



March 2008

Celebrating one year!

Volume 1, Issue 1

Refugee facts

- A refugee is defined as a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..." - 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees
- Because the 1951 definition of what constitutes a refugee is limited in scope, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) also helps Internally Displaced People (IDPs), asylum seekers, stateless people as well other "people of concern" - this represents over 20 million people worldwide.
- Civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia displaced up to 80% of the population of those countries at the height of violence.
- The Buduburam refugee settlement, where The Niapele Project operates, has an estimated population of 45,000 refugees, mostly from Liberia and Sierra Leone
- The illiteracy rate in Buduburam is estimated to be 65%.

Looking back on a year of accomplishments



The Niapele Project is celebrating its first year of

operations!

Ok, well, almost—our initiatives did not begin in earnest until August 2007, but since March of last year, The Niapele Project team has been working hard to make our vision of a better future for refugee children come true.

For the founders and directors, this has been a true learning experience, one with a steep learning curve. From defining program areas and priorities, coordinating and communicating with our field partners, to fundraising and outreach, it's been quite a ride.

Thanks to the generosity of

our donors, and the support of friends (old and new!) and family, The Niapele Project has been making a tangible difference in the lives of refugee children in Buduburam.

Concretely, The Niapele Project has:

- Financed the start up and implementation of a **School Feeding Program (SFP) for over 550 elementary school students, at the only tuition-free school in the refugee settlement**—most of the students are orphaned or abandoned children. We are in the process of evaluating the quantitative and qualitative impact of the Program, thanks to our nutrition consultant, Adam Sandow, and our field coordinator.

- With the School Feeding Program, **we have served over 50,000 meals!**
- Given 17 abandoned children the **opportunity to grow and thrive in a healthy, nurturing environment**—providing them with the tools to become empowered individuals.
- Worked with local community leaders and organizations to **build relationships and foster co-operation**—The Niapele Project worked to insure that the handicapped children from The Harmony Center could benefit from the SFP.



Adam Sandow, conducting the clinical evaluation of the School Feeding Program on CAMES student

School Feeding Program News - A new partnership with local farmers!

Thanks to our field coordinator's amazing work, The Niapele Project is in the process of brokering a deal with a local NGO to provide the School Feeding Program with a steady source of food at low prices.

Indeed, FEED, a grassroots NGO dedicated to empowering local Ghanaian farmers, will be selling their products to the School Feeding Program at below market prices. This will insure that the School Feeding

Program uses local produce and food stuffs, hence supporting local production, cutting out middlemen, and lowering overall transportation costs.

The farmers will benefit from having the security of a stable demand, and sell their products in large quantities— in addition, because the Liberian and Ghanaian vary, the farmers will be able to sell food they wouldn't normally sell (Ghanaians only eat the cas-

sava root, while Liberians are accustomed to eating cassava leaves, for example).

We look forward to bringing you more news regarding this initiative—stay tuned by visiting our regularly updated blog!

www.niapele.blogspot.com

[Inside this issue](#)

Safeguarding Refugee Rights in Ghana, Niapele News, Blurbs from Field Partners & more!



The Buduburam Refugee Settlement is located approximately 30km outside Accra, the capital of Ghana.

“Kids now come to school on time, learn well, are happy at school and no longer sleep in class, and this is good news for us all.”

Karrus Hayes



Carolyn A. Miller School student eating his daily meal



Safeguarding Refugee Rights in Ghana—by Megan Sullivan, Niapele Communications Officer

The Niapele Project is currently engaged in expanding its reach due to recent events at Buduburam Settlement. While the initial commitment to our established projects and core mission remain priority, we believe that optimizing stability in the community is integral to all of Niapele’s initiatives. As a result, we have taken the time to join an urgent campaign to stand up for the human rights of refugees in Ghana through the formation of Budburam Refugee Concerns International, a coalition of NGOs and individuals with interests at the camp.

Schools on the settlement have been closed for several weeks while hundreds of Liberian women peacefully protested for increased support from the UNHCR. On March 17, 2008 the police of Ghana reacted by arresting 630 of the protesters. Ninety

of the most vulnerable of these women and children were released on March 21st, including some of the unaccompanied minors, pregnant women and elderly women that were detained. In light of this, 530 still sit imprisoned in dire conditions awaiting justice.

Further raids took place on camp during the last week of March and tensions are currently high. As life returns to *normal*, we continue our efforts to advocate for an immediate and fair resolution to the crisis. The peaceful protests on camp have now ceased and schools are expected to reopen April 1st. We can also assure you that the children at ARCH are safe and thriving.

Both directors of The Niapele Project, Celina and Penelope will be in Ghana for the entire month of April and will be able to assess the situation on the ground while monitoring and developing the projects.

Though the events of the past week has been challenging, we welcome the opportunity to collaborate with other individuals and NGOs, and are pleased to be forming relationships that will enhance our work in supporting refugee children.

Perhaps the outcome of current negotiations could lead to a more concrete future for the refugees whose livelihoods are at stake. For more details and updates and to sign the petition, please see the Niapele News blog at www.niapele.blogspot.com

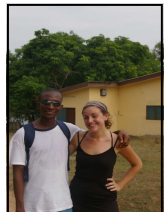


Save the Date—June 20th is World Refugee Day!
The Niapele Project will be marking the occasion with events in Los Angeles, Paris and New York—stay tuned for more details in the weeks ahead!

If you would like to host an event for World Refugee Day, please contact megan@theniapeleproject.org

The School Feeding Program— by Karrus Hayes, Founder and Director VAAFD

I am honored to let you know that the feeding program is a success at the Carolyn A. Miller Elementary School and we are proud to work with Niapele in this community as a partner in implementing this project. This program has really been a great help to the refugee kids at the Carolyn A. Miller Elementary School in the Buduburam refugee camp. Before the idea of this program was developed, it was terrible for the refugee school kids in term of nutrition - most of the kids were not focused in their lessons and their performances were very poor since they were always hungry whenever they came to school. It was common for the kids to sleep in class during the hour while lesson was going on and at recess period students would beg any visitor that come to the school either for money to buy food for lunch or water. Many refugee kids at the Buduburam Refugee camp parents or guardians cannot afford a full daily meal therefore they cannot provide breakfast and lunch for their kids during school period – at most, they eat once day after school in evening.



I am grateful that this nightmare is now over - it is over because God has touched the heart of people to support The Niapele Project in providing support for the feeding program. Kids now come to school on time, learn well, are happy at school and no longer sleep in class, and this is good news for us all. On this note, I want to thank all of the supporters and sponsors of the feeding program and for their love and kindness. I also want to encourage them to continue the good work and sacrifice they are making for these poor and needy ones. The greater thing God ever made on Earth are human beings, therefore whoever builds the interest to help other humans, God moves on their behalf.

Thank you so much we are proud of and we appreciate you a lot—Karrus



What's New at Niapele?

- ◆ Welcome to Megan, our Communications Officer, and coordinator for Buduburam Refugee Concerns International, the coalition formed in response to the recent events see Megan's piece titled "Safeguarding Refugee Rights in Ghana" on page 2.
- ◆ Thank you to Holly Adams & Roger Carlson for their priceless advice and invaluable input on legal and financial matters for our 501(c)(3) Tax Exempt Application.
- ◆ Jenny Weston, Niapele's Pub-

licity guru, will be in Ghana at the end of April where she will be volunteering with another org, but will be visiting our projects in Buduburam. Looking forward to having her there to see all the good work we are doing!

◆ With Ayoka Productions (www.ayokaproductions.org) we will be filming a PSA this month in Buduburam that will make its international multi-media debut at our June 20th World Refugee Day events in Los Angeles, Paris and New York.

- ◆ We will be launching a new line of *Made In Buduburam* merchandise. Made by the refugee women in Buduburam, the sale of these yoga bags, jewelry, skirts, trousers, etc. will strengthen their ability to provide a better quality of life for the most vulnerable children under their care.
- ◆ Thank You to Christ's Church Youth Group in LA for raising awareness and funds during their 30 Hour Famine event in March. Check out the video on our blog! www.niapele.blogspot.com



ARCH kids



Jessica Leombruno, Niapele field coordinator, with the ARCH family

Ben Molland—Niapele Field Coordinator (Dec 2007—Feb 2008)

On the Buduburam Refugee Camp, it is rare to find many instances of perseverance and creativity in the face of such overwhelming despair and loss of hope. In working for The Niapele Project, living and working in the cramped spaces with individuals who were trying desperately to recreate their sense of place and identity, I was struck by those examples of individuals who had found the strength to persevere despite the collective sense of marginalization.

I was humbled by these individuals' desire and ability to craft new meaning both for themselves and their children, all of which represent the vision of a better future, both for Liberia and the Liberian people.

The two main projects on which I worked - the school feeding program at the Carolyn Ann Miller Elementary School and the Abandoned Refugee Children's Home (ARCH) - are examples of work being done to create a vision of the future that seeks to protect the basic human rights of all children, namely: access to adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, supportive care, and primary education.

As an intern with Niapele, I found it especially compelling that these basic human rights, which are not and will not be guaranteed by camp authorities, are essential stepping stones to any hope of the refugee community building a sustainable, constructive future, whether that be in Ghana or Liberia.

Within this context, it seems evident to me that social justice can only be guaranteed by those who have the resources to freely advocate for themselves and others. Without this freedom, communities in camps such as Buduburam will continue to struggle to realize their own hopes and dreams for the future.

My experience confirms my belief that it is crucial that Niapele, and other organizations and individuals who are similarly concerned with humanitarian affairs, continue to work to empower communities in environments such as Buduburam Refugee Camp.

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Regina Krangar-ARCH Director



Regina Krangar started caring for disadvantaged children at the age of 13 and dreamed of having an orphanage

from an early age.

She would steal food, soap, and other supplies from her mother's house in order to care for them and would often be beaten as a

result. Having been raised in a broken home, she understands that children need to be cared for, loved, and watched over so that they have a chance at a normal and productive adulthood.

Throughout the Liberian and Sierra Leonean wars, Regina was caring for children and helping them to survive when no one else would sacrifice for them. Today, she is running the ARCH orphan-

age and cares for almost 20 children, all of which she considers to be her own. When I asked her if she ever feels that she sacrifices too much, she said, "No. I wish to sacrifice more than this... This life has become part of me. It is who I am."

(Interview by Jessica Leombruno)



The Niapele Project is a proud member of CSAfrica, a collaboration of non-profit organizations offering sustainable solutions for grass-roots initiatives to empower the people and communities of Africa. www.csafrica.org



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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 refugee children.

We achieve this by working **in partnership with the community, 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.

Make a tax-deductible donation today!
Visit www.theniapeleproject.org for details



A word from the co-founders and directors

We hope that you enjoyed this first newsletter! We will publish one every quarter, so expect more from us!

Through our quarterly newsletter, besides keeping you updated on our initiatives, we hope to provide you with interesting, thought provoking commentary from people in some way connected to The Niapele Project—we will develop some regular features—like Regina Krangar’s column and “Refugee Facts”, as well as invite different contributors for each issue.

As always, we welcome your feedback and comments!

We are glad to announce our return to the Buduburam refugee settlement in April, to further define The Niapele Project’s long term strategy in the field.

We are especially excited about investigating the feasibility of building a brand new eco-friendly Center to host our initiatives. We are in the early stages of developing this new endeavor—we look forward to sharing exciting updates with you on our blog and in our next newsletter!

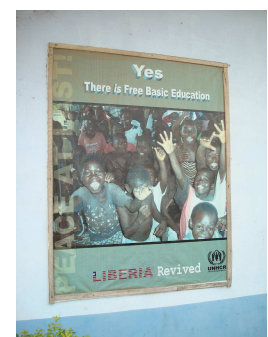
Thank you for your support!

With a smile,

Penelope & Celina

We extend our deepest gratitude to the following people, whose amazing generosity is breathing life into our programs:

- Barbara Guich
- Steven & Connie Landers
- Tim Shamroy
- The Hightower Family Foundation
- The Ecole Active Bilingue Jeannine Manuel



Liberia Revived?