



The Niapele Project

Quarterly Newsletter
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"Together with Programs Manager, Henry Snyder, and in constant contact with the directors of our partner projects - I have been working on establishing The Niapele Project in Liberia. Facing challenges and celebrating successes, we learn from every setback and are very encouraged for the future of the organization and our vision here in Liberia.

The dynamics of operating in Liberia differ vastly from life on a refugee camp. Navigating the logistics of a sprawling post-conflict nation with devastated infrastructure can be difficult. On the other hand, the opportunity to meet and collaborate with government ministries, local and international organizations has been valuable. What is obvious to me, however, is that it is the people of Liberia that exhibit the most enthusiasm to work, to make a difference, to improve their lives. Having given up the title 'refugee', many also have given up the sense of dependency that so often develops after years of life on a camp.

Seeing our partners and other friends who were in exile in Ghana starting their lives over in their homeland after years outside the borders reminds me each day of why Niapele is here. I often hear variations of "Life here not easy-o, but it is good to be home. No more refugee life, I

will help my country rebuild." Refugees who choose to come home exhibit tremendous courage and resilience, and Niapele is proud to stand with our partners as they recreate their successful projects that improved the lives of vulnerable refugee children, here in Liberia.

We are thrilled to be relaunching the School Nutrition Initiative with Carolyn A Miller School, a tuition free school that has just completed its first year back in Liberia. The students here come from families who cannot afford education, and often struggle just to put food on the table. Niapele will be serving these Liberian students the most nutritious combination of traditional Liberian food - purchased right here in Liberia from Malaya, a farming cooperative outside the capital. Malaya is a group of women who came together to help their community rebuild.

Through teamwork, they have been able to support each other and produce a tremendous array of crops that will provide the ingredients for the daily meals of Carolyn Miller students. Contributing to the local economy, promoting good nutrition and providing the fuel for the developing minds of schoolchildren - a recipe for success!

In addition, Harmony Children's Center is preparing to begin their first school year here in Liberia, where the numbers of children with disabilities who remain outside of the school system is staggering.

We also have forged a new partnership with the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), the government agency responsible for all internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees within Liberia, as well as all Liberian refugees outside the country. Niapele will work with LRRRC to provide capacity-building workshops and to promote their work to potential supporters and donors.

Starting over is always difficult. Our partners that have exhibited the leadership and commitment to carry on despite obstacles here in Liberia for the sake of the vulnerable children they serve, continue to inspire us that real change comes from empowering the community."

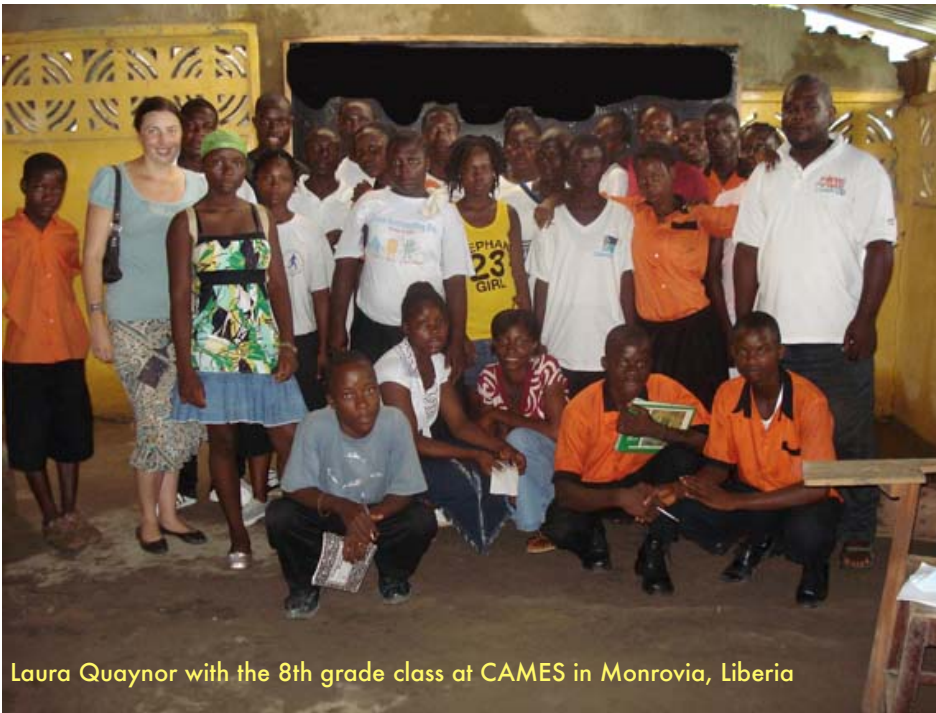
Based in Monrovia, Megan Sullivan is Country Director for The Niapele Project in Liberia. She can be reached at megan@theniapeleproject.org

Calling all wine lovers!

For every person who buys wine through [Artiste Winery](http://www.artiste.com) 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

IMPRESSIONIST WINERY
& TASTING STUDIO



Laura Quaynor with the 8th grade class at CAMES in Monrovia, Liberia

Quick Facts School Nutrition Initiative

- The School Nutrition Initiative is slated to provide meals to 600 students in Monrovia during the 2009-2010 school year
- More than a simple feeding program, this initiative aims to educate students, teachers and parents about healthy nutrition practices through regular workshops
- Food items are purchased primarily from a women's agricultural co-op in rural Liberia, Malaya
- Meals are designed by a certified nutritionist, respecting traditional Liberian fare

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

"In May 2009, I spent a month at the Carolyn A. Miller School (CAMES) pursuing a research project on civic education for Liberian children in the current post-conflict environment. As a former teacher of refugee students in the United States, my experiences of both the complications of integrating refugee children into the American system as well as the incredible fortitude of refugee families drove me back to school, enrolling in a doctoral program to learn more about how to best educate refugee children and work with their families.

During my initial visit to CAMES in the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana in 2008, I became convinced that CAMES was doing something right. Recent scholarship about schools serving Liberian children describe negative classroom climates, where teachers engaged in "physical beating, harsh yelling and making insults, bribery, corruption, and ejection of students from class." At CAMES, I saw everyone from the lunch ladies to the school principal tell children they were the "future of Liberia," and treat them as such.

"The reason my research centers on civic education is that in post-conflict societies like Liberia, the investment of youth in the political process is key for future peace and stability."

Since CAMES relocated to Liberia, the faces of many staff and students have changed, but the ethic of care for and investment in its students has not. Despite the immense challenges of educating over 500 children in facilities with no electricity, broken desks, and worn blackboards, CAMES just finished its seminal year on Liberian soil. For my research project, I worked with Pastor Eugene Williams, who teaches social studies and civics for grades 4-8. He is only one of many dedicated teachers at CAMES, but his story illustrates the challenges and strengths of many teachers and students.

Pastor Eugene has been a history teacher since 1988, when he began working in Nimba County, Liberia. He lost many family members during the conflict, and first came to Monrovia fleeing violence in Nimba in 1990. He speaks plainly about the war years: "I was in Liberia, running from one forest to another forest, saving my life and the life of my children."

Pastor Eugene works with CAMES because the school offers his children an education that would otherwise be inaccessible. "I have 10 children and grandchildren here," he reports. "If it weren't for CAMES, I don't know how we could afford to send them all to school." Though public education is nominally free in Liberia, many schools charge a registration fee each semester that would be too costly for him and his family. Because of his role as a Pastor and a father, teachers and students alike often come to him to resolve conflicts. During my month at CAMES, it was not uncommon for him to step out of class or take some of his recess time to hear both sides of a story.

In Pastor Eugene's civics class, students are both encouraged and allowed the space to express their views on controversial political subjects. In one 8th grade class, a student complained about a representative: "Each time you go see that man he doesn't have time for anyone. He lives in the community but that man is selfish. Armed robbers came to his neighbor's house and they called for help and he did nothing!" Pastor Eugene channeled her frustration into a lesson in the importance of civic action. "Who is he representing? He is representing you. He is voted into office." The reason my research centers on civic education is that in post-conflict societies like Liberia, the investment of youth in the political process is key for future peace and stability. In Liberia, where both the national government and international organizations are encouraging the establishment of the rule of law, educating youth in both their civic rights and responsibilities will allow the creation of what lawyers call a culture of law. Schools like CAMES and teachers like Pastor Eugene are the means through which, day by day, the peaceful future of Liberia is nurtured."

Laura Q. is an American PhD Student earning her degree in Educational Studies. She thanks all of the teachers and students at CAMES for welcoming her during her visit, and The Niapele Project for providing on-the-ground contacts and support.

The Niapele Project works with the Carolyn A. Miller School to provide daily meals to its students through our School Nutrition Initiative - to learn more, visit [this page](#)

A new media partnership for
The Niapele Project

Having moved operations from the refugee camp in Ghana to Liberia, we have come to realize that we need to adapt our strategies to our new environment. It is in this spirit that we are broadening our engagement with the Liberian diaspora, in the hopes of harnessing its strength to rebuild a strong society in Liberia.

While in Ghana, The Niapele Project partnered with community-based organizations providing direct services to vulnerable refugee children - for a little over a year, we supported organizations that, combined, reached nearly 700 children.

In Liberia, however, in order to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable children - including, but not limited to, refugees and returnees - we must also focus our efforts on strengthening community engagement and civic participation. Indeed, for an environment where children can thrive to emerge, an informed and empowered population is key.

The *New Liberian*, an independent online news magazine for and by the Liberian community at home and abroad, provides an important information platform for Liberians. Through news reporting, analysis and the coverage of a broad array of themes relevant to Liberia, such as human rights, politics, or life in exile, *New Liberian* contributes to building understanding and awareness in Liberian society.

The Niapele Project is currently assisting U.S. based *New Liberian* obtain official recognition as a non-profit organization. Acting as their fiscal sponsor, we are now accepting donations on their behalf. As with our other partner organizations, we are developing tools that will allow *New Liberian* to expand into a sustainable and vibrant news organization.

To learn more, visit
www.newliberian.com

[Click here to make a donation to New Liberian](#)



Andre, right, with his parents and siblings. He attended the Harmony Center in the Buduburam refugee camp, and, since returning to Liberia, asks his father every day when he will go back to school to learn and play with his friends again.

The Harmony Children's Center was founded as a safe haven for youth with disabilities to learn and thrive at the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana. What's special about this center is that five parents whose own children had various disabilities that kept them excluded from regular school initiated and now sustain the project. The love these parents have for their children, regardless of what they could and could not do, defies the cultural stigma that unfortunately lead many in the community to neglect people with disabilities. Harmony opened its doors at the camp in 2007, and, as the population of Liberian refugees in Ghana dwindles, it continues to provide a safe and nurturing environment to those that remain on the land that used to be Buduburam.

Meanwhile, several of the original students of Harmony have returned home to Liberia with their families, no longer refugees but still facing many challenges. The Government of Liberia struggles to provide basic education and other services to its citizens as it rebuilds after years of war. Special needs education is almost non-existent in a country where an estimated 16% of the population is disabled. Chronic poverty can lead to disability - malnutrition and disease are common causes. The cycle continues as persons with disabilities frequently are denied access to education, employment and adequate healthcare.

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The dedicated parents who created Harmony Children's Center in Ghana are determined that their children and others like them, will be able to thrive by focusing on their abilities and giving them the support they need to learn. Three of the original five families are in Monrovia with their children, and are eager to get started at resuming the center that meant so much to their lives in Ghana. Many other children with special needs have been identified in the community, children who are not included in Liberia's still struggling school system. Children whose parents need to be encouraged to see what they CAN achieve if given the opportunity. Children whose families need the support of other families who face similar challenges. Children who have the right to learn just like any other child.

When Harmony in Liberia opens its doors later this year to welcome Liberian children with disabilities, they will choose a new name for the center, but remain committed to the same vision of providing an education, socialization and a chance at a brighter future for these children. Harmony will also provide support and information for families of children with disabilities, allowing families to be actors of positive change in their children's lives.

Harmony is starting over in Liberia and preparing to rent a space for the school where about 15 youth with various disabilities will receive appropriate lessons taught by patient teachers who rely on positive reinforcement and encouragement. They will receive nutritious meals, and learn songs and games that help develop their motor, cognitive and social skills. The parents will all play a role in making the Center a reality and sustaining the project. They will reach out in the community to educate and promote understanding on the rights of children with disabilities.

About us

Founded in March 2007 by Celina Guich and Penelope Chester, The Niapele Project aims to improve the livelihoods of refugee 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

It’s our pleasure to share our latest updates from the field with you - as always, we hope to keep our friends, supporters and partners up to date on our activities. Megan Sullivan, whose “Story from the Field” appears on page 1 of this issue, has been acting as our Country Director in Liberia since April. Her presence on the ground has been key for program development, as well as for establishing our organization as an actor in Liberian post-conflict reconstruction.

We created this organization a little over two years ago with the intent of improving the livelihoods of vulnerable children, because we saw for ourselves the lack of services and support available for them as refugees. While we have moved our operations to Liberia, our focus remains on assisting returnees and other children whose communities have been weakened by displacement and exile. We have partnered with the [Liberian Refugee Resettlement and Repatriation Commission](#) (LRRRC), the lead entity of the Government of Liberia on all matters relating to refugees, internal displacement, returnees, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration. Through close coordination with the LRRRC, we ensure that

our work is in line with government priorities and complements existing initiatives. We’re also still working with most of the same organizations and community leaders who we forged partnerships with in Ghana, and we’re determined to continue assisting them in implementing their vision of a brighter future for their children.

In addition to our continued engagement with the Harmony Center and the Carolyn A. Miller School, we are continually exploring new means to empower communities in Liberia who have been affected by displacement. Our new partnership with *New Liberian* reflects this broadened engagement. Following [the crisis which pitted Liberian refugees against the Government of Ghana](#) in 2008, and led to the precipitated repatriation of thousands of Liberians, it became clear to us that years of conflict, violence and displacement sapped this community’s awareness of their social and political rights. Especially as presidential elections are fast approaching in Liberia, her citizens need to be informed and educated about the issues affecting their country, their communities, their families. We believe that *New Liberian*, with its contributors from within Liberia and the diaspora, can play an important role in cultivating a politically aware citizenry, and we are thrilled to have this new initiative in our portfolio.

We continue to be grateful to all of you who support our work. The \$2,000 grant we recently received from the [GO Campaign](#) to finance the start-up costs of the School Nutrition Initiative really inspired us to move forward with ever more determination - stay tuned for updates in the coming weeks and months, as our projects in Liberia get off the ground in earnest!

Peace and love,
Celina & Penelope

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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.

Thank you for your support!

- Christ Church Youth Group, Los Angeles

- Ecole Active Bilingue Jeannine Manuel, Paris

Do you want your school or youth group to be involved with The Niapele Project?

Contact us! info@theniapeleproject.org