

## **The Ethics of Children Sponsorship**

Afrikaya chose to build and manage a nursery school in The Gambia, believing that it is important to give deprived children a head start in life. State Primary Education starts when a child is 7 years old. Those children, (usually those from more deprived backgrounds), who live in communities where no English is spoken, are disadvantaged further immediately they start school. This is because all the teaching is in English with no local languages allowed. At Nursery School they learn speak, read and write in English.

Child sponsorship is high on the charitable 'feel-good' factor. It feels good to know you are helping a child become educated. However, it is important not to create dependency and unrealistic expectations.

In 2008, Sussex University undertook a study into the effects on sponsored children in other African countries. They found that sponsorship, despite helping children, could be unfair and divisive. This is particularly so when sponsors form close links with a child they sponsor and send personal gifts, or even money. This raises expectations. It also creates "anxiety, jealousy, disappointment among those children and families who receive no letters or gifts".

They concluded that "the much larger scale of unmet expectations and emotional disappointment for children poses a serious ethical concern and challenge".

Many sponsors decide that they wish to become a sponsor when they are financially secure. In just a few years, or months, this security can change and they are no longer in a position to continue monthly payments - through loss of income, ill-health or both. By letting sponsorship run for the length of time the child remains at the school, the sponsor can withdraw when the child graduates, if they so wish, without causing emotional upset to the child.

In an attempt to address some of the ethical concerns, Afrikaya:

1. makes it clear to each family and child that sponsorship is just until they move on to primary school.
2. does not encourage personal contact and no contact details are shared.
3. closely supervises any visits.
4. treats all students respectfully and equally, thereby not encouraging personal gifts.
5. undertakes appeals, where the money raised is used equally and transparently to meet the needs of each child.

By providing a firm foundation for a child's learning, Afrikaya aims to help each child grow up to be an educated, responsible member of the community in which they live. To contribute to that community, not just take from it, nor be dependent on Afrikaya.

***"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime"***