

14 December 2020

Dear friends and supporters of Bebor Model Nursery/Primary School,

I hope you are all doing well and staying safe and staying healthy. Please join me for a moment in celebrating our 20th anniversary of working with the Bebor Model Nursery/Primary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

We don't exactly have a specific 20th anniversary date to celebrate. I typically use October 21, 2000 which is the day I was lucky enough to marry Tijen Demirel-Pegg. That date makes sense because this project started with us asking friends and family to donate to the schools instead of getting us wedding gifts. We could potentially use April 2000 which is the first time I travelled to Nigeria and when Patrick Naagbantou first took me to his home village of Bodo to meet his mom, uncles and other relatives and first introduced me to Reverend Moses Nyimale Lezor, Bebor's school director. We could also potentially use whenever we first asked people to donate in the summer or fall of 2000 instead of getting us wedding gifts or whenever we received the first donation for Bebor. Whatever the case, 2000 – 2020 is 20 years and I think it's a worthwhile time to reflect on what we've done.

While I don't think it's the best measure of success or impact, one of the easiest evaluation metrics to report is that we have now provided the schools we support in Rivers State, Nigeria with US\$253,455 of funding in 44 separate funding rounds (the first in January 2001, the most recent in November 2020). We have thus averaged providing the schools with US\$12,672.75 of funding on an annual basis over the past 20 years.

We have expanded from supporting one school in 2000 to supporting six schools in 2020. We started supporting Bebor's original school in Bodo, Rivers State, Nigeria in 2000. In 2003, we expanded to support a second school in Bane. In 2012, our school director in Bane, Leelee Wiwa Tanen, started another school in Bori which we have supported since then. In 2015, we expanded our support to St. Patrick's Nursery and Primary School which is also located in Bodo. This became the first of three Catholic school partnerships we have now formed. In 2018, we expanded to Our Lady's Nursery and Primary School in K-Dere and in 2019 we expanded to St. Bernard's Nursery and Primary School in Biara. Four of our schools (Bodo, St. Patrick's, Our Lady's, and St. Bernard's) are either in Bodo or about 5-10 minutes' drive from it in neighboring rural villages. Bane is about 30 minutes' drive from Bodo and Bori is in between Bane and Bodo but closer to Bane.

Thematically, we have focused on five main areas in our first 20 years. We started with **constructing nursery and primary school buildings** to get the kids out of churches or private homes and into proper classroom buildings. Among other things, we have built four classroom buildings from the ground up (2 in Bane, 2 in Bodo), finished another four partially constructed buildings (1 in Bodo, 2 in Bori, 1 at St. Bernard's), roofed or re-roofed 7 classroom buildings with rust-proof aluminum zinc roofs that should not need to be replaced in the foreseeable future (3 in Bodo, 2 in Bane, 2 in Bori) and we have constructed security walls or perimeters around two of our school complexes (Bane, Bodo) and started work on a third (Bori). Except for maintenance work, potential improvements like solar panels or lights and Our Lady's Nursery

and Primary School (which is currently operating in rented facilities and which we are trying to secure permanent facilities for), we are mostly done with this phase of our work.

Second, we have been **providing scholarships for our poorest and most marginalized students** since 2002. We allow our school directors a fair amount of discretion in terms of how they reward these scholarships so some kids just receive tuition fee scholarships while others in greater or more extreme need might also receive school uniforms or books and supplies as well. Our partners at [Safe Child Africa](#) have also provided many scholarships over the years and we are happy to acknowledge their fantastic support.

Third, starting around 2009, we began **providing boreholes for improved drinking water and boys, girls, and teachers' toilets for improved sanitation**. Again, with the generous help of our partners at Safe Child Africa, we have provided boreholes and toilets at three schools (Bane, Bodo, Bori) while a fourth school (St. Patrick's) already had its own functioning boreholes and toilets before we started helping them. We hope to provide boreholes and toilets for Our Lady's in K-Dere and to improve, repair or expand boreholes and toilets at St. Bernard's at some point soon.

Fourth, in 2012, we began a pilot **health program** at our school in Bodo. Over the years, it has gradually expanded to cover all six schools that we support. We have provided, equipped and annually re-stocked sickbays at five of the schools we support (all except Our Lady's). We now provide basic immunizations (measles, meningococcal, pneumococcal conjugate, polio, tetanus, typhoid, Vitamin A supplements, yellow fever) annually and deworming treatment with Albendazole bi-annually at all six schools we support. Our health program was regrettably unable to get its visits in last spring before Rivers State shut all schools on March 23, 2020 in response to the COVID 19 pandemic. We have just restarted our health program, with its first visit being on December 10, 2020 to St. Bernard's Nursery and Primary School in Biara. Three other schools have already been visited with two more scheduled for next week.

Finally, in 2017, we started a pilot **nutrition program** at our school in Bodo. It is based on the three locally available and locally familiar ingredients of crayfish, millet, and soybeans. Each 1 kg of "Ogi Soy Plus" contains 0.5 kg of soybeans, 0.3 kg of crayfish and 0.2 kg of millet. It is served in "pap" (porridge-like) formula or in a dry formula that is often mixed into jollof rice. After the COVID 19 shutdown of schools in Rivers State in March 2020, we shifted to a socially distanced nutrition program, continued feeding 50 children in Bodo and added another 150 at St. Bernard's and Our Lady's because of the dramatic increase in food insecurity and child malnutrition following the shutdown. We took some financial risk committing as much funding to the nutrition program as we did in 2020 but we have also generated a tremendous amount of goodwill for stepping up to help the children we serve at a time of unusually great need. The 2020 Nobel Peace Prize award to the UN's World Food Program speaks eloquently to the timeliness of the commitment we made to expanding our nutrition program in 2020 (it is now funded at all three of those schools through March 2021).

After two decades, we have lost some friends and great supporters along the way. I want to take a moment to acknowledge them. On the Nigerian side, we tragically lost Priscilla Lezor to

HIV/AIDS several years ago. Priscilla (forever memorialized in a green and yellow graduation gown on the top of [our school's website](#)) was our headmistress in Bodo and she was a courageous and principled advocate for admitting physically and mentally challenged students to our school. Several disabled or challenged children would never have had an education but for her steadfast advocacy on their behalf. Last year, we tragically lost one of my best and greatest friends in this world, Patrick Naagbantou, when he was run over by a drunk driver while trying to hail a taxi in Port Harcourt. Patrick was a Bodo native, a fearless and courageous human rights activist, and a passionate advocate for the marginalized and oppressed. This project simply never could have been started without his time, assistance, enthusiasm, and expertise. Dr. Nabie Nubari Francis (our health and nutrition program coordinator), Nenibarini Zabbey (the coordinator of the Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development, the human rights group that Patrick founded) and I all feel the weight of Patrick's legacy and have all rededicated and recommitted ourselves to working as hard, smart, and compassionately as we can in moving forward without him. Anything less would be showing tremendous disrespect to his legacy that continues to inform everything we do.

On the international side, we have lost Ed Guthrie, Gerry Neils, Pat Neils, Burt Sapin, Susi Serrins, and Jim Wark. Susi established a wonderful personal bond with Reverend Moses and our school in Bodo in the last year or so of her life. Pat, Gerry, and Jim were all early and generous supporters of this work. Burt only learned about this project toward the end of his life but embraced it with great enthusiasm. I want to express my personal gratitude to the late Colonel Edward Guthrie. Ed was struck by Reverend Moses using an expression his mother often used. He made a \$5,000 contribution to our schools at a time when that accounted for well over 50% of all the funds we had ever raised. His donation was the first time that I really thought "wow, we might actually be able to do this for the long term." I don't know exactly what he saw at such an early date to inspire him to make such a great vote of confidence in this project, but I remain eternally grateful for the foundational contribution he made to our schools and to me personally. If Bebor had a hall of fame, Ed Guthrie would be a unanimous first ballot selection.

We have now been doing this long enough, particularly with our first school in Bodo, that several of our nursery and primary school alumni have now graduated from or are currently enrolled in universities. During my last visit to Nigeria in 2019, I met several of our Bodo alumni who had either recently graduated from university or were close to graduating from university. Perhaps our single greatest success story is Vera Hyacinth Kiele who graduated from law school and was called to the bar in Abuja, Nigeria's capital, a little over one year ago. We now have a picture of Vera in her judicial robe and wig (Nigeria is a former British colony) on the main homepage of [the school's website](#). Not everyone who attends our nursery and primary schools is going to finish university or become a lawyer, but it is gratifying to see and meet so many of our Bodo alumni who have gone on to do quite well for themselves.

We have been tremendously blessed with great, long-term partners. We have now been working with and partnered with [Timmy Global Health](#) for 18 years and counting. We simply do not have anywhere near the level of accomplishments we have without their support. The [Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development](#) has been our core Nigerian partner outside of the

schools themselves for give or take 15 years now. I can't even begin to tell you how proud I am that two of our top five supporters over the entire 20-year history of this project are [Mt. Vernon High School](#) in Fortville, IN and [New Palestine Junior High School](#) (formerly Doe Creek Middle School) in New Palestine, IN. [Aerodynamic Advisory](#) has become our most important corporate partner and a company that never ceases to find new and interesting ways to support the work we do in the rural Niger Delta. My sincere thanks to all those organizations.

Most importantly, we have been blessed by so many tremendous, long-term, generous, and intellectually engaged international supporters. I don't want to name names to respect privacy and to avoid leaving anyone out. You know who you are. Several of you have been with us for 10 or 15 or 20 years. Several of you have travelled to Nigeria to see the schools and meet the kids in person. We would never have been able to expand into health or nutrition without the steady, consistent, and incredibly generous support you have provided. Many of you have also provided valuable advice, guidance, or suggestions whenever I have reached out to you with questions or to make sure what I thought was a good idea really was a good idea. I'm the face of the project and the person who occasionally gets their work on it recognized in some way, but none of it would have been possible without you. It's been an honor working with you the past 20 years and I hope we can work together for another 20 years. All I want to do with this communication to you is just say thank you.

Finally, if you are someone who hasn't contributed or been engaged for several years and would like to re-engage in celebration of our twentieth anniversary, you can do so by going [here](#) and selecting "Nigeria – Bebor" under the "please use my donation" tab.

On behalf of the now more than 1,400+ beautiful children we serve every year in the rural Niger Delta, thanks as always for your past, present and hopefully continued future support of this work. It is greatly appreciated and will, as always, be put to wise and judicious use.

Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

Thanks,

Scott