

1st/5th December 2004

International AIDS/Volunteer Days

News from our volunteers in West Africa

Things here in Buea, Cameroon are going really well following the induction course which was great. One of the programmes which we are following through from the previous volunteer team is the modest HIV/AIDS awareness project.

Cameroon is not alone in Africa from suffering the devastating effects of AIDS.



The Cameroon National Flag

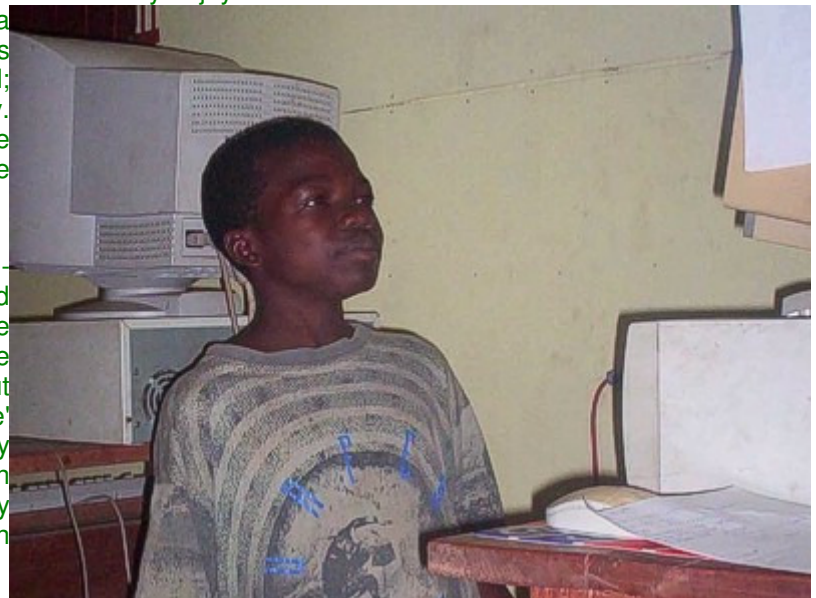
However, in Cameroon - unlike several other countries in Africa - we are encouraged to discuss the problem and engage in practical work. Much of our work has been to encourage this discussion amongst other young people and to distribute the information which we have here and from the UK - the "ABC Policy" - Abstinence, Be faithful, Condom use". Practising with condoms has been an interesting example of "opening up" the discussion. We are holding our final seminars for the youngsters of local schools (aged 15 - 20) and they are going well. The theme is AIDS awareness, but the seminars are very informal, and are basically a chance for everyone to share ideas. As we were setting up the project we became aware that the children are already very informed on the subject of AIDS and how to prevent it. Our research also showed that they already had formed their own opinions on how to deal with HIV and AIDS themselves, and within society. So we decided that re-informing them about the science of the virus was pointless. Instead we set up seminars. This gives the youngsters a chance to ask any questions, and express their own opinion, in an informal manner, with just small groups. We wanted to introduce the idea of tolerance, and the acceptance of AIDS, a concept that they are not yet too familiar with here. They went very well, and not only this but the children really enjoyed it.



Condom practice in AIDS class

On the World AIDS Day, December 4th 2004, we had a concert, with the theme of AIDS awareness. The youngsters who have taken part in the seminars were all involved; making posters, writing poems, acting, and it was a fun day. We involved some of the local artists; a rap group, a bible singer, some singers, painters and actors, as well as the local youngsters of all ages.

We arranged an earlier musical concert for the children - Eliza's Royal Academy of Music skills came in handy - and a sports day when Amy's skills from HM Forces were invaluable. There has been much discussion about the use of our donations. In the end we are spreading them about which will include getting the small computer school 'online' for at least a few hours each week. That has been the joy of Joost Hoornweg from The Netherlands. He has been working so hard to get this important learning tool in daily use. The internet is such a "Gateway to the World" which we from Europe so often forget.



Gateway to the World

The hospitality here has overwhelmed us. Despite all the wonderful UK preparation we just never quite expected this level of friendship - perhaps in Europe we have almost forgotten the meaning of real communities. Everyone looks after one another.

We shall be very sorry to leave so soon. **The Africatrust Team at United Action for Children** www.unitedactionforchildren.org

We hope you are not too cold and wet at home in Europe.

Noble words from Ben Okri, Nobel Laureate

BIRDS of HEAVEN

"In Africa everything is a story, everything is a repository of stories. Spiders, the wind, a leaf, a tree, the moon, silence, a glance, a mysterious old man, an owl at midnight, a sign, a white stone on a branch, a single yellow bird of omen, an inexplicable death, an unprompted laughter, an egg by the river, are all impregnated with stories. In Africa things are stories, they store stories, and they yield stories at the right moment of dreaming, when we are open to the secret side of objects and moods.

Africa is a land bristling with too many stories and moods. This over-abundance of stories, this pollution, is a sort of chaos. A land of too many stories is a land that doesn't necessarily learn from its stories. It should trade some of its stories for clarity."

FOOTBALL in CAMEROON

Everybody is encouraged to join in a game in some way. Cameroon has a fine history of producing many excellent international and national heroes on the playing fields which often are not very green.



NEWS

Our new Hon. Webmaster is **Tom Steel**. Any suggestions on the website may be sent to webmaster@afriustrust.org.uk. We're very grateful for his hard work especially given that he has a real job at the UK Charity "Charity Finance Directors' Group".

Our new Hon. Marketing Guru is **Adam Gallacher** who produced our recent 90 min. DVD whilst he was in West Africa. Copies are available from him on adamgallacher@afriustrust.gi

Since first knowing us in 2001, **Quami Yawson** has been appointed to join our team in **Ghana** and may be reached at quamiyawson@afriustrust.org.uk. He is a former winner of a bursary from Africa Bridge Club [www.afriabridgeclub.org]

Nobody who works with us in Europe receives any financial reward as all appointments are honorary and hence the use of the word "Hon".

Mount Cameroon or "**Chariots of Fire**" is West Africa's highest mountain at 4095m [13,435ft] and our project on the western side at Buea is a quarter of the way up.



The first recorded whiteman to conquer this still active volcano was the British eccentric and explorer, Sir Richard Burton, in 1861. The first European lady to do so was the pioneer social anthropologist, Mary Kingsley, in 1895.

The western side of the mountain facing almost directly on to the Bay of Biafra is the second wettest place on earth. It receives hundreds of inches of rain each year and the record evidently stands at 577 inches in the year 1919.

WHERE RU NOW ?

In those far off days in '94 when we started there was little internet and very few e-mail addresses - so, not all former volunteers and others who knew us then will be getting these updates.

If you know of anyone who would care to keep in touch but who has not received this then do please ask them to contact us with their e-mail address at info@afriustrust.gi

NEWS

Our new Hon. Director for Morocco is **Chris Hands** who has French and British nationality as well as being a Cambridge graduate now living in Oxford. He is on chrishands@afriustrust.org.uk

Thanks also go to all those who have volunteered in Africa and the many who have helped us with presentations in the UK. Special thanks to Olaf Egner in Hamburg, **Germany** who kindly donated his time to help us build a new website for our friends in Cameroon www.unitedactionforchildren.org

Thanks also to the special fund-raisers in **Wales** under the leadership of their founder, **Suzanne Wintle**, all of whom may be seen on www.afriabridgeclub.org as well as to **Nd Ngoka**, their Hon. Webmaster