



Activa Cameroon

Insuring women
for a better future

ACTIVA Cameroon is one of Cameroon's leading insurers: 2nd in the Non-Life Branch and 3rd in the Life Branch. In November 2019 it launched the Activ'Lady insurance program tailored towards Cameroonian women, a first for Cameroon, where almost the entire population is uninsured. Activ'Lady was co-created in partnership with IFC (International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group) and developed in line with the main recommendations of the [SHEforSHIELD report](#), with the objective of "protecting women to protect society better."¹

Activa launched this women's insurance strategy in Cameroon following the success of similar programs in some other markets—Nigeria and Philippines, where insurers had worked with IFC to increase women's access to insurance. Activa Cameroon seeks to increase the access of women and female entrepreneurs to improved risk mitigation and financial protection mechanisms in all its lines of business: life and non-life. With advisory support from IFC, Activa responded to this critical new market segment by conducting research to understand the needs of women, and design insurance solutions specifically for them.



Activa Cameroon in brief

Created in 1998 by Cameroonian shareholders. Its two subsidiaries are part of the Activa Group Products: Non-life and life insurance. The vision of the Activa Group: To make Activa a successful insurance group in a borderless Africa, thanks to a customer-oriented organization, mobilization of staff intelligence, and the effective use of technology. The Group is present in eight African countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mauritius (headquarters of the Group holding) and in France (headquarters of Activa Europe). It is also present in 49 African countries through the GLOBUS network, Africa's leading insurance network, of which Activa Group is a founding member. ACTIVA Cameroon with its two companies, is respectively the Second Insurance Operator in the Non-Life Branch and the Third Insurance Operator in the Life Branch in the country. It's also one of the leading enterprise insurance companies on major projects (new bridge on the Wouri, major road construction works) and the leading insurance company for major international and national industrial groups (Bolloré, TOTAL ENERGIES, RAZEL etc.).



The Women's Market Opportunity

Cameroon is one of the largest and most diversified economies in the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC)* region, contributing 45 percent of the region's GDP in 2021. Women in Cameroon have had access to better education and skills development in recent decades and, thus, greater income earning opportunities. They play an increasingly active role in the professional and business world—for example, women and men hold a near equal share of top jobs as legislators, senior officials and managers.² Women's labor force participation rate stood at 70.2 percent in 2021—above the average for Sub-Saharan Africa,³ and the gender gap in employment is low.⁴ But like working men, almost all working women in Cameroon are in the informal sector, with 83.2 percent being self-employed. Women's unemployment rate is low, at 4.2 percent, suggesting the necessity of work (both figures for 2019).⁵ Self-employed jobs are low-skilled and low-earnings, without access to social protection, and Cameroon's high employment levels mask widespread precariousness in jobs.⁶

Despite considerable progress in Cameroon in recent years, less than a quarter of formal businesses are reported to be run by women—only 22.9 percent have women top managers, against 77.1 percent with men.⁷ In small firms, the SME Finance Forum estimates that Cameroon's formal sector has about 22,550 small and medium enterprises (SMEs), of which only a quarter are women-owned and operated. About 43 percent of all SMEs in the formal sector in the country cite full or partial financial constraints. Limited access to finance is a significant obstacle for women entrepreneurs seeking to expand their businesses or renew their stock. The potential financing needs for Cameroon's formal SMEs, whether run by women or men, is estimated to be \$7.8 billion.⁸

We know that globally women-led SMEs are particularly vulnerable to business risks and have unique financial protection needs, especially those in the informal sector who are outside the formal credit system and lack access to formal avenues, such as insurance, to cope with shocks. Yet the insurance penetration rate in Cameroon is very low at less than 2 percent.⁹ In fact, in 2021, Cameroon's share of the insurance market on the African continent (<1 percent) was far behind those in the lead—South Africa (69 percent) and Morocco (7.2 percent).¹⁰

Since assets, such as insurance, often act as a guarantee against loans, lack of access to insurance and other forms of assets impedes women's access to finance. While the financial market for women is growing globally, most unbanked adults are women, and they are typically self-employed, and excluded from formal credit. In 2021, only 20.29 percent of Cameroonian

women reported having access to an account in a financial institution of some kind, whether a bank, post office, credit union or microfinance institution.¹¹ Women business owners might also face social, cultural, and legal factors that limit their use of financial services, particularly loans. Few adult women or men report borrowing from these institutions, instead turning to friends and family when they need help.¹² One positive development in access to finance is that the widespread use of mobile payment services has opened up new opportunities to serve women and the poor better, as well as other groups traditionally excluded from the formal financial system.

Insurance can provide peace of mind, covering not just business risk but also the personal needs of individuals and their families. Worldwide, women have an increasingly greater say in the health-spending needs of themselves and their families—in 2018, 54.2 percent of Cameroon's working age, married women ages 15-49 said that they alone or jointly had the final say in decisions about their own healthcare, and 46.7 percent said they participated in the major purchasing decisions of their households, up from only 23.7 percent in 2011.¹³ According to market research conducted during the project, Cameroonian women prioritize protecting their children and family over themselves.¹⁴ Their main fear is that they will be in poor health and have difficulty paying for their healthcare services.¹⁵ The World Bank reports that Cameroonians spend a relatively high amount on health care—an average of \$61 per capita, compared to \$51 per capita in Sub-Saharan Africa, of which only \$17 is funded by the government.¹⁶ With no affordable access to quality health care, they resort to self-medication, with an increased risk of developing complications. As a result, their ability to carry out their professional activities or manage their businesses is reduced, resulting in lower income. Furthermore, 57.9 percent of women continue to experience severe financial difficulties due to the disruption caused by COVID-19.¹⁷

An insurer entering this market would need to research these issues and provide women with coverage specific to their unique needs, beyond the mandatory benefits. Activa Cameroon took such an approach.

IFC anticipates that by 2026, the insurance market for women in Cameroon will be worth nearly **CFA 80 billion (\$132 million)** and the non-life insurance will be worth **CFA 53 billion (\$87 million)**. This an untapped opportunity for the insurance industry in a segment that is still underserved.



70.2%

Women's labor force participation rate in Cameroon

83.2%

of all working Cameroonian women are self-employed

4.2%

Women's unemployment rate in Cameroon

* Comunidad Económica y Monetaria de África Central (CEMAC)

The Activ'Lady Strategy

1 Using research and feedback to develop tailored solutions

Activa Cameroon sought a deep understanding of women's behaviors, knowledge, perceptions, needs and practices in health and financial management. Market research commissioned by IFC revealed that Cameroonian women were unaware of the benefits that insurance could bring in preventing and managing life's hazards. Women also felt that existing insurance offerings were not made sufficiently appealing, including the sales approach.¹⁸ Using these results, Activa Group developed bespoke insurance offerings and strengthened its sales approach by training its agents to become trusted advisors to women, which formed the basis of its strategy. Research had identified several segments of women to potentially target—women entrepreneurs, Bayam-Sellams or low-income traders, millennials, and professionals. Activa narrowed its focus to low-income women traders and entrepreneurs as part of its market penetration strategy. Research had highlighted two areas of concern for these segments: supporting their families and maintaining their health.

Accordingly, Activ'Lady initially launched **Mon Asso** a customized solution designed to meet the needs of low-income women particularly those grouped in cooperatives and the Bayam-Sellams. Mon Asso offered individual road accident coverage, along with a display and storage container for purchase by women traders to protect and preserve their goods against bad weather and theft. Activa's objective was to allow women traders to face the hazards of their activity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. But sales of Mon Asso, did not take off. Activa was eager to learn, so it deployed a beneficiary feedback process to allow advisors to promptly integrate suggestions for ensuring the sustainability of the solution. Feedback revealed that the containers were too costly for the women to purchase; moreover they preferred insurance coverage targeted to their specific needs: broader health coverage rather than only for road accidents. Activa Cameroon was quick to learn and using

Human Centered Design methodology, it developed an alternative solution that better suited women's needs: **Asso Santé**, an individual health coverage targeted specifically for low-income women traders and entrepreneurs that are part of cooperatives. Activa Cameroon's nimbleness paid off.

Furthermore, although women's entrepreneurship is booming in Cameroon, the research study revealed a nuanced picture of the challenges that women entrepreneurs in particular face, more than their male counterparts: greater difficulty in networking, identifying mentors, and gaining credibility. Activa Cameroon resolved to implement the recommendations of IFC's SHEforSHIELD report, which advises insurers to increase their support for women-led SMEs through targeted activities and to provide capacity-building and business development support in partnership with entities that are already engaged with women entrepreneurs. In March 2021, Activ'Lady rolled out the **Lady Start-Up** solution to give women entrepreneurs financing over the short, medium and long-term. Lady Start-Up acts as a savings platform that allows women to build up capital, which they use to help access credit through Activa's financial partners. Activa also offers to support them through training via business incubators and is committed to supporting them in the financing phase with its bancassurance partners.

HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

HCD is a creative problem-solving approach that is built on empathy. It helps designers to be client-centric in addressing the needs of those who are experiencing the problem, and involves creating, failing fast and learning quickly. HCD is a methodology that puts the user of a product front and center and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit her needs. HCD equips companies with the tools to design insurance solutions, not products.

"To ensure growth and protection for Cameroonian women regardless of their social status, and the life cycle in which they find themselves; and to put all the chances of success on their side."

Activ'Lady Program Launch, ACTIVA CAMEROON

agents interviewed, only 8 had a portfolio where the number of women customers exceeded 30 percent. According to these agents, it was easier to sell to men than women, and the perception that men were the financial decision-makers and users of insurance policies was strong. Such beliefs contrasted with the market research findings in Cameroon, which indicated that women have a strong desire to buy insurance but choose

2 Strengthening sales force capacity to reach women more effectively

Female insurance agents were included in the interviews conducted under the market research study commissioned by IFC. These agents were already working for Activa, but their portfolios covered mainly male customers. In 2018, out of 30 Activa

not to in the absence of suitable information appropriately marketed towards them. Potential women customers had said that they often face male agents who they feel cannot help them meet their needs. This signals a need for the sales process to pay special attention to women's concerns, which are very different from those of men.

IFC's SHEforSHIELD report highlights the importance of having qualified female insurance distributors or agents, especially when seeking women customers; as well as the need for balanced gender representation in the sales force.¹⁹ An insurer could also create a supportive learning environment around insurance. The women insurance agents interviewed for the study confessed a need to better understand the industry and its products, and a need for training and development in sales.

Accordingly, Activ'Lady's strategy was to develop its distribution network with two major components in mind: recruiting more women and raising gender sensitivity within its workforce. In October 2019, Activa launched

an extensive gender awareness campaign for senior management, staff, and agents. With IFC support, Activa rolled out a two-day training program for the entire sales force on marketing to women. It focused on the sales force's ability to identify challenges they face in dealing with women in the field, including how unconscious biases impact their approach. This training has allowed Activa Cameroon staff and agents to reassess their relationships with women clients, better connect with them, and design the products that meet women's expectations.

Positive feedback from the satisfaction survey resulted in Activa Cameroon

including gender sensitivity training (GST) in the induction program for new agents. Over 280 agents, senior managers, and team members throughout Cameroon have participated in the gender sensitivity training, including 36 trainers. All Activ'Lady agents must complete this training when they join Activa Cameroon. The company plans to conduct in-house GST using trainers who have attended IFC's 'train the trainers' workshops. Through these new approaches, Activa Cameroon has significantly increased the number of female policy holders and gross premiums in its women's portfolio.

3 Promoting women's entrepreneurship with strategic partners

ACTIVA'S COMMITMENT TO WOMEN'S DATA AND FINANCIAL RESULTS



152% increase

Female Activ'Lady policyholders, 2017 to June 2021



3 new insurance solutions

for women small business owners and market traders



21% increase

in gross premiums subscribed by women, from January 2020 and June 2021

Activa's Cameroon women's market penetration strategy, developed in 2018, was aimed at reaching 1 million Cameroonian women by 2022. The firm established partnerships with trusted stakeholders to educate and empower women in the customer base and geographic location of those stakeholders, which played an essential supportive role in Activ'Lady's offer to women. For example, JABA Space, a business incubator, and Ladies' Afterwork, which targets young women entrepreneurs, both partnered with Activa Cameroon to offer financial education seminars to Cameroonian women-led start-ups. Activa also worked with the Association de Bayam-Sellams du Cameroon (ASBY), as well as a women's association (COWAC), to distribute the new solutions. The insurer also collaborated with ASBY in sponsoring an International Fair to promote its insurance offers for Bayam-Sellams.

In addition, Activa Cameroon, in partnership with AXA Partners, introduced Cameroon Legal Assistance. This insurance guarantee allows women clients to access an online platform (Smart Legal) containing a wide range of templates of contracts and other legal documents for both their personal and professional needs. Clients can also access free legal assistance and coverage of up to CFA 983,936 (\$1628)** if the issue is brought to court. The coverage is priced at CFA 5,000 (\$8.33) (including VAT) per year and is offered through the purchase of a home insurance policy. This insurance policy is an added value for female customers. Activa intends to replicate the program with the partner in Activa's other subsidiaries in the countries where it operates.

Expanding the reach across the web

In addition to the sales force of over 200 agents on the ground, the Activ'Lady team developed online content on social networks. It has also assigned dedicated advisors to meet with potential clients connecting to the platform. The project team also launched a social media marketing campaign to support the launch of the Activ'Lady Program and to inform and educate Cameroonian women on the importance of insurance and other essential topics. Through this campaign, Activa reached over 800,000 women.

Lessons learned



Maintaining agility

Finding the right insurance solution requires innovation and creativity, and continuous iteration and monitoring of feedback from consumers. Activa showed agility, quickly revising its original offer, Mon Asso, which, while highly valued at the time of program launch, ended up having to be revisited to better meet client demands and was therefore changed into Asso Santé.



Taking a Human Centered Design approach

The client-centric HCD approach was indispensable for truly understanding women's needs and has helped the insurer explore the development of other insurance solutions for women who are in differing phases of their lives – whether housewives, employees, or business owners.



Applying lessons learned

Ensuring the sustainability of the Activ'Lady program led the Activa Cameroon team to quickly embrace the new insights gained from IFC's advisory services. In 2020, based on the HCD methodology introduced at the April 2019 Client Value Proposition workshop, the Activ'Lady team replicated this process to develop a series of 10 new solutions dedicated to its Cameroonian clients and refine existing ones in light of feedback from the market.



Being the change most needed

Activa Cameroon realized the significant gender bias existing within its team and made a concerted attempt to tackle this. Its dedicated training programs challenged the assumptions of its employees and helped change mindsets.

** Exchange rate USD1 = 604,38 CFA May 15, 2023

ABOUT IFC

IFC—a member of the World Bank Group—is the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets. We work in more than 100 countries, using our capital, expertise, and influence to create markets and opportunities in developing countries. In fiscal year 2022, IFC committed a record \$32.8 billion to private companies and financial institutions in developing countries, leveraging the power of the private sector to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity as economies grapple with the impacts of global compounding crises. For more information, visit www.ifc.org.



The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) supports women entrepreneurs by scaling up access to financial products and services, building capacity, expanding networks, offering mentors, and providing opportunities to link with domestic and global markets. To learn more, visit www.we-fi.org.

ENDNOTES

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