

Origin and Explanation of the Project

The Campaner Foundation is a non-profit organization that was started in 1996. The primary goal of the Foundation is to eradicate the childhood disease called Noma (Cancrum Oris), which mainly affects malnourished children in the poorest parts of the world.

Noma is an infectious disease that destroys the soft tissues of the face that usually begins with fever. Ulcers form in the mouth and extensive and rapid degeneration (due to Necrotizing Ulcerative Gingivitis) begin to affect the cheeks and lips. The original ulcer forms a crater and eventually destroys the bone; the entire process happening at an extremely fast rate.

Noma is only found in extremely poor countries, such as Niger. Even though it can begin at any age, Noma is most frequently seen in malnourished children with an extreme lack of hygiene. If left untreated, the child will die due to the illness. However, when treated (with high-dosage antibiotics) the disease is curable. The side effects are serious when the disease is detected at an advanced stage, but the majority of the cases can be resolved with plastic and reconstructive surgery. In these cases, the children are transferred to Spain to receive the necessary operations.

The families and others in the community begin to reject the children who are, or have been affected by the disease, and they consider them to be cursed or “delatadores del pecado” (an old superstition). For this reason, the affected children are hidden, or when left untreated, killed and abandoned.

Noma is a gender-linked disease because it is directly associated to the diet and food supply in some ethnic groups, who give priority to the elders, then to the boys, with the girls being last.

The Campaner Foundation was created in the year 2000 in order to give legal support to the work in Niger. The center of the operations in Diffa consists of a medical clinic and a school.

The work of the Campaner Foundation is divided into three strategic groups for the treatment of Noma. The three groups focus on the various projects they execute throughout the year: prevention, medical care, and reintegration.

The first focus group has carried out different projects related to the access to water, hygiene, construction of wells, access to food (credits for women farmers, enclosures for crops and donations of grinding mills), and awareness campaigns regarding the causes of Noma and other diseases.

With respect to medical care, visits are made periodically to villages. The Foundation's clinic in Diffa offers medical attention and care to those children affected by the disease. All of the medical care is free of charge.

Finally, regarding reintegration, the Campaner Foundation has provided a school for

530 children and finances the studies and professional opportunities for the children affected by Noma. All of these activities are carried out by a team of 23 native workers from Niger, contracted by the Foundation.

According to information from the United Nations Development Program, Niger, sadly, is one of the poorest countries in the world. The Campaner Foundation works in the region of Diffa, some 1500 kilometers from the capital Niamey. The territory is characterized as semi-arid and slightly wooded, with irregular rainfall and hot temperatures that sometimes reach up to 50°C.

The economy in Niger is based on agricultural activities and livestock. Due to the scarcity of land, many villages in the Diffa region find it difficult to cultivate fruit trees and vegetables. The terrain is often sandy due to the lack of water and the livestock from the local villages often roam the land, ruining the crops (the heat and lack of water force the animals to search for fresh grass). For this reason, the Campaner Foundation has thought of implementing a project to solve this problem, enabling the cultivation of fruit and vegetable crops and protecting them from the aforementioned adversities.

The terrain is normally sandy; therefore, the most suitable area of land will be closed off and prepared with fertilizer. This way the soil will be well nourished and ready for cultivation.

Since 2005, the Foundation has constructed wells in various villages in the area. This new project will keep these villages in mind, as the wells have already been constructed and water is available for irrigation.

The main point of this project is to protect the crops with a plowshare. In all of the villages in the area, the economic sources come from the livestock, which are left to roam the area freely. For this reason, it is necessary to fence off the area to protect the crops.

The fenced area will cover 30,000 square meters, where fruit and vegetable trees will be cultivated. Half of the trees will be fruit trees, including: mangos, oranges, copto and okra. The most suitable vegetable trees for the area will be cultivated on the other half of the land.

A group of women will be selected from the village and will be in charge of carrying out the various jobs required for cultivation. With this orchard, they will attempt to reduce the diseases caused by lack of nutrition, while improving the nutritional level of the population. Additionally, they will try to prevent the appearance of diseases, specifically Noma, and promote subsistence farming in the area.

The methodology of this project will consist of visits to the villages. In order to recoup costs, the Foundation will take advantage of these visits to also speak about the prevention of Noma and healthcare. During the visits, the Foundation's technical team will meet with the management committee in order to analyze the progress of the crops.

