Title: Green Sand: In Support of Refugee Children at Hope School Western Sahara

Country: The Sahrawi Refugee Camps in Algeria

Institution: Methodist University

Designated project leader: Ladiba Said (Western Sahara)

Summary

The Green Sand Project is situated within the Sahrawi Refugee Camps in Algeria, with the primary objective of creating a secure and enriching environment for refugee children. This initiative seeks to achieve this goal through the construction of a dedicated playground, with the intent of alleviating the challenging environmental and humanitarian conditions faced by these children.

Project description

Growing up as a refugee, not a single day went by without discussions about the prospect of returning to our homeland, or at the very least, nurturing the hope that such a day would arrive soon. Although the Sahrawi community firmly holds onto the belief that their displacement is temporary, they persevere in their efforts to create a camp that can truly feel like home, even amidst the challenging conditions. This endeavor includes striving to provide the fundamental necessities for children to thrive in a secure environment. Yet, from my personal experience as a child, nothing occupied my dreams more than the desire for a playground—a place to play and blossom. When I contemplate the circumstances within the Sahrawi refugee camps, numerous project ideas arise to address the community's needs. Nevertheless, I cannot overlook the reality that, over the past 47 years in these camps, children have typically played outdoors in the sand, often enduring the scorching sun and playing with rusted metals. Consequently, I've chosen to embark on the development of a versatile project with the potential to make a positive societal impact.

I opted to construct the playground adjacent to Hope School in Western Sahara for several reasons. Hope School represents a classroom initiative that I spearheaded with invaluable assistance from my associates at the United World College Red Cross Nordic during the summer of 2019. This opens the doors for me to continue my initial project. Additionally, the proximity of ample land adjoining the school made it an ideal location for executing the project. This site gives an opportunity for the children to have access to education as well as an entertainment location.

The initial project plan aimed to have the playground ready by August and establish a small library at the corner of Hope School. However, several modifications to the original plan became necessary due to various factors:

- **Commencement:** Instead of initiating the project in early June as initially intended, we began our efforts toward the end of June due to delays in fund distribution.
- **Playground Completion:** Unfortunately, completing the playground by August proved unattainable due to the challenging summer conditions experienced at the refugee camps. The intense heat made daytime work unsafe for our workers'
health. Consequently, we adjusted the working hours to a few morning hours to minimize exposure to extreme temperatures.

- **Water Constraints:** Limited access to water resources at the refugee camp also played a role in delaying the construction, preventing us from meeting the original August deadline.

- **Current Progress:** In light of the exceptionally high summer temperatures in the refugee camps, we have made the decision to modify our initial plan, which involved constructing a small library near the Hope School. Instead, our new focus is on creating a shaded area adjacent to the playground. This space will provide a comfortable spot for children to rest and play, shielding them from the harsh environmental conditions. After completing the construction of the playground, the installation of the equipment will begin.

So far, we have made significant progress in constructing the playground, although the installation of equipment remains pending. Despite these challenges, we maintain an optimistic outlook and anticipate the completion of all project components by October.

Considering that there are five primary Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria, dispersed over various locations, I am confident that numerous opportunities exist for me to persist in addressing this issue. My intention is to examine the community’s response to the playground and its utilization. Should it align with our expectations, my aim is to pursue the objective of establishing a welcoming playground in every Sahrawi refugee camp for the benefit of the community.

**Reflection**

Between the experience of growing up in a refugee camp and embarking on international educational journeys, it has become increasingly complex to precisely define the concept of peace. Nevertheless, throughout the years I have maintained the belief that peace can be most aptly characterized as the ability to prosper within a society that guarantees the fulfillment of essential needs, entailing a secure and sanitary environment. This project is fundamentally dedicated to the realization of this vision.

In the short term, the green sand project creates a secure and welcoming space within the community, allowing children to play safely as they continue to grow.

In the long term; given the nature of this project, there is great optimism that the green sand will not merely offer a secure and inviting environment for the community but will also grant them access to a forthcoming library at Hope School Western Sahara. Furthermore, the project seeks to initiate fundraising efforts to provide monthly support to children or families impacted by the recent war in Western Sahara.

As I engage in this project and tackle the challenging task of constructing a secure playground within the refugee camps, my objective is to extend my efforts to establish comparable initiatives across various regions within the Sahrawi Camps. This
endeavor is driven by the aspiration to provide a safe place for as many children as possible.

**Personal Statement**

“The Green Sand project represents more than just the construction of a playground in a refugee camp; to me, it signifies a chance to reciprocate the support and encouragement I’ve received from this community over the years, enabling me to fulfill a dream that I have had for many years” (Ladiba Said Nafe).