



Sustainable Liberia

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Spring Ministry Update

Countering Hopelessness in Liberia



Many Liberians consider 2018 a year of new beginnings. The peaceful transfer of power from President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to President George Manneh Weah marks an historic moment. **It has been 73 years since Liberians have seen a successful transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another.** On January 22, 2018, many Liberians, both young and old, were in tears of joy as they witnessed the inauguration of President George Manneh Weah at the Samuel Kayon Doe Sports Complex in Paynesville. On that day, **Madam President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and President-elect George Weah were seated side-by-side on the same podium to demonstrate the peaceful transfer of power.**

Constitutionally, this event should have taken place at the Centennial Pavilion in the City of Monrovia. But the citizens' love for President Weah and popular demand from the general public mandated that the inaugural event take place at the sports complex where President Weah's success as a professional soccer player started. In his inaugural speech President Weah commented,



Peaceful Transition of Power Between President Weah and Former President Madam Johnson-Sirleaf

"I spent most of my professional life in stadiums where I was either a winner or a loser; but today, it is the Liberian people who win." President Weah in his speech introduced "Pro-Poor governance policy" that promises to include and protect the interest of the poor.

It has been nearly two months since the Weah-led government took office. Even though Liberians are hopeful, we have not seen much change in the economy. Unemployment, inflation, and economic hardship are some of the challenges facing Liberians.



President Weah

Food and commodity prices are rapidly increasing. The buying power of the Liberian Dollar (LD) is very weak. The exchange rate from January to March has skyrocketed from \$124 to \$135 LD to one U.S. Dollar (USD). Despite the economic challenges, Liberians are hopeful for a prosperous future.

In God's Grace,

Rev. Dr. Jessie Togba-Doya
Executive Director



"The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge, for the ears of the wise seek it out."
Proverbs 18:15 (NIV)

Progress at The Gbansue School

Recently Jerome Tulwon shared pictures of students at Gbansue School utilizing the Mack and Pattie Hannah Library to study and do homework. After school, Gbansue teachers also spend one hour in the Library to prepare for the next school day.

Prior to the hiring of Jerome as Lead Teacher, Gbansue teachers spent very limited time on research and planning. The materials they used for lesson plans and other teaching resources were mostly information they recalled from their days in elementary school. Much of this information has changed over time. Teaching from obsolete materials was not helpful to the students and their learning process.

Utilizing the Library and current materials gives the students fresh ideas and keeps them informed about the world and current events. This progress in the quality of education is a big step forward in preparing Gbansue students for challenges of tomorrow. This is great news! **Thanks to our teaching team from Dunwoody Baptist Church, we are definitely making progress.**



With the help of a Torch device, Jerome teaches Bible study and leads the Good News Club for kids in the villages.



Sustainable Football Club (Sustainable FC) is a soccer program that gives troubled teens a second chance.



Combined with Bible study and counseling, we utilize sports to rehabilitate and reintegrate youth into their communities.



Jessy works to clear overgrowth from an area where a garden will be planted using the Seeds of Hope packets he brought back from the US in February.



Villagers in Gbansue work to clear two areas, one for the school garden and one for the community garden.



The school garden they are clearing will allow teachers to show students how to plant a garden, which will also feed the class while they attend school.

*"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches."
John 15:4-5 (NIV)*

Partnership Brings Hope Amidst Ruins

In 2017 money was raised to start a cocoa business to help local farmers get better returns on their labor. The relationships built while helping the cocoa farmers form co-ops opened the door for the Sustainable staff to bond with the remote village of Gou.



Last November, Jessy and Bill built relationships with the village chief, elders, and cocoa farmers in Gou.

In November, while on a site visit to the processing site in Gou, we discovered that their small elementary school had been severely damaged by a storm earlier in the year.

During Jessy's time in Gbansue last month, he walked to Gou and visited the site of what used to be the elementary school. The building collapsed back in December of 2017 as a result of that earlier storm. The ruins are all that is left.



The ruins of the Gou school after a storm destroyed it. 200+ children now attend school in a one-room community hall.

Jessy met with the chief, elders, and the other villagers and told them about Sustainable Liberia's desire to help them rebuild the school. He also told them they will have to be responsible for most of the rebuilding process. They agreed and have started producing Adobe (mud) blocks for the building. They also agreed to cut the timber for the roof structure and provide the manpower to build the school.

At a board meeting on March 26, the Sustainable Liberia board agreed to raise the money necessary to provide the roofing materials, nails, paid skilled labor, and a contractor. The six-classroom building will cost about \$13,000 USD. Currently, the school meets in a one-room community hall. In the near future, the teachers from Gou School will join the teachers in the Gbansue School library for a workshop.



Village of Gou
(Pronounced "go")

Please keep the people of Gou in your thoughts and prayers.



Cabbage from Seeds of Hope packets, which were put together at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in 2017, are now flourishing and producing an abundant harvest for the villages!



In February, Jessy brought the packets from Seeds of Hope 2018 to Liberia and they will soon be planted in gardens within the community.



Villagers are looking forward to the future harvest of plants provided by the Seeds of Hope packets put together at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in January 2018!

Charitable Giving: What Are Your Options?

by James Underwood CPA, CFP

With the tax law changes created by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, there are more questions than ever around charitable giving. Now, how and when you give is more important than it previously was. With the increase in the standard deduction, many people who previously itemized their deductions and claimed a tax deduction for gifts to qualified 501(c)(3) charitable organizations will no longer itemize and lose the tax benefit from the gift. **Even if you will not be eligible to itemize your deductions, there are ways that you can still receive a tax benefit from the gift.**

Most charitable donations are done using cash, but you have other options. If you have owned stocks, bonds, or mutual funds for at least a year and they have increased in value, instead of selling the investments and donating cash, you can transfer them directly to the charity. You will avoid paying tax on the appreciation and if you itemize you will receive a deduction for the value of the investment transferred. The charity will sell the investment, paying no tax on the appreciation, and they get the same amount as if you had given them cash. This is a good option for donations greater than \$500.

There is another option if you give larger amounts to charity or you want to give money to charities in the future but don't know which ones. In recent years, donor advised funds (DAF) have grown in popularity as an alternative to private

foundations. A DAF allows for contributions of cash or appreciated property to an account that will be used to fund charitable gifts over time. If itemizing, you get a full tax deduction in the year you contribute to the DAF, but you do not have to give all of the money to charities in that year.

This is useful and can be very valuable if you have a large income year. You can prepay your next few years of charitable giving to a DAF to get the deduction now when it is more valuable. Additionally, if you no longer itemize your deductions, under the new law you can contribute to a DAF every few years to be able to itemize your deductions in the year of the gift.

Lastly, you can give part or all (up to \$100,000 limit) of your required minimum distribution from your IRA directly to charity. You will not receive a charitable deduction for the contribution, but it will reduce your taxable income. This can be a good option for someone who is no longer eligible to itemize their deductions.

Reducing your taxes is a great benefit of giving, but it should not be your main motivation. You should give because you want to and not because you have to. When you are considering giving to Sustainable Liberia, see if any of these options make sense. As with any tax decision, please consult your tax advisor before making any final decisions.



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