

The Ethics of Child Sponsorship

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Afrikaya chose to build and run a nursery school in The Gambia because we believe every child deserves the best possible start in life. State primary education begins at age seven, and many children—especially those from the most deprived backgrounds—enter school already at a disadvantage. In communities where English is not spoken at home, this disadvantage is even greater, as all teaching in primary school is delivered in English, with no local languages permitted.

At Afrikaya Nursery School, children learn to speak, read, and write in English from an early age, giving them the foundation they need to succeed when they move on to primary school.

Understanding the Responsibilities of Sponsorship

Child sponsorship often brings a strong ‘feel-good’ factor. It is natural to want to help a child access education and opportunity. However, sponsorship must be handled carefully to avoid creating dependency or unrealistic expectations.

A 2008 study by Sussex University explored the impact of child sponsorship in several African countries. While sponsorship can be beneficial, the study found that it can also be unfair and divisive—particularly when sponsors form close personal relationships with individual children or send gifts or money. This can raise expectations and create *“anxiety, jealousy, and disappointment among those children and families who receive no letters or gifts.”*

The researchers concluded that *“the much larger scale of unmet expectations and emotional disappointment for children poses a serious ethical concern and challenge.”*

Why Afrikaya Limits Sponsorship to Nursery Years

Many sponsors begin their support during a period of financial stability. But circumstances can change quickly due to illness, loss of income, or other life events. If a sponsor must stop their monthly contribution, this can be distressing for a child who believes a personal relationship has been formed.

By limiting sponsorship to the years a child attends the nursery, sponsors can choose to end their support when the child graduates—without causing emotional upset.

How Afrikaya Ensures Ethical, Fair Sponsorship

To address the ethical concerns identified in research, Afrikaya:

1. **Explains clearly** to families and children that sponsorship ends when the child moves to primary school.
2. **Does not encourage personal contact**, and no contact details are ever shared.
3. **Supervises all visits** to ensure they are appropriate and respectful.
4. **Treats every student equally**, avoiding situations where personal gifts create inequality.

5. **Runs appeals** where funds raised are used transparently and distributed fairly to meet the needs of all children.

Our Long-Term Vision

Afrikaya aims to give each child a strong educational foundation so they can grow into confident, responsible members of their community—able to contribute, not depend.

As the saying goes:

“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”