



MMM France 25th Anniversary Diner “Quand les meres s’en mêlent... Ça marche!”

The power of health education and mothers training

By Gabrielle de Milleville

I am now taking you to West Africa in the Ivory Coast, and more precisely to an Abidjan suburb called Songon. It is composed of many villages made of basic concrete houses and in which live a great number of families. Most of the mothers are illiterate and bring up their children whilst meeting basic community needs such as water chores - the well is 10 km away – and collecting and selling firewood in the markets.

Jean Bolly Kouassi, brought up by his mother just like his other many siblings, is a man who has always admired the determination of women, and mothers in particular.

This is what led him to create an association called Aide à la Jeunesse Africaine Défavorisée (AJAD) (help to the unprivileged African Youth), to provide young people with perspective, relying on the main force of community action: mothers.

His first struggle was to fight against early pregnancies, after he had had to care for a 12-year-old girl who arrived pregnant in one of the villages. He then decided to address high-risk behavioral patterns stemming from the lack of information on reproductive health and to improve the pregnancy monitoring of very young mothers who are further faced with the impossibility of attending school. Jean Bolly also committed to reducing the high child mortality rate, due to insufficient baby care.

MMM decided to help by appealing to UNESCO funds that enabled the organization in 2017 to host two conferences and two mother training seminars with a gynecologist, a midwife and a pediatrician.

Six hundred people, a majority of whom were mothers and young girls and boys, attended these conferences.

- ⇒ The first: educating on reproductive health and the prevention of early pregnancies
- ⇒ The other: educating on childhood development and protection.

Six mothers were specially trained as health and protection monitors for young pregnant girls.

And lastly, a total of forty-four mothers, two per village, were trained to deal with the health and protection of children and tasked with training other mothers in their neighborhood.

I don't want to load you down with statistics so here are just three:

- a 30% drop in early pregnancies,
- a 40% increase in prenatal visits,
- a decrease of 15% in child mortality.

Young boys are learning to respect young girls; young girls now make the effort of going to the doctor despite long distances or ask advice from the trained mothers. Communities look after the children to allow young mothers to go to school.

Thanks to these results, the State of Ivory Coast has engaged and is supporting AJAD MMM. It asked and received financial UNESCO support to extend this initiative to other areas. The implementation of this new project is entrusted to AJAD MMM and will take place in 2019 with the help of the Education Ministry, in order to allow teachers and students to participate.

To conclude, I would say that this experience highlights that thanks to supporting the mobilization of mothers and rallying fathers and decision makers to their cause, mentalities can change and life conditions of a whole community can be improved anywhere in the world.

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is an international NGO created in 1947 to raise the awareness of policy makers and public opinion on the contribution of mothers to social, cultural and economic development. MMM has no political or religious affiliations, and thus transparently voices the concerns of mothers at international level with permanent MMM representatives at the United Nations (General Consultative Status), UNESCO and the European Union.