

**THEMAG**

**AIDE ET ACTION**

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Special Report

**40 YEARS  
OF ACTION** **FOR  
EDUCATION**

**40** YEARS OF EDUCATION  
ANS D'ÉDUCATION

 **Aide et Action**

Changing the world through Education

# IMAGE OF HERE AND NOW



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As part of our projects in Southeast Asia, we provide training for teachers, parents, and communities regarding the importance of quality education and we pay special attention to early childhood, including nutrition. School meals and gardens in Laos, emergency food parcels distributed in Cambodia during the COVID-19 pandemic: we are taking action to ensure that children are healthy, happy, well-nourished, and therefore ready to learn when they are at school. 🌱

## NUTRITION AND EDUCATION

A World Bank study on the state of student health and nutrition has shown that diseases and malnutrition reduce school attendance. It has been proven that children who suffer, clearly show significant delays in their psychomotor and intellectual development.

# “Everything starts with education.”



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“Setting up Aide et Action was a project that was certainly crazy at the start, but which took shape little by little since the beginning of the year and which has now become a very concrete reality thanks to all of you”. These were the first words in the editorial by Pierre-Bernard Le Bas, founder of Aide et Action, in September 1981 in the zero issue of this Magazine.

What a road we have travelled since!

As we celebrate 40 years of Aide et Action, we would first of all like to thank you for your unwavering support, without which nothing would have been possible. Your commitment to us has enabled us to become increasingly ambitious and to strengthen our impact at all levels, both in terms of number of countries of intervention and the number of people we support. Together, we have accompanied millions of children, youth, and adults on the path to development across Africa, Asia, and Europe.

By improving access to and quality of education, we enable a better future for vulnerable and marginalized populations who are victims of injustice and inequalities. This fight has had its share of progress and victories, and we are very proud to lead it thanks to you. Together, let us continue to defend our beliefs which position education as the start to everything!

**Charles-Emmanuel Ballanger**  
CEO of Aide et Action

## Summary

PAGE 4

News



**CHILD LABOUR SEEMS TO INCREASE**

PAGE 7

Special report



**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, EQUAL CHANCES**

PAGE 16

Opinions



**STAKES OF EDUCATION AFTER THE CRISIS**

PAGE 19

Take action with us

PAGE 20

In short

PAGE 21

Witness report

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## CAMBODIA

# SOPHOS AVOIDS SCHOOL DROP-OUT THANKS TO HIS TEACHER

*As the International Teachers' Day will be celebrated on October 5<sup>th</sup>, we are sharing with you the story of Sophos \*, a young Cambodian who was supported by his teacher throughout the entire health crisis and able to avoid dropping out of school.*

**F**or Sok Seiha \*, a 35-year-old mother, seeing her eldest son learn to read and write was an immense joy. When she was only seven years old herself, she had to drop out of school to work in the street with her mother following the death of her father. Now illiterate and living below the poverty threshold, she dreams of a better future for her four children. Having grown up in the city of Poipet, located in the north-west of Cambodia, her son Sophos \* started attending school at the age of ten years old, when he joined an educational centre run by Damnok Toek, a local charitable organization. The centre, supported by Aide et Action, provided him with nutritious school meals, a safe play space and quality education.

### “MY TEACHER EXPLAINS EVERYTHING TO ME CLEARLY”

Now, at 14, Sophos is an excellent student and dreams of becoming a teacher. When he talks about school, his face lights up. “*I like everything about school,*” he says with a smile. “*I especially like my teacher who explains everything clearly.*” In March of last year, Seiha and her husband lost their jobs and had to sell the family smartphone to pay a smuggler for her husband to cross the border to Thailand in search of work. At the same time, Sophos school closed. Without a smartphone or television to access education programmes remotely, the only way Sophos could keep up with his studies during school closings, was the weekly visit from his teacher. His teacher supported and accompanied him for several weeks in order to ensure continuity of education.

More than ever, in this period of global health, economic and social crisis, both the educational and social role of the teacher deserves to be supported and highlighted because a teacher gives hope to younger generations. Let us pay tribute to teachers and reaffirm our support for them during this challenging crisis. 🌱

\* Names of children and vulnerable adults have been modified.



### Good to know

The film “*Teachers at the end of the world*” pays tribute to teachers worldwide through the story of three remarkable women. Each in their own way, Svetlana, Sandrine and Taslima fight to pass on their knowledge to children who are eager to learn on a daily basis. Teaching the alphabet without chalk or a blackboard, pushing back early marriage, building peace, preserving nomadic culture ... They are prepared to face a thousand difficulties.

To find out more, please read our interview with Barthélémy Fougea, on page 16 of this Magazine.



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## HAITI EARTHQUAKE

# A DISASTER FOR EDUCATION

*Already hit hard by a political, social and health crisis, Haiti is currently in a critical situation. On August 14, 2021, an earthquake measuring 7.2 hit the south of the country impacting Nippes, Grand'Anse and the South - all areas where Aide et Action is operating.*

In the fields, the emergencies are multiple: it is necessary to help the victims, but also to help in the reconstruction of the country. The start of the school year, initially scheduled for Monday, September 6, has been postponed to September 21 for the majority of Haitian students, but in the three southern areas, classes will not resume until October 4.

### 15% OF THE SCHOOLS CONCERNED ARE TOTALLY DESTROYED

The provisional death toll for the impacted areas stands at, at least, 2,207. More than 12,268 injuries have been recorded and nearly 3,000 schools have been affected. "15% of these schools are totally destroyed and 60% damaged," UNICEF estimates.

The Minister of National Education and

### Good to know

Prior to the earthquake in March 2021, UNICEF estimated that 4.4 million people (a third of the population) were food insecure, 217,000 children were suffering from global acute malnutrition, and 2.95 million people, including one in three Haitian children, needed emergency health care. The disaster is expected to further exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

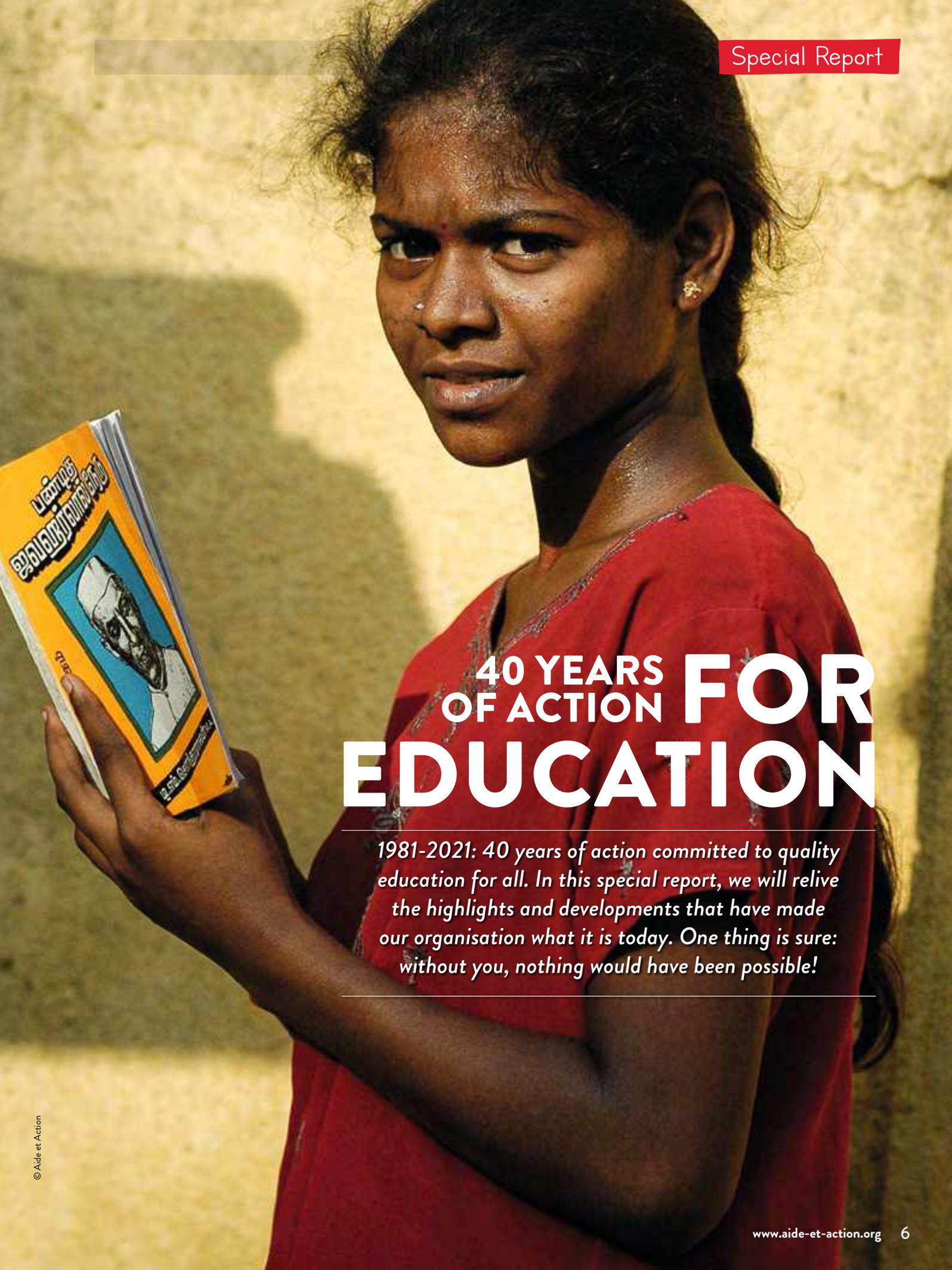
Vocational Training, Marie-Lucie Joseph, set up an emergency committee to consider resuming school activities. Its goal: "to coordinate the actions of the ministry with a view to assessing the damage caused to educational structures, the loss of human life in educational staff and the urgent needs to allow the resumption of school activities as soon as possible".

Aide et Action has been involved in Haiti for 13 years in educational development projects. After an absence of 5 years, our organisation is back on site as part of the project "School, a vector of social change in Haiti" funded by the The Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and conducted in partnership under the responsibility of Solidarités Laïque. This earthquake is a disaster for education.

### ON SITE AND WITH ITS PARTNERS, AIDE ET ACTION ACTS FOR HAITI

In addition to this situation, there is the threat of the Coronavirus: given the current situation, many victims are unable to apply barrier gestures. Haiti also faces a fuel shortage which makes travels difficult. In addition, insecurity reigns and the country's political environment is still volatile. There is an increase in cases of kidnappings in the metropolitan area. The Aide et Action and Solidarités Laïque headquarters teams are working with the local teams in the field to coordinate a support action for the populations of the most affected quarters. We can already announce that for the start of the school year, 30,000 students will be provided with school kits from the end of September, in order to allow children to return to school in good conditions despite all the difficulties associated with the situation.

For greater efficiency, Aide et Action and Solidarités Laïque are joining forces to carry out the solidarity actions necessary for the affected populations. We would like to engage with Haitians to tell them that we will stand by their side to face this situation and to act in full solidarity with them. 🌱



# 40 YEARS OF ACTION FOR EDUCATION

*1981-2021: 40 years of action committed to quality education for all. In this special report, we will relive the highlights and developments that have made our organisation what it is today. One thing is sure: without you, nothing would have been possible!*

# 40 YEARS OF ACTION AND EVOLUTION

*The story of Aide et Action is first and foremost that of vulnerable and marginalised communities, children, and adults who, deprived of education, had little hope of seeing their future improve. But, since 1981, millions have been accompanied by our teams on the road to development and now know how to read, write, and count. In 40 years, so many lives have been transformed.*

1981

Pierre-Bernard Le Bas founds Aide et Action, launches its first projects in India and initiates child sponsorship.

1984

Development of first projects dedicated to early childhood in India.

1987

First teacher training seminar conducted in India.

2004

> Opening of a project for children with disabilities in Cambodia.  
> Following the tsunami, Aide et Action implements professional training centres for (young) adults in South Asia.

1983

Opening of a project in Burundi, 4<sup>th</sup> country of intervention after India, Kenya, and Rwanda.

1986

Start of building of school infrastructure in Togo.

2002

Aide et Action includes disease prevention in its projects.

Aide et action develops an educational strategy in France and, later in Europe, for populations living in precarious housing.

2007

“ The goal that all children, without exception and without any discrimination whatsoever, may have access to quality education is unfortunately not reached. There is still a lack of political will to acknowledge education as a pivotal element. ”

Charles-Emmanuel BALLANGER,  
Director General of Aide et Action and Director France - Europe

2013

Aide et Action is a partner of the film “On the way to school”, awarded with a César for best documentary in 2014.

2017

> Aide et Action participates in the release of 50 young Indian migrants that were exploited.

> To end the exploitation of the youngest ones in India, Aide et Action and its partners create “the Smiley brick”: a worldwide known symbol that is attached to bricks that have not been manufactured by children.

2019

Aide et Action celebrates the first edition of the International Day for Education.

2021

> Aide et Action is leader of the Education Coalition.

Aide et Action launches “Enlight” dedicated to vulnerable girls in India.

2015

2018

> Aide et Action launches the “Mobile libraries” project in Cambodia.

> Aide et Action launches the “A Light For Africa” project in West Africa.

> The Indian state of Tamil Nadu officially adopts schools for migrant children, developed by Aide et Action in India since 2002.

2020

Aide et Action adapts its programmes and innovates in order to respond to the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.



## 40 years of action

# Major achievements

*In the 40 years of our existence, we have carried out hundreds of projects around the world and helped millions of people. We have chosen to come back here on four flagship programmes that illustrate our different areas of intervention, and which reflect the impact of our actions!*

**GUINEA, Transforming civil society.** Made up of 700 organisations, both Guinean and French, and led by Aide et Action, the Capacity Building Programme for Civil Society and Guinean Youth Organizations (PROJEG) is a “Concerted, multi-stakeholder Programme (PCPA)”. In other words, a programme of innovative cooperation, the objective of which is the emergence of organized civil societies, which is able to have dialogues with governments on public policy-making. Between 2008 and 2020, PROJEG supported actors of Guinean civil society to contribute to the evolution of policies and management of public policies and the consolidation of democracy and peace. In 12 years, PROJEG has acted for the unity of civil society in times of crisis and for conflict prevention; it has supported numerous investigations around violations of human rights; it has mobilized the diaspora during the Ebola epidemic in 2015, while denouncing, at the same time, the isolation then imposed on Guinea; it has worked on the development of texts of Laws such as the Mining Code for greater contribution of mining companies to local development or criminal law procedures for the criminalization of torture; it has initiated a process to make gold mining more human and virtuous; it has allowed the creation of a network of youth workers (already more than 900 trained facilitators) and brings out many young people as Guinean leaders. “We worked on issues and key subjects for Guinea.

We got great results, major successes, and great changes. But the most impressive remains the evolution of the people who have grown from year to year. It’s a real pride for us” says Sonia Vinolas, coordinator of PROJEG.

**INDIA, Reinventing vocational training.** It’s at the aftermath of the devastating 2004 tsunami in South Asia that Aide et Action is strategically committed to young people affected by the disaster, to help them rebuild their lives. In 2005, our teams started a skills and entrepreneurship development programme (Livelihood Education and Development - iLEAD). From a first training centre in Chennai, India, the initiative quickly spread through the country and very quickly beyond its borders. Several innovative ideas and approaches have been developed and tested in the field to add more rigor and efficiency to the training programme which has the advantage of lasting only three months! This improvement allowed the team to gain confidence and thus implement the concept successfully in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Philippines.

Since 2005, more than 240,000 young adults aged 18 to 32 have benefited from vocational training and support in the search for employment in more than 40 trades. Having become over the years more holistic, inclusive, and empowering, the project has evolved to enable young people

to become vectors of change in their communities. The project also succeeded in breaking down the gender barriers and leading young women to become models of success; it has also enabled young people with disabilities to be taken care of and lead their life with dignity.

“The road travelled since 2005 has been filled with various challenges, nevertheless, the support and trust of parents, communities, governments, educational institutions and companies and foundations encouraged us to move forward and to make this initiative one of the flagship initiatives by Aide et Action,” says Aishwarya Mahajan, director of the iLEAD programme in South Asia.

**SENEGAL, GUINEA, IVORY COAST, BURKINA FASO, TOGO, BENIN, MALI, NIGER, Improving access to quality education in West Africa.** The Programme for Improvement and Diversification of the Educational Offer in West Africa (PADOE), led by Aide et Action, constituted a large-scale project both in terms of the number of countries concerned and the number of vulnerable populations. Indeed, this one should contribute to the improvement of education for all, including marginalised groups, by developing, among others, alternative forms of education, in eight countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo.

Over half a million children have received a better quality of education during our project’s 13 years. Various community groups, from parents to teachers to school principals, have developed new skills and played active roles in education leading to almost 3,000 schools and 300 schools improving their school management.

Two main axes have been developed: governance through a participatory community and the school project. While the first allows membership, participation, and involvement of any member of the community in the school, the second represents a tool for implementing educational policies at



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the local level and allows for a profound improvement in the quality of learning.

In all countries of intervention, the access indicators and the quality of education have improved dramatically. In appreciation of the welcome changes, a letter sent by managers of primary schools, high schools and colleges, technical education and vocational training institutes of the Republic of Ivory Coast thanking Aide et Action for its support in management of its education system was received in year!

**CAMBODIA, Supporting out of school children.** In 2014, when we launched The Cambodian Consortium for Out School Children, over one quarter of children aged 6-17 were reported to have not been attending school (in 2012) due to poverty.

Composed of 23 NGOs and led by Aide et Action in partnership with Educate A Child, a global programme of the Education Above All Foundation, we founded the Consortium to address five key areas that impacted access to primary school: disability, urban poverty, rural poverty and geographical remoteness, language barriers (among ethnic minority populations), and children that were considered too old to enter school.

In its first phase (2014-2018), the Consortium enrolled 57,448 children into education, 46% of whom were girls and succeeded in retaining 93% of these students in education for three academic years. “I am proud of what we have accomplished together. Knowing that 9 children out of 10, from the most marginalized populations, are new to the school benches, is a real relief”, explains Samphors Vorn, Aide et Action Cambodia’s Country Director.

Currently, the Consortium is in its second phase and is prioritising the continuity of education during Cambodia’s Covid-19-related school closures. 🍀



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40 years of action

# For them and thanks to them

*To take a step back from the past 40 years and measure the impact of our actions, we felt that the best people to talk about it were the first concerned.*

*This is why we interviewed our teams on the ground, some of whom have been members almost since the start of the adventure, as well as people supported by our projects of yesterday and today.*



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**INNOCENT SAMA, sponsorship manager, Aide et Action Togo.** I started working at Aide and Action in October 1991, so that is already 30 years! I always wanted to work in the field of development. My motivation became stronger when I knew Aide et Action was working in favour of education because, already as a university student, I organized tours to raise awareness about schooling, especially that of girls, in schools and colleges from my home prefecture. So, this organisation was for me fruitful ground to fulfil my dream.

Since I joined Aide et Action, the intervention strategy has evolved a lot. From direct support, we went to support the communities who are thus in control of their own development. Partnerships have been developed, giving more force to interventions and influence on educational policies. And over time, education indicators have improved a lot in the intervention regions in Togo, especially concerning girls. The parents now understand the importance of schooling, they participate in school life and take initiatives

to support the school (initiation of school community, recruitment and support for teachers, involvement in educational debates... etc.) Thanks to Aide et Action, schools in Togo, once initiated by the communities and that were unfairly called “underground schools”, are recognized by the state under the name of local initiative schools. The organisation also provided invaluable support to the preschool education sector which was previously reserved to urban areas and wealthy families. In Togo, the organisation has a very large base in the field. The educational offer has significantly improved not only in terms of access and quality, but also in local participatory governance.



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**SUGALI RAMA LAKSHMI, former Aide et Action sponsoree girl in India.**

I work as a health educator. I have two children, a daughter and a son. We live in Anantapur. When I was younger, I was supported by an Aide et Action sponsorship programme. My sponsor asked me what I was learning, what subject I wanted to study, what I

wanted to become, if my parents supported me and if I wished to continue my studies. I used to answer all these questions in my letters. It made me understand that education was very important for girls. In my school year, there were ten other girls, and they all gave up. I’m here alone to have continued, while I walked five kilometres to get to school every day.

These days my husband and I are educated. I also wanted my children to contribute to society, therefore, I educated them. I could support my son who is currently a doctor and my daughter who works in agriculture. My husband is at the service of society as a teacher. In order to become a health educator, I myself graduated from the tertiary level of education. Daily, I take charge of women’s health, pregnant women and other women who come to see me, and I refer them to a doctor if needed.

I was able to study well thanks to the sponsorship of Aide et Action. If I hadn’t had this opportunity, I would have been illiterate like many children from underprivileged backgrounds and I would be staying at home. Now I have decent living conditions and I want to open a dispensary with my son to provide medical facilities that are worthy and free to people from underprivileged backgrounds. I think my knowledge has been very useful to people during the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel like I did well to raise awareness among people and warn

them. I am proud. I wish that all rural girls were educated and have the same opportunities as the ones I benefited from.



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**CHAKRIYATEP, Financial Director, Aide et Action Cambodia.** I joined Aide et Action when I was 23 years old, in 2005. I came from the private sector, and I wanted to work for a non-profit organization. It was important for me to value the impact I could bring to the company. My job is to lead and manage the finance team by putting in place and maintaining solid internal financial control systems.

I therefore believe that my contribution to the smooth running of the organization is significant. This is what pleases me.

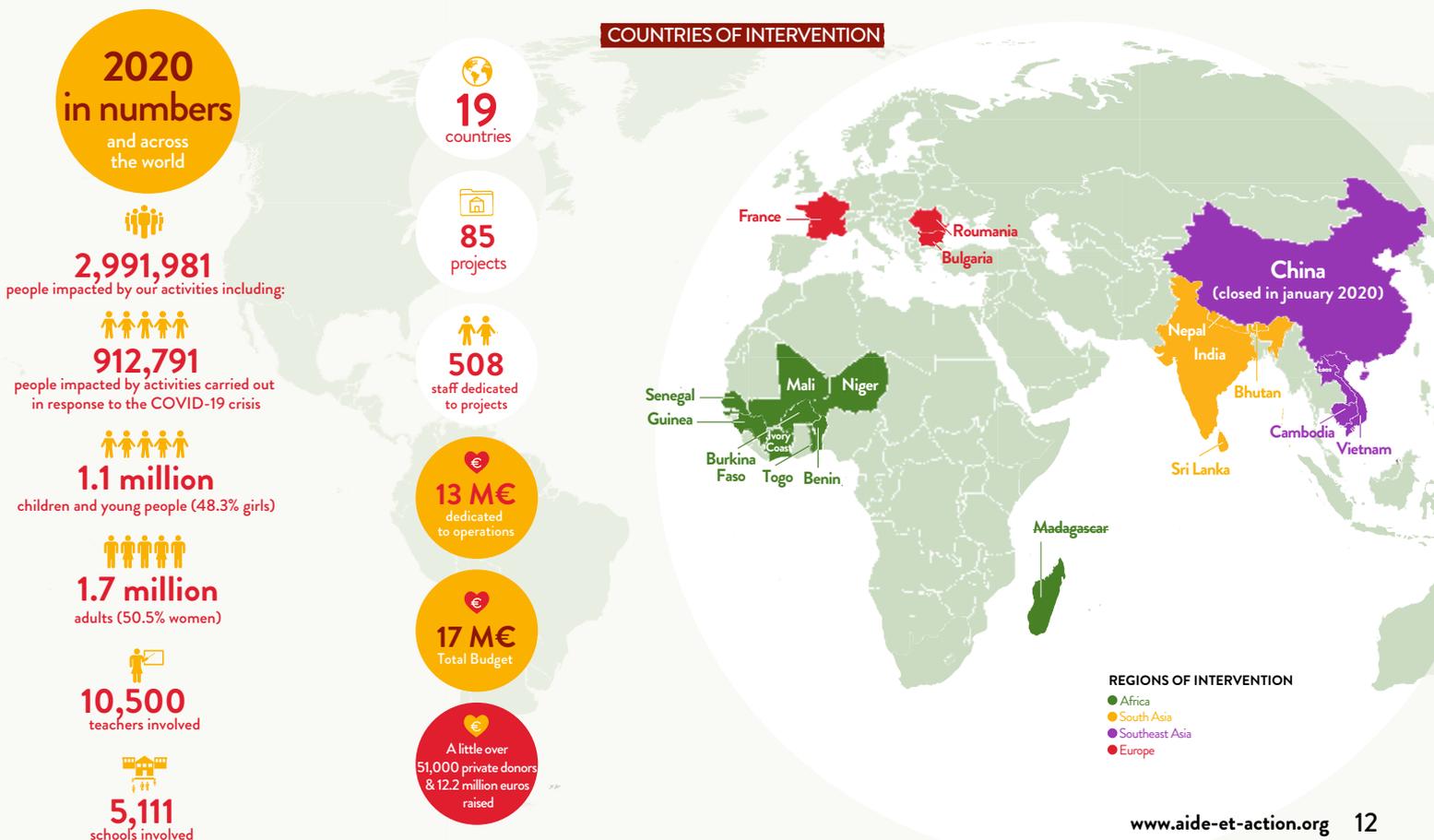
Since my arrival, the financial and operational strategy of the organization in Southeast Asia has changed a lot and it has adapted to the needs of populations. The current implementation of projects is based on a multi-stakeholder basis where members of communities are invited to get involved in a sustainable way on the issues that concern them and so become vectors of change. These days we can say that our organization has many advantages. Thanks to its expertise and the concrete impact of its projects, Aide et Action influences countries on their educational policies. By promoting the model of partnership as a key to development in our areas of intervention, we educate those involved and encourage them to understand that valuable relationships are significant within civil society; government and stakeholders in the private sector can contribute to the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. I consider that we form an ideal team and that together we can do anything! I am proud of the considerable impact of our actions in support of vulnerable populations. For me, a child's smile is the most beautiful of rewards and that makes me happy day after day.



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**PHAM HUY DUC, deputy director of a school supported by Aide et Action in Vietnam.** Our primary school in Nung Nang, located in the Lai Chau province, joined the Aide et Action programme in 2019. The aim is to improve access to education for





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children aged 3 to 8 years old by improving educational methods and the learning environment. The project aims to increase involvement and accountability of parents and promote local autonomy. Before that, there was no specific school project, we simply followed the instructions of the Ministry of Education and Training including teaching methods that did not promote active learning of children. Activities that generate enthusiasm among students were not taken into account or implemented. Thanks to the project, the teachers at our school now have many tools that allow them to improve teaching methods, thus helping to improve children's learning on the whole. They have a more efficient approach that is based on educational tools that are relevant and that help students to better assimilate lessons. The courses are rolling smoothly, more at the children's pace relieve academic pressure. Students regularly participate in activities that are dynamic, interactive, cooperative, and focus on sharing.

They are increasingly more confident and daring! Being in charge of education, my wish for the future is to improve the quality of education and make it more inclusive to help pupils from ethnic minorities to fully develop their capabilities. For this we hope that Aide et Action will continue to support and accompany us.



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**ABDOULAYE, former Aide et Action sponsoree boy in Senegal.** I became godson of Aide et Action in 1997, I was seven years. At the time, there was no school in Thiewel Bessel,

my village. The nearest school was more than a 30-minute walk away. This is why Aide et Action decided to take action in the Kolda region, in Haute-Casamance. It developed a school in my town, that was able to accommodate around 50 pupils. Without this project, I would never have been to school. It was an unbelievable chance. Thanks to the support of collective sponsorship, my comrades and I didn't just learn to read and to write, we also learned trades such as market gardening or dyeing. It's very important to be prepared from an early age. It allowed us to find a job afterwards.

Despite my lack of previous education, I managed to learn subjects without difficulty. The four years during which I was a godson allowed me to gain confidence in myself and move to sixth grade. Once the sponsorship ended, I wanted to continue, and I got to the second year of college where I received a history-geography degree. I was then hired by the

Ministry of the Environment in Dakar, before returning home as a forestry coordinator within the departmental council. I always say that a former Aide et Action pupil does not have the right to be unemployed. We can all get by. This is why I am extremely grateful towards this organisation. Everything that I have today, is thanks to Aide et Action. I regret that not everything in Senegal's education system is based on this model. The question of education is simply a priority for me. I invested myself by being elected to the post of first vice-chairman of the regional board of the youth centre of Kolda in 2016.



**MEERA**, international sponsorship coordinator, Aide et Action India. I started working at Aide and Action in 1996, so that's 25 years of service! Basically, I was a French teacher, but I quickly realized that to always teach the same bases to children would not allow me to quench my thirst to learn more. I then heard talk about Aide et Action, and I joined the organisation with a passion for education and the French language. This work, I believe, is tailor-made for me and that's why I'm not amazed to be still so involved 25 years later. As a witness of difficulties endured by underprivileged children to access quality education, my passion for education has multiplied and I serve this cause with real conviction. I'm happy to have a role to play in the development of marginalized children and their communities through education. Since I joined, the organization has evolved



*I always say that a former Aide et Action pupil does not have the right to be unemployed. We can all get by. This is why I am extremely grateful towards this organisation. Everything that I have today, is thanks to Aide et Action.*

**Abdoulaye**,  
former Aide et Action godson in Senegal

both in substance and in form. Basically, we have intensified our work in the field of education going beyond formal primary education to meet new needs and target populations such as migrant children, children with a disability, children of women in the sex industry, etc. And in terms of form, the organization has grown from a single Asian country and some African countries in 1996, to 19 countries today in Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

The different developments that have taken place since my arrival are the reflection how far the organization has come. Moreover, as a coordinator of international sponsorship, I would like to stress the importance of this commitment. Quality education being at the heart of all our interventions, I ensure that sponsorship activities, i.e., all exchanges of letters between children and godparents, become a real educational tool for the empowerment of children.

Sponsorship is above all a question of sharing and mutualization, so I would like to say a big thank you to all the godparents who gave a little of themselves to help open the eyes of children that are isolated from a different outside world. Since its establishment in India, Aide et Action has definitely moved the cause of education forward. More of its concrete interventions, the organisation was able to influence other stakeholders, urging their support, to allow populations until then left behind to access education!



**CHIMÈNE**, beneficiary of our project "Child-friendly school, Friend of girls" in Togo. Since school government was put in place by Aide et Action, life at school in Tchabi Copé has changed a lot. I am Minister of Sports and Recreation! Like we're meant to set a good example as ministers, we pay attention to our behavior and encourage our classmates to do the same. We tell them we must come to class on time, learn lessons, not to tease each other, to respect parents and not to give up attending lessons.

As a girl, previously I didn't dare say a lot. But now it's different. I was elected to my post, then I take the floor and I am not afraid to say what I think. I am proud of my role as Minister. I've always loved sports and I don't think it is just for boys. I even organized a soccer match at school, and everyone was happy. What a boy can do, a girl can do that too. You just need to have trust and not doubt too much. For girls, the atmosphere has changed at school, now we are comfortable, we feel free. There is more respect and less violence. 🍀

## Inclusion in international cooperation: commitments and reality



The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 80%<sup>1</sup> of people with disabilities live in developing countries where access to education is an ongoing challenge. In Cambodia, nearly 57%<sup>2</sup> of children with disabilities do not attend school. To overcome this, Aide et Action has developed a project in partnership with the local NGO Rabbit School Organization which offers “integrated” classes. Reduced in number (no more than 12 pupils for two teachers), their objective is to mix children with disabilities and pupils with a delay in school achievements. The children thus benefit from adapted teaching methods thanks to which they can hope to return to the traditional school path.

For Aide et Action, inclusive education is a key response so that the right of all children to quality education is better respected. 🌱

1. OMS 2016.

2. UNESCO 2017.

## Aide et Action and Solidarité Laïque together in Haïti

*We are proud to have recently teamed up with Solidarité Laïque in Haiti to pool our resources and skills to better serve the population. The creation of our alliance, which has become official since last June, gives new impetus to our two organisations.*

Aide et Action and Solidarité Laïque formed an official alliance in June 2021. Our two organisations have gotten to know each other within the Education Coalition and, for six consecutive years, we have worked together to change things in the field of education through multinational programmes. In the changing context where we evolve and where the responses must be multi-faceted, both partnered and coordinated, this alliance will allow our two organizations to be more efficient. Aide et Action and Solidarité Laïque work together on the “Lekòl Chimen Libète” project, where Aide et Action will provide more specific support for community mobilization, and the preparation and implementation of school projects. 🌱



## Barthélemy FOUGEA

# Film producer “Teachers at the end of the world”

*Having collaborated with Aide et Action for the documentary film “On the way to school”, which received a Cesar award, Barthélemy Fougea launches a new film project dedicated to the importance of education entitled “Teachers at the end of the world”. This documentary, directed by Émilie Théron, follows three female teachers in Burkina Faso, Siberia and Bangladesh who decided to teach against the odds, in particularly difficult conditions. A wonderful tribute to the teaching profession.*

### Where did the idea for this film come from?

During the screenings of the film “On the way to school”, I was impressed by the number of people who were talking about their former teachers. I realized that we all had in memory one teacher who had changed our vision about things, and who had given us trust in ourselves. The great majority precisely remembers the name of this teacher because it corresponds with an emotional moment, usually very strong and very intense. I wanted to take a closer look at these encounters.

### How did you choose the countries and the three characters?

For us it is research that creates film. There had been a lot of work carried out by journalists who know the subject of education. They searched for stories and finally gathered over a hundred. We then focused on those that challenged us the most, did not look like the others and that were interesting in themselves, but also in underlying aspects. This is the case of Sandrine in Burkina Faso, Svetlana in Siberia, and Taslima in Bangladesh. Their journeys not only



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talk about the importance of promoting access to education but also against what must be put aside, such as nomadism, forced marriage or educational deserts. Then there is a question of an encounter, desire, and transmission. The director did a real job of building trust. The fact that we finally ended up with three women was not a political will on our behalf - we wanted to film a male teacher in Lebanon, yet it could not be done - but it is finally quite logical



since they represent 78% of the profession.

### What message does the film convey?

Beyond the vocation of these three women, I find that there is an almost sacrificial thing. They have absolute courage. I am convinced that educating can change a lot of stuff, so it's also about the will to pay tribute to teachers. With the pandemic, we have been able to thank medical staff, but we did not do so with teachers. These are however the caregivers of our souls. They are still too often in the shadow while their mission is essential.

### What are the main challenges teachers face?

Their common and primary challenge is to grab the children's interest. There are a lot of forces contrary to education, including poverty, culture and parents' tradition, or even geographical distance... So, they have to think about what it takes to interest children and make them want to learn. For example, in the film we see that Sandrine buys a solar panel on her own initiative and with her personal funds, to allow children to learn in class even when it is dark. It is her “faith” which will turn things upside down for her students. I believe that all teachers are both tired and optimistic, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic which took a big toll on education, but they are brave in the first place. They teach against the odds, through thick and thin, because that is the meaning of life. 🌱



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