



Sustainable Liberia

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Summer Ministry Update

Countering Hopelessness in Liberia



Community Transformation *By Jessy Togba-Doya*

In the last year, I have witnessed God do eventful and rewarding things for the people of Liberia through our partnership. God's work in Liberia is growing and transforming lives. **The mission of Sustainable Liberia is to enable transformational development by investing in the dreams of the poor, so that they might be released from physical and spiritual poverty. The love of Jesus Christ being the primary motivation, opportunities are created for Evangelism, Education, Economic Empowerment, Infrastructure Restoration, and Leadership Development.** Here are some highlights of what has been accomplished in each thematic area:

Evangelism & Discipleship

- *Good News Club* hour at Gbansue Elementary School is every Friday. After school about 40 students gather in a classroom or outdoors to sing, read the Bible, learn the Walk Thru the Bible hand signs, and

memorize Scripture verses. Students in the club receive personal Bibles and treats to encourage attendance.



- *Community Bible Study* takes place on Sunday evenings. Brother Jerome Tulwon collaborates with four local pastors to lead community Bible study for more than 55 active members from Lutheran, Methodist, Deeper Life, and Aladura churches to help the congregants learn God's Word and grow in their personal faith. Members receive Torches (solar powered audio players) loaded with the Bible to aid their personal Bible study.

- *Sight Seekers* is our reading glasses program. Brother Derrick Nyenneh conducts eye exams and makes reading glasses for the visually impaired in New Kru Town, Gbansue, Gou, and Paynesville to help them read. We also supply Bibles upon request. Twenty-one people were served between January and July.



Education & Vocational Training

- *Primary Education Program* works with two elementary schools in Bong County. We provide administrative oversight and pay the teachers' salaries. Balama and Gou schools just completed the school year with 310 and 225 students enrolled, respectively.

*"Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name,
Isaiah 25:1*

- ***Sustainable Witness (SW) Vocational Training School*** graduated its first class of 28 students in March: 7 students received certificates in Computer Literacy, 16 received certificates in Drivers' Education, and 5 received certificates in Food Service. Our current enrollment at the vocational school has doubled to 53 students.



Economic Empowerment

- ***Brendi Cocoa Company*** provides discipleship opportunities, jobs, and income for four employees who deliver technical advice and support services to more than 85 cocoa farmers. Our cocoa staff also renders value-added services through processing, drying, and selling cocoa beans. Besides profit incentives, purchasing wet cocoa from the farmers saved them about 12,240 hours associated with cocoa processing and drying activities and US\$700 in transportation costs for getting their cocoa beans from village to market.
- ***Coal Pot Queens Restaurant*** feeds students, street vendors, construction workers, and low-income families with a hot bowl of rice and baked goods for minimal cost. By so doing, the restaurant provides discipleship, jobs, and income for eight people. The blessing of stable employment and income gives the women a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Ongoing operational costs for the restaurant are met by its monthly revenue.



Infrastructure Restoration

- ***Community Garden Program*** organizes gardening co-ops in Gbansue and Gou to help more than 20 villagers cultivate vegetable gardens and rice patches. Food for Work is used as an incentive to motivate and encourage the villagers. They are currently planting rice and Seeds of Hope donated by Peachtree Church. The gardens will provide food and income for the villagers and their families. Early this year, Haddock Baptist Church shipped a 40-foot container loaded with tractors, farming tools, and supplies. After clearing the brush and planting for this year, our goal for next year is to remove the stumps from the garden spots and plow the soil for future gardens.
- ***Gou Elementary School*** broke ground in February of 2019 and began construction of a brand new Elementary School in Gou. More than 50% of the construction costs were supplied by villagers in sweat equity. The 120' x 25' school house contains six classrooms and a long veranda in the front. The people of Gou decided to name the school in honor of Mr. Vesselee Fleminee, the oldest elder and landlord, who at age 98 literally crawled to the construction site for the ground breaking ceremonies. During the event, the children of Gou lit candles, gathered around the site, prayed, and sang "This Little Light of Mine." Today, Vesselee Fleminee Elementary School is 85% complete, due in large part to community spirit and collaboration.



for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things..."
(NIV)

Leadership Development

- **Scholarship Program** is currently funding a scholarship for Brother Derrick Nyenneh at BlueCrest University College. Derrick is pursuing a degree in information technology. His dream for the future is to continue serving with Sustainable Witness and perhaps serve as Coordinator for the Vocational Training Program.
- **Collegiate/Student Ministry** provides room and bed for four students, gathering and meeting space, and computer access for more than 200 students at Bong County Technical College.
- **Athletic Program** identified in 2017 that the use and abuse of gateway substances such as marijuana, alcohol, and others are a major problem facing Liberian youth. As a matter of fact, Coal Pot Queens compound in Paynesville is surrounded with ghettos where substance abusers gather. So in the first quarter of this year, we organized Sustainable Football Camp that gave 35 street kids a second chance. Before playing soccer, SW counselors and coaches conduct devotional time with the young athletes.



It has been a great year so far! Thanks for your ongoing prayers and support for the people of rural Liberia.



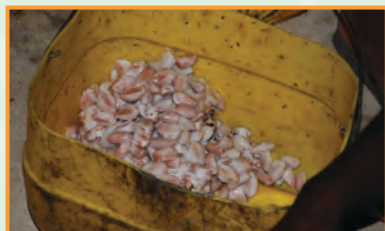
*"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God
has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

Philippians 3:14 (NIV)

Harvesting Hope through Cocoa

By Jack Stallins

Cocoa harvest season runs from mid-July through December, and since we are in the cocoa business, this is a pivotal time of the year. Our company, Brendi Cocoa, is a Christ-centered business-as-mission venture that buys, processes, and sells cocoa, passing the savings on to rural farmers and their communities. Our mission is to build and operate cocoa buying and processing centers in rural Liberia in order to add value to both wet and dried cocoa harvested by rural farmers who have inadequate resources and limited access to market. We currently own and operate two cocoa processing facilities – one in Gbansue and one in Gou.



This year, we have two buying agents, Henry in Gou and Jeremiah in Gbansue. Our agents buy a combination of wet and dried cocoa beans and process some of the beans for quality control purposes. This operation saves more than 85 rural cocoa farmers about 12,240 hours of work, as well as the US\$700 it takes to transport their beans to the market. This operation, which includes technical advice, underbrush loans, fermenting, drying, and storage, helps improve the quality of cocoa beans produced by the farmers.



The goal of this program is not limited to the economic development of these communities, but rather extends to spiritual development as well. Besides the business component of our work, we use our cocoa processing as a platform to disciple farmers and their families by leading Community Bible Studies in Gbansue and Gou to help local farmers and their families learn Scripture and develop personal relationships with Christ.

As important as this is, the opportunity for sharing the Gospel with local farmers has come at a price. Besides the logistical challenges associated with transporting cocoa beans on motorcycles through rough terrain, the overall economic hardship, driven by a rapidly increasing national inflation rate and the devaluation of the local Liberian currency, also impacts our operation and the cocoa industry. The economic challenge has also pushed the government's over-regulation and taxation of agricultural produce, which negatively impacts the local growers with whom we work. As a result, the purchase and resale price of cocoa beans is not stable.

In spite of these challenges, we continue to push ahead with Brendi Cocoa Company because it provides a unique platform for reaching rural farmers and their families with the Gospel. Because of this, we are looking for ways to alleviate the economic pressures, as we hope to expand the number of local buying agents in order to increase the volume of cocoa. The agents will not only receive technical training in cocoa processing, but they will also be taught how to share the Gospel and their personal faith in a one-on-one or group setting. As harvest season continues, please pray for Brendi Cocoa and all of the local farmers!



*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."
John 15:1 (NIV)*

Fighting Hunger Together

By Jack Stallins



Peace returned to Liberia 14 years ago, and although the guns no longer fire, the memory of the war still presents itself every day in the enormous structural and livelihood challenges faced by the people of Liberia. There is a lack of food, safe water, and electricity. Unemployment is extremely high with few available educational opportunities. This stands in stark contrast to the Liberia before the war that flourished and prospered from its export of rubber, iron ore, gold, diamonds, timber, and cash crops. A country once known for its emerging economy lies in ruin as a result of 15 years of civil war (1989-2004).

Liberia's return to peace began in 2005 with the election of Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as President, the first female Head of State in all of Africa. During Madam Sirleaf's regime (2006-2018), there was a great outpouring of goodwill and generosity from the UN, USAID, and other friendly nations and donor agencies, in part due to her previous connections with the international community. Unfortunately, her successor and current leader, President George Manneh Weah, has not gotten the same level of support from the donor community.

Weah, who happened to be a world-renowned soccer star in the 1990s, was elected in 2018 by an overwhelming majority vote from the youth of the country, who account for over 60% of the total population. They voted in hopes that Liberia might once again return to greatness under a new regime, but the realities of life in Liberia have proven the opposite to be true.

The local economy slowly is crashing due to the rise in inflation, unemployment, and food shortages. The price of rice, Liberia's staple food, is on the increase. A 55-pound bag of rice currently is sold for the equivalent of \$20 U.S. This is devastating for families who make \$75 U.S. per month or less. While in America, this price hike would mean buying a cheaper substitute, this is not an option in Liberia, and those in Liberia who are unemployed can barely afford to feed their families.

Sustainable Liberia believes that gardening provides a lasting solution to the food crisis. As such, we encourage villagers to organize co-ops by providing tools and a "Food for Work" program that gives them food while they work in the gardens, to help them cultivate vegetable gardens and a rice patch. Co-op members take turns working on each others' farms, so that they can all reap the benefits of each others' work equally. They are hopeful that by December, the vegetable gardens and rice patch will have yielded food for their families and seeds for the next farming season.



If you have read our last few newsletters, you know about Haddock Baptist's wonderful gift in 2018: a container shipped to Liberia loaded with tractors and farming tools. Our plan for these co-ops this next year and beyond involves that gift, as the tractors will be used to plow garden plots once they have been cleared of stumps and roots. This will allow the villagers to reuse garden plots rather than move from one to another. We are grateful to our mission friends at Haddock, and all those who give, as it has allowed us to focus on working with the people in the villages to overcome these hardships. Please keep the villagers and their gardens in your thoughts and prayers.



"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up"
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

A School for Gou By Jack Stallins

The UN's Millennium Development Goals names poverty as one of the most pressing socio-economic problems facing the world today. Poverty is not necessarily a lack of resources, but rather a lack of access to those resources, which include education, a market, healthcare, safe drinking water and sanitation, roads and transportation, and communication. This feeds the social dimension of poverty, a "poverty of the spirit" – a belief in shared despair and hopelessness.

The people of Gou village in Zota District, Bong County, are very hard working, yet they remain poor due to the lack of access to resources.



The village is quite literally "in the middle of nowhere". Located in the tropical rain forest of Liberia, the villagers lack access to the very things mentioned above. To make matters worse, they are geographically disconnected from other towns in Bong County. The road to Gou is a footpath that winds through the forest, hills, and creek-beds of the jungle, the only source of transportation being motorbikes called PehnPehns in Liberia.



During Sustainable Liberia's first visit to Gou, the villagers identified several assets they possessed. The village is endowed with cocoa, timber, gold, and other natural resources. Unfortunately, they do not have the resources needed to utilize their assets. When asked what their most pressing need was as a community, the villagers pointed to the lack of education. It was decided that together we would build a school so that education could combat this lack of access to other resources.



During the Town Hall Meeting discussing the construction of the school, several team members wondered how we could possibly transport materials and build a school in the middle of the rain forest without access to roads and transportation. After a period of brainstorming, our team and the people of Gou mutually agreed to share responsibilities for the project. Sustainable Liberia agreed to furnish zinc, cement, nails, and rebar; the people of Gou agreed to furnish their labor and to gather all the supplies and materials that could be found locally. Against all odds, the people of Gou are committed to fulfilling their dream of owning a school. With very little help from Sustainable Liberia and lots of collaborative efforts from members of

the community, the people made adobe bricks, cut timbers, gathered sand, gathered gravel, and fetched water from the nearby creek in order to build what is today Gou School.

We broke ground for the school in February and started the construction in March. As mentioned, the villagers agreed to name the school in honor of Mr. Vesselee Fleminnee, the oldest elder and landlord who, at age 98, literally crawled to the construction site for the ground breaking.

The children of Gou lit candles on the construction site, gathered around, prayed, and sang "This Little Light of Mine," expressing their happiness at the possibility of a school in their community. Today, Vesselee Fleminnee Elementary School is 85% complete. It took a considerable amount of community spirit and collaboration to build the school, and here we are!



When we opened our first school in Balama in 2006, we started with a class of 25 children. Almost 15 years and two schools later, we have managed to touch the lives of over a thousand children. The Gou school is but another step to reaching more and more children.

*"Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long."
Psalm 25:5 (NIV)*

Fighting Unemployment through Computer Literacy

By Jack Stallins

As a college student in America, I can say with certainty how critical it is today to have access to a computer. From completing assignments or doing research, to even communicating with my professors and classmates, having some way to access the internet is necessary. What if my computer decides to break down in the middle of finals? From experience, I can tell you that there are about 50 computers available on the first two floors of our library.



All this brings us to our friend in Liberia, Monica. When Monica graduated with honors from college, she had yet to take a single computer class. Many universities in developing countries like Liberia have great academic programs, but lack the resources needed to integrate their curriculum with computer skills. In a modernizing economy, Monica looked to us for help acquiring these valuable skills.

Unemployment is one of the major problems faced in developing countries. International businesses and nonprofit organizations serving in developing countries, like Liberia and elsewhere, often hire expatriates in the wake of massive local unemployment. Why?

Though the people living in developing areas have valuable knowledge and insight into their areas, they often lack skills that employers need.

Computer training is one of these skills. Not only are these skills a basic requirement for most jobs, but having this training makes a candidate more valuable to potential employers and allows access to higher paying jobs. Sustainable Liberia bridges the computer literacy gap by providing basic computer training for hard-to-employ job seekers for a minimum fee. Courses offered include MS Windows, MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint.

Monica enrolled at Sustainable Witness' Vocational Training School at the Coal Pot Queens Compound to enhance her education and skills. Monica now is using those skills to give back, as she currently serves as an administrator for Sustainable Witness. Telling her story, Monica comments that she is immensely grateful for the skills acquired at Coal Pot Queens. *"I can now compete with my professional peers,"* she says. Besides her administrative responsibilities, Monica is a graduate student and currently helps to teach classes at the school.





Want to Gain 2020 Sight on Ministry in Liberia?

We invite you to experience what we are calling “Gaining 2020 Sight – A Sustainable Liberia”. When this mission is accomplished, we believe transformation will occur both in the lives of the mission team on the ground serving and the lives of those we serve in rural Liberia. There is a need for a few more volunteers on the next short-term mission team trip, planned for early 2020 (likely January or February). Sustainable Liberia leverages volunteers in all aspects of our operations, both in Liberia and stateside. Some skills needed for this trip include (but are not limited to):

- Share Bible stories and songs with children in the villages.
- Lead Bible studies with the women and men to build relationships and understanding.
- Facilitate workshops/seminars that teach rural teachers how to teach.
- Review health and hygiene with students in the village.
- Conduct MS Office Training of Trainers (TOT) workshop for teachers at Computer Literacy Program.
- Organize and manage the distribution of used laptops, elementary school books, uniforms, school supplies, and personal care packages for students and families in rural and low-income communities.
- Edit and compile recipe resources produced by students at Coal Pot Queens Training Restaurant.
- Teach cocoa farmers and cocoa processing staff about farm maintenance and quality control for processing cocoa.

Join us by praying additional team members will want to bring their gifts of service and seek to see the ministry firsthand. Would you or your group be interested in visiting Liberia to “Gain 2020 Sight”? If so, please fill out an Inquiry Form at: sustainableliberia.org/make-an-impact. We’ll contact you as soon as possible.



Join current members of the 2020 mission team (from left): Gwen Cottrell, First Baptist Decatur; Michelle Shevlin, Peachtree Presbyterian; Jessy Togba-Doya, SL Executive Director; and Linda Flagler, Dunwoody Baptist. Not pictured: Ellen Low, First Baptist Decatur; and Allen Taliaferro, Pastoral Care & Senior Adult Pastor, Dunwoody Baptist.



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