



### STORY FROM THE FIELD

# Behind the scenes

Niapele's mission is to promote sustainable strategies for the empowerment of vulnerable children. But what does that mean, exactly?

**M**OST OF OUR newsletter features focus on stories from the field. After all that's where the heart of Niapele lies: with our community-based partners in Liberia. And that's where the direct impact of every donation you make is felt. The most compelling stories usually end with happy schoolchildren enjoying a nutritious meal; a child with disabilities developing a skill; a community coming together to celebrate growth and economic opportunities that enable women to support their families.

The truth is, though, it's a long road to get to those moments that make it all worthwhile. So in this newsletter we invite you behind the scenes to learn more about the administrative and operational work that is the key to growing and sustaining our initiatives. In the interest of transparency, we want to share with you what we are prioritizing while most of our programs are on summer break.

Niapele's mission is to promote sustainable strategies for the empowerment of vulnerable children through the development of community-based initiatives. But what does that mean, exactly?

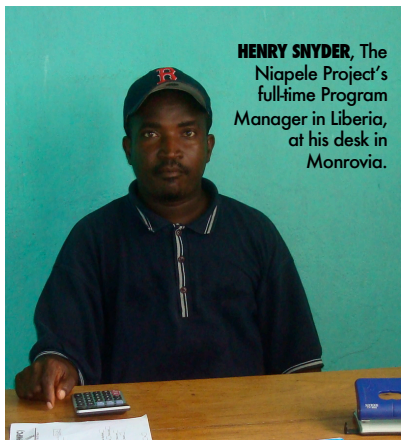
It can be easy to make a hungry child smile; hand them some food, give their parents some cash, and you can go home feeling proud of yourself for the difference you've made. But where does that leave the same child tomorrow? And what about all the hungry kids who did not cross your path? Outside solutions and handouts often have little impact or are a complete waste of resources. We've had some trial and error over the years, but so far the key to our success on the ground has been

remaining attentive to the ideas and needs expressed by the local leaders and individuals we work with.

At first, when we spent a bit of time in the communities where we work, we would be told what people assumed we wanted to hear. But after more time, more listening, more collaboration, we began to understand what our partners have identified as solutions they believe will benefit people over a greater period of time more than any mere handout.

We know that sustainable community development needs to come from within and be responsibly designed and implemented. There are no simple answers, no silver bullets. Niapele is, first and foremost, a learning organization. Our staff, volunteers and interns have studied international development, worked with large-scale relief organizations, and volunteered time in the field. We follow industry research and critiques of best practices in order to keep abreast of important trends.

As we prepare for our second school year of programming in Liberia, we are taking the opportunity to closely examine the nuts and bolts of our organization on all levels. Our Program Manager in Liberia, Henry Snyder, is working closely with our partners to assess and strengthen the systems of each initiative. Plans, budgets, reports, meetings and strategy sessions fill the days. This work may not be the kind that tugs on the heartstrings, but it's essential to producing and maintaining the direct services that benefit vulnerable youth in the community.



**HENRY SNYDER**, The Niapele Project's full-time Program Manager in Liberia, at his desk in Monrovia.

*This work is essential to producing and maintaining the direct services that benefit vulnerable youth in the community.*

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Depuis Mars 2010, Niapele eet une association loi 1901 en France. Vos dons peuvent être exonérés d'impôts. Pour plus d'infos: [penelope@theniapeleproject.org](mailto:penelope@theniapeleproject.org)

### IN THIS ISSUE

Story from the Field - **Megan Sullivan** | Featured Program - **School Nutrition Initiative** | Operations Update - **Marlene Barzana**

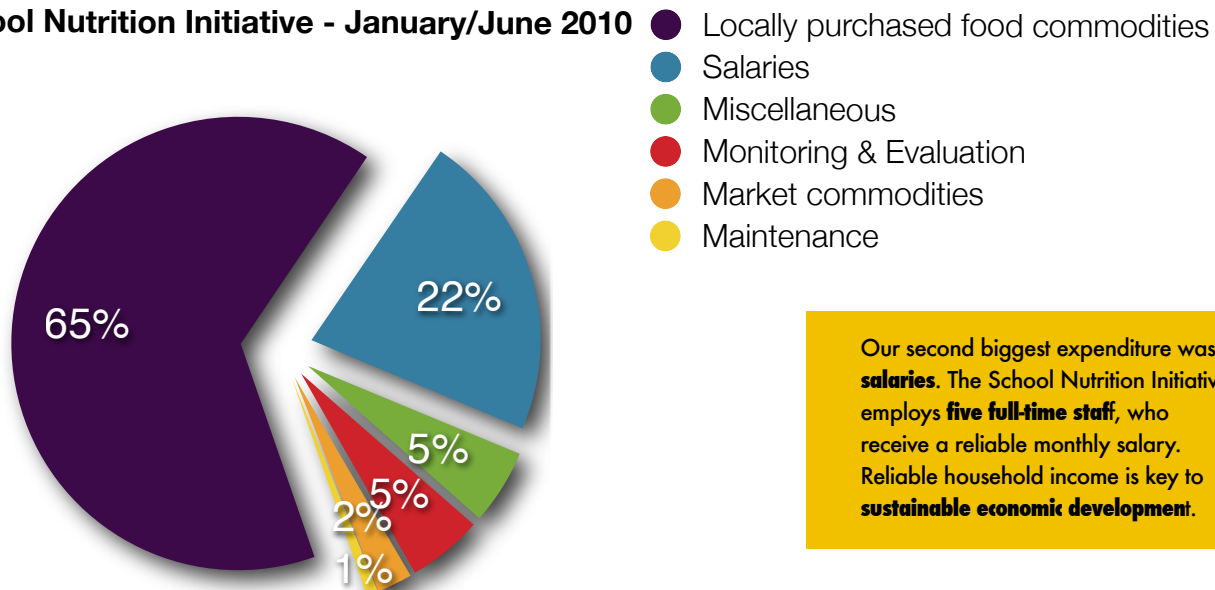
## FEATURED PROGRAM

# School Nutrition Initiative

Between January and June 2010, Niapele spent \$9,685 on the **School Nutrition Initiative**. Most of the funding for the program was used to buy locally produced food commodities, both from our partner organization, **Malaya**, and a new provider in Paynesville, Liberia **KHB**.

Through the **SNI**, we purchased \$6,287 worth of food from local farmers, supporting **local food production** and strengthening farmers' earning capacity. Only 2% of funding was spent on imported items, such as matches, soap, etc.

### School Nutrition Initiative - January/June 2010



Our second biggest expenditure was **salaries**. The School Nutrition Initiative employs **five full-time staff**, who receive a reliable monthly salary. Reliable household income is key to **sustainable economic development**.

**Maintenance costs** have been kept low during this first half of 2010 – only a few cafeteria benches needed to be repaired. We expect these costs to increase slightly in the coming months as we **prepare for the 2010/2011 school year**.

**THE SCHOOL NUTRITION INITIATIVE** is a joint project with **Vision Awake Africa for Development**, a grassroots organization that runs the **Carolyn A. Miller School**, and with the **MacDella Cooper Foundation**.

Over **450 children** benefitted from SNI during the 2009/2010 school year, and **9,000 freshly prepared meals** made from **local food** were served each month.

Our **low-cost, high-impact approach** to school feeding is well suited for the Liberian context, and we are working to make it easily adaptable for other schools and community-based organizations who wish to replicate the initiative.

In addition to miscellaneous costs (such as replacement kitchen items), **monitoring & evaluation** is our third largest expenditure. Through M&E, we keep track of the nutritional status of the students, and ensure that SNI continues to deliver an appropriate amount of nutrients to the children on a daily basis. Our **nutrition consultant** also advises kitchen staff on menu composition, hygiene and best practices.

**YOUR SUPPORT IS CRITICAL** | As we approach the beginning of the 2010/2011 school year, your gift will help ensure the initiative's sustainability. To make a tax-deductible donation to the **School Nutrition Initiative**, visit:

<http://www.theniapeleproject.org/content/make-a-donation>

## NIAPELE ADVISORY BOARD

**BACK IN NORTH AMERICA**, the leaders of Niapele are focusing on operations-related projects as well as conducting a detailed financial analysis of our programs.

As we continue to develop and implement our community building initiatives in Liberia, the need to broaden our expertise in various areas of organizational and program management increases.

Accordingly, we are currently working to form an advisory board to consult with our team and ensure that Niapele achieves its strategic vision. In potential board members, Niapele is looking for those working in the public and private sectors who specialize in marketing strategy, networking, finance and operations.

We are also seeking individuals with technical expertise or experience within specific areas: disabled youth, nutrition, community and organizational development, or vulnerable youth researchers/specialists.

At the same time, we are refining our business plan for current and upcoming projects, implementing organizational procedures to streamline our business, and working to make our financial and budget analysis more transparent so that you, the sponsor, can understand how your generous donation is being used.

## INTRODUCING: MARLENE BARZANA

**AS THE NEWEST MEMBER** of the Niapele family, Marlene Barzana has been volunteering her time and skills to work closely with the Niapele management team, advising us on financial and operations-related projects.

She first learned of The Niapele Project during a Tufts Alumni event earlier in the year where Penelope gave a presentation on the organization.

Marlene's interest in rebuilding communities devastated by war goes back to hearing stories of her family living in and eventually having to flee from Cuba during the revolution.

After hearing about Niapele's sustainable community building programs in Liberia, she was inspired to take a more active role in the rebuilding effort these displaced communities. She brings to Niapele her business management experience which she developed and honed while working with top-tier financial investment research teams and her passion for improving the lives of those victimized by war.



# Making a difference

### Enriching services while staying true to our small-scale, direct impact roots

**AS WE CONTINUE** to learn lessons from our work with HapFam, the Carolyn A. Miller School and Malaya, we are identifying areas where our grassroots commitment to supporting local leaders and promoting capacity development for the growth of accountable and responsible community-based initiatives has the potential to make a difference.

We are working toward strengthening our current programs to ensure that they have a lasting impact, and are eventually able to operate



**PANDORA JOHNSON**, co-founder of HapFam, with one of her students in December 2009.

independent of our support. By examining our trials and successes and reviewing details, we are seeking to develop models that can be adopted and implemented in other communities with similar needs. If you or someone you know operates a community-based program in West Africa or a post-conflict setting and want to learn more details about our School Nutrition or Center for Children with Disabilities programming, please contact us to discuss knowledge sharing.

## Connect with us on Twitter!

For Niapele news and updates:

[www.twitter.com/niapele](http://www.twitter.com/niapele)

Megan: [www.twitter.com/megan215](http://www.twitter.com/megan215)

Penelope: [www.twitter.com/penelopeinparis](http://www.twitter.com/penelopeinparis)

## MONEY FOR MEALS

**ON JUNE 7**, proprietors, staff and customers of **Twain's Billiards and Tap** in Decatur, GA came together to raise a pint in support of community-based initiatives benefiting vulnerable children in Liberia.

Thanks to the generosity of owners Ethan and Uri Wurtzel and the enthusiasm of staff members – particularly Brandi Helyer, Stephanie Truong, Linsey Meeks and Jarrett Hayes – Niapele raised **\$600** for

the **School Nutrition Initiative**. At just \$0.16/meal, the funds raised that night made a big difference.

Many thanks to all those who attended. Twain's Billiards and Tap ([www.twains.net](http://www.twains.net)) has been a community establishment in Decatur for over 12 years, and we are grateful for their support of our global community effort. Cheers!



## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

- Hamburger Mary's - Los Angeles, CA | [www.hamburgermarysweho.com](http://www.hamburgermarysweho.com)
- Twain's Billiards & Tap - Decatur, GA | [www.twains.net](http://www.twains.net)
- Kristinebergskolan - Åmål, Sweden

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

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# Behind the scenes

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The capacity building aspect of our mission is often the most key assistance that we provide. While community leaders that we partner with are good at identifying needs and envisioning a culturally appropriate solution, the operational support we offer is essential to sustainability and growth. True to our mission to identify community leaders with a vision, we are enhancing their ability to deliver much-needed services in a sustainable manner.

A society that has faced war and a lack of resources becomes focused on survival and day-to-day living. For true development to occur, people must shift to a mindset beyond "How do I and my family survive today?" to a forward-thinking "How can my community thrive and grow?"

We partner with leaders who have adopted this progressive mindset of empowerment and we support their efforts through capacity development. In Liberia and internationally, we seek to collaborate with various organizations and consult industry experts to ensure that we can maximize our potential.

We strongly believe that "[good intentions are not enough](#)" (check out this blog by one of our favorite aid industry experts, [Saundra Schimmelpfennig](#)), and we constantly strive to raise the bar on

accountability and best practices in our work. Even though we're a small organization, we owe it to our partners, to our donors and supporters, and to ourselves, to aim for the highest standards.

Ensuring that every donated dollar is stretched for the most effective impact requires constant attention to countless details. We appreciate every contribution and thank all of you who have made a donation. It truly makes a difference.

It has been over three years since the inception of The Niapele Project at the Buduburam Refugee Settlement in Ghana. We remain true to the

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grassroots spirit in which we were founded and, while we're still small in scale, we have grown more strategic and targeted in our work. (Check out our [Annual Report](#) for details on our watershed first year in Liberia and our plans for the future.)

We hope that you contact us with any questions or comments. We love to hear from our supporters and friends. Stay tuned for field updates, stories from beneficiaries and exciting new program features for Niapele in fall 2010.

## 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 a 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 mere 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.

## The Niapele Project

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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.

## 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](http://www.artiste.com)**

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