

Newsletter MF, 2011-1

Deventer, 29 May 2011

Can't you go a little faster?



“Why haven’t you started any of the projects in Liberia yet, you have raised some funds, haven’t you? And if there are no competent people over there, you will probably be able to find people in the Netherlands who would like to help. The school was founded by your parents, you would not want all their work to be undone, right?” These kind of questions faced me lately. And they’re all justified. However, when these questions come up, I refer to the reason why my dad came to the Netherlands.

The beginning

My father is a visionary. His vision began with the question “Why does a country - that is potentially richer than the Netherlands - where just about all tropical and subtropical plants grow, have to import food for its people?” His experiences during his childhood left their mark: never having enough to eat and having to attend school hungry. My father came to the Netherlands to learn everything he could about tropical agriculture so that he would be able to spread this knowledge amongst the Liberian people. His principle: **You cannot think about development unless you have enough to eat. That is why children have to learn the basic principles of agriculture in addition to reading, writing and math.**

The school as a means of development



The school was not my parents’ sole goal, which was the distribution of knowledge in order to contribute to the development of Liberia. Having started up an ‘experimental farm’, the school was an important means of achieving this goal. The 2 hectares of land were used to grow several varieties of rice that did very well in the Liberian climate.

The money generated by the school was invested in their living environment: they had a number of roads paved, built a couple of simple bridges, installed running water

and electricity, supported small businesses and sponsored children whose parents could not afford to send them to one of the private schools in Monrovia. Development in various fields, but all starting from the idea that people have to take responsibility for their own lives. “We look to God” is much heard in Liberia. My father’s reaction to this would always be: “God helps those who help themselves!”.

Mineke Foundation’s Vision: a change in mentality

That dream, that vision, is what is important to me and the foundation. **To accept responsibility for one’s own life, that’s where it all starts.** That is why we will not bring people in from the Netherlands to renovate the school. The community gains from the school (jobs, selling food and toys to children, good education and hence a better future). The people will also gain from other future projects: a clinic, professional training, and adult education. What part are the local people willing to play in this? That is the question we asked the residents in January.

It is a difficult question for people who, after 15 years of civil war, are no longer used to taking the initiative. Despite this, we are of the opinion that in order to bring about sustainable improvements, the people of Dabwe Town should “also feel responsible” for those improvements.

In the end it is all about a change in mentality. We would like to bring this about through the various projects, e.g. the renovation of the school. This is a long-term process. That is okay as I am prepared to be involved for many years. In addition, I have people around me who believe in me, the vision of my parents and this approach. People who are willing to assist me through word, deed and encouragement. And luckily an expanding group of people who provide Mineke Foundation with financial support.

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Plans

Starting up such a process in a community of 3,000 people requires due care, attention and above all continuity. On site we need a person to talk with the inhabitants - on a daily basis - and encourage them. Someone who sets an example of how to take responsibility for one's own life. We have searched thoroughly for such a "people's person" during the past year and... we found what we were looking for! Even better, we have found two well-educated women who want to go for it together. Together with these two Liberian women, we want to start projects, **with the cooperation of the people of Dabwe Town**. I will update you on progress in my next letter.

2010 highlights

(Media) attention:

- ⤴ We have received a lot of positive reactions to the establishment of the foundation. A lot of people have registered their e-mail address with us as they are interested in our work and want to stay informed.
- ⤴ In November 2009 I was interviewed by the Transistor (a staff magazine of the Dutch province of Overijssel). The result was a nice article about the foundation that included a picture. The staff magazine is distributed amongst all (950) employees of the province of Overijssel. Besides many positive reactions, this article brought in a number of contributions made by colleagues.
- ⤴ Since mid 2010, I have been working one day a week (Wednesdays) for the foundation.
- ⤴ In June 2010 I was again interviewed about the foundation, this time by the Stentor newspaper. This article also brought numerous positive reactions. I would like to thank Marieke Klosters for the preliminary work she carried out. In June 2010, our treasurer Johan Buwalda was also interviewed, on this occasion by the *Gelderlander* newspaper. Both interviews can be found on the website (in Dutch).
- ⤴ In February 2011, a brilliant advertisement was placed in Business Contact, the customer relations magazine of CBMC Netherlands. I would like to thank Daniëlle Korf, Elly Overeem and Marieke Klosters for their efforts. The advertisement was again placed in the May 2011 issue.

Finances

- ⤴ In 2010 we received a total of €14,680 in gifts of which around € 4,000 was donated specifically for the renovation of the Damiefia school.
- ⤴ The total costs were very low, mainly because we have no projects running so far. We spent a total of € 1,956 in 2010.

Trip to Liberia January/February 2011



Tonia and Johan (treasurer) visited Liberia from 24 January through 8 February. Apart from ear infections and allergic reactions, this trip was very successful. However, there's a long way to go towards 'personal responsibility'.

The trip had three main objectives: finding a person to work for the foundation on site in Dabwe Town (a program coordinator), presenting a clear challenge to the people in Dabwe Town, and building an active network among ngos in Liberia.

The two plane tickets for this trip were a donation. Eddy and Aad, thank you very much!

Results of the trip:

- ⤴ Two Liberian women have been appointed jointly to the position of program coordinator. They initiated the first activities halfway through February and, if all goes well, will have finished an action plan for 2011/2012, including the budget, in June. I will introduce the two ladies to you in my next newsletter.
- ⤴ The inhabitants have a long wishlist. Having read the above, you won't be surprised that we have challenged them to 1) decide together which project should start first and 2) inform us what they themselves will do. Tonia and Johan explained Mineke Foundation's philosophy to the Dabwe Town people many times during their stay. However, we do not expect that this is of immediate use to them. The odds are that we will have to start other activities first, such as a workshop on 'How to deal with conflicts'.
- ⤴ Mineke Foundation doesn't want to establish a large organization in Dabwe Town, so the program coordinators will involve other organizations if external knowledge is needed for projects. That is why Tonia and Johan met with many ngos operating in Liberia. It is important to us that these organizations share our philosophy: Do they start from the idea of 'giving' or 'personal responsibility'? We established a number of interesting contacts.



Mineke Foundation was established in January 2009 to further the social and economic development of the Dabwe Town community in Liberia, through the renovation of a school, a gardening project, sanitation and hygiene, and entrepreneurship.

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- ⤴ Note: electricity in Monrovia is unreliable. There is no power supply outside of the city, except through the use of aggregates (expensive, contaminating and noisy). There is a possibility of Mineke Foundation collaborating with the UNDP on a solar energy project, utilising the roof of the Damiefa school. We will know later this year whether there is money to be assigned to this project.

Logo

- ⤴ The Mineke Foundation has a logo! Thanks to Henriëtte Logtenberg- Muilerman. The following elements have been assimilated in the logo: rich in contrast (There's a contrast between Liberia "now" and the "dreamed future", between Liberia and the Netherlands, but the logo as a whole is harmonious), professional (a sleek design, indicating the professional approach of MF) and green (representing growth, development and hope).

How to continue

- ⤴ We plan on putting more efforts into fundraising:
- ⤴ The Liberian program coordinators need transportation. We are looking for a four-seat Toyota pick-up.
- ⤴ The office of the two ladies has to be furnished. We need two desks and chairs, one storage cupboard, two laptops and an aggregate. We want to buy or have the furniture made in Liberia in order to promote employment. Estimated cost: 5,000 euro.
- ⤴ Funds for salary for the program coordinators in 2011: 8,000 euro.
- ⤴ Funds for the following two trips to Liberia: 5,000 euro.
- ⤴ Rest amount renovation school: 30,000 euro.
- ⤴ Funds for refurbishing of the Damiefa school: 20,000 euro.
- ⤴ Funds for smaller projects in Dabwe Town: 5,000 euro

The Mineke Foundation board is now waiting for the suggestions of the program coordinators. That proposal, together with the best ideas put forward by the residents, will form the basis for how we will proceed in Dabwe Town in 2011 and 2012. Johan Buwalda left for Dabwe Town again at the end of May to discuss the proposals and make long-term agreements.

Preview

In our next newsletter, the people behind the Mineke Foundation will introduce themselves to you, being the board, volunteers and Kuluboh and Mary, the two Liberian women who will fulfill the role of program coordinator together. We will also inform you further about our activities.

Help us!

Your contributions are welcome through the ING Bank, made payable to account number 4816154 (IBAN NL60INGB0004816154 and BIC INGBNL2A) in the name of Mineke Foundation in Deventer. Please specify whether it is a general gift or whether you wish to contribute to a specific goal. Contributions are deductible from your income tax statement as Mineke Foundation is a fully licensed charity under Dutch law (ANBI status).