

A Step Forward for Cameroun, A Step Forward for All

Delivered by **Adrienne Germain**
President, International Women's Health Coalition

April 26, 2007

Launch of FESADE's Comprehensive Sexuality Education Curriculum,
Yaoundé, Cameroun



I am thrilled and honored to join all of you here today.

It is a privilege to share this landmark occasion with FESADE students and parents, alumni and staff, and honored guests.

We have so much to celebrate. We are here to celebrate the vision and remarkable achievements of Damaris Mounloun and everyone at FESADE. We are here to acknowledge the generous collaboration by the Minister of Public Health, his technical services, and the Minister of Secondary Education. And we are here to celebrate a new world of possibilities for young women and men across Cameroun.

I speak for all of us at the International Women's Health Coalition and our many partners around the world, for this is a celebration for young people everywhere. Today's youth, more than any generation that came before, share a closely connected world. Therefore, a step forward for Cameroun is a step forward for all.

We at the International Women's Health Coalition are particularly honored to have worked shoulder to shoulder with FESADE since 1994. In 1994, FESADE focused on addressing the needs and concerns of rural women. They soon saw, however, that women's greatest health challenges—unintended pregnancy, maternal and child mortality, and increasingly, HIV and AIDS—could not be addressed unless young people received full and accurate information about their health and rights early. They saw that women would never be equal, and that societies could never be just, until young men and women learned to think differently, to treat each other differently – with mutual respect for human rights and equality. And FESADE had the courage to act. Damaris once said that “women have the greatest potential to bring about change in their communities.” FESADE, and their new curriculum, are living proof of that.

Today, FESADE has reached more than 8000 young people and adults with their message of gender equality and sexual health and rights for all. The curriculum we celebrate today represents a powerful tool for carrying their message of change even further.

Just as we at the Coalition are proud to have supported FESADE for more than a decade, we are proud to have supported this curriculum since its inception. This pride is rooted in the fact that the curriculum we celebrate today is unlike any other in Cameroun. We are proud of the thought and care with which it was developed—with the input of communities, educators, and young people themselves, like the marvelous youth clubs, teachers, and their principal we met yesterday in Ombessa.

Most importantly, we are proud that this curriculum does not just give young people biological information about their health. It teaches young people about communication and decision-making. It teaches them what respectful, rights-based relationships are and how to achieve them. It fosters positive sexuality. It helps young people to develop self-esteem and to

understand and care for their bodies. And, in an age when HIV infections continue to rise, it teaches youth how to protect themselves and each other.

FESADE developed this curriculum because they knew that information on its own is useless unless young women and men are empowered to believe that their own views and values are worth something. By offering girls and boys the knowledge to protect themselves and challenge pervasive inequalities, this curriculum will change attitudes and behavior. It will shape a more hopeful future for girls and women, boys and men.

This curriculum also recognizes that being a parent is a difficult job, perhaps more difficult than any other, because it involves the molding of a new generation who will face challenges beyond our generation's imaginings. It was designed so that schools, communities, and government leaders can lend parents a hand in preparing their daughters and sons for a rapidly changing, and often perplexing, world.

We are gathered today because we are a community of individuals who believe that healthy, educated young people hold the key to better, healthier lives for themselves and their families. Today we live in ever more challenging times. As all of you young women and men here today, and all of Cameroun's young men and women, journey down the roads of your lives, we stand with you, across generations, to work together for a better and a more peaceful and prosperous tomorrow for all communities and nations. May Cameroun prosper.

Thank you.