

Inauguration Primary school building Sukuta Madina (Thursday, 06-06-2024)

Dear community of Sukuta Madina, school committee, teachers, representatives of various organizations and, last but not least, dear children of the Lift Nursery and Lift Primary School

We are gathered here today for a very joyous and special occasion: the inauguration of the Primary School building in Sukuta Madina! Built in 2019, the year before the outbreak of the Covid epidemic.

We first visited your beautiful country in 2011 and, by chance, we met Mr. Muhammed Jabbi during that visit. Muhammed told about his community Sukuta Madina where he already in 2008 started setting up a Nursery, but he could not finish the school building due to lack of money.

He asked us if we could help finish the school building. Back home in The Netherlands we discussed that request, we decided to help and we established the foundation Education for The Gambia.

That was the very start of an exciting and fruitful collaboration between the community of Sukuta Madina and our foundation. No one could have predicted in 2011 that this would lead to a beautiful Primary school in Sukuta Madina.

But arriving at a Primary school was a long and difficult process.

Already in 2015/2016 the community dreamed of a Primary school. A strong argument for an own Primary was that the good quality education at the own Nursery could be continued at an own Primary.

However a Primary school is a bit more than a Nursery school.

Important issues:

A good school site was not available

The more than 5 million dalasi for a building with 8 spacious class rooms, toilet facilities and furniture was not available

The uncertainty about money for running a full Primary school; this requires a lot of money every year again.

So our foundation was a bit reserved to step into this development.

But to be honest we did not feel confident with our reluctance.

During our visits to The Gambia we became more and more aware how different the world is.

In our country, The Netherlands, it is very common that everyone is able to follow the education he or she wants.

In our visits to The Gambia so far we saw how happy children are that they can go to school and what this means for the children.

So why should we hold back; the children in Sukuta Madina also deserve to receive the education they need and want.

It is not without reason that our slogan is: **Education is a Right!!!**

Back to the dream about an own Primary school.

An important step forward was that the Ministry approved the operation of a Lower Basic school in Sukuta Madina.

With that approval the community started in Academic year 2017-2018 with a Primary grade-1 class in the structures of the Nursery school.

However that put a lot of pressure on the issues schoolground and accommodation.

Many, sometimes heated, discussions have taken place to resolve these issues.

The school ground issue was resolved by Mr. Muhammed Jabbi; he decided to buy about 1.000 square meters of land just next to the Nursery.

In a meeting with the community our foundation emphasized that sponsors only are willing to contribute to investments when the investments are sustainable; their scarce money must be spent effectively.

So we asked for commitments for quality Primary education and for the ability and willingness to contribute, year after year, the money needed for running the school.

Knowing that a school site was available, the annual income for the school was committed and our good feeling about the ability to deliver good quality education, our foundation could start looking for sponsors for the more than 5 million dalasi investment.

Fortunately the AFAS foundation in The Netherlands was willing to sponsor the whole project amount.

The AFAS foundation receives a share of the profit of the AFAS software company every year; this money has to be used for charities that make the world a bit better, fairer and more beautiful.

Early 2019 the development of the school facilities could start. At the start of Academic year 2019-2020 the Primary school building was ready for use.

Today the Primary school has been operational for several years already, many children attend the school and some of them moved on already to further education.

Alimatou and Muhammed are the driving forces behind the school.

Together with the teachers, other staff and the school committee they developed the school to a quality school.

We would like to compliment and thank Alimatou and her staff for what has been achieved with and by the school.

A very important and robust foundation for the children in their development to powerful young people. We have seen a lot of excellent school reports. Many children to be proud of.

We wish that all children of the community can develop further.

However, it's extremely important that this young generation is given opportunities and challenges after their education.

They need jobs in which they can apply and further develop their knowledge and skills

Without jobs, opportunities and challenges, young people may start to feel discouraged, unmotivated or even worthless with the consequence that they can drift towards undesirable behaviour.

That happens all over the world where opportunities and challenges are lacking.

Young people that are disappointed about opportunities also could start looking longingly for opportunities elsewhere.

For many young people Europe seems to have everything to offer to them, but the reality is very different.

We see every day that it is becoming increasingly difficult to gain a foothold in European countries.

There are already so many refugees from war zones and areas with natural disasters.

So an extremely important task for authorities, companies and everyone in The Gambia to do their utmost for employment and opportunities for young people.

That requires an enormous effort from everyone, but we are convinced that it is worth that effort.

Your children's success is not in our hands, not in the Netherlands, 5000 kilometers from here.

No, their future is in your hands, here in The Gambia.

And the future of The Gambia will be in the hands of this young generation.

As foundation we are taking a further step back.
We stay committed to raise money for the poorest families so that also their children can be educated.
And to raise money for the so very important daily lunch at school.

Amy and Frans (the blind man) stopped being ambassador of our foundation.
We are very grateful for all the work they did for Sukuta Madina.
Many people in their living environment contributed to the school and the children. We think it is fair to mention that the coming years their and also other contributions shall go down a bit.
Amy and Frans could not be here to day, but they asked us to greet everyone warmly; so here are warm regards from Amy and Frans.

Well, all there is left to say, are words of gratitude.
We would like to thank everyone from the bottom of our hearts for their contributions towards the realization of this beautiful school.

Now it's time for some small presents for the school.

First a nice big new flag of The Netherlands; we hope that this flag always reminds to what we have achieved together.

Second we have a frame with the logos of our foundation and AFAS to remind our foundation and AFAS forever.

Third we like to handover a cheque with an extra contribution of 25.000 dalasi for the so important schoollunch for the children.

Finally, we wish the staff of the school and the community of Sukuta Madina a lot of strength with the wonderful education at this school.
And we wish all children and the whole community a very bright future.

Thank you!
Arie Burggraaf (Foundation Education for The Gambia)