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## **Report : a joint Aids awareness campaign in a German-Togolese Dressmakers Training Centre for Young Girls**

**30 March 2005**

On the morning of the 30 march 2005, V Glob members Fola (Coordinator), Souley (Secretary), Birenam(member), Têvi(member), Antje (German volunteer for VGlob's Women Aids program) and Josie (British Assistant Project Coordinator) set out for the village of Agbodrafo on the international road to Benin 35 km from Lomé. Upon arrival we were met by the members of our partner NGO 'Action Contre le Sida (ACS)' led by Mr.Mensah, with whom we had organised to do a joint Aids awareness campaign in a German-Togolese Dressmakers Training Centre for Young Girls (Aktion Gemeinschaft Dritte Welt-Africa, Represented by Akovi Godohoun Mensah). Following our previous meeting, ACS and VGlob had decided to combine our respective skills and specialisations to begin working together to fight Aids in and around Lomé; ACS specialises in Aids Prevention whereas VGlob has focused its attention on Aids Awareness; these are subtle but very important differences which meant that both ACS and VGlob could benefit and learn from the each others activities. Furthermore, experiences of both associations had emphasised the way in which young girls are increasingly at high risk of catching the Aids virus: our work in this centre and centres like it was of paramount importance.

The session took place in the training centre itself where the 20 girls, all under the age of 24 were given a pause for the morning in order to participate. Following some technical problems, we were unable to show the Aids awareness video brought by ACS and thus the session revolved entirely around the members of ACS and VGlob. The session was begun by Mr.Mensah, who, speaking entirely in the traditional language of Ewe in order to ensure full comprehension, gave a detailed explanation of the Aids virus, how it is transmitted and how to protect oneself from it.

This was followed by a question-answer session that highlighted many of myths that are perpetuating the continual spread of the Aids virus. One of the young girls, for example, said that she had heard that the best way to "get rid of" the Aids virus once you have it is to sleep with as many people as possible; her rationalisation was that with each person with whom you have sex, a small part of the virus will leave your body. Another girl has been told by a man that it is condom themselves that spread disease. After members of both ACS and VGlob had responded to these questions and corrected the misunderstandings, Mr Mensah gave a demonstration of how to use a Femidom. Each of the girls was then given a packet of Femidoms.

test. They were advised that, knowing that they have the disease gives them an opportunity not only to get the help they need in order to live well, but also in order to protect others such as their partners and children from catching the virus. 'Action Contre Le Sida' promised to take care of the girls (with



*Mr.Mensah of ACS gives a demonstration of how to use a Femidom to the young female apprentices of Agbodrafo.*

adequate medication and counselling) should the test turn out to be positive. After a few minutes all twenty girls agreed to take the test.

Members of VGlob and ACS worked together to ensure that the girls took the test in full understanding of the consequences; they spent time with each of the girls individually to explain what each of the results –negative and positive – would mean and the ways in which their lives would change but not end if the result was positive. Each of the girls was asked about the risks they had taken and warned about the strength and prevalence of the HIV/Aids virus. They were, furthermore, assured that they would receive all the help they need should the result be positive.

Using a relatively new Aids test kit, ‘Determine’, which permits a test based on a small quantity of blood taken from the finger and gives results within minutes, each of the girls and their Teacher (male, 50 years old) were tested.

*Mr.Mensah, ACS begins testing the girls for the HIV/Aids virus.*



The results showed that 2 out of the 20 girls are HIV positive. The test results were consequently confirmed by laboratory tests. This means that 10% of the girls has aids; this is a highly alarming rate especially if one considers that the girls both have partners.



VGlob and ACS have planned other joint Aids Awareness/Prevention campaigns in other training centres in and around Agbodrafo.

*Vglob and ACS with the young female apprentices of Agbodrafo, March 2005*