

LESPLAY PILOT REPORT



January 2021

Prepared by
Gilbert Ajebe Akame
Executive Director

Solidarity and Development Initiative (SODEI)

Bota Middle Farms, Limbe
SWR, Cameroon

www.sodei.org

Table of Contents

Pilot Highlights.....	3
About SODEI.....	4
Context/SODEI’s Baseline Research	4
LESPLAY	6
Program Activities.....	7
Focus on Environmental Preservation	9
Their Voices!	11
Focus on Craftwork.....	12
Focus on Games	13
Focus on Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence.....	14
Conclusion	15
Annex 1: Random LESPLAY Creative Arts & Games Sessions.....	17
Annex 2: Skills dev’t – Painting, Craftwork & Computer Training.....	18
Annex 3: LESPLAY Outdoor Activities	19
Notes	20

Pilot Highlights

The pilot justified SODEI’s principled position about young people as having the ability to tap into their unique potentials and make a difference for themselves and communities when given the chance. The pilot also highlighted the importance of alternative and creative ways of acquiring and using knowledge, and the significance of after-school learning support for young people in general, and specifically for those facing challenging circumstances. According to participants’ testimonies, LESPLAY provided a useful opportunity for them to continue learning, follow up effectively with schoolwork during school disruptions, and learn new and useful economic skills. Participants took part in a series of workshops where they acquired new creative skills in arts and craft, learned about rights and important thematic issues such as the environment, gender equality, gender-based violence, etc. Over 50 children benefited directly from the pilot project in 2020 and about 500 more indirect beneficiaries.

In total the pilot hosted 30+ LESPLAY workshops at our center, paid 8 visits to schools, other CSOs and the local community to deliver LESPLAY. One of the biggest achievements of the pilot was the observation of a change in the young participants’ perceptions about their potentials, and their desire to learn new useful skills and be engaged in youth and community development activities. Another important achievement was the empowerment of young people by providing a platform where their voices, ideas and understandings of events and surroundings are fully taken into consideration.

Lack of funding limited our ability to explore the full potential of the project, hence a limited impact. For instance, we could not afford the equipment to engage children in creative arts using modern tools. Equipment such as tablets and software are needed for modern creative arts and design. We also lacked sufficient financial resources to purchase material and tools for craftwork. Our ability to visit more schools and local communities was also limited because of lack of financial resources.

Your support will enable us to continue engaging children in LESPALY activities and expanding the platform. The year 2020 has been a difficult one with the effects of COVID-19 adding more stress to a community already devastated by a protracted conflict. We believe this project provides a unique opportunity for children affected by crisis and for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. With your support, we will continue to support them and provide them with the tools need to discover their ‘spark’ and develop their unique potentials.

Contact US @:

Email: admin@sodei.org, **Website:** www.sodei.org

Bank Info: Ecobank Cameroon S.A - SODEI Cameroon

Bank Code	Branch Code	Account Number	RIB
10029	26015	31090012647	29

IBAN: CM2110029260153109001264729

Swift Code: ECOCCMCX

About SODEI

Solidarity and Development Initiative (SODEI) is a registered Non-Profit Organization (NPO) founded in November 2018 in the wake of the conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, and the devastating impact on the welfare and education of children and young persons within the region. SODEI is registered as a charity in the UK and has registered sections in Cameroon and Norway. Most of our operations are currently run mainly in the Southwest Region of Cameroon, with the intention of expanding to other regions progressively.

SODEI was founded by Cameroonians of good will, concerned about the repercussions of the growing socio-political and security crises in the country on access to education for young persons. Boko Haram has constantly attacked the border towns in Cameroon from neighboring Nigeria and even imposed a ban on education; the Eastern region was also suffering a spillover effect of the conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR); and the ongoing crisis in the two English-speaking regions of the country which has not only affected access but the quality of education.

We believe that Education has a vital role to play in the creation and sustenance of a culture of peace and resilience in every society. In the wake of the regional and local conflicts affecting the right to education in Cameroon, it was imperative for strategies and initiatives to be elaborated and adopted to come to the aid of young Cameroonians whose access to a quality education has been affected. It is on this basis that SODEI saw the need to create a platform to engage youths in self-development, the expression of their thoughts and visions/dreams for their lives and participate in decisions affecting them, while providing education support to others.

SODEI's mission is to inspire and engage children and young persons by increasing their chances to succeed through innovative and creative methods of learning, alternative skill courses and education support. We do this by creating spaces and platforms to facilitate and foster expression as a means of communication, mental stimulation and participation in youth and community development activities.

Our work is inspired by our commitment to push young people to discover their talents and abilities as well as to create and make use of opportunities. We believe when young people discover their "spark", they effectively tap into their own unique resources. Communication, motivation, determination, passion, and social competence are all qualities which youths need to achieve personal development and to contribute meaningfully to the well-being of the greater community.

Context/SODEI's Baseline Research

Since late 2016, the Anglophone regions of Cameroon have witnessed a deteriorating sociopolitical crisis which has led to violent clashes between armed forces, loss of lives and property, internal displacement and a growing climate of fear and incertitude. The current crisis has its roots in grievances that date back to the early 1960s. Recent events have led to the escalation of violence and armed confrontations between government forces and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). Much of this violence is targeted at local communities and at schools, with pupils and teachers frequently facing attacks. The atrocities that have been perpetrated during these attacks have directly affected the areas in which SODEI works and operates. Schools have been regularly assaulted by armed groups, and tragically this has led to the loss of lives and the horrific traumatization of many children and teachers.

The multiple NSAGs fighting the government declared a ban on schools, Monday ‘ghost-towns’ⁱ and other spontaneous calls for shutdown of all activities in the regions, sometimes lasting several days and having a huge impact on children’s ability to attend school and learn.ⁱⁱ Schools have been prime targets of arson and other attacks, while teachers and students have been victims of violence, assaults, kidnapping, maiming, and in extreme situations, cold-blooded killing.ⁱⁱⁱ

The targeting of school infrastructure, teachers and pupils/students has created an environment of fear and prevented many parents from sending their children to school. Some have sought alternatives to formal education, some have fled to neighbouring French-speaking regions or relatively safe urban areas of the restive regions, while others have defied the ban on schools and the environment of insecurity and risked tragic consequences.

The continued disruption of children’s education in the Anglophone regions will have long lasting consequences on their development, and on the development of their communities. Education and development are intrinsically linked: schools and formal educational settings are pivotal in “helping individuals achieve their own economic and social and cultural objectives and helping society to be better protected, better served by its leaders and more equitable in important ways... Schooling helps children develop creatively and emotionally and acquire the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes necessary for responsible, active and productive citizenship” (Colclough 2004).^{iv} Formal educational settings provide not only the cognitive development children need to thrive, but the emotional and social development that will equip them with the tools to participate effectively in their community. Continued denial of education not only harms the individual child in the short term as they grow and mature but also damages their community’s long-term developmental goals.

Without education, “Poverty will remain intractable, disadvantage will continue to be transmitted across the generations, and economic growth will be compromised by shortages of knowledge and skill in the work force” (Lewin and Akyeampong 2009).^v

LESPLAY

“Children and young people express themselves through creative arts and play”

Learn, Speak and Play (LESPLAY), is a SODEI concept and a project involving young people in Limbe, in the southwest region of Cameroon. LESPLAY provides an alternative for children experiencing disruptions in normal functioning of schools by engaging them in creative informal learning, participatory action, a space for peer interaction and play. LESPLAY employs creative techniques including drawing, sketching, painting and photography; and group techniques such as role play and participatory action. The aim is for participants to learn about rights, and develop creative talents and skills in ways that are interactive and fun. LESPLAY also provides an opportunity for storytelling. Participants express their understanding of their rights, the daily experiences in their life-worlds through drawing, sketching, painting and photography. Through tutoring and participatory action, young participants also improve their skills in math, public speaking and IT. SODEI selects those gifted with artistic skills to showcase and create opportunities for career development for them.

The other arm of LESPLAY involves engaging with other partners including schools and other local civil society organisations (CSOs) through a “LESPLAY Caravan”. A caravan of volunteers visits partners schools and CSOs to engage pupils/student and out-of-school children in LESPLAY activities.

Rationale

The crisis in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon and the school disruption has severely affected children’s access and quality of education. In our research on school disruptions in the Anglophone regions, we found that many children from the affected regions were seeking alternatives either by moving to nearby towns in the French-speaking regions or to relatively safer urban towns in the Anglophone regions. Limbe in the Southwest regions is considered as one of the relatively safe towns hosting many internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled the rural enclaves. Hence, we saw the opportunity to launch the LESPLAY pilot in Limbe.

SODEI has visited some schools within the Southwest region hosting children who fled violence and gotten accounts of their experiences. During our conversations with children in schools, they repeatedly mentioned their desire to continue learning and lead a normal life. SODEI has also received and hosted some of these children and offered learning support in computer training and reading.

Implementation strategy

SODEI has setup a youth center in Limbe in the Southwest region of Cameroon, to serve as a ‘out-of-school’ learning support center and a space for play; providing access to a space, volunteer tutors, computers, books, and games for young people. We also visit schools and community centers to listen, engage and play with children. We give priority to children who have fled conflict areas and live in difficult circumstances within Fako Division of the Southwest region. SODEI plans to visit more schools with a LESPLAY caravan to provide opportunities and engage young people in LESPLAY

Creative Arts: We employ the use of creative arts for learning and self-expression. Children are provided access to material and tools for sketching, drawing, and painting. They draw, sketch and

paint events in their lives and surroundings, depicting their ideas of selected themes such as environmental protection and provide explanations for their arts which are then documented.

Drama/Role Play: Some young people find it easier to communicate through role-play and other forms of drama especially when it has to do with sensitive issues. LESPLAY employs role-play to help young people develop public-speaking, leadership, and decision-making abilities. Participants involve in role-play to discuss key issues affecting them and their communities.

Games: LESPLAY provides a variety of indoor and outdoor games for children both at the Limbe center and in public spaces like school playgrounds and public parks. We pay much attention to the game of chess for its ability to improve on children’s learning, thinking and analytical skills.

Participatory Action: LESPLAY participants work in groups on different project ideas. They identify themes or ideas for example, designing a recycling plant. Groups work together to brainstorm and come up with a sketch/drawing of the plant. The outcomes are later disseminated to the community in workshops where the groups present their design.

LESPLAY Caravan: LESPLAY volunteers visit schools, partner CSOs and community centers monthly to engage children in LESPLAY activities. Volunteers involve in activities including creative arts, games and play in primary schools; and conduct workshops and debates in secondary schools.

Program Activities

LESPLAY was piloted for one year through a host of activities including creative arts workshops at our Limbe youth center, craftwork sessions with CAMHELP, LESPLAY caravan and outdoor activities in 5 locations within Fako Division in the Southwest region.

LESPLAY Creative Arts Workshops

We organized 30+ LESPLAY workshop hosting at least 50 participants aged between 10 to 18. Participants were recruited based open calls and recommendations. The sessions were held once in a week on Saturdays and coordinated by our program volunteers: **Tataw Ayuk Emilie** (LESPLAY Program Coordinator), and **Ruth Tebah** (Creative Arts Coordinator); and supervised by **Susan Maloba** (Program Manager). The sessions were organized around themes suggested by SODEI volunteers in consultation with the program participants. Themes included: environmental preservation, gender equality, gender-based violence, body image, bullying in schools, violence against women and child rights. Each theme was divided into two sessions. The first session involved an introduction and discussion of the theme between the participants and facilitators, and in the second session participants represented their understanding and ideas about the themes through arts. This was followed by an explanation of their arts. The section titled “Focus on Environmental Preservation” and “Their Voices” provide an example of how the themes were treated.

The feedback from the sessions shows that participants were highly inspired in their understanding and representation of issues affecting their communities and society at large.

"I was so amazed at their level of maturity as they shared their various opinions and ideas about what they think are the best ways of preserving the environment. Overall, working with these children is so heartwarming as I get to see them bloom into wonderful leaders our community will be very proud of" Tataw Ayuk Emilie

It was a great learning and skill enhancement opportunity for the participants. At the end of each theme participants provided feedback where they expressed their understanding of the subject matter, new knowledge acquired, how they were impacted and what more we can do.

Tyra one of the participants stated: "I love the paint activity we engage in using different colours to create beautiful art pieces on cardboard papers...It promotes creativity in me and others as we can express ourselves freely." "

Faith stated: "The civic engagement topic helped me to understand we all have a role to play in keeping our environment clean. I loved the topic in bullying because I got to learn about some of the dangerous effects it can cause particularly to victims" Regarding what she would like to improve she stated: "I love to see practical works like baking and designing using recycling materials". Regarding LESPLAY as a whole she said: "I like this program LESPLAY because I have learnt a lot from it and I love the games we play like Pictionary".

Caleb enjoyed the Chess game because it is entertaining, and it helps improves his thinking capability. He also enjoyed the workshop on deforestation. He stated: "For deforestation, it helped to me to understand trees are very important in our environment and that without them, we will face a lot of negative consequences". He would love to see more craft and skills development activities like beads making and baking.

Ridley enjoyed the lessons on the rights of the child: "It made me to know some of the various rights like the rights to an education, shelter and nationality and how to know when they are not respected".

Ivo's favourite were sessions on mental health, self-esteem, and body image: "I got to see the importance of our mental health just like our physical health, to best handle dilemmas. Again, I got to know we are all unique and special and no one has the right to put us down".

Focus on Environmental Preservation

Environmental protection and preservation was a key topic of focus spanning 5 sessions of LESPLAY. Workshops focused on an introduction to the environment, the importance of plant and animal life, the effects of human interference, methods of protection, preservation and conservation. Participants learnt about methods including the protection of fauna and flora, and the importance of recycling.

Deforestation was a major topic of discussion based on its prevalence in the area and its importance in maintaining animal habitat and preserving the environment. Participants shared some reasons trees are cut down, including for furniture, for cooking purposes through the production of charcoal and firewood and for timber exploitation which is one of Cameroon's major exports. The case of the "rosewood tree" in Senegal and the Gambia which is under the endangered species list for plant life was given as an example because of its prevalent illegal exploitation.

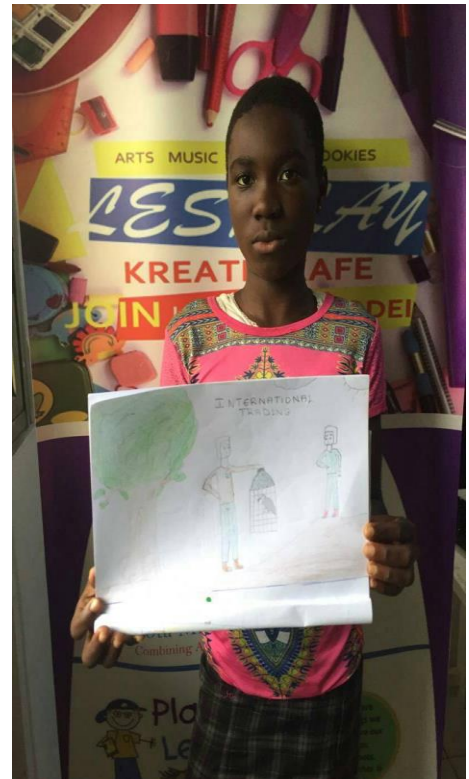
LESPLAY participants also learnt about forest reserves, where protected species could thrive such as the **Korup National Park in the Southwest and the Ebo forest in the Littoral region**. Participants learnt about afforestation which involves the replanting of trees. They learnt how afforestation could be a counter measure in areas where logging takes place as the new trees will grow in the place of the fallen ones.

Other methods of environmental protection and conservation discussed involved the proper usage of water and energy for example through conserving water and using long lasting light bulbs which reduces green house gases emissions.

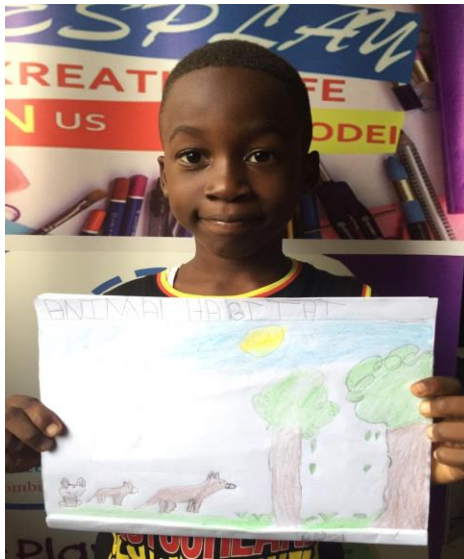
Through individual and group work, participants provided practical solutions to environmental protection and conservation. Examples include the replanting of trees, preserving animal habitat, different ideas of recycling of waste as seen below.



***"When trees are in an environment, harmful effects like soil erosion will be limited."** Jesse*







“I think the destruction of animal habitats through cutting down trees can harm or destroy animal life... animals play a big role in supporting other species like plants to grow” Harmony



Their Voices!

Harmony and Elizabeth – Protection of Wildlife

Harmony and Elizabeth believe we cannot talk about environmental protection and saving OUR planet without protecting wildlife.

Harmony draws on how a good animal habitat should be, without the interruption from humans. “I think the destruction of animal habitats through cutting down trees can harm or destroy animal life... animals play a big role in supporting other species like plants to grow”

“They can be protected by humans not interfering in their habitats. They can be saved by creating reserve parks and zoos to ensure they will not be killed”.

Elizabeth depicts the illegal trade on animals as a possible cause of extinction. According to Eli, when animal species get extinct, it has an effect on the ecosystem. She opines that, there is need to refrain from human activities that can harm their habitat like logging. She advocates for conservation units like reserve parks particularly for species facing extinction.

Recycling – Gideon & Leonard

Leonard and Gideon believe recycling is key to ensuring a clean and sustainable environment through the reduction of pollution on land and water. Recycling can be controlled through recycling points and reward. According to Gideon, inadequacy of recycling plants and lack of information is a major setback.

Re-afforestation - Jesse

Jesse illustrates the importance of re-afforestation. Planting and replanting trees is an effective method of environmental conservation. “When trees are in an environment, harmful effects like soil erosion will be limited.”

Community Engagement - Ako

For Ako, community engagement is crucial. “I believe when communities come together through initiatives such as clean-up campaigns, it helps to maintain a clean and sustainable environment...choosing specific community clean up days is an effective measure”.

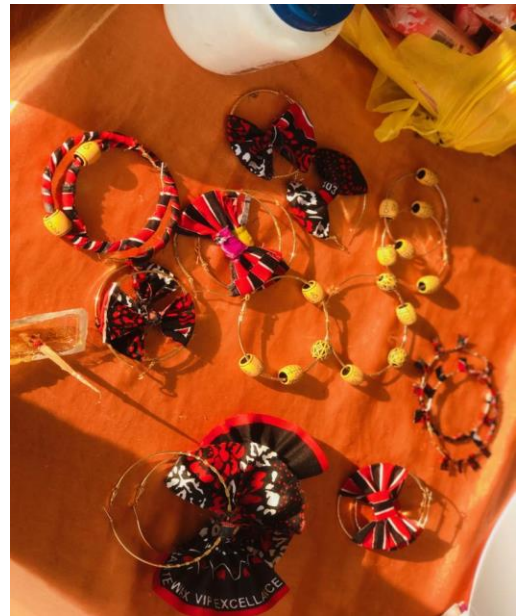
Focus on Craftwork

SODEI collaborated with CAMHELP to carry out empowerment seminars for LESPLAY participants and their peers from CAMHELP. We carried out workshops on ‘ankara’ designs, beads making and cookery. At the end, participants learnt basic skills and produced some sample items as seen in pictures.

The craft activities were coordinated by our creative arts coordinator Ruth Tebah and involved designing jewelries and other accessories like shoes and bags using ankara materials. Participants were given a chance to be creative in designing the items. The coordinator did a practical demonstration by designing the first item, showing the beneficiaries step by step the required process.

Participants also worked in groups, and each group was led by our team members to guide and supervise the children. The groups were assigned two (2) different designs to create using tools such as scissors, needles, ankara and beads.

At the end, the participants’ designs were showcased and judged based on their creativity and uniqueness. A display of the designs was done by the beneficiaries where they took part in the parade wearing their various designs.



Focus on Games



A space for play &
LESPLAY
A platform for interaction

“We pay much attention to chess for its ability to improve on children’s thinking and analytical skills”.

LESPLAY engages young people in different forms of indoor and outdoor games. We believe strongly that leisure and play are important for young people’s health, education, development, and happiness. It is for this reason that we embed play as an integral part of LESPLAY. We engage children in indoor games once a week, where they can either play chess, puzzle, or construct objects. We pay much attention to chess for its ability to improve on children’s thinking and analytical skills. In 2020, we organised over 20 chess sessions and launched a children’s chess competition. Other indoor games are hosted weekly. During LESPLAY weekly workshops, participants are allowed an hour break to play a variety of games of their choice.

Regarding outdoor games, the LESPLAY group has visited parks in Limbe such as the botanical garden where the children explored the beauty of flora and fauna while playing together. With support and funding, we plan to visit more children’s playground such as ALCEF in Limbe to give our LESPLAY beneficiaries the opportunity to experience modern play facilities.

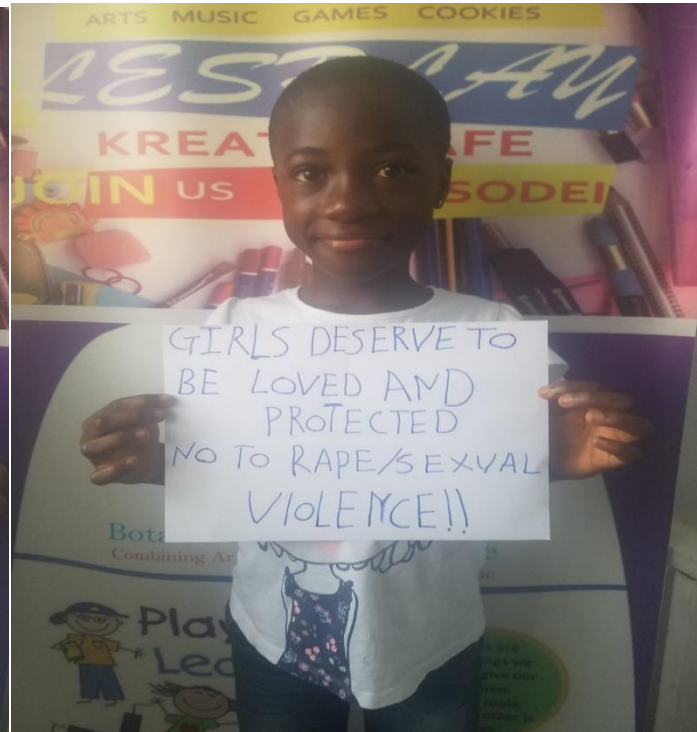
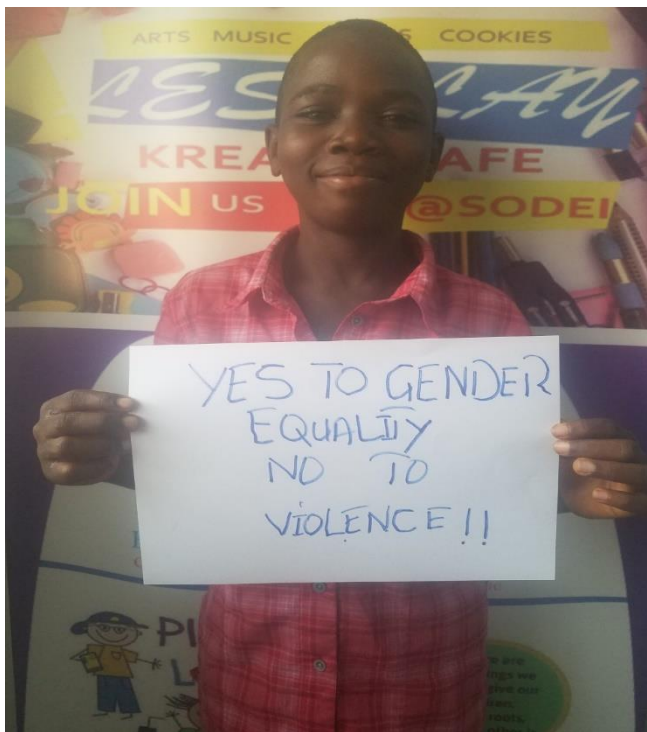


Focus on Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence

Gender Equality and gender -based violence (GBV) has been one of the overriding themes in our LESPLAY workshops. This is based on our unwavering support for gender equality and zero tolerance policy on GBV. We advance gender equality by leading by example in our organizational structure and programmatic focus. We have also been very proactive in our campaign against GBV. In our two years of existence, we commemorated two editions of 16 Days of Activism against GBV culminating to the release of our basic lexicon on violence against women.^{vi}

More than a quarter of our LESPLAY workshops have focused directly or indirectly on educating on gender equality and GBV. Educating on gender equality begins from the inclusive and interactive approach we adopt for our LESPLAY workshops. During the workshops, we observed that all participants had a very positive attitude towards gender equality and played a very important role in disseminating the message. Participant’s ideas of equality ranged from roles in society and career choices, to the right to ownership of landed property.

In the many sessions on GBV, participants learned about key definitions of GBV, why it is bad, who is likely to commit GBV, why it is necessary to curb GBV and who has the responsibility to end it. During the workshops, participants gained significant understanding of the harmful practice and assumed their role in the fight to curb the practice through advocacy.



Conclusion

SODEI was motivated by the need to inspire a change of mindset for young people in Cameroon, to inspire a generation of change makers who believe in their potentials and can contribute to move society forward. We saw the gap created by the Anglophone crisis and the impact on access to quality education. In the course of this pilot, we saw the need to conduct a baseline research on the question of access to education during crisis and the impact it had on children's ability to learn. We also sought to identify alternatives and strategies adopted and how these contributed to creating opportunities for continuous learning and development of potentials for young people.

Our research found that school infrastructure, students and teachers suffered the most casualty of the crisis in the Anglophone regions. Many have been displaced, their school infrastructure destroyed and some unfortunately paid with their lives. We found that the targeting of school infrastructure, teachers and students created an environment of fear and prevented many parents from sending their children to school. As a result, some have sought alternatives to formal education, some have fled to neighbouring French-speaking regions or relatively safe urban areas of the restive regions, while others have defied the ban on schools and the environment of insecurity and risked tragic consequences.

SODEI also conducted a need assessment to identify the contribution of after-school follow up to children's school performance. We found that limited after-school follow up has an impact on school performance and that follow up could greatly improve performance in school. We also found out that after-school activities in general provide an opportunity for children to learn new skills and play with friends. As such, SODEI recognizes that the knowledge and skills gaps that exist in our community can be closed through platforms such as LESPLAY. Hence, LESPLAY inspires young persons, students and children to develop a sense of purpose, life skills, empathy and social competences which will help them to achieve higher academic performance and actively contribute to the well-being of their greater community.

The pilot justified our principled position about young people as having the ability to tap into their unique potentials and make a difference for themselves and communities when given the chance. The pilot also highlighted the importance of alternative and creative ways of acquiring and using knowledge, and the significance of after-school learning support for young people in general, and specifically for those facing challenging circumstances.

SODEI adopts a rights-based approach in its programming. This implies that we take children's right into serious consideration in every aspect of our work. In this pilot, we took all the dispositions to ensure that international standards to uphold child participants' rights were met. We obtained consent from participants and their parents/guardians. Consent was obtained for their involvement at different levels of the workshops and for the use of their ideas and pictures to promote the project outcomes for the purpose of continuity. We also adopted a participatory approach in delivering the workshops, which implies participants were fully engaged and allowed the freedom to express their thoughts and ideas.

We are immensely proud of the commitment the participants have shown to this initiative and hope we will have the support and resources needed to continue engaging them and bringing out their potentials. Our volunteers have demonstrating immense commitment and willingness to sacrifice their time to empower the young ones. They showed genuine interest and passion to work with children and engaged them with love and compassion. We owe gratitude to them for their sacrifice and for the success of the pilot.

**Support US,
Donate, Become a
Volunteer!**



“Support us in realizing our mission to empower children and youth in Cameroon”

Your support will enable us continue to engage children in LESPALY activities and expanding the platform. The year 2020 has been a difficult one with the effects of COVID-19 adding more stress to a community already devastated by a protracted conflict. We believe this project provides a unique opportunity for children affected by crisis and for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. With your support, we will continue to support them and provide them with the tools need to discover their ‘spark’ and develop their unique potentials.

Contact US @:

Email: admin@sodei.org, **Website:** www.sodei.org

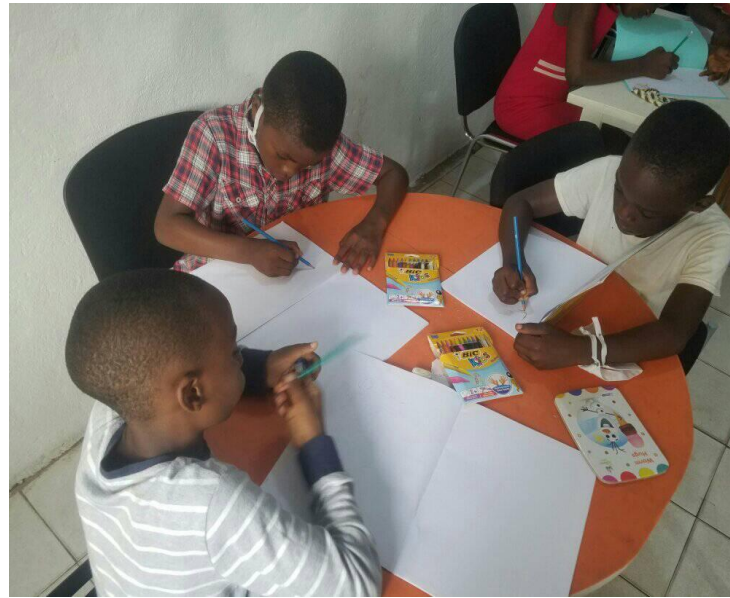
Bank Info: Ecobank Cameroon S.A - SODEI Cameroon

Bank Code	Branch Code	Account Number	RIB
10029	26015	31090012647	29

IBAN: CM2110029260153109001264729

Swift Code: ECOCCMCX

Annex 1: Random LESPLAY Creative Arts & Games Sessions at our Limbe Youth Resource Centre



Annex 2: Skills dev't – Painting, Craftwork & Computer Training at our Limbe Youth Resource Centre



Annex 3: LESPLAY Outdoor Activities



Notes

- ⁱ Since the onset of the crisis in the English-speaking regions, Monday has been used as a day of protest or boycott to send a message to authorities. On such days, every business, public and private institutions including schools remain shut down in nearly all the towns and villages of the two regions.
- ⁱⁱ International Crisis Group (October 19, 2017) Cameroon's Worsening Anglophone Crisis Calls for Strong Measures. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/130-cameroon-worsening-anglophone-crisis-calls-strong-measures>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Amnesty International (2018), A turn for the worse: Violence and human rights violations in Anglophone Cameroon. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/8481/2018/en/>
- ^{iv} Colclough, Christopher, and Global Education Monitoring Report Team. *Education for All: The Quality Imperative*. UNESCO Publishing, 2004
- ^v Lewin, Keith M., and Kwame Akyeampong. "Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Researching Access, Transitions and Equity." *Comparative Education*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2009, pp. 143–150., doi:10.1080/03050060902920492
- ^{vi} Stop Violence Against Women (VAW) SODEI's Basic Lexicon. Retrieved from <https://www.sodei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/VAW-Basic-Lexicon-New.pdf>