



Stichting Een Helpende Hand  
**SEHH**  
A Helping Hand Foundation

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## A HELPING HAND FOUNDATION VISITS SIERRA LEONE NOV. 2019



SEHH is an NGO based in the Netherlands that supports schools and cares for the disabled in Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. SEHH is a small organization of enthusiastic volunteers, with long-term and trusted contacts in both countries. The foundation attaches great importance in personal relationships between the board, donors and beneficiaries. Hence its motto: *"from heart to heart, from hand to hand"*.



In Sierra Leone, SEHH has been active in improving education for 16 years. In recent years we have supported two secondary schools in Yonibana and in Yele located in Tonkili District (Northern Province of Sierra Leone). Both schools are affiliated with the SDA (Seventh Day Adventist) and play a regional role in the district with more than 1000 students registered in each school.

SEHH believes in empowering girls in Sierra Leone through education. We provide scholarships to the most talented girls, who come from challenging backgrounds. This year, for example, 200 students will each receive 450,000 Le in school material. In addition to that we have funded water and sanitation programs such as the construction of water wells and extra toilets. Also, we have funded an electric generator, computers and sports equipment.



*Water and sanitation program to improve the level of hygiene in Yele (2011-2016)*



*School girls receiving school uniform and school materials (October 2019)*

### **Our Visit in 2019**

From November 19th to December 2nd 2019, two board members of the foundation, chairman Piet Houtenbos and member Nellie Hanemaaijer, travelled to Sierra Leone. They were accompanied by Lydia van der Kieft (Piet's wife) and Julie Kamau, a Kenyan young lady who has been studying Development Studies at Tilburg University for the past three years. This visit, was an internship for her. We visited two high schools (SDA Secondary School Yele & Yonibana Secondary School), two hospitals (City Garden Clinic, Makeni and Lion Heart Medical Centre, Yele) and FootPrint Mission, a child care center for Ebola orphans in Makankisa, Yele. We like to present our experiences.

### **Yele SDA Secondary School**

The first school we visited in Tonkolili district is in Yele, a town in the middle of Sierra Leone that also serves a regional function. During our five-day stay, we met with the management of the school, various teachers and the chairman of the school board: Dr. Abdulai B. Daniel Sesay, an active and progressive man who is a practicing doctor at City Garden Clinic and a Member of Parliament of Gbonkolenken Chiefdom Tonkolili District, Northern Province. Topics for discussion included the construction of a science laboratory (including water supply), improvement of the quality of education and the continuation of scholarships for students and teachers.





*Meeting under a tree within the school compound (L-R) with school Principal Mr. James Conteh and School Board Chairman Dr Abdulai B. Daniel Sesay*

### Construction of a Science Laboratory

One greatest wish from the school management was the construction of a science laboratory for chemistry, biology and physics practical lessons. Due to the lack of a science lab and proper equipment, students are not only denied the opportunity to sit for the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) but also have no knowledge of the sciences. Currently, there is a plan for the construction of a science laboratory, including a new water supply in the school compound. Hopefully this will attract more science teachers to the school and encourage students to pursue science subjects.

For the realization of this project we are working together with a local hospital: Lion Heart Medical Centre Yele, founded by a Dutch NGO, 'Lion Heart Foundation' (see: [www.lion-heart.nl](http://www.lion-heart.nl)). This hospital also has an interest in improving student training especially in the health sciences. Approximately forty young people work in medical and administrative service, there is a need to recruit more staff from Yele. It is the intention of the hospital to have the staff locally trained. Therefore, the science laboratory will serve several purposes.

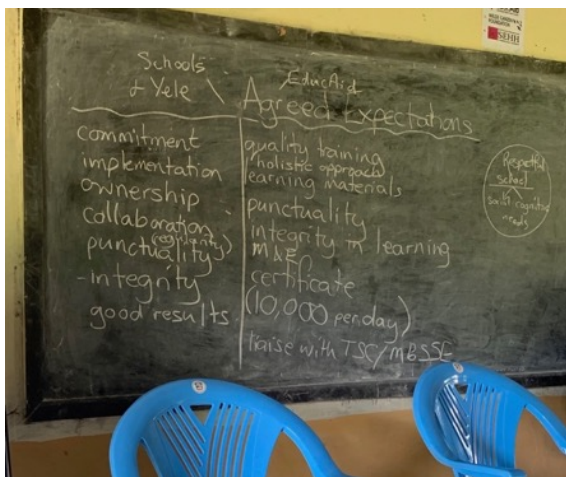
Meanwhile, the funds for the project, from SEHH, Lion Heart and the Dutch Wild Geese aid organization, are available. Dr. Anton Bussink, the Country Director of the hospital and the chairman of SEHH spoke with the contractor on site. Construction will start as soon as possible.



*Chairman of SEHH addresses the 100 scholarship students and hands over a laptop to the school principal Mr James Conteh and "our" recently graduated IT teacher Abdul T. Tholley*

### Education quality improvement

Education in Sierra Leone faces significant hurdles, particularly regarding the level of education of teachers. Our efforts are now focused on raising the quality of the teaching staff in SDA Secondary School Yele. Starting in September 2019, fifty teachers from SDA Yele Secondary School received training on pedagogical methods and techniques offered by EducAid, a British foundation. This training will be effective for a whole year. SEHH will pay for part of the training program and the remaining part will be co-sponsored by Wild Geese and Lion Heart Foundation. During our visit, we spoke to a number of young teachers who attended the first part of the training and they were particularly enthusiastic. We received positive feedback such as "the training is a turning point in my life" and "the training is a blessing for the school".



*Educaid Teachers Training, teachers carefully following the principles of contemporary teaching (September 2019)*

Prior to our arrival in Yele, we met the Country Director of EducAid, Miriam Mason in Port Loko. She has been the driving force behind the education program for twenty years. We visited an EducAid network Primary and Secondary Senior School in Maronka and Port Loko, using a different method of transferring knowledge and dealing with students. We were impressed with the results.



*Miriam Mason Country Director of Educaid, on her right hand Idriss Bundu & The Senior Secondary School in operation (Port Loko)*

Finally in Yele we discussed the next steps with the school management such as continuation of the EducAid teachers training and scholarship program, but also the installation of solar panels (the power supply is inadequate) and the approach to computer classes.



We also agreed the formation of an administrative WhatsApp group for transparency and to improve the level of communication between the school management and SEHH.



*The management of SDA SS Yele (L-R) Deputy Principal Mr John Kamara, School Bursar Mr Lamin Kanu, Principal Mr James Conteh & with the Region Chief of Gbonkolenken Chieftom Tonkolili*

## Yonibana Secondary School

The second school we visited in Tonkolili district is Yonibana, a town that also plays a regional function in the district. We had a wonderful session with the 'scholarship' students from Yonibana SS. We learnt that there are students who daily have to cover long distances to school on foot. We spoke to them and listened to their pleas. The students mentioned that they lack food thus making it difficult to concentrate in class. They leave home without breakfast and have no money to buy lunch. The school lacks a feeding program. Meanwhile, at the gate of the school ladies sell a plate of hot food for a small amount, between 1000 and 3000 Le, but only to those who can afford it.



*Women from Yonibana selling lunches and fruits close to the school gate*

In Yonibana, SEHH also provides scholarships to 100 pupils and four prospective teachers at this secondary school. We had separate meetings with the teachers and students. One student said, "I would have been a dropout without your help," whereas teachers were grateful for the opportunity to further their studies. One of our teachers, a talented young lady named Fatmata said, "I am an orphan and my aunt takes care of me. Her auntie sold her goats, then her entire herd of animals, for her to study. She was immensely pleased that the foundation can now cater for those costs. "





*Reception by the chairman of school board & At the table with students Fatmata, Santigie and Saidu*

We then discussed the school's challenges with the school principal Mr. Joseph Conteh. We concluded that providing everyone with lunches would be financially constraining. We could, however, think of a small "snack", such as a banana, a cassava dish or a soup for the hungry students. This idea is currently being looked at.

On the other hand, for the students who have to cover long distances to school, we discussed about the possibility of purchasing of bicycles for the school. Since the roads in Yonibana are reasonably passable, for 350,000 Le the school can acquire bicycles suitable for the terrain. The school can then lend the bicycles for a small fee.

Sex education was another point of discussion with the students, teachers and school management. The country suffers from teenage pregnancies, early marriages and female genital mutilation. Currently, there is a nationwide campaign supported by the First Lady titled: "Hands off our girls!" Concurrently, good education at school for boys and girls can sensitize various issues that are not openly discussed at home. We have offered our assistance in putting together a teaching package. The school is currently preparing a proposal.



*Meeting in meeting, (L-R): Nellie, Piet, chairman of school board Ms. Elisabeth, School Principal Mr. Joseph Conteh and Julie*

We informed Joseph Conteh about the EducAid Training program, as implemented at SDA SS Yele. Maybe also a prospect for Yonibana SS in future?

Moreover, the school principal presented three candidates requesting to receive scholarships. Two of the candidates intend to pursue teachers training and the other candidate seeks to study medicine. We took his request for reimbursement of their study costs (between 3 and 5 million Le per year) into consideration. Finally, we agreed to form a "WhatsApp group" for transparent communication, just like in Yele. After a day and a half of intensive discussions, we bade sayonara to Yonibana.

## Two hospitals: City Garden Clinic, Makeni & Lion Heart Medical Centre, Yele

In Makeni we visited Dr. Erdi Huizenga, medical head of the City Garden Clinic. The hospital specializes in urology and orthopedics. During our visit, Dr. Erdi was busy setting up an easily applicable device for testing for cervical cancer. Every year a relatively high number of women die from this disease, whereas, this number can be reduced. The hospital needs renovation and new facilities. The Dutch organization Smarter Hospital tries to collect the funds for this purpose. We were very impressed with the work there. Due to the lack of resources, creativity had to be used to regularly for instance in treating complex fractures.

During our visit we were startled by the news about the Dutch tropical doctor who had been admitted to a Leiden hospital with Lasse fever, a serious infectious disease. He worked in Masagna hospital, about 100 km from Makeni. Dr. Erdi was immediately very concerned about it. Two days later we learned of his death and the extensive reporting about this in the Netherlands. To prevent our acquaintances from becoming very concerned, we sent them reassuring messages and also an article for the local newspaper.

# Maaslanders in Sierra Leone zijn veilig

Piet Houtenbos, Lydia van der Kieft en Nel Hanemeijer verblijven momenteel in Sierra Leone. Deze drie Maaslanders zijn leden van de Stichting Een Helpende Hand en bezoeken in Sierra Leone de scholen en ziekenhuizen waar zij steun aan verlenen. Afgelopen zondag kwam Sierra

Leone in het nieuws nadat een Nederlandse tropenarts, die werkzaam was in dit land, overleden is aan de besmettelijke lassakoorts. Er werd direct groot alarm geslagen. Piet Houtenbos kan melden dat zij buiten de gevarenzone verkeren, maar wel alert moeten zijn. "De verslagenheid onder de

Nederlandse artsen in de ziekenhuizen is groot. Zij hebben gelijk maatregelen getroffen om besmette patiënten te herkennen en te isoleren. De ebolacrisis van vier jaar geleden staat nog vers in het geheugen. Wij kunnen onze reis voortzetten, maar kunnen beter de ziekenhuizen mijden."



De Maaslanders op bezoek bij het tehuis voor Ebola weeskinderen.

Foto: Pri

News article in the local newspaper: 'Dutch visitors in Sierra Leone are safe'



### Lion Heart Medical Centre

We also visited our partners at the Lion Heart Medical Center in Yele. As mentioned above, we work together with them in Yele. There too, the staff were affected by the news of his death since the doctor had worked there for some time. The hospital in Yele has been in existence for eight years (two years after SEHH became active here) and is now under the medical direction of Dr. Daphne Bussink. Her husband Dr. Anton Bussink does the logistical work and he has taken the initiative for the joint project, which is now being implemented.

### **FootPrint Mission Sierra Leone Child Care Center, Makankisa**

During our visit to Yele, we also went to a child care center that was built two years ago. Twenty children are staying there, who have lost their parents due to Ebola. The Dutch organization Smarter Hospital takes care for their livelihood by organizing sponsor families.

We were warmly received and shown around by the manager, Joseph Lowo Conteh. He showed us a room with ten sewing machines, where women and girls are taught tailoring class. There are plans to also start a carpentry workshop to support the young men in the community.

Behind the child care center is a large garden, where vegetables are grown, partly in plastic greenhouses. Due to harsh weather conditions, some greenhouses roofs were ravaged. Nonetheless, there are plans to construct better greenhouses, install an irrigation system with a solar panel-driven water pump, to bridge the period of severe drought. With this, the young people can get started and learn new farming techniques.



*The greenhouses behind the Child Care Center and farm next to it*

### **Looking back and ahead**

The trip to Sierra Leone this time was longer and more intensive, compared with earlier visits. We made new acquaintances and strengthened relations with our contacts in Yele and Yonibana. We are satisfied with the recognizable improvements that are underway and the promise of the developments that the foundation has set in motion. At the same time, we realize the country has a long way to go.

SEHH sees the improvement of education as an engine of progress. Certainly, if we are able to make a connection of our efforts with other initiatives in the area. For example, in Yele an



agricultural project could be highly beneficial to the community. There is fertile soil and an easily accessible water supply from the nearby river. Our school can boost knowledge development in agriculture and horticulture. Now that we have established more contacts here, we want to explore how to initiate broader development together with local actors and other organizations operating in the area. The central focus is how Yele community can be sustainable and self-sufficient!

In the end the journey enriched us with new ideas and encouraged us to continue our support. Our big thanks and appreciation go to all our acquaintances in Yele and Yonibana, who take their responsibility to make their communities better.

On behalf of the travel party, Nelly, Lydia and Julie,

Piet Houtenbos  
chair of SEHH ([www.sehh.nl](http://www.sehh.nl))

The Hague, December 20 2019