

THEMAG

AIDE ET ACTION

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Special Report

SELF-RELIANT WOMEN; INDEPENDENT WOMEN

40
YEARS OF EDUCATION
ANS D'ÉDUCATION

 Aide et Action

L'Éducation change le monde

IMAGE OF HERE AND NOW



© Christine Redmond/Aide et Action

In rural Cambodia, long distances separating school from home are often considered dangerous for girls. This is one of the reasons why they give up their education. Indeed, worldwide, girls are more exposed to mistreatment, physical violence, and emotional and sexual abuse, both at school and on the way to school. Unfortunately, many parents then make the choice to no longer send them to school. In order to reduce these inequalities, Aide et Action provides bikes for girls (and boys) from underprivileged backgrounds who live more than 5 km from school, so that they have a better chance of completing their education. 🌱

“IT IS ESSENTIAL TO INCREASE RESPECT OF EDUCATION WITHIN COMMUNITIES. WE MUST INVEST IN ALL KEY FACTORS IN LEARNING AND TAKE ACTION WITH PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SO THAT EDUCATION IS EVERYBODY’S BUSINESS.”

Samhors Vorn, Director Cambodia
Aide et Action.



“2021, just a year, a history, of major actions”



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This year, Aide et Action is celebrating its 40th anniversary; four decades of uninterrupted commitment to promote and strengthen the right to education for all. Since 1981, we have been working relentlessly to support vulnerable and marginalized populations, to reduce inequalities to which they are facing, reduce injustice and create the best educational opportunities.

The COVID -19 pandemic has made the task particularly complicated and, despite the progress made in recent years, the situation has too often deteriorated, especially for girls and women. This is what leads us to dedicate this new issue of our Magazine to our focus on inclusion. You will see how we support women in Laos, India, and Burkina Faso in order to enable them to participate in their own development, to build a brighter future and to contribute to a more egalitarian, humane and more peaceful world.

With solidarity,

Charles-Emmanuel Ballanger
CEO of Aide et Action

Sommaire

<p>PAGE 4</p> <p>News</p>  <p>40 YEARS OF ACTION ADVANCING QUALITY EDUCATION</p> <p>PAGE 19 Citizen mobilisation</p>	<p>PAGE 7</p> <p>Special report</p>  <p>SELF-RELIANT WOMEN; INDEPENDENT WOMEN</p> <p>PAGE 22 In short</p>	<p>PAGE 14</p> <p>Opinion</p>  <p>SUPPORTING WOMEN EQUALS TAKING ACTION FOR A FAIRER WORLD</p> <p>PAGE 23 Witness report</p>	<p>PAGE 20</p> <p>Worldwide</p>  <p>OUR PROJECTS IN THE FIELD</p>
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© Naïde Plante

“MY INTUITION SAID THAT SCHOOL WOULD BE THE FOUNDATION OF ALL DEVELOPMENT.”

Pierre-Bernard Le Bas,
founder of Aide et Action.

40 YEARS OF EDUCATION
ANS D'ÉDUCATION

ANNIVERSARY

40 YEARS OF ACTION ADVANCING QUALITY EDUCATION

1981-2021: 40 years of commitment, together with you, to defend access to quality education for each and everyone. On this occasion, discover some highlights of our history!

Good to know In 1981, Pierre-Bernard Le Bas, decides to create an organization whose mission would be to push forward the cause of education for all populations. He then launches, in France, individual sponsorship of children in order to develop education. It is an instant success, and the first programmes kick off in Kenya and India. During the 1990s, the organization developed and launched sponsorship of classes and then projects.

SIDE BY SIDE WITH VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

By discovering the situation of children in shanty towns during a trip to India, Pierre-Bernard Le Bas decided to create Aide et Action in 1981 in order to support education for vulnerable children.

MOBILIZE AND INVOLVE CITIZENS

During the 1990s, the organization promoted listening to local populations in order to create tailor-made educational and development projects to meet their needs and involve them in their implementation.

RESPONDING TO EDUCATIONAL ISSUES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

From the 2000s, Aide et Action became more international and now supports vulnerable people in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America – the Caribbean.

40 YEARS OF EDUCATION, AND IT'S NOT OVER!

Today, through 83 projects, we continue our fight every day to support nearly 2 million people in 19 countries in order to (re) give them hope for a better future. This story, we wrote it and will continue to write it thanks to you. More than ever, we are convinced that Education is changing the world. Thank you ever so much! 🌱

51,000

This is the number of patrons, sponsors, and donors that are currently supporting our actions. A big thank you to you, and them!



LEARNING CONDITIONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

Because a lit-up school enhances quality education and can become a resource centre for an entire village, Aide et Action launched an electrification project of 120 public primary schools in Benin and Burkina Faso.



© Vincent Reynaud-Lacroze



IN WEST-AFRICA,
NINE OUT OF TEN SCHOOLS
DO NOT HAVE ELECTRICITY.
THAT EQUALS AROUND
200,000 SCHOOLS WHERE
LEARNING CONDITIONS
ARE SUBPAR.

In Benin and Burkina Faso, less than 20% of rural populations have access to electricity. Schools are also often deprived of it. This lack severely impacts the learning conditions: making it difficult to study without lighting when night falls early, or even without a fan when it is very hot.

IMPROVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

To remedy this situation, Aide et Action is currently developing an electrification project and equipment for 120 public primary schools in Benin and Burkina Faso with the support of the French Development Agency (AFD). The aim is to demonstrate the impact of school environment on the quality of education in general and on school performance in particular.

In a wider perspective, other activities are planned such as social mobilization, setting up of boreholes and school latrines, the organization of support courses for the benefit of students in difficulty, skill development opportunities, meeting the training needs of young people and women and more. This project is an extension of the “A Light for Africa” project, thanks to which we were able to provide electricity to 33 schools in West Africa since 2017.

This three-year project will have an impact on the lives of 18,000 students and 840 teachers and educational supervisors. 

A close-up photograph of a woman with a joyful expression, wearing an orange sari and a yellow patterned blouse. She has a blue tilak on her forehead and a gold nose ring. She is holding a sleeping baby in her arms. The baby has a black bindi on their forehead and is wearing a light blue top. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden structure.

Self-reliant women; INDEPENDENT WOMEN

While women's rights had significantly improved over recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic has reshuffled the cards. Unfortunately, the "after world" is likely to include an alarming regression of women's rights. However, for Aide et Action, the current crisis presents an opportunity seized to ensure that half of humanity has its rightful active and civic place.

Empowerment of women

The most secure way towards equality

515 MILLION

This is the number of women who lack basic reading skills. Only 2% of women living in rural areas complete their upper secondary education.

42%

This is the percentage of women following vocational training in 2018 (against 45% in 1995).

47 MILLION

This is the number of additional women and girls that the pandemic will bring back to below the poverty threshold, thus wiping out decades of progress towards eradication of extreme poverty.

23%

This is, on average, the difference in pay between women and men.

63%

This is the share of women among the 773 million illiterate adults.

108 YEARS

This is the time it will take to bridge inequalities between women and men at the current pace.

Sources : UNICEF, A new era for girls, 2020; UNESCO UNESCO GENDER REPORT, 2020; UN Women, 2019 World Bank



The crisis has highlighted and exacerbated inequalities between women and men. It has revealed the undervaluation of jobs mainly carried out by women.

Françoise Milewski
Economist

The Beijing Declaration and its action programme adopted in 1995 have been considered to be the main global policy document on empowerment of women and gender equality. Unfortunately, the year 2020, which marked the 25th anniversary of this event, was not synonymous with celebration, on the contrary.

The COVID-19 crisis, when it comes to women's rights, is not different from other crises, be it social or economic. It demonstrates that girls and women are typically the ones affected most negatively and remain the most fragile. Despite faring better than men in terms of numbers of contaminations and deaths linked to COVID-19, women and girls are likely to suffer more consequences in the long term.

DECADES OF REVERSE PROGRESS

New data from UN Women and the United Nations Programme for Development show that COVID-19 will deepen the gap between women and men and lead 47 million additional women and girls to fall below the poverty threshold, thus reversing decades of progress towards the eradication of extreme poverty. Although the poverty rate for women was supposed to decrease by 2.7% between 2019 and 2021, projections now point to an increase of 9.1% due to the pandemic and its consequences.

"The increase in extreme poverty among women [...] clearly points to the deep gaps that exist in the model that we have chosen to build our societies and our savings", lamented the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. This is why Aide et Action believes that this moment is an opportunity

to construct a more inclusive and egalitarian world.

REBUILD DIFFERENTLY

Our organization has always supported women, especially those that are underprivileged and live in rural areas or are from marginalized communities. To support them, we have set up two main activities which are: literacy and vocational training with the

"HALF OF HUMANITY MUST BE HANDED BACK ITS ACTIVE AND CIVIL PLACE WHICH HAS BEEN RAVISHED, WITHIN SOCIETY, FOR CENTURIES."

support of businesses. Our goal is clear: to give these women access to economic opportunities that are adapted to their needs and thus promote their development and their empowerment.

Indeed, we are convinced that it is in recognizing the work of women, facilitating their participation in economic life and by increasing their financial autonomy, we can support them to develop more decision-making power and independence. 



Empowerment of women

A warranty for independence

Through our various projects, Aide et Action promotes quality education for all, through all stages of life. We are convinced that it is by guaranteeing equal access to school that we lay the foundations of a society which is fairer and more equitable; this is an essential first step. But for sustainability, it is just as essential to support adult women through literacy and vocational training.

8 March – International Day of Women’s rights

The theme of this 8 March 2021 was “Female leadership: for an egalitarian future in the world of COVID-19”. This one celebrates the incredible efforts made by women and girls all over the world to shape a future and a relaunch which is more egalitarian following the COVID-19 pandemic. It also follows up on the priority theme from the 65th session of the Commission on the situation of women, “Full and effective participation of women taking decisions in the public sphere, elimination of violence, achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls”.

Gender equality is not only a fundamental right, but also a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. That is why, equality between men and women is part and parcel of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals which must be reached by 2030 to “Eliminate poverty, protect the planet, and improve the daily life of all people all over the world, while opening up future prospects”. Of course, progress and notable achievements have been made in this area in recent years, but much remains to be done.

“EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN APPEARS TO US AN OBVIOUS LEVER OF SOCIAL EQUITY THAT MUST BE DEVELOPED AT ANY COST..”

SOCIAL EQUITY QUESTIONED

Apart from the crucial stake that represents education of girls, that of economic stability for women is a major challenge. Even today, almost 60% of women work in the **informal sector**, which makes them more likely to fall into poverty and more vulnerable in many aspects (nutrition, safety, health, violence and more). Trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty,

they are still far too numerous, unable to emancipate themselves and remain deprived of their rights and freedoms. To counter this injustice, empowerment of women appears to us an obvious lever of social equity that must be developed at any cost. Discover our actions in this sense, with the testimony of three women we have accompanied on the way to freedom. 🍷



© Omar Havana

Informal economy Any economic activity conducted by workers or workers who are not covered or are insufficiently covered - by law or practice - by official provisions.



Literacy is necessary for all women that didn't go to school like me. Thanks to an Aide et Action project I learned how to read and write. 
Viviane



© Dramane Sessouma/Aide et Action

Because of a lack of education when she was a child, Viviane had to get by on her own. Today, she is independent and proud of being so.

IN BURKINA FASO, VIVIANE IS LEARNING THE TRADE OF WEAVING AND IS FINALLY ACQUIRING HER INDEPENDENCE

Viviane is 33 years old and the mother of three children. Lacking education when she was a child, she had to fend for herself and learn an informal job. “Since my childhood, I have loved weaving. I dreamed of being a weaver or seamstress of Faso danfani, a traditional fabric”, she confides. Watching her sister-in-law who carried out this activity, Viviane ended up acquiring the basics and decided to buy her own loom.

The Training in the Service of Female Leadership project (FORSELF), initiated and implemented by Aide et Action in Burkina Faso, enabled Viviane to complete her apprenticeship and become an entrepreneur. Intended to sustainably improve living conditions of women by the promotion of income-generating activities and

micro-enterprises, the project is based on the following components: training, literacy, and digital initiation. “I had training in a weaving centre. It has helped me a lot. I learned different dyes, several patterns and double weaving wire”, explains Viviane. “Literacy is necessary for all those who, like me, did not go to school. Thanks to the project, I learned how to write and read. I also learned to calculate. I am really happy. Moreover, I did not think that a digital tablet could help me in my work, but Aide et Action did well to give us these devices and to train us. I take pictures of models and samples and I send them to clients.”

Viviane set up on her own workshop in December 2020 and now welcomes a neighbour in apprenticeship. “By leaving my sister-in-law, there has been a real change. I am no longer under her authority. Today I have new clients in my neighbourhood, and I work for myself. What I earn, is for my family”, specifies Viviane, with pride.



I am pleased to see how we have managed so far. Thanks to iLEAD that has given us self-confidence. ”

Rani

Despite numerous obstacles such as poverty and gender stereotypes, Rani and Asha did not dwell on their daily struggles.



© Chandra Kiran Katta/Aide et Action

IN INDIA, RANI AND ASHA BECAME SOURCES OF INSPIRATION FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Rani and Asha are two young Indian women who have had to face difficult situations. Rani married right out of high school at the age of 17. Unfortunately, the financial difficulties of her in-laws pushed her to look for work, despite her lack of qualifications. The second, Asha, had to drop out of school very early, and her dream of becoming a teacher, was put aside to take care of her six siblings.

Yet both were determined not to dwell on their daily struggles. The young girls joined the Aide et Action iLEAD Centre in Jaipur where they respectively followed fashion design and computer classes. Since 2005, our skills development program iLEAD (Initiative for Livelihood Education and Development) allows young people, aged 18 to 32, to benefit from vocational training and

support in finding a job. It offers them the possibility of pursuing a profession, despite many obstacles such as poverty and gender stereotypes.

At the end of their training, Rani and Asha co-founded the company “Design for Smile”, a fashion design and ethnic manufacturing house. The iLEAD team supported the duo in the development of their business plan and also from a marketing point of view (brand image and merchandising). The two young entrepreneurs even plan to go into online sales soon thanks to digital knowledge acquired by Asha during her training. “I’m surprised to see where we’ve come to today, says Rani. Thanks to iLEAD we have gained self-confidence. We hope to catapult Design for Smile as a well-known and recognized brand”. Rani and Asha are a source of inspiration for hundreds of other trainees in our iLEAD programme, especially young women who admire their career and their determination.

IN LAOS, YENKHAM HAS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE HER LIFE

16-year-old Yenkham had to drop out of school in fourth grade so that her parents could afford to send her siblings instead. Her career opportunities were therefore very slim. But when the chief of her village announced that Aide et Action was developing a specific educational project teaching business skills to young girls from ethnic minorities, Yenkham seized the opportunity. After completing a nine-month training course and receiving mentorship to identify, design and implement a small company, Yenkham decided to create her own retail store. Indeed,

after a study of the needs of the community and the local economic potential, Yenkham noticed that her village had no retail stores and villagers had to travel long distances to buy the products they needed.

Grants coupled with training sessions on business management, accounting, technical production, and marketing opened a new path for Yenkham. “After having participated in this project, my life has changed a lot”, testifies the young woman. “I never thought that I could have a business because I didn’t have any commercial or entrepreneurial knowledge. But, thanks to this project, my living conditions have improved.”



After a study of the needs of the community and the local economic potential, Yenkham decided to set up her own retail store.



Yenkham

© Aide et Action



After having participated in this project my life has changed a lot. I never thought I could run a business.



“IN CONCLUSION, EDUCATION LEADS TO EMPOWERMENT”

While the situation of women around the world was already fragile, the COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardized it even further. “We work in sensitive areas where girls’ access to education was far from being achieved. With the COVID-19 crisis, which is affecting the economies and populations of all countries, the status of women will very likely take a huge leap backward”, asserts Vanessa Martin, in charge of Public Speaking and Advocacy at Aide et Action. To avoid, in the future, that new crises shake the progress made in the fields of women rights and gender equality, it is essential to invest heavily in their education which will strengthen their empowerment. We are convinced that the more we empower women from an economic point of view, the more successful we will be in empowering them both politically and socially.

Womens rights

Supporting women means taking action for a fairer world

With the launch of our global philanthropic campaign “Education For Women Now” in January, Aide et Action is determined to shake things up with regard to the issue of women and girls’ rights to education around the world. An issue that is more relevant than ever after the COVID-19 crisis, which further weakens them and reduces their rights.



© Aide et Action

economically, and be leaders and role models in their lives and communities.

PROMOTING THE ROLE OF FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

To achieve this goal, the project revolves around six main activities. These allow apprentices to acquire technical skills in business management, marketing, accounting and team building. Professional meetings are also organized, just like gender awareness sessions. Finally, participants benefit from grants and mentee support.

We believe that by increasing entrepreneurial opportunities for young people from ethnic minorities, we can promote the role of women entrepreneurs in micro and small businesses in rural communities and contribute to the economic development of Laos. Our project has already changed mentalities on the issue of gender and enabled younger generations of women to take control over their own personal and economic development. 🌱

In order to remove the obstacles linked to gender inequalities, at the start of 2021, we launched our philanthropic campaign “Education For Women Now”. This is intended to provide access to quality education to more than 3 million girls and women in Africa, Asia and Europe, by 2025, through ten major programs.

CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Among these ten programs that we are developing, the one aimed at encouraging female leadership and entrepreneurship in Laos is particularly relevant. Like Yenkham, the young woman who testifies in our case (see page 13), it helps many Laotians to break out of cycles of poverty.

Through training, we create new opportunities for young ethnic minority girls living in poor and rural areas. Indeed, they are the ones with the lowest enrollment and literacy rates in the country, coupled with high levels of school dropout rates. Leadership and entrepreneurship training helps them to develop their skills, become more prosperous

GOOD TO KNOW

In Laos, before the pandemic, 9% of women were married by age 15, while 35.4% were married by age 18. This figure is above the global average (by 20%) and could increase as the COVID-19 crisis continues. Reports warn that 25 years of progress to end the practice of child marriage risk being reversed as crisis puts 2.5 million more girls at risk of early marriage by 2025 globally.



Education at risk

A global crisis in education and learning

By Vanessa Martin,
in charge of Public Speaking and Advocacy at Aide et Action France

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the global crisis in education and learning which had already prevailed for several years. Only a massive investment from all countries can help ensure education of all children.

In 2019 the picture was hardly already optimistic with a stagnation in numbers of out-of-school children at 258 million¹, with close to one in six children unable to read a simple sentence even after several years spent on school benches², with some global public spending allocated to education away from minimums recommended by United Nations to consider any progress³. At the end of 2020, after months school closures and lockdown in almost all countries, after a health crisis that had become in a few weeks one global and multi-sector disaster, it is not surprising that the educational situation in the world has deteriorated. To this is added a global economic crisis which will entail a drastic decrease in aid allocated to education, both nationally and internationally.

THE OBJECTIVE OF GUARANTEED EDUCATION FOR ALL FURTHER AWAY

The goal of education for all⁴, which already seemed compromised before

COVID-19, now seems utopian, thus endangering the future of entire generations. The big donor countries, providers of aid for education, will definitely have an essential role to play in the face of this crisis and the rebuilding of an educational system which is accessible to all, both qualitative and resilient, capable of facing all types of crises whenever they pop up.

2021, A YEAR FULL OF PROMISES?

The opportunities to take measures or invest heavily in

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The program "Educate A Child" has supported Aide et Action to lead The Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children to ensure over 118,000 children who are out of school or at risk of dropping will have access to education.

1 - Unesco 2018

2 - Unesco 2018

3 - IIEP, UNESCO, 2020, http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fr/covid-19-which-the-price-pay-for-education-13369#.XoW_JJ1WAU4.twitter

4 - In September 2015, 193 States adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals which provide for the construction of a world without poverty, famine, or disease by 2030... The sustainable development objective N°4 is dedicated to the right to education and plans to guarantee all children 12 years of free education. More info on www.un.org/sustainable-development/en/sustainable-development-goals/

education will not fail in this year 2021, but will world leaders and local governments meet the challenge? To be answered this year during major international events, where education is announced as the order of the day:

- In June 2021, the G7 Summit, under the Presidency of the United Kingdom: Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that



© Christine Remond/Aide et Action



500 MILLIONS

this is the number of children who were not able to follow distance learning during the months of lockdown due to lack of help or access to digital tools.

(Unesco, 2020)

girls' education is "the Swiss army knife of development as it made it possible to avoid early marriages, to improve chances of finding a job and to improve incomes" and it makes this summit a priority. He appointed the parliamentarian Helen Grant, new special envoy on the education of girls: she is responsible for directing UK

efforts to ensure that all girls receive quality education for 12 years.

- Also in June 2021, the **Generation Equality Forum**, organized by UN Women and co-chaired by France and Mexico, is a global gathering for equality between women and men. After a kick-off in Mexico at the end of March, the Forum

will know its climax in Paris in France. The summit will focus on six themes: gender-based violence, economic justice and economic rights, the right to

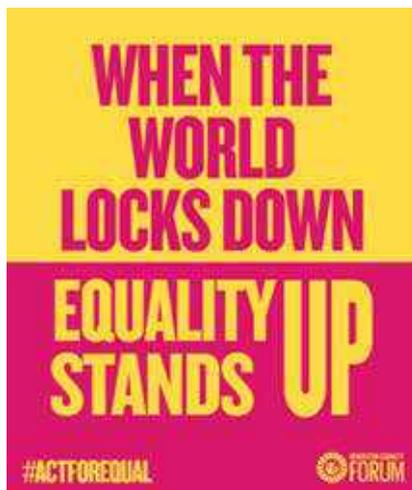
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"GIRLS EDUCATION IS THE SWISS ARMY KNIFE OF DEVELOPMENT AS IT MADE IT POSSIBLE TO AVOID EARLY MARRIAGES, TO IMPROVE CHANCES OF FINDING A JOB AND TO IMPROVE INCOMES "

Boris Johnson,
Prime Minister of the UK

NEXT >



her body and health and sexual and reproductive rights, action women in favour of justice climate, technologies, and innovation in the service of equality between women and men, movements and leadership feminists. On each theme, a series of actions targeted at both concrete and ambitious ones will be launched over the period 2020-2025, in order to have a real impact on equality between women and men and rights of girls and women. At the heart of this action programme, the financial means will determine results, by identifying systematically resource deficits that have hurt until then to the achievement of results.

- In July 2021, the conference of refinancing of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), an international organization that supports the improvement or reconstruction of education systems in developing countries. The conference will be co-chaired by the United Kingdom and Kenya. The GPE has already announced that it wants to raise almost \$ 5 billion from partner countries to finance education for over a billion children in 87 countries. 🍀

France

Aide et Action heads the Education Coalition

Since January 1, 2021, Aide et Action has been heading the Education Coalition. A group of 20 stakeholders of civil society - unions, NGOs, organizations, popular movements for education - which defends the right to education for all, which is inclusive, equitable and of high quality.



© Vincent-Reynaud-Lacroze

Aide et Action is particularly proud and happy to currently lead the Education Coalition, a unified national coalition which has defended the right to education for all since 2014. It was created by six organizations of French solidarity: Aide et Action, Handicap International, The league of education, Plan International France, SNUipp-FSU and Solidarité Laïque. While the COVID-19 pandemic has seriously worsened the global crisis that was already rippling through education and faced with the risk of an explosion of inequalities and exclusions, 2021 must be a year of unprecedented mobilization for all players and stakeholders in education. Faced with these new challenges, the Education Coalition wishes, in particular, to intensify its advocacy with authorities, both

public and institutional stakeholders, further strengthen French civil society and develop common expertise.

"The Education Coalition, which begins the year with a new triennial and a new leader, will spare no effort to achieve the goal of education for all and will continue its mission with even more intensity. Many challenges are waiting for us, and we will need everyone so that it continues to progress everyone's right to quality education!", insists Charles Emmanuel Ballanger, CEO of Aide et Action International, leading organization of the Education Coalition. 🍀

To find out more about the Education Coalition and find all its publications, visit:
www.lacoalitioneducation.fr

MALI

Opening school doors to all children

In Mali, some children are taken away from school because of their differences or handicaps. **Thanks to the Access to School for All Children programme, implemented by Aide et Action and its partners, their situation can finally change.** In fact, in remote villages, often

devoid of suitable infrastructure, **we institute academic courses in traditional schools** through the provision of supplies and materials teaching, as well as the provision of a volunteer teacher trained by the project.

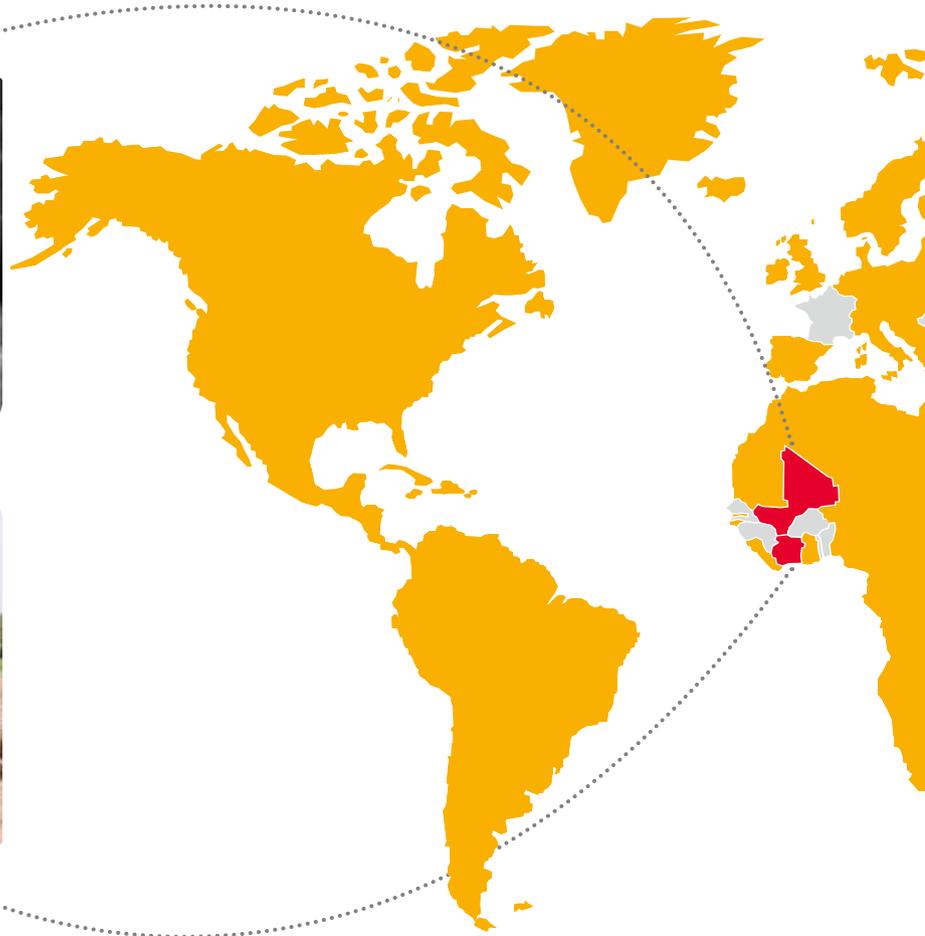
Good to know School residents can benefit from a more traditional education, in French and thus have access to the various examinations of the general education system.



© Aide et Action



© Vincent Reynaud-Lacroze



IVORY COAST

An effective multi-stakeholder project

Thanks to **collaborative work**, the partners who support Ivory Coast, **offer better living conditions for the population.** At the initiative of the Orange Foundation, we have developed a multi-stakeholder partnership with

the Bel and Suez Foundations based on complementarity of the sectors and professions of each around infrastructure, education, health, and water.

Good to know By bringing together three corporate foundations for the first time, we are establishing a complementarity that takes on its full meaning thanks to the deployment of multiple skills and synergies.

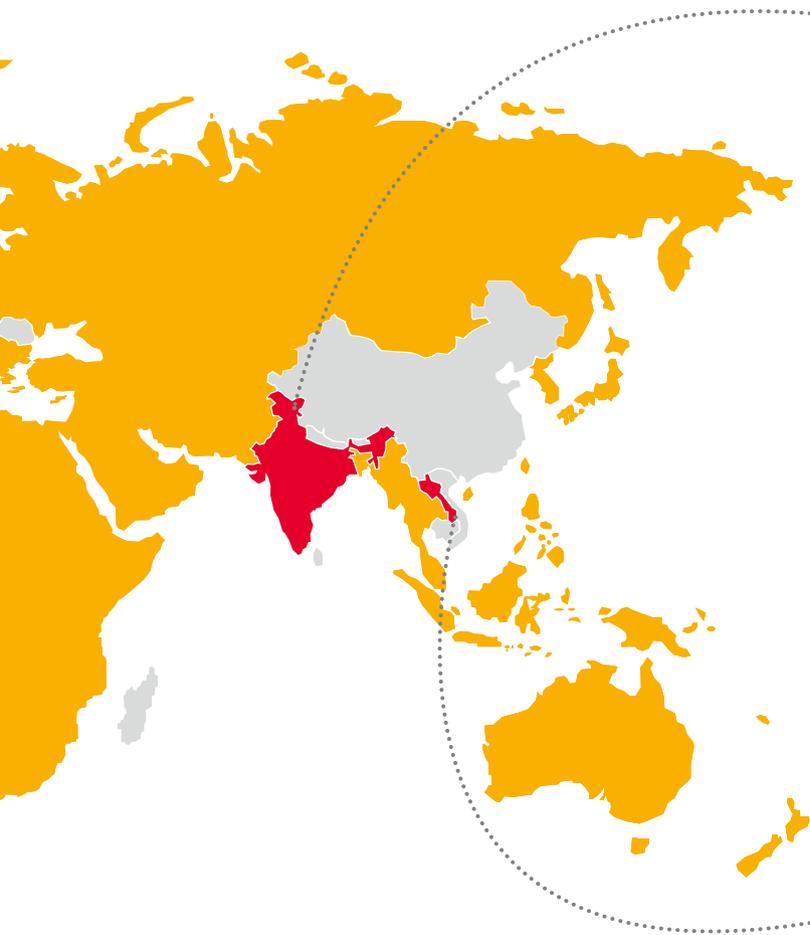
INDIA

Supporting migrants and their families

Since 2017, **Aide et Action and the SNCF Foundation have worked together in favour of migrant children in India by providing them with access to education and rights.** But with the arrival of COVID-19, our project had to adapt. From March 2020, **we have decided to support**

the population differently, by offering emergency support and ensuring the supply of basic goods (food, health, hygiene). So, families have ample choice to stay on site, avoiding the risk of a return trip.

Good to know The first phase of the project established five reception and learning centres (Child Care and Learning Centres), to accommodate 1,047 children there, and to educate 439 in surrounding schools.



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© Matthew Dakin/Aide et Action

LAOS

Enabling pedagogical continuity

In April 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, **many Laotians were deprived of education because of lack of internet** connection or computer equipment at home. Pedagogical continuity therefore could not be assured, and many were seriously behind schedule. Aide et

Action and its partners developed a learning app for kindergarten and primary school. Aiming to improve digital skills and digital learning, it is also accessible off-line to avoid connectivity issues.

Good to know In Laos, less than 2% of households have fixed internet connections at home. This digital divide represents an essential stake, including on the educational level. Equipping schools with digital tools is a priority for Aide et Action.

VANESSA MARTIN



© Sandrine Assouline / Aide et Action

Vanessa Martin, in charge of Public Speaking and Advocacy at Aide et Action France, shares her concern about the women's rights situation around the world. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, she believes that these rights are more threatened than ever.

AEA: What is the current status quo of women's rights today?

Vanessa Martin: 2020 should have been a year of celebration of acquired rights for women over the past two decades. Instead, it will stay in the annals as the year that records one of the biggest setbacks in human rights. The reason: the COVID-19 pandemic which put women on the frontline of the health, economic and social crisis.

AEA: Before the pandemic, was there any noticeable progress?

VM: Although gender equality has never been reached by a single country, the last two decades have been the scene of improvements especially in terms of women's rights: they notably had better access to care, education, and the employment market. Over the past 25 years, 180 million girls

were enrolled in primary and secondary school, early pregnancies dropped by one third between 1995 and 2020, passing from 60 to 40 births per 1000 women aged 15-19. And the proportion of women married before the age of 18 dropped by 25% in 1995 to 20% between 2013 and 2019.

AEA: In concrete terms, what are the consequences of the crisis for women?

VM: The economic impacts, the social and political crisis were violent, in all countries, for women and girls. Starting with employment. Working a lot in the health sector, women who represent 70% of health workers were immediately more exposed to the virus and work overload, resulting in a surplus of physical and mental fatigue. On the global job market,

women still occupy the more often short-term jobs, part-time, even in the informal economy. In fact, the general lockdown immediately caused many to lose all sources of income.

AEA: What other aspects of their lives have been impacted?

VM: With the loss of the basics, they have lost all possibility of accessing family care and plans, leading to an increase in unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions. The COVID-19 pandemic has also undermined the efforts made to fight against early marriage: over 13 million girls younger than 18 years old could be forced to get married between 2020 and 2030. Periods of lockdown have otherwise been conducive to an increase in violence against women in almost all countries. The situation therefore revealed and reinforced pre-existing gender inequalities. If major measures are taken today, the crisis could nevertheless be a unique opportunity to rebuild a fairer and more sustainable world.

What must be done to start again on a good basis?

VM: The priority is to distribute school grants to the most deprived families in order to avoid school drop-out by girls, to put in place support courses so that girls have the opportunity to catch up with the accumulated delay and ensure access to the digital tools of which they are today largely deprived. To make women's rights a reality, here and now, major investments and the development of innovative and multi-sectoral initiatives must be carried out. Waiting is no longer possible. 🌱



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