



Asmae - Association Sœur Emmanuelle
Lettre d'information bimestrielle n°6 – Avril 2010

Asmae celebrates 30 years of action!

Asmae is celebrating 30 years of action. 30 years of struggle, sharing, love and revolution driven by the extraordinary energy of Sister Emmanuelle. The "30 years, 30 faces" operations is celebrating this anniversary with the pictures of the men and women responsible for that action.

In this special edition of the newsletter, we would like to introduce you to the kind of children we're fighting for. JN, Virginia, Renuka or Manampy are the faces of Asmae.

J.N., 26 year-old, Lebanon

"My parents sent me to AFEL mainly because neither of them wanted to take care of me and my younger brother after they were divorced. They wanted to get on with their own lives. My first day at AFEL was both terrifying and very sad. It was terrifying because of all the new faces, and sad because I had lost my family. I was all alone, and very scared of everybody. Because I had been abandoned by those nearest and dearest to me, I now trusted no-one. Little by little I started to become involved, to become attached to the people I was living with. They sent me to a private school where I scored an average of 12/20. I realised that my future would depend on my school work and that encouraged me to become a very good student. The AFEL staff supported me and promised that they would always be there for me. I understood the importance of their support and their love. AFEL gave me all the encouragement I needed. They supplied me with books and allowed me to work on my own in the dormitories. In the end it was these little things which were of enormous help to me. When I obtained my school certificate, AFEL allowed me to continue with my studies. The whole time I was in secondary school I was first in the class. When I came home from school, there was always someone on hand waiting for me, ready to welcome me home with a smile. Throughout all these years social workers Amal and Chantal supported me and gave me all the love I needed. Nor can I forget Joe, who was like an elder brother to me, always full of sound advice, and Georgette who became a very dear friend. Now I feel that AFEL is my home, and the team is my family. Without a past, there can be no future. My past is AFEL, which helped me and was always delighted by my success. I shall always be your daughter and will never forget what you've done for me. I would also like to thank Asmae for making it possible for me to carry on studying, thanks to an annual grant right up to my final year at university. I am now a marketing consultant with a bank in Lebanon."

Virginia Agustin Soneja, former beneficiary of the TOS sponsorship programme (1997-2001), Philippines

"My parents gave me everything I needed - a roof, food, clothes, and, most important of all, education. But everything changed when my father had the accident. We prayed that he would soon be back on his feet, but in the end he lost his job. The entire family started to make place mats. This became the family business, but it was a small business with a small income. Realising that money was such a big problem, I asked my parents' permission to start work once I had finished high school. They weren't keen, and said it was up to me.



Credit : Virginia

However, when a close friend of my mother told us about TOS and their sponsorship programme with Asmae, we hurried round to the San Vincente Ferrer complex for an interview. I was accepted, and my life took a completely new direction! Overcoming all difficulties, I passed the educational science examination. I then started work as a teacher. Inspired by my parents, my sisters, Sister Emmanuelle, my sponsor, Mrs Rekha and Mr Hao Chin from TOS, I'm still working and striving to be a patient and stimulating teacher.

Along with other sponsorship beneficiaries, I now get involved every month in organising activities for the current crop. This is my small way of thanking everybody who is working to keep the programme going. I never stop thanking you from the bottom of my heart!"

Comment collected by Marina Dubois

Renuka, 13 year-old, child, Tara Mobile Crèches in Poona, India

Looking so tiny and frail, you might think her a shy little creature. But at 13 years of age, Renuka already shows determination and an indomitable will. She was born just when Asmae found their first Indian partner, Tara Mobile Crèches. This association takes care of the children of migrant workers employed on building sites at their centres, and there they are cared for, fed and receive basic education. Renuka was taken into the nursery school.

"I had never been to school," she recalls. "Now we had pencils to do drawing with, which was great. I remember the jobs, the songs, the games, and the camps! We learned so much about our environment". The varied programme also taught her to read and write. Tara Mobile Crèches organises its activities in accordance with the rights of the child. This approach has been buttressed by the work done by Andrew, a volunteer on mission for Asmae, who, along with the teams, has organised a child's parliamentary systems.



Credit : Tara Mobile Crèche

You only have to listen to what Renuka has to say to see the fruits of this approach. "At the end of standard 7 (class 5), my family wanted me to leave school. They said it was pointless. I was really angry, I was crying. I tried to explain to them how important it was." Thanks to her determination, and the Tara Mobile Crèches workers, she obtained a place in a boarding school. "Here I have all the time I need to do my homework. I really like studying". She has big plans: "I should like to become a software engineer - that's where the future is going. Then I'll be in a position to improve the living standards of my family. And then I could teach my mother, who never went to school". What she says and the way she looks at you make it clear - Renuka will be an outstanding woman.

Comment collected by Agnès Golfier

Manampy, 9 year-old, Ankasina district school, Antananarivo, Madagascar

"I have two sisters and a brother aged between 12 years and 6 months. My mother is a laundress, her work is to wash and iron clothes. My father is a bricklayer. Since there is no work for him here, tomorrow he sets off for Antsohihy where he has found a job. Since this is very far, I shall be unable to see him every day. I'm in the CE class Betania centre. Everybody in the neighbourhood knows it. It's a very familiar place.



Credit : Solène Girard

Mrs Tiana, our teacher, told us at the beginning of the year that from now on we would be going to the library twice a week. Miss Voahirana is the librarian. We all read, do activities with books, watch cartoon and films. She's very nice and I really like going to the library, even during break, just to talk to her or to read ... This year I'm reading much more than I did last year.

With Miss Voahirana, I feel that I'm learning new things. In the future I would like to be a builder, building schools and churches. If I get rich I shall buy ducks and go into the duck raising business. My life will be calm and peaceful. I should like to marry a nice, wise, easy-going girl, and have just one child, a son".

Comment collected by Myriam Razafindratsima

Homage to Virginia, president of Ulikid

Virginia Leuterio passed away February 28 last year.



For five years, until the last month of her life, she was the dedicated, smiling and driven president of one of the Filipino partners of Asmae – the Association sœur Emmanuelle: Ulikid, which works for the dignity and education of handicapped young people and children in Iloilo, on the island of Panay in the southern Philippines.

Born in 1949, Virginia started to study social work, but had to break off her studies after two years at university. At 19 years of age, she got married; she had two boys, then two girls, and did a variety of different jobs, sometimes having to support her husband and family. She was a market trader, insurance agent, beauty product retailer... But she was always involved in her work in the parish - social work was never far away ...

A dedicated fight for handicapped children

When her eldest son's marriage was in difficulty, she offered to look after her little grandson, RV. When he was three, doctors discovered that RV, who always suffered from delicate health, was deaf.



Virginia then learned sign language, and accompanied her grandson to a special school where she spent many long hours so that she could give more help to the grandson she now called her son. And when the parish priest decided to organise a group of handicapped parents, it was naturally to Virginia that he turned. It was mainly thanks to her that the parents and children became organised, it was she who motivated and supported the mothers, who were often discouraged by the difficulties involved in getting their handicapped children educated.

The fact is that all too often in the Philippines, not to mention other parts of the world, having a handicapped child is seen as a source of shame, as though it were a punishment. Children are then left at home, hidden, neglected. But coming together within Ulikid, the parents of handicapped children, with Virginia at their head, demand that their children are accepted and even treasured by their families and in their communities.

Total dedication

Virginia's commitment to the wellbeing of her grandson, RV, and all the handicapped children was remarkable for its dedication and totality. When a partnership was launched between Ulikid and Asmae at a building site, it was Virginia, accompanied by Guia, the development agent, who slept all through the night on the site to prevent theft. She spent three months doing that, coordinating, protecting the premises, and even helping with the building.

On Saturdays, it was often Virginia who ran the Playgroup activities, which were open to all disabled children. She also facilitated work with the priests helping Ulikid and, as President, coordinated work with the management committee and district managers.



And when Asmae sent a specialist teacher to support Ulikid introduce educational activities for children who were not attending school, once again it was Virginia who volunteered to run one of the two daily sessions set up with the support of the visiting Asmae teacher. Within the workgroup established, Virginia and her fellow team members worked to create session outlines and lesson plans, and held meetings for debriefing purposes and to give consideration to working with both children and parents.

Today, thanks to Virginia's perseverance - with Asmae's continued support and thanks to the help of the other Ulikid members – children's activities have been developed, work on educational relationships has been deepened and the Molo community in Iloilo has come increasingly to accept disabled children.

Virginia leaves a big gap in the lives of her four children and nine grandchildren, as well as with parents and the hundred or so children enrolled in Ulikid and all those who were fortunate enough to meet this fine person, whose energy was infectious.

But her struggle will not have been in vain.

The baton has been passed to a new generation: 1, 2, 3 go!

Maud Bernard d'Heilly

Coordinator, Asmae Philippines – Visayas Mindanao

Photos: Thierry Omnes

From emergencies to development?

From 10 to 12 March, cyclone Hubert hit the entire south-east region of Madagascar, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. Madagascan households were devastated by torrential rains. In the town of Vohipeno, 90% of the population – or almost 186,000 people - were affected. Faced with this catastrophe, Asmae – Association sœur Emmanuelle swung into action. We have, in fact, been working south-east Madagascar since 2001. As we are a development-oriented NGO our activities are long-term in nature, but we are sometimes faced with crises resulting from natural disasters or from political or armed conflicts. When confronting situations of this type, which have a significant impact on our projects, our partners can experience substantial difficulties - to which we cannot remain indifferent.

Humanitarian action and development

For today's general public, humanitarian action is understood to encompass all assistance activities by the various interested parties (NGOs, associations, States, international institutions, etc). Within the international solidarity movement we identify operations dealing with emergency situations and reconstruction in countries experiencing conflict or where natural disasters have occurred, within the broader context of general development operations.

“Humanitarian assistance,” “development,” “international solidarity” – there is no shortage of terms for describing action by the various associative players in developing countries. As a result, it is not always easy to find one's way or to understand the particular roles of each interested party.

Globally, humanitarian action covers emergency situations and reconstruction activity in countries experiencing conflict or in response to a natural disaster. In emergencies, the main question is to ensure the survival of the threatened population. Conversely, so-called development operations aim to bring about long-term change through tackling the causes of social and economic inequalities through supportive care and local capacity-building. The main differences are to be found in the goals, mandates and objectives of action undertaken, as well as in operational methods. On the one hand, emergency NGOs are concerned with rapid interventions, creating their own operational channels in parallel with those established by States - which are often dysfunctional because of the crises they are experiencing. For their part, development-oriented NGOs attempt to incorporate a long-term perspective into what they do, and for this reason tend to favour the strengthening of civil society and negotiation with the authorities in place.

For many years, humanitarian action was defined in linear terms: intervention in an emergency situation progressively gives way to long-term development assistance, following a period of reconstruction. But after the fall of the Berlin Wall, conflicts proliferated in many countries and it became apparent that conflicts could be recurrent and enduring, and are often complex and multi-faceted. This realisation raised questions about the continuity of humanitarian action.

Today we need to take into account scenarios where instability is inbuilt. And in this context, “emergency” and “developmental” NGOs are complementary. There are more and more situations in which emergency and developmental activities co-exist and are complementary.

Asmae's philosophy

As a development-oriented NGO, Asmae works in countries which enjoy a certain political stability, and attempts to strengthen civil society in these countries by supporting local associations. This operational philosophy enables us to support the most appropriate solutions, because such solutions originate with persons who are fully conversant with their cultural, economic and social context. However, the countries in which Asmae operates remain vulnerable to natural disasters such as last September's floods in Burkina Faso, or the cyclone in Madagascar. These unforeseeable events have a considerable impact on development, including on the projects we are supporting.

This is why, when a crisis arises and despite the fact that emergencies are not our primary focus, we commit ourselves alongside our local partners and support them as they manage the crisis.

Consequently, the program coordinator assesses the damage that associations, children and their families have suffered and transmits this information to Asmae headquarters so that an evaluation can be made of what additional assistance the associations require. Often, projects can be temporarily suspended to enable the crisis to be faced and to respond to people's urgent requirements.

Infrastructure must then be repaired and time taken to restart projects, if necessary incorporating any changes that may be required as a result of the crisis.

Madagascar: Consequences of the cyclone

Houses were devastated by the cyclone that hit the island, with many being carried away or seriously damaged by the rain, particularly in the poorest districts. In the town of Vohipeno, 90% of the population – about 186,000 people - were affected.



According to our partner, AIC Manakara, over half of the isolated mothers it supports lost their houses. The waters also flooded rice paddies and seedlings and carried away crops and animals. This constitutes a severe threat to all of the area's food for the coming months. Infrastructure (a bridge, roads etc) has been destroyed. Schools and other buildings have been severely damaged. Many families, especially the poorest ones, have thus lost the few belongings they had. Their children risk undernourishment and health problems such as diarrhoea.

Faced with this catastrophe, Asmae has swung into action

Already our local coordinator, Sophie Clavière, is coordinating assistance and, together with our partners Tanjomoha and AIC Manakara is organising basic food aid (rice, vegetables, mats, powdered milk, etc). Asmae is also supporting school canteens run by partners such as AIC Vohipeno, so that children – whose malnutrition is worsening - can have at least one meal a day. We all hope that in a few months' time harvests and animal production will once again be able to provide for the population's needs.

In the longer term the challenge will be to support people to return to a "normal" life, by cleaning up damaged schools and buildings and by providing new equipment to students so they can resume their schooling – and consequently by preventing this disaster from having an irreparable effect on their future.

Our support is thus going in the first place to canteens run by our partners operating in Manakara and Vohipeno, then to school equipment and buildings in these areas. By way of example, with 350 Euros AIC Vohipeno can provide one daily meal to 120 children for a period of two months.

We ask all donors, child sponsors in Madagascar and Asmae members to help our partners and the people they support every day.

You can send your donation by bank or postal cheque (made out to the order of Asmae – Association sœur Emmanuelle) to the following address: 26 boulevard de Strasbourg - 75010 Paris – or you can visit www.asmae.fr and click on "I would like to make a donation."

On behalf of all our partners, and all of the children: thank you!

*Mady Chanrion
Delphine Vincenot*

You said "Community Service Project"?

Creating an international community service project is primarily a process of understanding the development issues faced by countries in the south. It is also an opportunity for a rich human experience, among team volunteers but also with local associations, children and their families. You live, within local communities, a practical experience of development.

Asmae - Sister Emmanuelle Association organizes annual community service projects. Last year, a total of 137 volunteers participated in our field projects.

A Practical Experience of Development

Every summer, as well as in the spring, we send a group of volunteers to support development projects that we follow throughout the year. Each project organized with Asmae is part of a broader partnership with a local association. This is one of our four avenues of intervention, along with the financing of projects, the sponsorship of children and professional missions. The project can be focused on group animation, construction, or both. It answers the needs they have specifically expressed and is part of a long-term project for which it often represents an important step. The project may also be an opportunity for Asmae and its partner to begin a project of greater significance.

A Project with Asmae

A community service project with Asmae lasts three to four weeks. All participants are volunteers and contribute to the cost of their trip. From different backgrounds, cultures and religions, whatever their training, volunteers share a common goal and desire to learn from each other. Team spirit, openness and flexibility are essential qualities for the success of the projects. Any adult in good health is welcome.

For you, a project is an opportunity to discover a country and its culture in a unique way and also to comprehend the development issues. Does the adventure tempt you? There are still spots available for a project this summer in Lebanon or Egypt.

Projects in France, another way to get involved

This year, for the first time, Asmae offers an opportunity for you to discover its activities in France in a unique way: we are organizing two projects as part of the Diverse-City (Divers-Cité) program.



Asmae works throughout the year with groups of people living in several "sensitive" neighborhoods of Paris and the suburbs. In these neighborhoods, parents are often worried about the future of their children, particularly about school failure, unemployment, the loss of social bonds, incivilities and other conflicts. As such, Asmae's goal is to support the actions proposed by the inhabitants to improve their quality of life and that of their children.

This summer, you have the opportunity to share in the daily life of the residents of a multicultural Parisian neighbourhood for three weeks. Throughout this project, you will lead activities with the children of these neighborhoods.

The goal? To offer them a breath of fresh air. These "sensitive" neighborhoods also house disadvantaged families whose children do not go on vacation. As such, you are coming to help a neighbourhood association organize creative, cultural and sports activities for children 4 to 16 years old.

Mady Chanrion

Cairo, 60% informal neighbourhoods

With over 15 million inhabitants, Cairo is the largest city in Africa and the Middle East. But nearly 7 million Cairenes, or 60% of the inhabitants of the agglomeration, live in "informal" neighbourhoods.

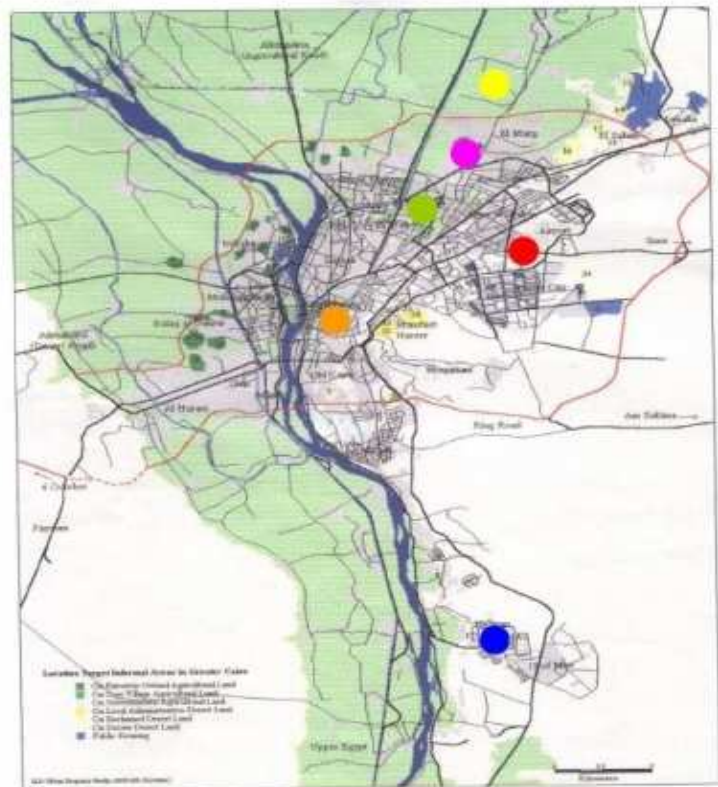
The major problem of these zones of precarious housing is the lack of sanitary (access to drinking water, waste management, sewage) and social (hospitals, schools) infrastructures. This situation has implications for the lives of the children who grow up there.

Asmae has been present in Egypt since 1972, continuing the activities of Sister Emmanuelle with the homeless. Today we work in several "informal" Cairo neighbourhoods that concentrate the most disadvantaged populations.

Informal, illegal, spontaneous neighbourhoods

An informal neighbourhood is an area of housing established outside of any formalized urban development plan. It is therefore irregular and spontaneous as it is not regulated by government authorities. The informal neighbourhoods spread haphazardly according to the needs of the people. However, unlike the slums, the houses here are solidly built, mostly in red brick.

The informal neighbourhoods are the result of major demographic pressure on the Egyptian capital. In some neighbourhoods, the population density is about 640 inhabitants per hectare. In comparison, in the agglomeration of Paris, there are in average of 30 inhabitants per hectare. While their exact number is difficult to assess because of their illegality, their expansion continues today, three times faster than that of formal neighborhoods. They are the result both of major demographic pressure and the disengagement of the State.



Les zones informelles de l'agglomération du grand Caire

● Bureau Asmae	● Helwan (El Bashayer)	● Mattareya (Caritas)
● Ezbet el Haggana (El Shehab)	● El Marg (AEDG, FdM)	● El Khanka (Lekaa)

Cartography of informal zones in Cairo
Nathalie Martin

A long existing settlement

The first informal neighborhoods were created in the 1960s, on farmland on the outskirts of the city, out of already existing surrounding villages or desert lands belonging to the State. This explains the absence of government reaction, since rural construction is not subject to special regulations in Egypt. Some of the unsanitary neighborhoods of Cairo's historic centre, as well as some rundown urban pockets, consisting of unmaintained buildings, are also regarded as informal neighborhoods but concern fewer inhabitants.

A lack of sanitary and social infrastructures

The major problem of informal neighborhoods is the lack of infrastructure, particularly in terms of access to drinking water, which is inadequate to the demographic of the neighbourhood, and sewage systems, which are often ineffective and prone to frequent overflow.



According to a study by Marion SEJOURNE, one in three households in these neighborhoods does not have access to drinking water distribution. Similarly, garbage is rarely collected. Sanitary and health conditions are deplorable and conducive to disease. Neighborhoods located in desert zones or on farmland, because of their distance from the center of Cairo, have a larger number of problems: high rates of illiteracy, lack of access to health and education services, very low incomes, and a lack of privacy among inhabitants.

Life in these informal neighborhoods has implications for the development of children who grow up there. They face a very low level of hygiene, which is the cause of many diseases, including diarrhea and respiratory diseases due to stagnant waste, and they lack access to health care. Government hospitals are rare and the only doctors are from private practices too expensive for the small means of these families.

In informal neighborhoods, the number of schools is also insufficient to accommodate all school-age children. Classes are often overloaded, with 40 to 70 students, which make learning conditions difficult for the children. Many children also work at a very young age to help their families financially and therefore drop out of school or find themselves failing because of the little time devoted to school work.

Asmae's Commitment

Faced with this situation, Asmae - Association Sister Emmanuelle works in the heart of the informal neighborhoods of Cairo, with the help of the local associations AEDG, El Shehab and Leka. The projects revolve around three main areas: early childhood education and school, primary health and developing community awareness of these two concepts. Because it is important to provide quality education to children from the earliest age in order to better prepare them for academic learning, Asmae supports AEDG's kindergartens and empowers educators to develop pedagogical methods based on stimulation and learning.

Because the education and the health of a child are inseparable, AEDG also organizes awareness sessions for mothers regarding the health of their children.

In the schools, Leka has developed a program related to child participation, and engages families in the proposed educational and pedagogical activities so that community members become agents of change. Along with educational activities, the association organizes meetings to promote personal cleanliness, nutrition and first aid. Children are also taken to the clinic.

For its part, El Shehab is working on the development of a community model whose goal is to prevent the dropout phenomenon among disadvantaged children thanks to the understanding, by their environment, of the importance of education.

In 2010, more than 500 children are affected by the projects of Asmae and its partners in Cairo's informal neighborhoods.

Mady Chanrion

Photo credits: Nathalie Martin / Georges Saillard

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