

"Nouvelle Planète"

A Swiss foundation for development cooperation

"When I founded the international development organisation 'Nouvelle Planète' 34 years ago, I never thought it would reach such a scale," explains Willy Randin. "Nouvelle Planète" is really a different kind of development cooperation. In the 1970s, Willy Randin began his deeply human international involvement. He led Red Cross medical teams to war-torn countries like Yemen and Vietnam. In the 1980s, he served as director of the Albert Schweitzer Hospital in Lambarene, Gabon. — Today, his son Philippe Randin directs the fortunes of this impressive relief organisation, which was founded in 1986.

In an interview with "Swiss Standpoint", Willy Randin describes today's activities: "'Nouvelle Planète' supports efficient and sustainable small-scale projects of initiative local groups in several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In this form of aid, careful and sensitive attention is paid to ensuring that this corresponds to the real needs and wishes of the respective population: support on a personal level on an equal footing. The projects mainly involve support for children and young people, the advance-

ment of women, environmental protection and rural development, and assistance for the disabled and sick. They are always geared to the basic needs of the disadvantaged population in poor regions and are usually suggested by local partners. The local population participates in the implementation of the projects with their own resources, whether in the form of funding, materials and/or labour. Our aim is that the projects become independent as soon as possible and that we can withdraw after one or a maximum of three years. In all our activities the spirit remains the same — the implementation of Albert Schweitzer's motto: 'I am life that wills to live, in the midst of life that wills to live. I must therefore respect all forms of life.'

For further information: www.nouvelle-planète.ch



Let us beware of corona opportunism

by Roman Twerenbold and Xavier Mühlethaler, project manager "Nouvelle Planète"

The year 2020 is already engraved in the collective consciousness. The corona crisis has left deep scars and its effects have prompted various aid organisations to reorganise or focus their activities on the fight against the corona virus and to organise major fundraising campaigns. At "Nouvelle Planète", we resisted this temptation and decided to remain true to our guiding principles. Our aid projects are already aimed at making the populations of the countries in which we operate more crises-proof.

No to "covidisation"

There is a risk of "covidisation", where everything else is subordinated to the fight against the virus, including daily and systemic problems, which are potentially more destructive than the Covid-19-

virus. In the often informal subsistence economies, the concerns of the populations are of a very different nature from ours. It is therefore impossible to impose a lockdown like in Europe. A good healthcare, however, is also of paramount importance. In Guinea, for example, we are making a contribution in this direction with a project to build a health point.

Naturally, we have intensified hygiene measures in our countries of operation and complied with national restrictions. In Benin, Senegal and Guinea for example, we have been providing training in hygiene and hand washing and distributing masks to project beneficiaries since the beginning of the pandemic. Resisting the bandwagon effect does not mean denying the reality of Covid-19, but it seems important to us to maintain a critical distance.

Uncertainty remains

2021 will be a year of uncertainty. The vulnerable groups we support are particularly susceptible to the economic impact of the corona crisis.



Beaming pupils before curfew. (Picture "Nouvelle Planète")

They are directly affected by fluctuations in commodity prices. Malnutrition rates in Senegal are alarming, as farmers have not been able to sell all their crops: a disaster in a subsistence economy, especially as the state does not have the financial means to support the population. Our projects, which generate income and increase food security, are particularly useful in this context. Incidentally, thanks to appropriate organisation, our coordination team was able to implement the projects almost normally, thus helping to mitigate the economic impact.

Long-term development remains our main concern. Our projects address structural problems that have worsened as a result of the crisis. We remain coherent and true to our principles — today more than ever.

Fighting for equal opportunities

India/Covid-19 – The state-imposed curfew to curb the corona virus is having a serious impact in the large forest area of Chhattisgarh

by Xavier Mühlethaler, project manager "Nouvelle Planète"

Since 1976, the community of Hemalkasa has been taking in children from the Madia Gonds ethnic group. The ethnic minority of the Gonds groups is still considered to be second class citizens and still suffer from numerous forms of discrimination. From 1996 to 2015, "Nouvelle Planète" has supported the development of the Hemalkasa community.

From one day to the next

Some 650 pupils from more than 100 villages are taught in the bilingual school in Hemalkasa – a bridge between the two cultures. The majority of the children live in a boarding school nearby, as it is not possible for them to travel home every day. They are taught and looked after by thirty teachers and twenty school staff with respect and empathy.

On 15 March this year, the state imposed a strict curfew to curb the Corona epidemic. The school closed from one day to the next and the children returned to their villages. What had been planned for a fortnight turned into more than two months, although no infection with the virus was detected in this region. So the children exchanged their school desk for work in the fields.

The government has also decided on the continuation of the school year due to the possibility

of digital teaching. However – the pupils of Hemalkasa live in remote hamlets without electricity, mobile communications and computers. The highly praised solution was completely detached from the real context.

Catching up

Often the pupils in Hemalkasa are the first of their families to receive an education. The village population itself has no resources to support the children in continuing their education. The hard-earned skills are quickly lost during longer breaks. Saniksha Godse, the headmistress of the school explains: "The longer the interruption of lessons, the more serious the loss." The curfew is followed by a few weeks of school holidays, which results in a three month interruption of school. Teachers use this time to adapt their lessons to the difficult conditions in order to try to make up for lost hours when they reopen. What a challenge!

This situation makes us aware that crises such as the Corona epidemic hit first and foremost those who are already vulnerable, and thus increases social inequality. The disadvantaged do not have the same opportunities as the middle class in Mumbai or elsewhere to respond to the collateral damage. We must not forget them!