

 **The Bon Timoun Organization**

22 december, 2020

Dear friends of the children of Haiti and the Bon Timoun organization,

Much has happened and a lot has been achieved in the past year in the three schools we support in the capital city of Haiti. The 2019/2020 academic year wasn’t an easy year for anyone. Haiti was no exception although fortunately, thanks to quick preventative measures and a national lockdown, there were few COVID-19 infections. However the “normal” living conditions of the country, in which dire poverty pervades, were exacerbated by several events.

One such event was the protests against the government. The protests created widespread unrest and compromised public safety which caused repeated shutdowns of the country and school closures that lasted several months. Also, an unfathomable economic policy caused the American dollar to artificially decline. This led to nationwide price hikes, the consequences being disastrous since nearly everything including basic commodities is imported. Salary costs also doubled as a result of the dollar decline, putting a well-deserved salary raise further out of reach for our teachers. All of this combined with the storm, Laura, that destroyed the school building in Galette Greffin, created enormous challenges in Haiti for the students, teachers and directors, and for us as supporters, volunteers and financiers.

But, in the words of Albert Einstein: “In the heart of every challenge lies a chance!”

We are enormously grateful for all of the support and a number of large donations that made the following progress possible:

* In the summer of 2019, the Ecole Mixte de la Nouvelle Jérusalem (EMNJ) **school** in Torcelle was **built on private land**, with 7 classrooms for preschoolers and elementary schoolers (grades 5 and 6 are housed together as is standard in Haiti), a room for the director, housing for two families to guard and maintain the school grounds, a storage room, an open kitchen and dry toilettes. The school has 285 children.
* A small house was built at the EMNJ school in Galette Greffin for one of the teachers who functions also as the superintendent. Two new nursery school classrooms were also built in February 2020. At the end of July 2020, a storm destroyed the building of the primary school (which in 2018 local residents used recycled materials to build). And now: there are **two completely new buildings with a total of 6 classrooms**. The school has 195 students.
* The ABC for Life school remained open against all odds. This school is located in a small rented building. Every other Saturday, children from the neighborhood join the ABC school students at the Human Values ​​Club for a story, activities, crafts, games and a snack. The school now has 60 students.
* Since January 2020, **water has been provided three times a week** to 50 families. They each receive 125 liters of water. This means that 150 families now receive clean water for drinking, cooking and washing. The only other water source for miles around is a polluted river.
* **Food packages were distributed** to all families of the children of the EMNJ school in Galette, 22 families from ABC, and families from the EMNJ in Torcelle as well. In total, 172 food packages were distributed with 2 weeks worth of food for a family of 5.
* A piece of land adjacent to the school in Torcelle was purchased to create a vegetable garden. The garden functions not only as a food source but also to educate the children about nature, gardening and environmental awareness.
* Several online sessions were held in July and August 2020 as a follow-up to the annual **Sathya Sai Education in Human Values** training courses. While the teachers from the EMNJ and ABC got together and also gave presentations themselves, Katinka listened online, asked questions and gave feedback. Katinka also presented various training modules.
* **Hygiene** practices in the schools were enhanced by the purchase of electronic thermometers to test everyone entering the school and soap together with buckets of water with taps for hand washing. In addition, we received a donation of 200 facemasks for the older students.
* Since the start of this new school year in November 2020, for the first time, we were able to ensure that all children have **school books**. Usually the parents have to buy these themselves, but many are unable to. We are therefore very grateful for the generous monetary donations and for a donation of school books in Haiti. This has had a huge impact, not only for the children who are now better able to follow the lessons and do homework, but also for the teachers who no longer need to copy the lessons on the board for those children who do not have books. As a result we expect an improvement in the students’ performance.
* A variety of **school supplies** were purchased and distributed to needy children.
* **Special meals** for all children and a number of parents were provided for Christmas, and included presents for the little ones.

The work continues steadily. There are still a number of activities we would like to begin: installing concrete floors in the classrooms (currently they have dirt floors); setting up a library; improving the director's room in EMNJ Galette; furnishing the classrooms in Galette (a storage cupboard for the books, notebooks and extra school desks); fencing off the site in Galette for security; and developing the vegetable garden in EMNJ Torcelle.

In the meantime, the salaries of our now 25 employees will of course also continue. We were forced to slightly lower rather than increase the already low salaries, while our costs have nevertheless increased considerably due to the lower exchange rate of the dollar. To our great regret, for financial reasons we have had to cut back considerably at ABC, which has a relatively small number of students: we had to let go of 4 teachers and combine classes. The kindergarten teacher did not want to leave her children and remains present daily as a volunteer. Of course, we would also like to offer her a salary.

The commitment of the directors and teachers to their students is extraordinary! We are happy to be able to continue to make this possible. The schools and this organization have been, even amidst the Corona crisis, still incredibly lucky. We have a foundation to fall back on-- in Haiti this is a matter of perseverance and also of surrender, because nothing is certain. It is truly a pleasure to work with these dedicated people to give these hundreds of children a chance to thrive.

A big thank you to everyone from the Bon Timoun organization,

Lalita de Goederen and Katinka van Lamsweerde



