working since 2003 in my country Cameroon and abroad in many initiatives that aim to advance Women's rights, empowerment, and health, Girls' education, justice, and sustainable development with several charity activities to end poverty and hunger in grassroots communities. I will always stand tall when it comes to empowering/inspiring women and girls to DARE and ACHIEVE. My commitment is to contribute to everything that can make the world a better place for all (women, men, youth and children) without any discrimination; a peaceful, just, inclusive and equal world. I am lucky because destiny always brings my way wonderful people who can mentor, coach and support me. I strongly believe that "when people come together with one vision, they can change the Unimaginable into Possible".



IAW Water and Pads Project

www.iawwaterandpads.com and www.womenalliance.org

This edition of IWNews focuses on the story of this wonderful project, how it was inspired by a comment from a young social worker from Nepal during a side-event at the WHO General Assembly in 2017: *"While they are menstruating, girls and women in rural areas are 'dirty', and therefore they have to leave their homes and vegetate in shabby huts being exposed to hunger, cold, disease and violence"*. This led to enquiries, proposals to IAW and then the work really began. The planning, the promotion to various schools and the events could not have happened without goodwill and close collaboration by all involved. As Anne Pelagie Yotchou says: "When people come together with one vision, they can change the Unimaginable into Possible".

I'm sure you will enjoy reading this story and the other two supporting articles. It's wonderful to see all the photographs too which bring us closer to all those involved.

Additional benefits arose during this project. The goodwill extended locally to schools and the children, spread through families, local communities and the local media. Families were generally very pleased with the benefits being brought to their daughters. In some schools the boys were very interested to learn too and demonstrated their support for the girls.

Unexpected benefits emerged when the pandemic started spreading around the world. IAW volunteers for the project turned their expertise and energies towards organising help in their local areas and at the schools, including the production of masks and disinfectants and organising food deliveries.

We congratulate Ursula and Gudrun and everyone for meeting the challenges and making this a success story. And it is slowly becoming self-perpetuating as schools spread the good news. However, that needs more people to become involved, more local promotion and, of course, more booklets and pamphlets and all the work entailed in organising more events.

Financial Support

Growth and expansion of this important project is essential and that means financial support is urgently needed. What has been achieved to date on the very modest funds that have been donated is remarkable. But this is an ongoing project from year to year both with the schools currently involved and the growing number of other schools wanting to become involved.

Please contribute whenever you can or perhaps you might consider supporting the project regularly. Even small amounts, say monthly, can provide the surety of some regular funding.

Postfinance: Account: 91-824969-4 Grub AR Alliance Internationale des Femmes

IBAN : CH96 0900 0000 9182 4969 4 Intended use: "Water and Pads Project"

Online bank transfer - go to the IAW website: www.womenalliance.org and call up Donations and Membership / Donations to the following project: "Water and Pads". It's a very secure system and you will receive a receipt by email.

IAW Future Projects

Earlier in 2021 Dr.K. G. Vijayalakshmi, director of Sandepani school at Kerala India took on the role of **Convenor of the IAW Commission on Education**, called for prospective Commission members and outlined a proposal to investigate structural and comparative issues with education in various regions. This was supported by the **Working Party on Regions** (Priscilla Todd) which plans to pursue the aim of building regional networks. Our work has been curtailed during this second year of the COVID-19 pandemic but it is hoped to revive interest and recommence discussions as soon as possible.

Meanwhile the Water and Pads Project has already built a network of IAW member organisations working on a common aim together, thus providing a basis on which to build. Dr Vijayalakshmi is part of this network. I see this as a blueprint to guide those who may have ideas about other prospective projects.

IAW members who are interested in becoming involved are invited to contact Dr Vijayalakshmi whiindia@yahoo.co.in (website www.whiindia.org) and Priscilla Todd iawpmt@gmail.com

Note: We were both in touch with some members earlier this year and will renew contact with them.

compiled by Lea Börgerding, Jessica Orban and Holly Herbert

Free Contraception in France for women under 25

There has been a decline in the use of contraceptives among young women in France due to the cost being unaffordable. The French government has responded by offering free contraceptives for women up to the age of 25 starting next year. The country's health minister Olivier Veran stated "It is unbearable that young women cannot protect themselves, cannot have contraception if they choose to do so because it is too expensive for them". Veran said the age of 25 was chosen because "it is an age that corresponds, in terms of economic life, social life and income, with more autonomy." The government will be setting aside about 21 million Euros to pay for all types of contraceptives including IUDs and consultations on their use.



©Getty Images

Abortion decriminalised in Mexico

Mexico's Supreme Court has ruled that criminal penalties for terminating pregnancies are unconstitutional. The Supreme Court's ruling is a major victory for women's rights activists in Mexico who have spent over a decade campaigning for expanded reproductive rights. The decision doesn't legalise abortion across the country; experts say judges will have to apply this precedent for future legal challenges to abortion restrictions in Mexico. Before this ruling, abortion was severely restricted in all but four of the country's thirty-two states. Supreme Court Justice Luis Maria Aguilar described the move as a 'historic step for the rights of women'. The ruling will allow women in all states where abortion is criminalised to undergo the procedure with a judge's order.



©Reuters

Two German politicians make history by becoming the first transgender women to win parliamentary seats

Germany has made history by electing two trans women to the Bundestag, the country's federal parliament. Tessa Ganserer (44) and Nyke Slawik (27) will become the first openly trans MPs to hold seats in the Bundestag. Both candidates represent the Greens party, which won 14.8% of the vote. Slawik and Ganserer were among the four trans MPs who contested the elections this year. Ganserer stated "It is a historic victory for the Greens, but also for the trans-emancipatory movement and for the entire queer community," adding that the results were a symbol of an open and tolerant society. Ganserer wants legislative changes to allow lesbian mothers to adopt children. Slawik has called for a nationwide action plan against homophobia and transphobia, a self-determination law and improvements to the federal anti-discrimination law. Homosexuality was decriminalised in Germany in 1969 and same-sex marriage legalised in 2017. But hate crimes against LGBT+ people jumped by 36% last year, according to police figures that highlight a rising trend of homophobia in parts of German society.



San Marino referendum ends abortion ban

In San Marino, which is landlocked within central Italy with a population of 33,000, over 40% of the population participated in the referendum to end abortion bans. The residents voted overwhelmingly to legalise abortion with 77.3% in support of allowing abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy. Beyond the 12th week, the procedure would only be permitted if the mother's life is in danger or there are foetal abnormalities. In San Marino abortion has been illegal since 1895; it is one of the last places in Europe that maintained a total ban on abortions and the practice was punishable by between 3-6 years imprisonment. Women seeking to terminate a pregnancy were forced to go to Italy, where abortion has been legalised since 1978.



©Antonio Calanni

Meet the Australian 11-year-old who created a magazine to tell stories about women's sport

An 11 year old girl from Australia called Abbie has created her own women's sport magazine to promote women's sport. Abbie was inspired to create her magazine Her Way when she was in a medical waiting room looking at a sporting magazine and noticed there was little coverage on her female sporting heroes. With the help of her parents, Abbie created a magazine, writing articles and creating puzzles in the format of a digital magazine. The first issue launched on September 24 at a cost of \$2 (AU) with half the money going to UNICEF Australia's Empower Girls Through Cricket Appeal. Within days of the release of Her Way the magazine gained the support of high profile athletes including Australian cricketer Elyse Villani and Australian golfer Karrie Webb. Multiple Australian female sporting teams have reached out to get in touch with Abbie to offer her interviews with players for her upcoming issues. Abbie plans to make monthly issues of her magazine. Link to Her Way Magazine



©Her Way Magazine

A Feminist Action Framework for the Digital Economy

Rapid technological developments in the 21st century, based on the digital and data revolution, have raised strong concerns regarding the realisation of gender justice. Since the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively affected women's participation in the workforce, this concern has worsened. Now, a feminist working group that is supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, published a new "Feminist Action Framework for the Digital Economy" that could help shape the discussion. The framework describes ways to reimagine our current digital economies and to reclaim its transformative potential in ways that hold big tech accountable, overcome gender bias in the design of data and AI-technology, and facilitate South-South cooperation. For example. If you want to find out more about what a gender-just digital economy could look like, visit the website of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation or check out the new action framework here: <https://www.fes.de/en/themenportal-gender-jugend/gender/the-future-is-feminist/artikelseite/have-we-seen-the-writing-on-the-wall-a-feminist-action-framework-to-reshape-our-digital-destiny>.



©Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation

Jaha Dukureh: FGM activist, UN ambassador and Presidential candidate for The Gambia's next election

Jaha Dukureh was appointed Regional UN Women Ambassador for Africa in February 2018. CEO and Founder of the NGO 'Safe hands for girls', she was pivotal in the banning of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in The Gambia in 2015. She was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018. After joining the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS) in March 2021, in October she announced her candidacy for the Presidential election in The Gambia scheduled for 4 December.



©UN Women/Ryan Brown

Read more :

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/goodwill-ambassadors/jaha-dukureh>

Afghan cyclist Masomah Ali Zada made her Olympic debut in Tokyo in July 2021, whilst promoting the rights of women and refugees around the world

One of the 29 members of the Refugee Olympic Team for Tokyo, 25 year-old Masomah Ali Zada took part in the women's cycling time trial. Currently a refugee in France and a civil engineering student in Lille, her representation of women's empowerment in Afghanistan in particular - where cycling is a political statement - is an inspiration to female athletes around the world and especially to the Afghan cycling federation's women's division.



©The Guardian/Fabrice Coffrini/AFP/Getty

Read more about her fellow female cyclists in Afghanistan : <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/jul/27/were-so-proud-of-her-afghanistans-gutsy-female-cyclists-ready-to-cheer-on-masomah-ali-zada>

IAW Water and Pads Project

Period Poverty

By Holly Herbert

Period poverty is the lack of access to sanitary products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, hand-washing facilities and waste management. All those who menstruate are ostracised from basic activities all around the world.

Around 2.3 billion people globally live without basic sanitation services and in developing countries, only 27% of people have adequate handwashing facilities. This makes it difficult for women and girls to manage their periods hygienically. Another impacting factor is the tampon tax, known as the 'pink tax' which makes sanitary products unaffordable for some who have to choose between food or sanitary items, leading women to use unsafe alternative materials like old clothes, rags and sawdust. Although some countries around the world have lifted the tax on period products, there is a long way to go.



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Periods and menstrual cycles don't just have a physiological impact, they have a psychological impact as well. Menstruation continues to have a stigma attached. In some cultures, there is shame attached to menstruation and a shortage of educational resources. Social stigma around menstruation is rooted in gender inequality and discriminatory patriarchal norms about women and girls place in society. As well as this, having a lack of access to sanitary products can bring feelings of shame and embarrassment, leaving women and girls uncomfortable talking about it or asking for help.

Menstruation impacts women and girls' ability to participate in everyday activities. In particular, schooling and education for girls. Education is a key determinant of better livelihood options, greater economic mobility, and the ability to thrive. Education is a universal human right, yet girls face barriers to staying in school, one of which is menstrual inequity. Period poverty is detrimental to girls' school attendance, academic grades, and completion of secondary education.

The following are some statistics on period poverty's impact on school attendance in different countries. In New Zealand, a study found that 29% of menstruators surveyed had missed school or work due to a lack of access to period products. A study in Bangladesh found that 42% of participants surveyed had missed at least one day of school a month due to menstruation. A survey done in the US found that 84% of teenage menstruators who were surveyed had either missed school or knew someone who had missed school due to not having access to period products.



© sites.utexas.edu

Charities working to fight period poverty

These are just 3 examples of the many organisations around the world making a difference for women and girls.

Share the Dignity - An Australian charity that works to make a real, on-the-ground difference in the lives of women and girls experiencing homelessness, fleeing domestic violence, or doing it tough. They distribute sanitary items to those in need and work to end period poverty here in Australia.

www.sharethedignity.org.au

Binti - Binti's mission is to provide girls with menstrual dignity, education about menstruation, access to pads and freedom from stigmas surrounding menstruation. Binti works in India, Africa, the UK and the USA to achieve these goals.

www.bintiperiod.org

Freedom4girls - works with those who menstruate by challenging stigmas and gender inequalities associated with menstruation. They provide education, period products, product choice and support environmentally and financially sustainable options. Based in Leeds, West Yorkshire they do a lot of work in that area. They also have projects that run in East Africa, predominantly Kenya and Uganda.

www.freedom4girls.co.uk

Countries that are working on ending Period Poverty

The following highlights some countries and their steps towards fighting period poverty.

United Kingdom - The whole of the UK eliminated the 'Tampon Tax' in January 2021 this year. Furthermore, Scotland in particular, has passed The Period Products (Free Provision) Bill. This made Scotland the first country to provide free tampons and sanitary pads to anyone who needs them.

New Zealand - In February 2021 Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced that all schools in the country would provide free tampons and pads to help increase school attendance.

Australia - In 2019 the 'tampon tax' was abolished. Australian states New South Wales (2021) and Victoria (2020) implemented free pads and tampons in all public schools.

USA - Illinois, Washington, New York, New Hampshire and Virginia are all states in the US that have passed legislation to provide public schools with free tampons and pads.

France - The Île-de-France region started distributing free organic period products in high schools in September 2020. In 2021, French universities were instructed to install free tampons and pads dispensers.

Kenya - Kenya was the first country worldwide to eliminate the 'tampon tax' in 2004. In 2018 the government started distributing free sanitary pads to girls in public schools.

India - in 2018, India's 12% tax on feminine products was abolished.

South Africa - In 2018, the 'Tampon Tax' was eliminated, and a commitment was made to provide free period products in schools.

Botswana - In 2017 all school-aged girls became eligible to receive free sanitary pads.

Zambia - In 2017 Zambia's government announced it would distribute free sanitary pads to girls in rural communities. The plan was implemented in 2019.

Canada - The 'Tampon Tax' was abolished in 2015. British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island all provide menstruation products to students in schools. The Prince Edward Island government's free period products policy extends beyond schools and includes food banks and shelters.

Malaysia - in 2018, Malaysia's 6% tax on feminine products was abolished.

Colombia - In 2018 Colombia removed all taxes from pads and tampons, extending the exemption to menstrual cups in April this year.



©watchdoggazette.com



The Story of the IAW Water and Pads Project

by Ursula Nakamura

IAW Water and Pads for School-Girls Empowerment for Life!

An audience shocked

"While they are menstruating, girls and women in rural areas are 'dirty', and therefore they have to leave their homes and vegetate in shabby huts being exposed to hunger, cold, disease and violence", explained a young social worker from Nepal during a side-event at the WHO General Assembly in 2017. There was a complete silence among the whole audience with many health specialists and diplomats gathered. Everybody was stunned, and one simply could not believe this tragic fact. The speaker then presented her group of adolescents who had established educational campaigns in these villages, a successful way to eradicate taboos and discrimination.

Later on **Seema Uplekar** and I, both IAW delegates at WHO, contacted **Gudrun Haupter**, convenor of the IAW Commission on Health. Actually Gudrun had also heard about numerous taboos in Africa and Asia throughout her long-time communications with IAW organisations in Africa.

Is all this true and what can be done?

Spontaneously we felt that we should know more about this huge problem and ask our IAW member organizations MOs about it. Possibly we might be able to "do something about it". **Joanna Manganara**, president of IAW, **Rosy Weiss** treasurer of IAW and **Lene Pind**, communication unit of IAW right away liked this idea and have fully supported it ever since. Without their help the WP project never would have survived. It is also well accepted now by the current IAW president **Cheryl Hayles** and the IAW Board.

As we wanted to present some valuable proposals at the IAW Congress in Cyprus 2017 we had to speed up our activities. This commenced with fact finding by sending out a rudimentary questionnaire to 15 IAW MOs in Africa and Asia. 11 organizations responded very positively by confirming the problematic general health situation in their countries. Most of them were also voicing their interest in participating in a joint IAW action for menstrual health. They recommended reaching out to the young generation, the schoolgirls.



Anne P. Yotchou of CEFAP at the cistern of Medjo primary school Cameroon

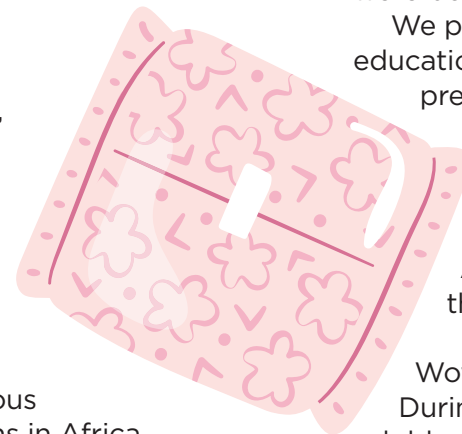


The unbearable toilet-situation at Bunyakiri primary school DR Congo

At the same time there was a lot of background work to be done. We were collecting general information about other entities involved in this field. Anne Yotchou from CEFAP Cameroon, with all her experience of working with women in rural areas, was an excellent bilingual counsellor. We all knew that we needed reliable teaching tools in order to be well accepted by the teaching staff in the schools. After extensive internet research, we finally discovered booklets edited by UNICEF -

ABCs of being a girl in English and, thanks to Anne Yotchou - **La puberté et l'hygiène menstruelle** in French, both designed for primary schools.

By that time Gudrun and I had become aware that we had triggered off quite a big task. If we wanted to achieve successful activities, it had to be done seriously within the frame of an official IAW project.



Gudrun Haupter,
IAW Convenor,
Commission on Health



Ursula Nakamura
IAW delegate at WHO until
2019

Start at the IAW Congress 2017 Cyprus

Thanks to Gudrun, a professional translator, we could always communicate in English and French with our IAW colleagues. Before the 2017 IAW Congress started, we were both very excited.

We presented our idea of promoting sexual health education and also a better sanitary infrastructure in precarious rural schools, an activity we wanted to call **Water and Pads project**, WP project.

We had already worked out a timeline and a provisional financial plan. Would the delegates agree to our proposal? We hoped so very much, because we knew that our IAW colleagues in Africa and Asia urgently wanted to participate in such a menstrual health programme. Later on, they were called the **WP actors group**, because they wanted to work in their own regions.

Wow! It was all well accepted by Congress.

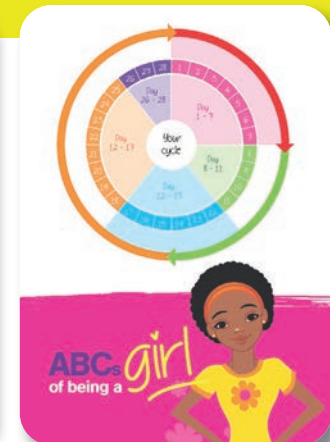
During some cosy evening talks in the hotel lobby, we were able to establish a helpful **WP steering group** with **Natalie Kostus** USA, **Anne P. Yotchou** Cameroon, **Ruhi Sayid** Pakistan, **Anuarite Siirewabo** DR Congo, **Seema Uplekar** India, **Signe Vahlun** Denmark and **Lyda Verstegen** Netherlands (advisor). Gudrun and me became Co-coordinators of the WP project.

Seven pioneers and a lot of background work

Highly motivated, we went back home and started all our background work. Firstly, we wanted to get more detailed information so we sent a questionnaire to the interested IAW member organisations, asking them more precisely about their needs and their recommendations. The result was simply overwhelming with many excellent proposals, a lot of know-how and wide ranging expertise among our IAW colleagues!

The 7 pioneer participants wrote in detail about the dire living situation of rural schoolgirls, emphasising how much they would like to improve the life conditions for these children. Here they are:

Anuarite Siirewabo Muyuwa SOFEDEC DR Congo, **Ruhi Sayid** All Pakistan Women's Organization Pakistan, **Anne P. Yotchou** CEFAP Ladies Circle, Cameroon, **Edah Gondwe** Zambia Alliance of Women Zambia, **Sab Julliet** RENATA Cameroon, **Rita Marque Mbatha** Women's Comfort Corner Zimbabwe and **Rebecca Juga** BAWUFAG, Cameroon.



IAW Congress 2017 Cyprus:
Gudrun and Ursula present
the new project.



IAW Congress 2017 (from left):
U. Nakamura, G. Haupter,
R. Sayid and S. Vahlun



Anuarite Siirewabo |
DR Congo



Ruhi Sayid | Pakistan



Anne P. Yotchou | Cameroon



Edah Gondwe | Zambia



Sab Julliet | Cameroon



Rebecca Juga | Cameroon



Rita Marque Mbata | Zimbabwe

Together they were further developing the WP project. Rebecca Juga from BAWUFAG had to quit for the time being.

Reaching out to selected schools

In Spring 2018 the pioneers were successfully finding directors of selected schools for potential menstrual health education. They approached them with a new questionnaire, this time asking them about the actual situation in their specific school. It seems that everywhere the staff was pleased about this new project and right away our IAW colleagues were very well accepted. Almost all of them wanted sexual health information already at age 10. For them it was great to know that these women's organisations would provide the health teaching and the necessary material. They all filled out a form with many details about the location, size of school, type of classes, curriculum etc. Most important, they all wished to have a well adapted educational event. The form was jointly signed by the responsible school-person and the IAW representative.

Full support at the IAW Board Meeting 2018 in Berlin

We explained the development and the actual situation with a power-point presentation. Thanks to a generous donation by Deutscher Frauenring and a few private contributions, we already had a small seed capital. Unfortunately Anuarite Siirewabo from DR Congo was not able to attend, but by a video-connection she joined us and among other items she also pleaded for better water installations in rural areas. Anne Yotchou from Cameroon gave a short statement on how she would envisage carrying out the WP project. Several delegates brought up some excellent ideas, also about getting the necessary funds. At the end the assembly unanimously gave the green light to continue the WP mandate. It was a great and very motivating feeling for us.

It is money we need!

From now on we had to prepare all requirements for a serious project: detailed basic information, a concept note and a procedure plan for each IAW member organization participating. We had to establish a financial plan, emphasising the point that, like all engagements within IAW, here too the entire work had to be performed on a voluntary basis. Looking back today we are just enormously thankful to our IAW colleagues who have carried out the WP project as a non-paid extra job on top of all their hard everyday life.

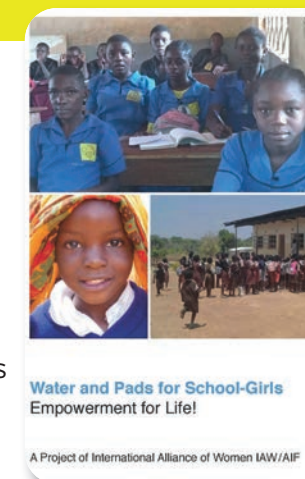
We sent all our documentation in English, French and German to around 50 mostly foundations, most of them based in Switzerland. Despite numerous additional phone-calls etc. the results were simply frustrating. But at least we could sometimes establish a few promising connections.



IAW Board Meeting 2018 at Berlin


WP project steering group:
G.Haupter, U.Nakamura, A.Yotchou,
R. Sayid and S. Vahlun.

We have to thank **Dr. Sybille von Heydebrand**, a Swiss delegate at the IAW Board Meeting in Berlin, who was fascinated about the WP project and wanted to help. As she was planning her well-known yearly New Year women's event at Basel she also promoted the WP project. Beforehand she had contacted **Claudia Pauletto**, a young graphics designer from Basel to create an appropriate flyer which was then widely distributed. The fund-raising resulted in a very generous amount of more than 3000 Swiss francs, which was highly motivating for us! Together with Sibylle we now organized identical leaflets in French and English. We added photos given by **Francine Perret**, also an ADF member. Her pictures about schoolgirls in Africa were so appealing. Later on Sibylle distributed the flyers at the CSW 64 conference in New York.


Original WP flyer
in German

English version of
the WP flyer

Creating a special website for the WP project

Thanks to Lene Pind there had always been information about this new project on the general IAW website. But now we needed a direct platform to communicate with the participants and the public.

With the help of Gudrun Haupter, we could create identical French and English versions. As well as the technical work, it was and is just simply a great joy to upload the highly interesting contents: the reports written by IAW colleagues and all their lively pictures about the wonderful WP activities they had performed in their region!

This turns out to be a win-win situation, because some IAW member organizations are maybe on facebook, but they do not have their own homepage. Some isolated rural schools with no internet connections cannot be reached and therefore they are very happy about the opportunity to be at least present on this WP platform.


Preparatory Event "Water and Pads"
at the Epworth High School
Zimbabwe, in close collaboration
with Women's Comfort Corner (WCC)
Zimbabwe

Everything ready - the pilot-project starts in February 2019

It had been agreed that the budgeted money for the yearly WP activities would be identical for all WP participants because, due to the tight WP financial situation, no extra costs could be funded. Pioneer Anne Yotchou, coordinator of CEFAP Cameroon, tackled our pilot project. Already a year before she had visited the Medjo primary school with its disastrous lack of sanitary installations. She now presented a detailed budget about the planned event and so in October 2018 we could send her the booklets "La puberté" and later on the necessary finances to prepare her WP activities. Of course we were very excited: How would this new idea of teaching menstrual health be accepted in such a forlorn poor area? Are the schoolgirls interested in it at all? How would angry parents react to such a "dangerous influence"? Would there be repressions against CEFAP?



The result was unbelievably good: Anne and her colleagues had earlier established excellent contacts and meticulously prepared for this special day. As a women's organisation with great expertise they had also informed the local media about their activity. Not surprisingly, soon after the radio broadcast there were requests from other schools at Yaoundé asking for similar activities in their institution! Most of all the schoolgirls and their teachers were very happy. Surprisingly also the parents felt relieved to know that their daughters would get some basic knowledge about the biological lifecycle.

Regular contacts with all participants of the WP project

Of course we often exchanged information by newsletters sent to the WP actors group and the WP steering group. No wonder that the report about the successful pilot project was highly motivating for a lot of them! Soon afterwards some booklets and a financial contribution could be transferred to the coordinators of the **RENATA** organization in Cameroon and **SOFEDC** in DR Congo.

Both of them managed to carry out WP activities in not one but two schools. Juliette Saab and the team of RENATA even reached out to the Far North of the country, and Anuarite Siirewabo with the volunteers from SOFEDEC travelled through highly dangerous forests to the primary school at Bunyakiri. Everywhere, like at Medjo school, they were welcomed, the pupils and the teaching-staff were highly interested and expressed their wish to have more such health events.



Anne Yotchou (right) at Medjo primary school



The official picture with all WP participants



SOFEDC at Bunyakiri primary school DR Congo



SOFEDC at the primary school SOS Village Bukavu DR Congo



RENATA at the Kongola primary school Cameroon



RENATA at the Louggéo Dubai primary school Cameroon

2019 Menstrual health booklets – not on the online bestseller list!

Although we had gathered a lot of valuable background information, we were facing a completely unexpected difficulty: How could we find age-adapted and easily understandable texts for the secondary schoollevel? Obviously there are countless extensive studies on teaching methods in low and middle income countries and also a lot of expensive textbooks on sale but simply no booklets with reliable rudimentary information about sexual health.

We were shocked about such a worldwide lack of basic tools...! How then can we expect that boys and girls would understand the biological lifecycle of women and meet girls and women with the necessary respect?

Well, under the guidance of Dr. Chandra Mouli an expert on menstrual health, WHO had published some useful brochures although usually just in a local language. Seema Uplekar, my IAW colleague at WHO, at that time had established the initial contacts. Some regional health organisations had also edited small booklets but simply refused to give us the copyrights.



WHO Geneva 2019: Seema Uplekar (left) and Ursula Nakamura meet Dr. Ch. Mouly at WHO.

It became obvious that we had to create our own booklets and restrict our scope to English and French, although some WP participants would have preferred to have texts in their native language. Like so often, it was thanks to some helpful friends that the goal was reached. This time it was Barbara Berger, director of Swiss Sexual Health SSH and member of ADF Suisse, who gave us the green light SSH had published an excellent booklet about menstruation called “Hé les miss!” for the secondary level, edited in German and French. We got permission to use all the fact based texts and anatomical graphs. **Daniela Enzler** from SSH just had returned from Malawi where she had investigated period bleeding. Her advice was very helpful, and she has become a WP consultant.

All this was perfect, but we had to change the whole booklet with its nice pictures of the leisurely life in Europe and adapt it to the sparse surroundings where young people are growing up in the Global South. Again, our friend Francine Perret helped us. She gave us wonderful pictures she had taken during her numerous visits to schools in Africa. Like before, Anne Yotchou from Cameroon was an excellent consultant. She was lecturing on the content and gave us recommendations about what to add or leave out. She also investigated small businesses producing reusable pads.

We had to translate it all from French into English. Again, thanks to Gudrun and another English expert we could finalize it. Alison Brown from IAW proposed “Entering Womanhood” as a title and the French version was called “Devenir femme en toute sérénité” (title by A. Yotchou).

Needless to say that with all these changes we needed a completely new layout! Again we asked Claudia Pauletto, graphist. She was so excited about the WP project that she worked for a minimum charge.

A new school year starts in September 2019

Ruhi Sayid, president of **AWPA Punjab in Pakistan** and her colleagues were excited about the booklet «ABCs of being a girl”, edited by UNICEF and they established contacts with girls aged 12 years in a school located in a very poor neighbourhood of Lahore. They were very well accepted, and the young students had heaps of questions. As Ruhi told us much later, in Pakistan they have a different approach to promoting menstrual health than in Africa. So they also talked about it at meetings with adult women, all within the frame of childhealth care.

In October two anglophone IAW organisations in Africa had their first experiences with WP events. Rita Marque Mbata, president of **Women's Comfort Corner Foundation WCCF** in Zimbabwe, went for a preparatory visit to the Epworth Haigh School at Harare. Despite having to sit examinations on the same day, the students were happily carrying posters with the slogan “Entering Womanhood”.

Edah Gondwe Chimya, coordinator of **Zambia Alliance of Women ZAW**, and her team travelled to Chibwe Secondary School, situated in a remote area. They were the first ones to distribute our “home made” booklets. How would the reaction be? Would they be shocked seeing all these explicit anatomical graphs or reading about secure contraception? Not at all – just the contrary! All the girls were highly interested about this new information, and they spontaneously talked about



WP booklet for the high schools in English and in French



their own often negative experiences during the period bleeding. We were deeply moved when we got a video from Edah with two girls voicing their demands for more menstrual health care and better sanitation systems (see WP website).

2020 – a promising start

Goma Bastola, president of Rural Women of Nepal RUWON, had now joined the WP Pioneers. She and her team went to Shree Jana Jagriti Secondary School, in a district which is still suffering very much from the devastating earthquake in 2015. Here too the welcome was overwhelming, the booklets well accepted, and the teaching staff was very thankful that RUWON had initiated such a helpful action. One can watch Goma Bastola during her talk about menstruation on a video here.

The WP event Rita Marque Mbato had planned also took place in February. It was very surprising that even the boys were highly interested about sexual health. They officially vowed to protect their classmates, the girls by founding a boy's group for respecting the biological lifecycle of women.

Pandemics – lockdown – lockdown – lockdown

In March it all changed. The precautions against the Covid pandemics were striking people in the Global South particularly hard. Because there was generally a lack of finances and health facilities, many governments decided to protect their populations primarily by strict lockdowns which lasted for months and months.

Our IAW colleagues were very much alarmed about this situation. Within an incredibly short time they all took measures on their own to fight against the pandemics. They knew about many poor rural women who are making their living by growing vegetables or fruits and by selling the crops on the daily markets. With the lockdown they were forced to stay at home – starving. As there were no protective masks or disinfectants available our IAW colleagues spontaneously stepped in with a lot of creativity. In no time

Anuarite Siirewabo had organized the official production of masks by women in a dress making atelier; Anne Yotchou CEFAP had shown women on the streets how to produce disinfectants; the RENATA team started a real production of disinfectants and masks; Rita Marque and the WCCF women were

counselling about Covid and Thérèse Akakpo from LA COLOMBE Togo promoted anti-pandemic precautions in front of small shops. Conditions in Nepal were so tough, Goma Bastola and her volunteers helped by bringing some basic food to the starving people. Fortunately two IAW affiliate associations - the Deutscher Frauenring and Association Suisse pour les droits des femmes - supported these IAW organisations by donations. Needless to say that all WP activities had to be stopped.



Pakistan: Girls school at Lahore



Chibwe Secondary School Zambia

WCCF: Instructions about Covid prevention



LA COLOMBE: Installing hand disinfection outside shops

Sandepani school at Kerala India participated.

She had organized this event by zoom. The feedback from the girl students was very positive.

Anne Yotchou was very successful at “her” Medjo School in Cameroon despite the fact that the booklets had not arrived yet.

Anuarite Siirewabo was determined to travel to “her” primary school at Bunyakiri before Christmas. When she had almost crossed the huge natural forest and was near to her destination, she and her driver were attacked by a brutal military gang. It was almost a miracle that she was not killed like some nearby villagers. All material was lost and Anuarite was in shock. Some IAW members spontaneously helped her with their donations for a quick recovery.

2021 – a year full of hope

Except for RUWON which until now has been fighting against the starvation in Nepal, most WP participants could catch up with the delayed 2020 activities. Then they started with the implementation of the activities planned for 2021.

The best way of getting an idea about all the recent developments is to look at our special WP website. There you will find all activities mentioned. We recommend that you also read the full reports written by each participating organization. You will be surprised about all the teaching skills, the various ways of implementing the project and the spontaneous decisions when facing difficulties. You will read about the very understandable demands of the schoolchildren for better toilets and the pleas of the teachers to continue these health teaching sessions – to “have more of that”!

When you are looking at all the pictures with happily smiling girls in cramped shabby rooms or outdoors under a tree or wherever, then you must consider that all these wonderful photos have been taken by our IAW colleagues, sometimes under very difficult circumstances. Often they only could reach us thanks to the communication by WhatsApp due to their shaky internet connections.

www.iawwaterandpads.com

At present 9 IAW member organisations are actively participating. We hope that also BAWUFAG, still blocked due to a brutal military conflict, will soon be able to join the others again.



Heidi Bodmer
In action – preparing the parcels with the booklets



Goma Bastola speaking at Shree Jana Jagriti Secondary School Nepal, see also video on the WP website.



Epworth High School Harare Zimbabwe with the leader of the boys group



SOFEDDEC DR Congo: production of protective masks



RUWON Nepal: help to the starving women and girls

It is clear that one still feels the effects of the pandemic everywhere. There is a drastic increase of women living in poverty in Africa and Asia. As the majority of the population still does not have access to Covid vaccinations our IAW colleagues have got additional jobs. During their WP activities they also must organize the necessary pandemic precautions. The responsible people in the small villages and schools are very happy about these events because now our IAW colleagues also bring disinfectants and masks. Later on they usually address the whole community, thanks to their expert knowledge – a completely unforeseeable positive side-effect!

Even now we are printing most of the booklets here in Switzerland due to the exceedingly high production costs at local printing shops. When we are sending the parcels by a postal service it takes much longer than before the pandemics. The long waiting times make the planning for the WP participants and schools very difficult.

What are the chances for the WP project in future?

Having or not having the necessary funds is the crucial question. Since the beginning, many IAW members helped with donations. We are very thankful to them. Recently we were particularly lucky to get an unexpected donation by a Swiss foundation, but it was clearly earmarked for new projects. We are happy that this way now the IAW member organisation **LA COLOMBE** based in Togo with **Thérèse Akakpo** as its coordinator can also participate in the WP project.



Thérèse Akakpo and the team of LA COLOMBE during a pandemic prevention course.

At the moment LA COLOMBE, like CEFAP and RENATA are reaching out at three “new schools”.

But, speaking in general, we must admit that despite all of our continuous efforts, the results of our fundraising are meagre. The donations come in rather haphazardly, be it thanks to some generous spending of IAW members or a collection at a birthday party or some reunions of local women's organisations, churches etc.

Looking at the increasing demand for WP activities voiced by our IAW colleagues then we need more than ever the necessary funding. We

are grateful to both IAW treasurers, Rosy Weiss and now Antonia Lavine, because they have always kept a good eye on our finances.

We know that the IAW members have always given their support to this project be it by some useful recommendation, be it by an interesting documentation or be it by contacting other entities working on health issues. All this is highly appreciated and valuable for the future.

At this point we also want to express our thanks to our IAW colleagues working for the WP project in Africa and Asia. They have all accepted the fact that the financial resources are extremely limited. We are working well together because we can all trust each other.

We all are aware that we have to engage ourselves for women's and girls' rights which are constantly endangered.

With the WP project we can promote two important sustainable development goals – Health and Equality.

Which organisation, if not IAW, is more suitable to strive towards this global goal?

Ursula Nakamura, Co-Coordinator of the IAW Water and Pads project
21 October 2021



Le projet « Eau et Serviette » au Cameroun The water & pads project is a gift for rural girls' education in Cameroon

by Anne Pelagie Yotchou,
Coordinator of Cefap-Ladies Circle Cameroon (IAW Board Member)



Avec le projet « Eau et Serviettes » au Cameroun, nous arrivons progressivement à briser le tabou autour des menstruations. Ce ne sont plus des sources d'absentéisme scolaire pour les filles dans les zones rurales où nous avons travaillé au Cameroun depuis 2019, à l'instar de Medjo, Bandjoun dans la région de l'Ouest et tout récemment Ngaoundéré dans le septentrion.

Selon un rapport de l'UNESCO, en Afrique subsaharienne, une fille sur cinq ne va pas à l'école pendant son cycle menstruel, ce qui correspond, d'après certaines estimations, à 20% du temps scolaire perdu sur une année. Au Cameroun, après plusieurs déploiements de collecte des données sur le terrain par notre organisation CEFAP-LADIES CIRCLE, nous avons pu constater dans les 25 villages visités que huit filles sur dix abandonnent

complètement l'école lorsqu'elles sont en âge de puberté. C'est par manque de produits hygiéniques, manque d'installations adéquates dans les écoles pour une meilleure gestion de leur hygiène menstruelle et aussi un manque criard d'informations y relatives.

Cette initiative de l'Alliance Internationale des Femmes (AIF) a été reçue comme une aubaine et notre organisation, qui en membre, n'a pas hésité à s'impliquer pour qu'ensemble, nous parvenons à apporter un soutien multiforme et surtout adapté aux filles scolarisées dans les zones rurales au Cameroun afin qu'elles puissent mieux gérer leur période des menstruation avec assurance, sérénité, dignité et surtout sécurité. En fait nous avons eu des témoignages des filles qui se font agressées sexuellement dans la broussaille derrière les salles de classes parce qu'elles cherchent désespérément des espaces loin des regards pour changer leurs serviettes pour celles qui en ont, et ceci à cause du manque de toilettes et d'eau dans les écoles.

Après 3 campagnes successives dans 4 écoles/lycées/collèges de Medjo et Bandjoun dans la région de l'Ouest Cameroun et un collège dans la ville de Yaoundé, région du Centre entre 2019 et fin mi 2021, notre organisation a pensé à étendre le projet « Eau et Serviettes » dans le Grand Nord Cameroun. Cette partie du pays est très souvent aussi lésée à cause de la distance mais surtout à cause de l'instabilité qui y règne du fait des crises sociopolitiques. Il s'agit d'attaques perpétrées par le groupe islamiste et terroriste « BOKO Haram » avec des attentats à la bombe et avec des enlèvements contre demande de rançon. Dû à cette situation c'est une zone à risque. Mais nous de notre organisation, malgré ce contexte d'insécurité, nous avons mis en avant l'éducation de nos filles, sœurs et mamans qui s'y trouvent. Nous avons « osé » à travers les obstacles de visiter du 11 au 14 octobre 5 écoles et lycées de Ngaoundéré, en l'occurrence :

- Ecole publique de Tike Ngaoundéré
- Ecole Publique de Gada Dang
- Lycée de Béka Hosséré
- Lycée Technique Mardock et Lycée Technique Principal de Ngaoundéré

Menstrual hygiene matters

Through the project « Water and Pads » for girl's education, an initiative from the International Women Alliance (IAW) and implemented in many countries around the world including Cameroon with 03 organizations, namely: our organization CEFAP-LADIES CIRCLE and also RENATA

Our methodology

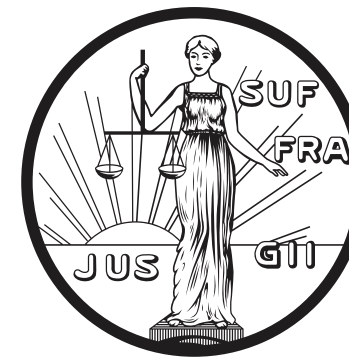
- Spread consciousness around menstrual hygiene management within the educative community.
- Make sure girls have proper education and awareness of menstrual hygiene through the various booklets put at our disposal by IAW (ABC of being a girl, Devenir une femme en toute sérénité, la puberté et l'hygiène menstruelle, entering womanhood)
- Give pads to girls to prevent them from missing school.

Our perspectives

Many girls and women in my country still don't have full control over their sexual and reproductive health, so there is still a lot to do about that. As we look forward to continuing our work and to extending the project in 2 different regions in Cameroun (South and East) for the next stage, some of the perspectives are to go beyond what we have been doing so far.

We plead with IAW and its partners to add to the educational aspects and the provision of pads to girls, by also considering how to improve health, hygiene and safety for girls in rural areas with access to safe water and sanitation within the school compounds.

We really thank IAW for all the support through this project for girls' education worldwide, especially in Cameroon.



International Women's NEWS NOUVELLES Féministes Internationales

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