



Asmae - Association Sœur Emmanuelle
Bimonthly newsletter n°5 – January 2010

2010: Introducing 3 new international partners

In keeping with the principles established by our founder, making listening and closeness to the community core values that guide our work, Asmae – Association sœur Emmanuelle – works in partnership with local associations in each of the countries where it operates. The aim of this approach is to strengthen the autonomy of the partner associations. To this end, Asmae engages with its partners for as long as ten years or more to offer them guidance and strengthen their structures and projects.

The beginning of a new year brings new partnerships and new projects.

In Mali, IRED Mali promotes basic education in a rural setting

IRED works in the Sikasso region with rural communities living in precarious conditions with regard to hygiene, education and health. 80% of towns and villages have no access to running water and only 20% of the population has electricity. In these conditions, literacy and school enrolment rates remain low, primarily because schools in the region are under-resourced and there is a dearth of trained teaching staff. In many rural districts, only half the villages have a public primary school. The others have community schools, which are run almost entirely by the local population.



Photo: C. Schmitt-Guilloton

The association participates in a program to support the decentralization of education in 10 districts in the Sikasso region and, with the cooperation of Asmae, is conducting a participatory research project on access to basic education and primary health in schools. The goal of this study is to provide the basis for launching new projects to improve the children's learning conditions and increase scholastic achievement.

In 2010, IRED plans to launch a project to promote hygiene and primary health in schools.

In India, Kshitij promotes education in a rural area

In the Taluka (sub-district) of Mulshi near Pune in the state of Maharashtra, the villages are very isolated. It is difficult for children in these agricultural communities to get a secondary education. They have to walk over 10 km to get to the middle school, and the nearest high school is in the town of Pune, a 90-minute trip along a road that is sometimes flooded during the rainy season. But the main problem is the gap between the language the children use at home and the "urban" vocabulary used in their textbooks and by their teachers. For these children, often the first in their families to go to school, it is impossible for them to get any help from their parents.



Photos: Martine Lecat, Caroline Dussart

To respond to this situation, Kshitij is working with 400 school children between the ages of 6 and 10 in the public primary schools in 10 villages to offer play-based language activities. Through educational games, the

children are familiarized with the alphabet, grammar, writing and vocabulary. They learn the difficult words that they will later encounter in their textbooks. The association also provides the children with a library and organizes a variety of recreational activities (music, sports, etc.). Thanks to a sponsorship, Kshitij is able to offer teenage girls financial support to encourage them to continue with their schooling.

In Madagascar, Avotra supports care for children with disabilities

Avotra grew out of an initiative by five people with disabilities who decided to set up a case management centre for disabled children.

The goal of the association is to allow children with cognitive disabilities who have left the school system or have never been to school to acquire a basic education. It serves 35 children living with a range of cognitive or physical disabilities, as well as children who have not been accepted at school because they were late enrolling or because they had learning difficulties. All the children are from very disadvantaged communities in the poor districts of the Malagasy capital, Antananarivo.



Photo: G. Guinault

The children attend reading, writing, Malagasy and arithmetic classes. A variety of craft and sports activities are also offered to them in partnership with other groups working in the area. Today, five youth are receiving vocational training in baking, woodworking and sewing at a public training centre thanks to support from Avotra.

Asmae and its partners: building side by side

Asmae systematically works with local associations. For each of these partnerships, the country coordinator has identified the association, its needs and its challenges.



Photo: K. Perrody

By working regularly and closely with the associations, we identify together the projects and priorities to be developed. We tailor our collaboration to their needs: team training provided by a professional on assignment, partial funding for a project, connecting the association with other Asmae partners so they can learn from each other's experience, volunteer work bees, sponsoring children, etc.

The needs of each organization are different and each response is specific.

Georgia was a coordinator in Burkina Faso for two years. Her work for Asmae, as she explains, is "to listen, discuss, suggest, and be part of an exchange of ideas. It is the local associations that have the best knowledge of the context and have all the keys for understanding the culture and providing social support. The associations have the potential to find solutions. Asmae's role is simply to support them in finding these solutions. We work together to improve the quality of services and give them the means to act."

When the mutually established goals of project quality and structural strength are achieved by the partner, it is quite natural for Asmae gradually to withdraw. From this perspective, Asmae regularly engages with new local associations. We specifically target small local associations that have a very good knowledge of the context in which they work and are involved in an innovative, high-potential project.

Partnership: the basis of our action

As a result of her experience in the slums of Cairo, Sister Emmanuelle was convinced of the need to act *with* local communities: "First listen, watch, understand, and integrate! First get to know the real needs and who, in the country, is responding to them. And don't arrive with the attitude 'I've got it all figured out – I'm going to look after everything!'"

The partnership enables us to act in a way that is respectful to the community and takes cultural diversity into account. Asmae and its partners nourish one another through the relationship they maintain. We provide local associations with access to the know-how and resources they lack, and in return, we are enriched by their ingenuity and their knowledge of the country context. We provide them with the human and material resources required to achieve their goals on behalf of children in poverty. It is important to us to make the

most of existing talent and skills. Far from being limited to funding, our support consists in strengthening this human potential.

Unlike projects conducted without collaboration, based on ready-made solutions that would prove to be inappropriate in the medium or long term, partnership ensures that we remain as close as possible to the real needs. It produces sustainable progress for the children.

(La mission d'Asmae : le développement de l'enfant, Véronique Graindorge, January 2009)

Sister Emmanuelle put it this way: "working hand in hand establishes a relationship and not a connection based on superiority. It is absolutely critical that we work with the people of the country if we are to succeed. Success depends on working in partnership."

Mady Chanrion

La Chrysalide, and after?

The mother/child residential centre at Bobigny, la Chrysalide [The Chrysalis] offers a home to young mums aged between 18 and 25 going through difficult times. The team offers them daily support towards an independent life. Originally from Ivory Coast, Estelle is 23 years old and the mother of little Coralie, who has just celebrated her fourth birthday. Estelle spent just under two years at the Bobigny centre from 2006 to 2008. Here she tells us her story.

The shy young woman starts by talking about her profession: assistant at a regular and drop-in crèche in the Paris region. "I liked being pregnant", she explains to us.

"That's when I knew what I wanted to do. After she was born and before arriving at la Chrysalide, my daughter was looked after at a crèche where the nurses showed me how to provide care, how to look after a baby. So I wanted to focus on the profession of nursery nurse. After six months training I became a teaching assistant".

As for her background, she talks about it modestly. "Before, I was staying with my brother and it wasn't working out. So my social worker suggested I go to a mother/child residential centre. To begin with I didn't want to. To convince me she made me visit three! In the end, it wasn't what I had expected. So I accepted". "At Bobigny, what was really good was the support from the youth workers. When you get downhearted they are there to tell you not to give up. Because sometimes, you want to do something and when you get an initial refusal, you give up. You need help. You want to do certain things, but on your own you can't manage it or you don't have the courage. When your youth worker tells you can do it, she believes in you even when you don't believe in yourself".

"If I could get out of there, they can too".

She describes the theatre workshop with a beaming smile. "We even did a performance!" she says proudly. "It was for Women's Day, in March. It was based on our own lives, which we explained in an amusing way. We each talked about our backgrounds, how we came to be at Bobigny, the plans we had for ourselves and for our children". Bobigny also offers other workshops, such as cooking "to make nice little meals" and gardening. But that, "that's not really my thing... Watering, ok. But no more than that!".

"We also organised short trips with the residents. We went to see Sister Emmanuelle at Callian. She was on form! She asked us what we wanted to do and gave us advice. It was very moving to see her, I had never met her before".

At Bobigny, Estelle was chair of the residents. "Three or four of us put ourselves forward and I was the one elected. My work was to ask the mums what they wanted us to improve at the mother/child residential centre. I listened and passed it on to the team. We requested the possibility of taking someone in, a payphone, a washing machine... which arrived after I left!".

"When your youth worker tells you you can do it, she believes in you even when you don't believe in yourself".

Her stay at la Chrysalide was rich and intense. Even today she talks about it with emotion. Her favourite memory? "The solidarity, the conviviality. As we didn't see each other much during the week because a lot of mums worked, we met up on Sundays in the garden to chat, walk and share a meal". "Every Friday, there were also meetings between the residents and staff. We talked over coffee. I miss that". Coralie also enjoyed her time at Bobigny. "When we moved out, she asked me every day: When are we going back?".

With a hint of nostalgia in her voice, she concludes soberly: "I really liked my stay at la Chrysalide". Today she lives in Montreuil with her two sisters. She found an apartment when she left. The future for Estelle: nursery nurse exams in Mars. And perhaps later become a teacher for young children. She has found happiness working with children.

In spite of the time that has passed, she remains attached to the centre and the people she met there. When we ask her for the first piece of advice she would give a resident, she replies: "that she believe in herself". Today, it's her turn to help young mums: she is going to become a resident's sponsor. "I will be there to give them advice and encourage them. If I could get out of there, they can too".

Interview by Mady Chanrion

Lebanon: restoring dialogue between communities

The ideal of the Lebanese association OffreJoie [Bring joy] can be summed up in three words: forgiveness, respect and love. In a country damaged by numerous conflicts and where more than 17 communities live together, the association is a real bridge between Lebanese. It brings together young people of different confessions and regions through activities that rally them together and provide social benefits.

Created during the Lebanon war in 1985, the association's objective is to bring together the Lebanese family and restore the links between the country's several confessions and regions. Through all of its actions, OffreJoie encourages young Lebanese to become aware of the importance of being involved with their families and communities. Through their actions to rehabilitate and maintain shared spaces, they contribute to improving living conditions in Lebanon.

Today there is a network of nearly 300 young volunteers aged between 18 and 30 on which the organisation relies to conduct its actions with the residents of disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, the projects are entirely designed and managed by the young people based on the needs they identify. OffreJoie is currently working on a project to create community centres and centres for minors in trouble with the law.

A country of several communities

The population of Lebanon is estimated at four million inhabitants and represents a mosaic of confessions and communities, 17 of which are officially recognised. The twelve Christian confessions are Eastern churches, some of which are affiliated with Rome (the largest church, that of the Maronites, followed by Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Catholic and Chaldean Catholic) whilst others do not recognise the authority of the pope (Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Chaldean Orthodox and Syriac Monophysite). There are also Roman Catholics and Protestants. Muslims, who are larger in number since the Palestinians arrived, are divided between Sunni and Shiites, to which are added the Syncretic, Alaouite and Druze communities. There is also a very small Jewish minority. Finally, in 1994, the Coptic community was officially recognised as the eighteenth official community.



Photos: OffreJoie

From 1975 to 1999 Lebanon saw a conflict which was both national and international. This conflict was partly based on the multi-confessional character of the country, opposing the communities against each other, thus damaging and often destroying the links between communities. The Lebanese political system is therefore organised proportionally according to the weight of the different religious communities. In Lebanon, every person is defined according to the community to which he/she belongs.

In a country with strong community resonances, OffreJoie is one of the few structures to give young people the opportunity to be socially involved without political or religious beliefs.

The partnership with Asmae

Every year, about 10 free camps are organized for the children of disadvantaged families as well as restoration projects for schools, neighborhoods, or prisons. OffreJoie has also opened several reception centers in Beirut and Tripoli, among others, and regularly organizes events to bring people together such as a children's party, a clothing collection, neighborhood activities, commemorative events, etc.

Asmae (Association sœur Emmanuelle) has been a partner of the Association since 1993. It provides support for its infrastructure - organization, data processing, program direction, and search for financing - and participates in its activities by financing camps and regular volunteers sent as an international solidarity project. These encounters promote cultural exchange and diversity between Lebanese and French in the spirit of the Association.

Mady Chanrion

In cooperation with Anne Morosini, Asmae Coordinator in Lebanon

Family support is the key for encouraging the schooling of Madagascan children

Stéphanie Hogrel is an Asmae (Association sœur Emmanuelle) volunteer. Her assignment is to support the staff of the Madagascan Hardi Association in implementing regular follow-up of the families in their care. Her objective is to encourage long-term schooling of children.

A partner association: Hardi

Hardi is an association established by Madagascan students in 1993 to help the population carry out their initiatives. The Association developed a school project in Antananarivo for children experiencing difficulties. The help for the children is based on their age, situation, and level. They attend a class for reading and writing, a refresher class, or school support for those who are in a normal school cycle. Hardi currently looks after 220 children.

One objective is long-term schooling of children



Credit: M. Razafindratsima

The children come from disadvantaged families of the capital's destitute neighborhoods. Many of them live under very difficult conditions, and their families ask them to help by earning a little money. They then run into problems attending the classes offered by the Association. In this precarious situation, however, the parents do not always see the education of their children as a priority in the face of the daily problems of family survival. Follow-up of families is therefore essential for encouraging the ongoing schooling of children.

Supporting staff in following families

The Hardi team consists of an educational manager and five teachers, one of whom is responsible for following families. She has regular discussions with the families whose children attend the Hardi Association classes. In cooperation with the Asmae volunteer, she makes home visits to establish a link with the families and become acquainted with their history through doing a social survey. Each child thus has a "life diary." This gives the teachers a long-term view of the child's progress in both schooling and development and of the family's situation.

The relationship maintained with the families of the children promotes understanding of the child's behavior and family dynamics and expands the ability of the teachers to help. This close-contact support aims to encourage parents to be involved in monitoring the schooling of their children and thus deal with the problem of school dropouts.

Mady Chanrion

Time for learning

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Altermondes*, a quarterly journal of international solidarity, published a report on the issue of children's rights in its December issue. Asmae had the opportunity to talk about its non-formal education program for children with no schooling in India.



Credit: Altermondes

INDIA. Around the world, 101 million children do not go to elementary school. The right to an education is nevertheless inseparable from childhood development. In India, where school policies are still weak, lay people are joining forces to make this right a reality.

Despite strong economic growth and the willingness displayed by the State, UNICEF estimates that there are 27 million children with no schooling in India. A shortage of school infrastructure combined with great insecurity and significant inequality of access to education are all factors that make it difficult to bring thousands of children into the "traditional" school system.

Provide schooling for all children

Only a few weeks ago, Satya, who is barely 12 years old, was working in the fields for 200 rupees (about €3). Aide et Action has been joining forces with local NGOs for 30 years to help thousands of children like him and to support their return to school. Convinced that young people can bring about change, the Association supports the establishment of committees of children, the Balashabas, who go from village to village to encourage parents to enroll all children in school.

To deal with this same alarming situation, the Indian State launched the "Everyone Goes to School" program in 2002. Its objective is to provide schooling to all children from 6 to 14 years by 2010. With this ambition but not able to meet the challenge alone, the State is delegating the basic teaching to NGOs ready to create "non-formal" classes and is supporting them by financing 20% of the expenses. Some see this as a clear desire of the State to become involved, and others see a lack government accountability that promotes the establishment of two-tier education. The results are encouraging. Between 2000 and 2006, the percentage of school-age children enrolled in elementary school rose from 75.9% to 83.3%.

Non-formal education

In Pune in the northwestern part of the country, Asmae (Association cœur Emmanuelle) supports four local organizations in strengthening their non-formal education program. It sends education professionals into the field with a mission to strengthen the skills of local players and support them in creating appropriate tools. The children are taken on by educational teams, themselves from working-class neighborhoods, who have developed specific skills and a keen understanding of the needs of these children.

Faced with groups of heterogeneous, vulnerable children not used to the pace of school, NGOs have to develop an appropriate educational response and teaching tools based on participation and experimentation.

"Non-formal education classes are the way to offer basic education to children and to prepare them to join the traditional school system. This is not enough, however, and educational policies must deal with providing real options to these children," says the Tara mobile Creche NGO that works with children from a construction site. Last year, its initiative benefitted nearly 6,899 children and 4,314 families.



Credit: G. Saillard

Orchestrating its own learning

As part of the "*Free the Schools*" project initiated by Aide et Action in 2001, local NGOs were partners in a thought process to consider alternative educational locations and tools. Villages were encouraged to have resource centers or libraries providing everyone with the means for self-education. When society has the option to orchestrate its own learning, young people can become more confident and more autonomous. They are more able to decide for themselves on programs for the common good without outside intervention. Developed in the last 10 years, participation is now recognized as one of the principal means of making a reality of the right to an education for the greatest number of people.

Sandrine de Carlo – Asmae (Association sœur Emmanuelle)

Vanessa Martin – Aide & Action

See the complete report, "*The Rights of the Child: Sufficient Protection?*", in the December 2009 issue of *Altermondes* at www.altermondes.org.