



The Niapele Project

Newsletter

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Delbert Johnson, founder and director of the Happy Family Center for Children with Disabilities, interviewed by Love TV, a Liberian network.

After 7 weeks spent in the field working with our partner organizations, I left Liberia humbled by their determination, commitment and passion. Someone once said that no one really knows how they would respond in a time of crisis. All of the individuals who work for the community-based organizations we are partnered with have experienced unfathomable levels of violence: their lives were forever altered by the 14 year civil conflict their country went through. Celina and I met most of our current partners while they were living in exile in the Buduburam refugee settlement, in Ghana. In spite of the difficult circumstances of refugee life, these women and men were giving their all to a cause they believed in, and were determined to improve the lives of their children, to give them a better chance. When they returned to Liberia, we continued to support them because we felt that, more than ever, they would need our financial and operational support to pursue their work in their home country.

Most of Liberia's 3.5 million inhabitants were displaced during the war - some become refugees in another country, others relocated to different parts of Liberia. Whether they were internally displaced or exiled abroad, most Liberians face similar challenges in rebuilding their lives and their communities. We are now working with a rural women's group in Bong Mines, a town a few hours north of Monrovia. Between the early 60s and 1990, Bong Mines,

part of a mineral rich mountain chain called Bong Range, underwent rapid transformation and development as a German company (Bong Mines Company) exploited the iron ore riches of the land. All of the hundreds of expatriates who lived in Bong Mines left in a specially chartered plane in July 1990, never to come back, leaving locals behind to face a brutal civil conflict.

Most of the people in Bong Mines today were also there during the war - in spite of its direct train link to Monrovia (the only one in the country), the town is isolated geographically because of its location within the county. At the very southern tip of Bong County and without a direct road access from the county capital, it is often overlooked by local authorities and NGOs. Bong Mines, which boasted an aeroclub, an olympic swimming pool, a shooting club and a casino, is now barely the shadow of its former self. The mining company's infrastructure was completely destroyed during the war, along with the rest of the once prosperous town.

The civil war created unprecedented levels of poverty in Bong Mines, as people's livelihoods had disappeared: wives became widows, children were abandoned, families were having a very difficult time caring for the youth and the elderly. Malaya - which you can read about in detail on page 3 - was born out of local women's desire to fight this chronic state of poverty. Led by a strong and determined woman, Finda Francis, Malaya has been

supporting the economic empowerment of women for two years.

We heard about this inspiring grassroots effort through our program manager, who had spent time in Bong Mines working for the UN's World Food Program. After learning more about them, their vision, their objectives and their hope for their community, it was clear they were a perfect fit for The Niapele Project. Improving the livelihoods of vulnerable or war-affected children is not just about increasing access to food, education or health care: it's also about investing in broad community development efforts, which will ultimately create an environment where children can thrive.

Spending time with the leadership of Malaya and other community leaders in Bong Mines, I felt extremely moved by their tenacity, their strength and willingness to steadfastly pursue their vision of a brighter future for their children.

Like all of our partners, in spite of the challenges and the systemic constraints they face, Malaya remains committed to their vision. It's an honor for us to play a role in Liberia's reconstruction by supporting these trail blazers.

Penelope is one of the co-founders and directors of Niapele. She blogs [here](#), and can be reached by email at penelope@theniapeleproject.org

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Calling all wine lovers!

For every person who buys wine through [Artiste Winery](#) and designates The Niapele Project as the beneficiary (with the designated code# 201023), Artiste will provide Niapele with up to 20% of the net proceeds. Visit their website: www.artiste.com

Combining a reverence for tradition and a philosophy of winemaking as an artistic expression, Artiste wines are labeled with gorgeous works of impressionist art

Artiste

IMPRESSIONIST WINERY
& TASTING STUDIO

Niapele Brings School Nutrition to MacDella Cooper Foundation Students

"Whenever some tells me they don't "get" Twitter and think it means broadcasting every minute detail of life, I jump on the chance to prove its virtues. "I have 60 children in Liberia, who ordinarily went to school hungry, receiving meals now," I tell them. "And it all started with Twitter!"

As Director of the MacDella Cooper Foundation, which focuses on providing Liberian orphans and abandoned children an education and the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, I manage our @mcf_liberia twitter account, where I had announced my plans to travel to Liberia with MacDella in November. Megan Sullivan, the County Director of the Niapele Project, tweeted back at me (meaning, she sent me a message in 140 characters or less) and asked if we had thought about a feeding program for our students. I replied that no, we didn't have one, but I'd love to set one up. She recommended I meet Penelope Chester, co-founder and director of the Niapele Project, while I was in Monrovia. Megan introduced us via email, and I started following both on Twitter (meaning I could see their updates anytime I logged on to twitter.com).

My second night in Liberia, I was writing emails in the Internet-enabled Royal Hotel, tweeting about our day's work, to the tunes of three white men singing oldies hits on a small stage in the back...quite random, semi-comical. Well, when I saw a tweet from @penelopeinparis observing the same thing, I knew she and I must be in the same place! So I messaged her back to ask where she was in the restaurant, and that's where Twitter kicked off our partnership.

"[W]e ultimately decided to implement the same feeding program for the students we sponsor. We plan to extend the program to our own MCF Academy, under construction and slated to open in Charlesville in Fall 2010."

Over the course of my two weeks in Liberia, Penelope gave us a walk through of the feeding program at the Carolyn Miller School, introduced us to her program manager and cooks, and we ultimately decided to implement the same feeding program for the students we sponsor. We plan to extend the program to our own MCF Academy, under construction and slated to open in Charlesville in Fall 2010.

MCF is so proud to partner with the Niapele Project, keeping our students nourished so that they can focus on their studies, and supporting local agriculture and labor. We also congratulate Penelope and her staff on creating such a turn-key program, which has been so easy to adapt to our campus. Following them on Twitter was the first step; following them on the ground in Liberia is a journey we are delighted to be on."

Tammy Tibbetts, Director, [MacDella Cooper Foundation](#)

The Niapele Project is proud to share our model for healthy, sustainable nutrition programs in schools with partners like MCF. In 2010, Niapele will be working towards improving the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program, and creating toolkits for organizations or schools interested in adopting this model - to learn more, visit [this page](#)



Connect with us on Twitter!

For Niapele news and updates www.twitter.com/niapele

Megan www.twitter.com/megan215

Celina www.twitter.com/cgquich

Penelope www.twitter.com/penelopeinparis

Tammy Tibbetts www.twitter.com/tammytibbetts

MacDella Cooper Foundation www.twitter.com/mcf_liberia

The School Nutrition Initiative in Numbers

- Over 400 freshly prepared meals served every day to vulnerable children and adolescents - for many, it's the only meal they can count on
- 5 full-time staff - including 3 women
- 3 anthropometric evaluations throughout the year to assess the nutritional status of students
- 660 pounds of locally grown "country rice" per month
- 600 pounds of fresh citrus per month
- An average of 500 calories per meal, with an emphasis on protein content

[Make a donation to the School Nutrition Initiative](#)



2009 milestones

If you've been reading our blog, following us on Twitter or became a fan on Facebook, you already know that we had a busy and exciting 2009. In the spirit of the season, here's a retrospective of the year's highlights!

In the field

12/11

The Happy Family Center for Children with Disabilities inaugurates its permanent center in Payneville, Liberia

09/21

First day of the School Nutrition Initiative at the Carolyn Miller school. 350+ meals are served each day

07/28

Niapele signs contract with Malaya for the purchase of food crops for the School Nutrition Initiative

At home

11/14

Art Harvest in Los Angeles, in collaboration with [Voices for Umoja](#). A curated exhibit of works by emerging artists

09/24

Will Paint for Food event in Vancouver, B.C. Over 70 people come to paint and support the School Nutrition Initiative

04/21

Megan Sullivan, our new Country Director, begins a 5-month stint in the field to plan implementation

Partnerships

MCF

NYC-based [MacDella Cooper Foundation](#) adopts School Nutrition Initiative for 60 scholarship students

Media

As part of our commitment to advocacy, we became [NewLiberian.com's](#) fiscal sponsor in the US, and partners with [Ceasefire Liberia](#)

LRRRC

Niapele is a strategic partner of the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission

Featured Partner: Malaya

Malaya, founded in 2007, is a women-focused economic empowerment organization. Located in Bong Mines, a former mining town nestled in the heart of a mountain range rich in iron ore, Malaya and its members are working towards improving the prevailing conditions in their community.

Shattered by war, a core group of about 40 women and 10 men have taken it upon themselves to rebuild their community. Starting with a micro-savings scheme called "susu" for 72 women in the community, they are now expanding their activities to include agriculture. Understanding that their farming activities could do much more than just feed their families, they began working towards bringing their crops to market. Prior to our involvement with this group, their market access was limited and unpredictable. Malaya would bring crops to market women in Monrovia, and come back a week later to collect a portion of these women's earnings from the sale of the food crops. However, with this opaque, unreliable system they were very seldom able to achieve more than recoup their costs.

The Niapele Project is Malaya's first contract-based client. We began our partnership with them as a business arrangement: Malaya is responsible for producing or sourcing local food crops, and delivering them weekly to



the Carolyn Miller school campus in Monrovia for the School Nutrition Initiative. Niapele included HapFam, the center for children with disabilities, as a recipient of the School Nutrition Initiative, thereby increasing Malaya's monthly earnings. Most recently, the MacDella Cooper Foundation decided to adopt our model and use our facilities to feed 60 of their students - again, this resulted in greater earnings and increased profit for Malaya.

Having never had this sort of reliable income, Malaya needed to develop an accounting system to keep track of their finances. The Niapele Project is working closely with them to help them design a system that is both efficient and appropriate for the organization. We are also assisting them in logistical planning, management and other key areas that will ensure the growth and sustainability of their business. While we are not agricultural or agribusiness specialists, we are working to connect Malaya with local and international experts in these fields and assist the organization in sourcing the technical expertise

that can boost their productivity and efficiency.

The individual members of Malaya are already helping themselves - we are merely giving them the tools, and, perhaps more importantly, the confidence, to push forward.

We'd like to thank the following individuals and businesses for their generous support. Thank you for making ART HARVEST LA a success!

A Catering Company, African Cowboy Clothing, Alexandra Thompson, Amy & Neal Fraser, Anthony Friedkin, Anti-Body, Artasan, Aveda, Barbara Guich, Belle Gray, Betty Buckner, Beverly Feldman, BLD Restaurant, Bikram Yoga Silverlake, Brian Elerding, Butterfly Emporium, Cathryn Gluck (MAC Cosmetics), Christina Moses, Christopher Leombruno (Brown Lion Photos), Eric Roberts, Grolsch, Hairroin Salon, Helen K. Garber, Hetty Matthijssen, Judith Mundwiler, Julianna Thompson, Ken Ohara, Kid Viskous, Lewis Jackson, Lisa Robinson Photography, Magic Castle, Maloof Chiropractic, Matthew Mitchell, Morgan Simons, Movie Colony Hotel, Myrna Powell, New Beverly Cinema, Nick Brandt, Nika Water, Orbit In, Privé Salon, Rae Maté, Rockreation Rock Climbing, Roscoe's House of Chicken and Waffles, Samantha Sloyan, Sarah Toshiko Hamler, Scott Donnell (DW Drums), Smashbox, Spork Foods, Starbucks Coffee (Highland & Franklin), Stephen Cohen Gallery, Steven Arroyo (Cobras & Matadors), Sunset Gondola, Sunstone Winery, Susan Shearer (Mary Kay), Susanne, Shropshire, Theresa Gluck, The Michelle Bonfils Show, Ralphs, Rick Perez, Third Eye Tattoo, Trader Joe's (Santa Monica Blvd. & Poinsettia), Trader Joe's (La Brea & 3rd St.), Trapeze School New York, Trippypics Photography, Urth Caffè, Vito's Pizza, Whipped, Beat & Battered

About us

Founded in March 2007 by Celina Guich and Penelope Chester, The Niapele Project works with local partner organizations to improve the livelihoods of war-affected children through empowerment—at the heart of which lies access to education and health care.

The Niapele Project aims to have direct, meaningful impact in the lives of vulnerable children. We achieve this by working in partnership with communities, assisting them to fulfill the needs they have identified, through the development and implementation of initiatives that aim to create the necessary conditions for children to move beyond survival and thrive.

Because we believe in holistic, sustainable solutions, The Niapele Project strives to integrate social and environmental standards into its work—through our initiatives, we encourage women's empowerment, local ownership and leadership, as well as environmentally sound practices.

From the Directors

With each edition of our newsletter, we reserve a small corner to share with you our candid thoughts about our work. 2009 was a very big year for Niapele: we officially completed our transition from working with Liberian refugees in Ghana to partnering with organizations in Liberia. There have been a lot of changes: moving operations from one country to another, hiring full-time program staff in the field, emphasizing capacity-building through partnership, we remain committed to our original vision and our approach: working with community leaders to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable children.

pleasure for us to work with Delbert Johnson, the founder of HapFam, and his wife, who are parents of a teenager with cerebral palsy. Their passion for caring for children is being buttressed every day by new skills in management, accounting and planning that we are helping them develop. As with our other partners, Malaya and the Carolyn Miller School, it takes a lot of one-on-one work, and a lot of patience. But the results are there: communities are strengthened by the presence of these leaders and their actions.

As is the case for many non-profits, we suffered from the financial crisis and from the recession. Fundraising was very challenging in the last quarter of 2008 and into the summer of 2009, but thankfully we're picking up steam again. We had two successful events: one in Vancouver, B.C., at Raw Canvas, and another in collaboration with Voices for Umoja, in Los Angeles. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those who generously donated their time or a gift for both these events, and, of course, all of the attendees. We want you to know that you are making a real difference, every day, in the lives of vulnerable children in post-war Liberia.

As this decade comes to a close, and a new one is about to unfold, we hope that you'll join us in our commitment towards reducing child vulnerability through community-based initiatives.

Peace and love,
Celina & Penelope

Thank you for your support!

- [Raw Canvas](#) - Vancouver, B.C.
- [Stephen Cohen Gallery](#) - Los Angeles
- Kristinebergskolan - Åmål, Sweden

Do you want your school or youth group to be involved with The Niapele Project?
Contact us! info@theniapeleproject.org

Special thanks to Marissa Nobauer, Shazeen Virani, Carolina Miranda, Christy Louth, Jessie Johnston, Sara Feldman, Lucie Rivet.

In a post-war society like Liberia, vulnerability is a dominant paradigm. But with children especially, it can be addressed. While we, as outsiders, may not know how best to deal with vulnerable children or how to improve their livelihoods in a sustainable way, we're privileged to be working closely with local organizations and community leaders who have a strong vision for social and economic development. This year, it's been a huge

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We are a registered 501 (c) (3) organization
in the United States, and a government
recognized NGO in Liberia.

All donations are tax-deductible in the U.S.