

Educating friends and parents

“I knew that girls have rights that are not respected. I had no power to do anything about it, though. But after this course I can now work for change,” says Syntiche, 16, in Zinvié, Benin. She is one of over a thousand children who have attended the two-day course and trained as Child Rights Ambassadors and experts on girls’ equal rights.

“Children here live in miserable conditions and their rights are violated. Girls, and sometimes boys, are forced to leave school, and no one protects them.

“Child apprentices in workshops are badly treated, as are foster children and orphans. Two brothers near my home are badly treated by their stepmother and can go all day

without food. Sometimes, when my mum lets me, I give them some food.”

Young girls out at work

“Many youngsters hang around rubbish dumps. They are looking for rubbish to sell, so they can get money to buy food. One young girl, who is nine years old, works in a sewing workshop. Her parents can’t afford to let her go to school and have sent her to be an apprentice. She also works as a maid for her boss. Girls are often treated badly at apprentice workshops and are too young to be there. Most of these girls are orphans. Others have been sent out to work because their parents have no money.

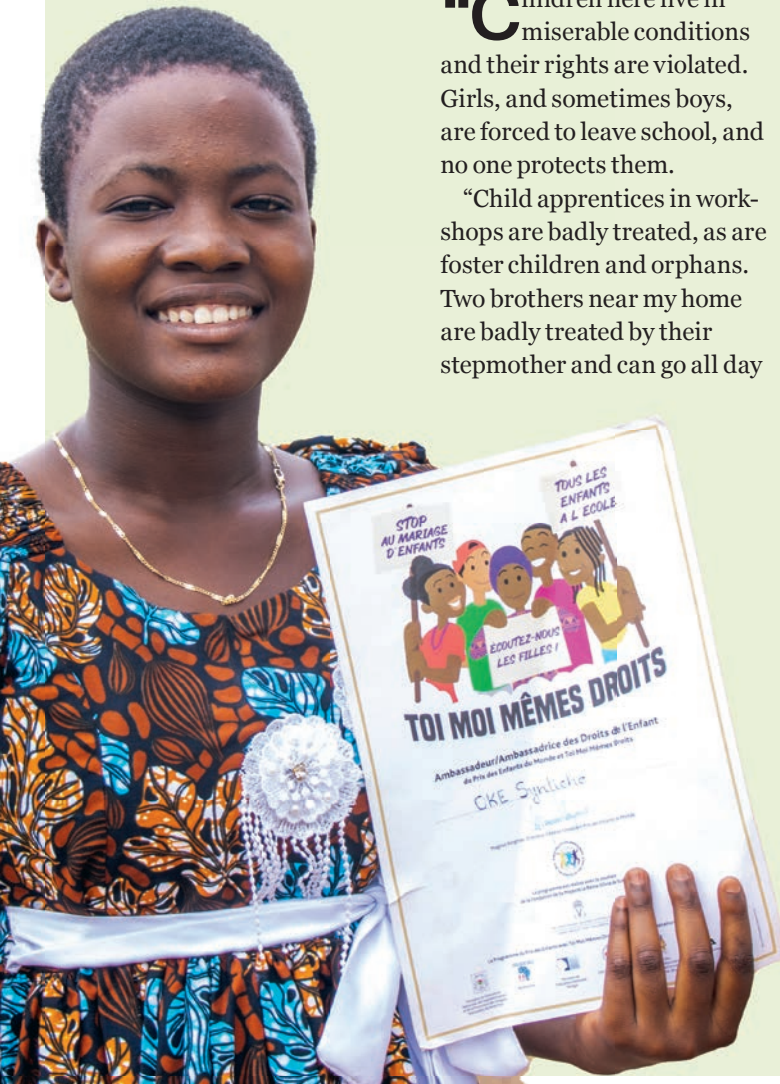
“When my friend Aminata’s dad died, she ended up in a home near me because her mum didn’t have any money.

Syntiche proudly shows off her certificate verifying that she is a trained Child Rights Ambassador.

She told me that she did all the household chores in her foster home and that she worked the rest of the day at her foster mother’s business. Aminata was always sad and didn’t enjoy her life. I comforted her that sooner or later her situation would change. However, one day her foster family left my neighbourhood and I have never seen her again.”

Proud to go to school

“My dad died when I was twelve, so I live with my mum and my three brothers now. At



Time to fight!

“During the two-day course I learned more about children’s rights than during my whole life. I learned how we can get others to respect girls’ and all children’s rights and how we can protect the environment. Now I know that girls should be treated in the same way as boys in all

areas and that girls should not have to suffer.

“I began going round all the classrooms, together with the other Child Rights Ambassadors, to gain support from the other students and to get them to join the program. During meetings with the leaders in all the

Ganimath talks to her schoolmates about the fact that boys and girls have the same rights.

classes we talked a lot about equality between girls and boys, the sexual harassment that girls are subjected to, early pregnancies and also climate change. We are now starting to see positive changes in the behaviour of both our friends and adults, such as less sexual harassment.

“I feel that I now have more power and courage to fight for children’s rights to be respected, especially girls’



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home I help my brothers with their homework, do household chores and help my mum to prepare food.

“It’s a long way for me to go to school. It takes 45 minutes to get there. I would like to have a bike or be able to afford to take a zem, a motorcycle taxi. I don’t always have the schoolbooks I need. Sometimes I wish that my mum had enough money to buy the books and more clothes and smart shoes, like my dad did. But I absolutely don’t want to live with anyone else. I’d rather suffer together with my mum and my brothers.

“I feel happy and proud to get to go to school. As the oldest child and the only girl, I have a duty to do my best. I want to make my parents proud, most of all my dad, even though he’s not with us any more. I teach my brothers the values that my parents taught me. I want them to be men who stand up for children’s equal rights.”

The course gave me power

“Even before I attended the Toi Moi Mêmes Droits (You

Me Equal Rights) course I knew that Aminata had rights that were not being respected. I had no power to do anything about it, though. But after this course I can now work for change. Even though I don’t know if adults who have other children who work for them will listen to me, I tell them to treat the children in the same way as their own children. These children also have the right to go to school and not to be beaten.

“I talked about what I learned on the course to friends in my neighbourhood. We decided to educate our parents and other parents about children’s rights and about the fact that there should be equality between girls and boys.

“The four of us in my school who are trained as Child Rights Ambassadors picked out two students from all 30 classes. We educated them so that they can help us to spread the information in our school.”



Syntiche has made several signs about girls’ rights that she uses for a variety of situations. Here she displays her signs saying ‘Girls and boys equal rights’ and ‘You and I equal rights’.



rights. It’s now time to fight against the violations of girls’ rights! The changes that I demand go far beyond my school and my town. I want girls everywhere to be more respected and valued.”

Ganimath Adame, 14, Akassato School, Benin



Ganimath (on the right) with her sign on which she says ‘No to female genital mutilation’.



“My friend’s fate made me start fighting”

“I learned that there should be equality between girls and boys and that all children have the right to an education. I am proud to be a Child Rights Ambassador. For me, it’s about being an educator who teaches those who are not aware of children’s rights. As a Child Rights Ambassador, I aim to improve the knowledge of traditional leaders about children’s

rights and about the consequences of child marriage. And to get them to understand that we must end harmful customs like female genital mutilation and forced marriage.

“The Globe, the You Me Equal Rights booklet and Hassan in the film about the World’s Children’s Prize gave me the power and courage for the mission I have been

given. It’s a noble mission.

“I want to see things change, so that girls are no longer treated as slaves. It was the fate of one of my friends that made me start to fight against violations of girls’ rights:

Aissa dropped out of school when she was eleven years old. Her dad had forced her to start working in other people’s homes. Her wages

were used to pay for her brother’s schooling. When she was fourteen, Aissa’s dad forced her to marry a 50-year-old man. She refused, but had no choice. When Aissa was fifteen, she got pregnant. When she was giving birth, both she and her baby died.”

Yasmina, 15, Child Rights Ambassador, Tanghin Barrage School, Burkina Faso



Yasmina, Ghislain and Guemilatou.

GARÇON ASSISTE
TA SOEUR
DANS LES
ACTIVITES
DOMESTIQUES.



‘Boy help your sister with the household chores’ is what it says on this girl’s sign in Parkou, Benin.

Essential to educate girls

“Educating a girl is educating a nation, in my opinion. As a Child Rights Ambassador, I want to change parents’ mentality by making them aware of girls’ rights. It’s our traditions and customs in particular that violate girls’ rights a lot. Parents must respect girls’ rights.

“Thanks to education I have discovered children’s rights and learned especially that girls have the right to rest and to play. Most girls here work hard and don’t have time to play or rest. Many girls drop out of school to get married or to work as a maid.

“Despite the ban on corporal punishment in school, teachers continue to hit students. Because adults do not respect our rights, we ambassadors have been selected to defend our and other children’s rights.”

Guemilatou, 14, Child Rights Ambassador, Tanghin Barrage School, Burkina Faso

Girls must be able to inherit

“On the course I learned a lot about the fact that girls and boys have equal rights, just like *You Me Equal Rights* signifies. Girls were not created to just do household chores. At my home we take turns to do the dishes and to cook.

“Being a Child Rights Ambassador means fighting to ensure more people know about and respect children’s rights. Forced marriage and early pregnancies cause girls to drop out of school. The government of Burkina Faso must make decisions that stop this, so that girls get a good education.

“It’s unfair that a girl can be treated like an outsider in her own family and not get to inherit. She is also her father’s child, not a sheep that you raise and then sell. Girls are not animals. Some boys do not respect girls or consider them. The girls are afraid of being monitors in school for fear that the boys will hit them if they add their name to the list for being disruptive in the classroom.”

Ghislain, 13, Child Rights Ambassador, Tanghin Barrage School, Burkina Faso