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Registered Charity
No: 1139530

Fanø (Faneo) Asked Questions

Questions from the students of Nordby Skole, a school on a small island called Fanø (Faneo), in Denmark.

What do you do?

We are a Sierra Leonean NGO working with our sister registered charity in the UK. We are aiming to start up an Education programme to help in the present Ebola crisis and after Ebola has finished to make education available for all children. It will be especially helpful for many girls who often are expected to work on the farms and in the house rather than go to school.

Why do you do it?

Our children have lost nearly one whole year of schooling due to Ebola. We want to address this problem and also to extend education provision to make it available and free for all Sierra Leonean children.

How does it help?

It will enhance the education provision in Sierra Leone. Currently only children who can afford to pay can go to school. Secondary schools all have fees that are beyond the means of many. Even though state primary schools are supposed to be free the children have to pay for school uniform (compulsory), books, pencils and pens and exam fees. This puts education out of the reach of many children who have to go out and work, selling goods or chopping wood instead.

This programme will enable all children to access the excellent emergency radio school at a time of their own convenience. It will be just as relevant after Ebola is finished for making education provision where previously none existed, for example our own village currently has no school and around 25% do not attend school at all.

How do they react when you help them, are they grateful?

The children will be very grateful. Education is seen as a big benefit here and children respect it and try hard to go to school. For many this remains just a dream and this will allow those children to take up the opportunity to learn.

Which problems do you guys face when you work?

Trying to raise the money to make things possible is our biggest challenge. Ebola has destroyed all of our incomes and livelihoods so it is not easy for us to achieve what we want. We all give our time and efforts for free to try and make this happen because we have the vision to see how it will help the children of this country but we do not have funds to buy the MP3 players for example. We have some people who are willing to help us and we have to bring all of that together.

Why do you think that the poorest countries are still poor, when Europe gives so much money?

This is actually a complex question because there are many reasons.

The reason that people from the West like to hear is that the money is taken by corrupt politicians and officials. To some extent this does happen and corruption plays its part but that is not the whole picture.

The West also does not play straight when talking about aid they give. Sometimes, like in the present Ebola crisis, countries say they pledge money and it looks like enormous sums but often this is not paid in actual fact.

On other occasions they do not give money but say they are sending “experts”. As I am writing this I am sat in The Raddison Blu Hotel which charges \$250 a night. It is full of these “experts” all here for Ebola. Their fees and expenses will be counted as aid to Sierra Leone but most of them will not leave the hotel.

Just for the record the reason I am here is because we have not had any electricity for three days and my laptop and phone are out of power and I needed to answer your questions. I can get power and internet here if I nurse one cup of coffee cheaper than in the internet café. That is how we manage our lives.

Many Western companies continue to economically rape African countries by negotiating deals for example on mining concessions, which do not give adequate payment for the concession. This last point is also linked to corrupt officials and ministers agreeing these deals so the matter is not straightforward. Who are the worst offenders, those offering the money knowing it is wrong or those taking it? In my book they are equally guilty of leaving a mineral rich country bereft of its rightful income.

Democracy, do you think it would change Africa?

There are already many countries in Africa that have a functioning democracy including Sierra Leone. There was a deal of international scrutiny over our last two elections and they were both declared free and fair.

Voting could only take place if a person had a valid biometric ID card, as sophisticated as any in Europe.

In fact when we look at elections in North America and places like the UK we see that standards are often not so high there, for example there is no need for a biometric voting card that can only be used once.

Remember Africa is the single largest continent and not all countries act in the same way. For information see <http://www.ask.com/geography/many-countries-africa-6d064c6831667ac9> and <http://www.infoplease.com/askeds/countries-africa.html>

Some are more democratic than others but do not judge all by the same mark.

Us from Denmark invested 15 billion kr. Last year in Africa, do you think money is the answer?

Money alone is not the answer, see above but if the West had responded earlier with things like ambulances, doctors and nurses instead of holding back and pledging money last May / June at the start of the Ebola outbreak it could have been contained and would have cost far less for the West and saved many lives here.

If not, what could we do to help?

Helping is by understanding the issues and the causes of the problems. This comes by enquiry so you have already started.

Africa is by far the largest continent with so many diverse countries, cultures and differences. It is good to remember that and find out about specific conditions in different countries.

Is Ebola a big problem? Are you scared of it when you go outside?

Ebola has been a massive problem here resulting in over 3,000 deaths and leaving thousands of orphans. Whether we are scared or not we still have to carry on with our daily lives. Sierra Leoneans tend to be very resilient and even though Ebola has taken many lives, left whole villages decimated and literally destroyed many businesses we all are still “trying” as we say here.

Thank you for your interest in Sierra Leone.