

Genieri Collections - Newsletter No.21 – January 2021

Oh what a year that's been.



COVID's been truly horrible for the Villagers, with none of the safety nets we enjoy in the "developed" world. They received only a single food supplement from their government, but that was paltry to say the least, they were in dire need. There is no unemployment benefit, no pensions or sickness benefit, and no furlough payments in this essentially cash- economy.



The Villagers' own discipline and abject fear of contagion were in a sense their greatest strength, as they stayed in the village - and in their own compounds throughout, even when they had little or nothing to eat. No-one was allowed into the village unless absolutely necessary.

Food quickly became a rare commodity, and a lot of the villagers were "struggling", coming as COVID did in part concurrently with their "hungry season", when reserves were already depleted, paid work was impossible, and the fields are dry and empty. They've come through it now and the rice crop is doing well after uncharacteristically good rains.

Our donor base responded magnificently to say the least, and that helped them such a lot. With your help since January we delivered just over 56,000 simple meals for people who desperately needed them, and that has doubtlessly helped with their general health at the same time. Feeding of the children in the Day Care Centre has of course continued, and that will always be our priority. That is now safe and secure.



Health Improvements

We also managed to expand our support a little, and provided modest food support during their COVID lockdown to the local Health Centre which services the Village. Medicine is only available on a fee-paying basis in that land, and all too many die from easily and cheaply cured complaints. As an example a course of Coartem costing about £3.80 can save a life from simple malaria, yet so many of them die from it - they just don't have the money to survive. Good to note though that there were no malaria fatalities this year, perhaps in part due to the small amount of Coartem that we fund through the Health Centre.



The Village itself has a very modest "Primary Health Care Centre" funded by another charity, but this can only provide for simple relief, with drugs like Paracetamol, sold by the single tablet.



More complex matters are dealt with by the Kaiaf Health Centre and that's where the vast bulk of local medical support is provided, just 1km. from Genieri. Of course this clinic is also impoverished, despite being part funded by the government, but operating on a fee-paying basis. We've been sending them some money over the COVID period for foodstuffs, as many of the patients, including from Genieri were both undernourished **and** ill, and we thought that was a bad mixture to say the least.

In January we managed to afford a little bit of money for food and drugs. They decided that they should buy rice, Ibuprofen and Diclofenac, and they're truly delighted as you can see from the photos.

So the photos above comprise a short word picture of the money being received by the treasurer (Fatou Danso), goods collection in the local food store - right through to some of the staff preparing the medical material for use with the patients.

The Ladies Gardens




Things have moved on quite a bit, and after a long saga we managed to help them get water again in the Ladies Gardens, working in close concert with a sister charity. Only just in time at that, as the home nurseries are bulging with crop coming ready to plant out, and they were becoming quite desperate. Water flowed on the 1st. of January, and we can only imagine the glee that followed.



They had been facing yet another lean period when the vegetables that supplement their rice over the dry season appeared in great jeopardy. The day has been saved and they are now planting out. Just a short time later and many of the nursery crops could have perished. We think it's fair to say that they're "food secure" until the rains start again, and that'll be a bit of a novelty for them. Perhaps the gardens

will even provide a small cash crop. Just knowing that there's food available for the children's breakfast will be great comfort for the mums.





Sustainability – Could this be the start?

The villagers themselves have installed a “commercial wrap” around the garden finances, with the equivalent of a ground rent/water usage charge associated with every plot. Additionally they’re putting a small tariff on crops sold, and a dedicated bank account is being opened.

All this should help them prepare for tomorrow, when they need tools, seeds and fertiliser, to say nothing of fencing and irrigation repairs. This is early days for them, it’s a novel idea indeed. The very fact that they’re considering it suggests that we’ve managed to push back somewhat on the immediacy of their hunger.

We’ve got no meaningful data yet regarding this initiative, but we’ll monitor this most interesting of developments, as we’re sure they won’t find this easy. If we can help them bring some sustainability into the picture it’ll help reduce their longer term exposure to food insecurity.

In a nutshell that was the year’s work. They’ve finally come out of it and we still have a small reserve in the bank for them.

Perhaps we’ve got them closer to that Holy Grail of charity - the start of self-sufficiency. It’s got a long a way to go, but here’s hoping.

Thanks again for all your help to do these things for them.

Jim, Sophie and Bob