

Compact

Newsletter for friends and supporters

Edition December 2020

Dear friends!

An Albanian, diminutive in stature yet powerful in love and deed, Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, observed, *"It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you ... yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand."* She is also known as Mother Teresa.

2020 gave NG opportunities to love in both word and in deed. From earthquakes to a pandemic and other challenges in between, NG offers a hand of generosity and increased self-sufficiency to others who are truly our brothers and sisters.

We celebrate a gift given two millennia ago. We celebrate you, our friends, family and coworkers, who enable us to offer a hand. We recognize, *"I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things"* - Mother Teresa.

Enjoy reading!

Your Compact team



Sweet Dreams And Good Education For Orphans in Tanzania

A first project with BMZ public funding takes shape

A cry for help

When Alexandros Charalimpides, director of the orphan project T.O.M. (Tanzania Orphan Mission) told us of his plight in 2018, we were at a loss: the project had mobilized its donors in 2017 and collected enough money to build its own elementary school on the T.O.M. compound in rural Tanzania. Now the smaller children no longer have to walk 1.5 km to the nearest public school where there are 100 pupils per teacher and where, still common in Tanzania, corporal punishment is applied. The new, T.O.M.-run school improves the situation of the children and raises their educational level, which until then had been below average.



Training in agriculture and horticulture - the children love it!

After completion, however, unexpected difficulties arose. According to Tanzanian law, the status of the organization changed from an orphanage to a boarding school. Unlike orphanages, Tanzanian regulations for boarding schools require that dormitories for girls and boys must be at least 100 meters apart. The dormitories at T.O.M. were only 15 meters apart. A new sleeping and sanitary building for the 28 boys was needed, otherwise the school's teaching permit would be revoked. But T.O.M. could not raise the costs of more than 36.000€, their donors had just financed the whole new school building. Even NG as a partner organization of T.O.M. could not provide such a large sum.

The solution

After weighing different possibilities, NG decided to apply for public funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In intensive cooperation with T.O.M. NG prepared the detailed project application. After some time of waiting and worrying, we received the grant approval in August 2019: the BMZ would cover 27.000 € of the construction costs! NG assured a support of 7.000 €, so that T.O.M. only had to generate 2.000 € from donations.

The construction of the new sleeping and sanitary building lasted from October 2019 to February 2020. It was built in the immediate vicinity of the elementary school, but - as requested - more than 350 feet away from the girls' sleeping rooms. Alexandros Charalimpides supervised the construction work. During the rainy season, rainfall delayed the work a little - nevertheless everything went smoothly. In March 2020, when the new bunk beds, wardrobes, shelves, mattresses, blankets, pillows and towels were also purchased, the boys moved into their new home.

The building is divided into two large dormitories and a central room where the children's caregivers live permanently. The electric light is better here and the showers and restrooms are right next door.

The primary pupils have their school right nearby. They are happy not to have to walk the long way to public school anymore - and their school performance has improved noticeably! The language of instruction in the T.O.M. elementary school is English (not Swahili as in the public school) and a good knowledge of English opens the way to further education.

Agricultural training

The funding application from NG and T.O.M. to the German BMZ contained something else besides the buildings: an agricultural training course, conducted by a trained agricultural scientist, who taught the children the most important aspects of sustainable agriculture, horticulture and species-appropriate livestock farming in a child-friendly manner. First there were a few hours of theory, covering sowing, crop rotation, correct fertilization and irrigation. Afterwards the children could literally try their hand in the field. Naturally, the garden and fields will be further cultivated after the training and the children could already bring in a rich harvest: corn, potatoes, green beans and carrots are used for the preparation of meals in the T.O.M. kitchen. Knowledge in the efficient and sustainable cultivation of food and the handling of animals will enable the children a more independent existence later on, because in Tanzania many people live - at least partly - from their self-cultivated food.

Conclusion

We are happy and grateful that the first public funding project applied for by NG was so successful.



In February 2020 the new dormitory on the TOM site was almost finished.



A classroom at T.O.M.

Admittedly, it was quite a bit of work and especially T.O.M.'s founder and director Alex had to shoulder a considerable amount of extra work - in addition to his daily tasks. After all, public funding always means complete documentation and communication as well as accounting that is based on German standards. Getting receipts and invoices for the purchase of things like blankets or towels in rural Tanzania turned out to be one of the biggest challenges.

But the effort was worth it - the Tanzanian education authority has now granted the unlimited license to operate the T.O.M. elementary school. The boys love their new home and the girls are also happy about more space, because they could now also take possession of the former boys' domicile. There is now also capacity to take in more orphans. Since the completion of the new dormitory, five more children have already found a new home at T.O.M.

TANZANIA

Despite political stability and positive economic developments in recent years, Tanzania is still one of the poorest countries in the world (source: BMZ). Poverty endangers the development of children, especially orphans, and reduces their chances in life. They have limited access to clean drinking water, food, education or medical care. Other threats include violence and (sexual) abuse.

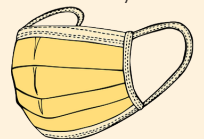
The NGO T.O.M. offers a home for orphans from Mbeya District, where they receive protection, comprehensive care and affection and have access to education and individual support.



What's in an aid parcel?

In the COVID-19-crisis help for the needy is more important than ever. NG is distributing more and more aid packages in Albania (worth about 25 €).

NG has always included a mix of staple goods such as cooking oil, pasta, flour, sugar, and coffee. Household cleaning supplies such as soap are also always included.



Now, we are including reusable face masks for all family members. Face masks reduce transmission of COVID-19, and as of October, they are legally required in Albania in all public places, otherwise incurring a fine of 3000 Lek (approximately 25 €). Families we help survive on incomes of as low as 60 €/month - such a fine would be ruinous for them.



Vjollca with two of her children



Sonja and Leonis with their sister, Kamela

From Struggling to Drowning

Albania's most vulnerable suffer most from the Corona Crisis

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Albania in March, 2020, the family of Vjollca Hoxhallari had achieved a precarious balance. Vjollca earned some money by cleaning houses, and her husband, paralyzed in 2018, brought in a modest stipend from the government. They were able to keep food on the table for their three children—until COVID-19 hit. The national lockdown shut down Vjollca's ability to earn money, and then in April 2020, Vjollca's husband died. The situation of this newly widowed mother quickly became desperate. As her husband had been a regular patient at NG's Buçimas clinic, in the lockdown she appealed to NG to receive aid parcels of food and cleaning supplies. This is the sole source of assistance available to them.

Sadly, Vjollca's situation is far from unique. Informal arrangements providing livelihoods for many have been upended. Few people now hire others to clean their homes. To save money and avoid potential exposure to the virus, people do their own cleaning. They cut their own firewood rather than hiring somebody else to do it. As a result, people who survive by taking on incidental tasks are left without any source of income. As in Vjollca's case, loss of that meager income immediately creates a crisis.

Seasonal agricultural work on the fruit harvest in Greece has long been a vital source of cash income for thousands of Albanian households, especially in the villages. This work pays far better than similar work in Albania and provides cash to get through the winter

months. Migrant work in Greece was severely disrupted this year. In the spring, COVID-19 lockdowns closed borders between Albania and Greece. Continued restrictions and new requirements have cut off this option for many—leaving families without a cash reserve going into the winter.

Albanian government unemployment benefits are only available to workers who have paid into social security, and whose employers have registered their work. Migrant workers and people in informal, day-to-day work arrangements are typically outside of this provision. Families and the arrangements they make for self-sufficiency remain the most important safety net. In summertime, many Albanians grow an impressive array of fruits and vegetables—food to sustain them well into winter. This food supply dwindles as the cold winter months set in.

The situation is even more dire among society's most vulnerable, such as the Roma community. Government social assistance programs offer a minimal subsidy—not enough for a family to live on—and eligibility criteria disqualify many people in need. Pensions for the elderly are also limited, leaving many seniors living in poverty.

Sonja, age 7, and Leonis, age 10, are students at NG's Amaro Tan School. Their parents are divorced, and their mother lives in Tirana. When COVID-19 started, they were supported by their father, a Roma community activist, and their grandmother, who makes a little



Sabirka and Edlira Sinanllari at the Amaro Tan soup kitchen



Thomai, Aleksandri and their family are happy about much needed food packages.

money selling old clothes on the street. The COVID-19 lockdown ended her work. The children's father died recently, leaving the children with no means of support. The family was already receiving aid from Amaro Tan. In this new crisis, the school is looking for other ways to love and support the children and provide material aid to the bereft household.

Sabirka and Edlira Sinanllari are Roma sisters in their fifties who live in a defunct military building outside Pogradec, in apartments with no electricity. As children, their parents pulled them out of school before they could learn how to read. Now, the only income available to them comes from begging. Edlira and Sabirka have been coming to the Amaro Tan soup kitchen for three years. During lockdown, Amaro Tan staff brought aid parcels and firewood to their home, and now are happy to see them again at the soup kitchen. The sisters agree that Amaro Tan is the only institution that has really helped and continues to help them.

In Gjirokaštër, **Thomai and Aleksandri** (age 10 and 7) are participants in the Roma school program. They receive material aid, equipping them for school and daily after-school meals, activities, and homework help. Pre-COVID, the family's only income came from the boys' mother collecting recyclables on the streets. When the lockdown started, that tiny income stream dried up. Aid deliveries from the NG Gjirokaštër team allowed the household to keep some food on the table.

In the present moment, society's most vulnerable have gone from struggling to drowning. People who had built day to day self-sufficiency are now struggling, and even those who were comfortable are now less secure. People whose lives teetered in a precarious balancing act now find themselves in crisis. Nehemiah Gateway's mis-

sion is to help and empower people to shape and determine their lives in dignity and independence. Today, dignity starts with having enough to eat. In the face of growing demand, our team at NG Albania is doing all it can to help people get through the COVID-19 crisis.

From the very beginning, humanitarian aid has been an important component of NG's Albanian work. When the Geiger family came to Albania in 1991, it was a time of profound social disruption and disarray. In 2020, the effects of coronavirus, and of trying to limit the spread of this deadly virus, are just as disruptive. Then, as now, helping people started with making sure their most basic needs were met. Our teams in Buçimas, Pogradec, and Gjirokaštër engage deeply in the lives of the people we help. Our aid delivery program brings essential supplies to people in need, and it also gives staff an opportunity to offer comfort and to help provide solutions to other challenges a household may be facing.

With an expected winter surge in cases, and new restrictions on the horizon, the need has never been greater. A Christmas donation to Nehemiah Gateway humanitarian aid work will expand and strengthen the support we provide to the people who need it most. You can give here:

Nehemiah Gateway Services gGmbH
IBAN: DE52 7605 0101 0011 7777 11
BIC: SSKNDE77

... or online

www.nehemiah-gateway.org/en



Cloth bags can be used for more than just transporting food.



The Evangelical Free Church in Berlin/Tempelhof

Reducing Plastic Waste

Cloth bags replace single-use plastic bags

Nehemiah Gateway Albania is reducing its trash footprint, with help from a generous US donor. Erik Stensland made a gift earlier this year to help NG start transitioning away from single-use plastic bags in its aid distributions. Erik lives in Estes Park, Colorado, and is a successful photographer, gallery owner, and author. He spent 12 years in Bulgaria, Albania, and Kosovo, and has known the Geiger family, and Doug and Michelle Mann, since that time.

Plastic waste is a big problem in Albania. Even in cities, adequate waste disposal facilities are limited and recycling is rare. Single-use plastic bags are particularly pervasive. This ultimately leads to landscapes and waterways clogged with debris.

With his deep love of wild places, Stensland is happy to help NG Albania stop contributing to this widespread problem. "Albania is a place that quickly works its way into your heart. Though I'm now far away, I'm grateful to have an opportunity to stay connected to this amazing place and people through the work of NG. Helping with projects that protect the environment of this gorgeous area is especially satisfying," he said. The sewing shop at Amaro Tan is making the bags, and students at Nehemia School are developing a colorful design for future batches. The first set of bags were used in the delivery of aid to the mountain villages this fall. The villagers are thrifty and have very little; a cloth sack offers a multitude of uses beyond that first load of aid from NG. The bags can even be used to strain the liquids from homemade cheeses! We are excited to launch this new initiative, and excited to see it expand among the people we help.

Just at The Right Time

A church in Berlin sends help for Amaro Tan

For many years, a Baptist Church in Berlin-Tempelhof (EFG) has supported the work of NG. One of their members, who got to know the projects in Albania in 2009 and taught at NG University as a lecturer, established the contact. Since then, the EFG has taken over the costs for the Christmas food packages for the Amaro Tan families every year, financed school materials, winter shoes, a new washing machine and much more.

Now, in these difficult times, when the Corona pandemic requires additional expenses and tears big holes in the Amaro Tan budget, an extraordinary donation of 3.200 € from EFG reached us - the timing couldn't have been better! We were able to distribute additional food to the families of the pupils and clients of the soup kitchen in October. Additional costs for hygiene articles, disinfection of the premises and the production of face masks for the Amaro Tan community in the school's own sewing workshop are covered. Especially now, when many have lost their jobs or can only work irregularly, a winter emergency budget of 1.000 € for Amaro Tan has also been set up with the help of the EFG donation. This budget will enable principal Marin Piqoni and his team to provide quick and uncomplicated help when firewood, medicine or food become scarce. Marin speaks for all of us when he says:

"Sincere thanks for your generous donation for the less privileged in such a difficult time. Your contribution allows us to continue to create a good learning environment and social activities to reach the children and their families. Our community needs us now more than ever. Thank you for your generous contribution."



Egli actively participates in class.

In Search of Excellence

A scholarship opens new doors for Egli

Egli Xhemollari, of Pogradec, is the 2020-2021 winner of the Dr. Jorgji Jajçari Academic Excellence Scholarship. This is the second year of the scholarship, which was created and fully funded by Nehemia School alumni Lori Cobani and Lazaron (Lazi) Gushe, cousins from Pogradec now living in the US. This year, Lazaron and Lori opened the competition to students from other schools in the Pogradec area, attracting a wider pool of deserving applicants.

Egli comes from Koli Gushe school and is entering 10th grade. In a recent conversation with Nehemia School Director Elona Rira, he said that he knew Nehemia School by reputation, and had long wanted to attend school there. When a family friend saw the scholarship announcement, Egli enthusiastically applied. Two months into the school year, Egli says his experiences have exceeded his expectations. He likes all his classes, with math teacher Fabjola Hasanllari, his grade's head teacher, as a particular standout. And for the future? *"I aspire to grow both academically and personally every day, not only to make my family proud but also to leave a mark in this world."*

Alumni Lazaron Gushe and Lori Cobani are already making a mark on the world by helping people like Egli and last year's winner, Jona Pano, attain their dreams. Nehemia School alumni are a young bunch.

At 30, Lazi comes from Nehemia's very first crop of graduates. He lives in New York and manages multi-million-dollar construction projects for a private corporation.



Egli - latest winner of the Dr. Jorgji Jajçari Academic Excellence Scholarship

Lori is 27, a PhD student at Temple University in Philadelphia. In addition to his studies, he works in a chemistry lab at Temple, and officiates soccer games on weekends. *"It's great exercise,"* he points out, *"I run like 15 miles a day when I'm working as a referee."*

Their commitment to giving back to Nehemia School is particularly inspiring given that they are practicing generosity so early in their careers, working with finite resources.

School Director Elona Rira puts it thus: *"The real quality of a school is reflected in the actions of students who have completed their education there and have no current obligations to the place. That our two excellent former students, Lazi and Lori, have chosen to bring back to school the values and principles with which they were educated, is a beautiful thing. And we are delighted that they have chosen to give other young people the opportunities they themselves experienced. Sooner or later, every good thing comes back in one form or another."*

A hearty congratulations and welcome to Egli! We look forward to seeing what you do with this opportunity.

You can learn more about the Dr. Jorgji Jajçari Academic Excellence Scholarship at <http://lyhndafund.com/>

AT A GLANCE



VOLUNTEERING IN CORONA TIMES

Chiropractor Eberhard Brachtel is helping people who are living with pain. Travel restrictions, lockdown and danger of infection did not keep him from making the long journey from Germany to Albania for the second time this year! For many years he has been coming to Albania as a volunteer. In addition to helping countless patients, free of charge, he provides training to the physiotherapy team at the clinic, and consults with staff year-round. Thank you, Dr. Eberhard!

25 YEARS WITH NEHEMIAH GATEWAY ALBANIA

Congratulations to Manjola Kamolli who started to work with NG in November 1995. In 25 years of dedicated work she became an integral part of NG in Albania.

Founder and Managing Director Arnold Geiger writes:
"It is great to have people with such a dedication, identification and endurance! Congratulations to Manjola, and to NG for having such people!"

To all our friends we wish
a peaceful Christmas season
and a blessed New Year!



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DISTRIBUTE AID

17th October is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty - an opportunity for the Nehemia School to raise the awareness of the pupils and their families for the social problems in their society and at the same time to help people in need. As every year, students from Nehemia High School helped gather food staples and other necessities and accompanied our SMI teams distributing aid parcels to poor families - this time of course with masks and keeping plenty of distance.

Nehemiah Gateway Services
gemeinnützige GmbH
Kontumazgarten 3
90429 Nürnberg



T +49 911 60009960
F +49 911 60009969
office@ng.team
www.ng.team

IBAN: DE52 7605 0101 0011 7777 11
BIC: SSKNDE77XXX