



# Our 30th Anniversary

*It was at the very beginning of 1991 that I had the pleasure of founding the association PARTENAIRES. For our 30th anniversary, here is a brief overview of our actions, over the years and across the globe, compiled by our team of volunteers. We will be pleased to receive your feedback and comments.*

Christian Raymond

Rather than simply listing our projects, which are easily accessible on our website, we have chosen the more engaging approach of describing how *PARTENAIRES* evolved through its successes and – more significantly – the trials and tribulations encountered in the field, with the reminiscences of our founder C. Raymond. He has long been a dedicated humanitarian, since his time as a student skipping classes at his Engineering College in Saint-Etienne - *l'Ecole des Mines* - in order to drag some of his classmates out to local shops, depositing and collecting large numbers of money boxes for a start-up humanitarian association called *Frères des Hommes*.

As he began his professional career, he continued to support it, but, in order to have a freer hand, he founded a new association named *PARTENAIRES (Partners)* [of the world's forgotten people] the night before he set off for a long-term diplomatic assignment in **NIGERIA**.



**NIGERIA** Medical care in the bush

## ***Africa***

Christian discovered OGUN-WATERSIDE, 200 km east of Lagos, a lagoon region without a single doctor for 100,000 peasant farmers and fisherfolk living in some sixty hamlets.

Whilst working as a Commercial Attaché at the French Embassy, for three years he devoted all his spare time to these people. At weekends, he would go from village to village, often by pirogue, always accompanied by a doctor and a nurse, volunteers working by rotation.

By the end of the three years, *PARTENAIRES* had not only carried out lots of treatments and vaccinations but had also renovated the only hospital, which had fallen into disrepair, increasing sixfold the number of patients. The vaccination rate, according to UNICEF, rose from the lowest to the highest in the country.

## Asia

**INDIA** (1995-2002). Transferred to Mumbai, Christian and his wife set up a small project for literacy, hygiene, sewing and medical care with a French nurse and Indian doctors. They had as a trainee a young woman from the Aveyron Department who had already worked in rural areas in ...Bangladesh!

**BANGLADESH.** Following an assessment mission in the country in 1996, Christian devised a project which was to become a major activity for *PARTENAIRES*, devoted to street and slum children in Dacca. If these children stay on the street, local authorities ignore them, they are despised by everybody and often exploited by criminals. At the end of 2001, *PARTENAIRES* opened a shelter home in Mirpur, a large working-class district, and in 2012 added an annex for teenage boys. In collaboration with the other schools in the neighbourhood, the thirty skilled staff of *Streetchildren's PARTNERS Bangladesh* provide services for 360 boys and girls aged between 6 and 19, 85 of whom are full-time residents: security, hygiene and health, food, education and vocational training leading to a decent job, with several years of follow-up by the local team and three volunteers in France, who ensure that each beneficiary continues to make good progress integrating the social and economic life of the country.



**BANGLADESH** All aboard our rickshaw!

The size of this task raised the problem of sustainable funding, which is a concern for us and our founder, who devotes all his finance, and houses our headquarters in Paris. The Bangladesh programme costs close to 150,000 € a year.

We must also thank the companies which have never failed to give their support: CORA, MONTAGUT, CARREFOUR, UN AMOUR DE CAFE, NESTLE, and more recently in Dacca CROSSLINE, OKAÏDI, GRAPHICS (Bangladeshi) and OTTO (German). Many thanks also to the German, Australian and French Embassies and to several French public entities which have been a great help to us, such as the *Conseil Général* of the Aude Department – and of course to all the individual sponsors who regularly support the cost of one child or two. Thanks also to our small band of volunteers, working alongside us on our projects, following them remotely from France or taking turns to visit them, at their own cost.

‘Our’ Bangladeshi children could not do without them.



A classroom in our shelter for street children in Dacca

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## MYANMAR

From his base in India, Christian also discovered Myanmar, learned to appreciate its impoverished but altruistic inhabitants, suffering for fifty years at the hands of a despotic and backward military regime. Something needed to be done!

Following two assessment missions from 1995, Myanmar became the second major pillar for *PARTENAIRES*, one of the most long-serving French NGOs present in a country which at the time was almost forgotten - and where our intervention was to become our most impactful and most diverse:

- access to drinking water, education, hygiene and health, child protection (2002-2003), AIDS prevention (2005-2006)
- building some fifteen schools and a dispensary
- installing toilets with water and septic tanks in 105 remote schools for UNICEF
- reducing hunger and poverty in many villages in the Dry Zone around Yenanchaung, Chauk and Myaing with WPF (World Food Programme)
- creating 10 km of roads in Salin and Yenanchaung Districts
- installing 500 ‘gardens without land’ for impoverished rural households.

Here is an example of our work, typical of the pragmatic approach and efficiency learned from experience: in 2008, following the tropical cyclone *Nargis* which left 140,000 people dead and two million displaced, *PARTENAIRES* provided schooling for 2,000 ‘dropouts’ and, in association with the NGO *Solidarités*, provided emergency housing for hundreds of families.

Unfortunately, 2016 and 2017 brought disillusionment on the political front. Although her popularity was still as high as ever, Aung San Suu Kyi was unable to oppose the massacre of the Rohingyas by the army and by their ethnic Burmese neighbours.

Discouraged by the killings carried out by members of a population which had until then gained our well-deserved love and respect, we opted at the beginning of 2018 to leave a country where we had done so much and established such robust partnerships and friendships as with our local director U Aung Lwin. The continuing oppression in his country is still heart-breaking



**MYANMAR** One of the schools we built



**MYANMAR** Our project brought drinking water and improved hygiene.  
Above, children learning to wash their hands properly.

## **South America**

During the same period, in **BRAZIL**, after renovating a *favela* in Teresopolis (housing and biodigesters), we implemented a rural development project in Mirandiba village in the *Nordeste* Region from 1999 to 2006. The project integrated micro-credit, housing and water tanks, livestock farming and promoting plus marketing bio-horticultural produce.

In 2003-2004, the volunteer responsible for this project, Erwann Lacoste, undertook a joint mission with the University of Louvain on the high plateaux of the Andes in **BOLIVIA**: improvements to water resources, greenhouse cultivation, valorization of llama meat and family economy.

A decade later, in 2016, Christian, who had earlier spent six years posted to Brazil, returned to South America with his former colleague in economic diplomacy, Monique Pauly, who had been working as a volunteer in Paris since 2008. The place they selected was **ECUADOR** because its 17 million inhabitants suddenly became poor, after facing a collapse in the price of oil, the country's main resource, which fell by 60% between 2016 and 2020. In addition, a serious earthquake hit the country at the end of their mission.

Since 2020, Ecuador has been the fourth worst hit country in South America by the effects of the coronavirus, which has led to an economic meltdown. For this reason, we have provided aid for the most impoverished and vulnerable people. Following an assessment of various NGOs, we decided to support the *Fundación Jonathan* in Quito, which was providing meals, clothing, medical and dental care to 200 poor children and adults, many of whom were also sick.

In 2018 we were able to observe how useful our support had been: the *Fundación Jonathan*, as we had hoped, was taking care of 400 vulnerable people as well as some Venezuelan refugees, thanks to the tireless energy of Catalina Avilez and 25 volunteers. In order to extend their premises, we enabled them to buy a neighbouring house where they could serve meals in a roofed canteen instead of in tents under rain, and have rooms for workshops and medical care. *PARTENAIRES* donated some 11,000 €.

## **What about Europe?**

Following a suggestion from our most long-standing volunteer Christian Heitzmann, we decided to undertake a project in the poorest country in Europe: **MOLDOVA**, where 20% of the population had to emigrate, leaving children to be looked after by their grand-parents or in the large number of dismal and under-resourced State orphanages. We supported a dozen of these from 2002 to 2011, providing training in beekeeping, livestock farming, hairdressing, sewing, shoemaking, carpentry and mechanics, thereby making a contribution to the reduction of disastrous levels of economical emigration.

Our travels there included many official visits to outsize premises adorned with the national hero Stephen the Great, amidst dreary landscapes with collective heating pipes meandering amongst the ruins of old kolkhozes and the occasional dilapidated vestige of an industrial site.





### **MOLDOVA**

*Bringing aid to several orphanages from 2002 to 2011, we set up a range of training programmes including sewing*

In devastated **HAITI**, everything is an emergency. Nine of its 12 million inhabitants live below the poverty level and the local currency, the *gourde*, recently lost 40% of its value against the dollar. Per capita GDP which was only 868 US\$ in 2018 – compared to 41,631 US\$ in France – will plummet further. Living conditions for Haitians, which are already precarious, continue to deteriorate and insecurity has exploded.

In 2019, we co-financed the purchase of a second-hand 4x4 truck for a small NGO in the southwest of the country, which our correspondent Ferel uses under increasingly difficult conditions to run a vital shuttle service to the capital Port-au-Prince.

In 2021, our endowment fund *PARTENAIRES SOLIDAIRES* helped to repair damage from the latest earthquake and to build a fish farm pond for a total cost of 37 000 €.

### **Back to Africa**



**HAITI** Ferel and his truck

From 2008 to 2010, *PARTENAIRES* was active in the central region of **MOZAMBIQUE**.

The aim of our project, near to Maputo, was to promote Maternal and Child Health (MCH), prevent malaria (notably through theatre) and support irrigated market gardening.

Later, in Gondar, **ETHIOPIA** (2013-2015) Christian and our Vice-President Monique Pauly undertook the construction of two bathroom units with showers, toilets and a biodigester

providing gas for a community kitchen. The total cost was 85,000 €, of which 45,000 € was provided by a consortium:

Lyons Metropolitan Council/Veolia/Rhone-Alpes Water Agency.

In 2017, our two intrepid travellers set off to explore two of Africa's most underdeveloped and least assisted countries MALAWI and TANZANIA, killing two birds with one stone since these are neighbouring countries.

**MALAWI** is one of the five poorest countries in the world (per capita GDP 381 \$) and is almost entirely dependent on its agricultural sector which is threatened in turn by droughts and cyclones. Food security is not ensured.

Many meetings with local NGOs, authorities and embassies led us to identify MANEPO as our first local NGO partner, with whom we launched several projects donating goats to help elderly people stop begging as their source of income.

After this successful pilot programme, we built a rural school in Balaka for 500 children who until then had none. The main sponsor of this project was the French footballer Jeff Reine-Adélaïde, who donated 25 000 €.

In **TANZANIA**, we built six classrooms with three local NGOs who were concerned about the physical conditions for teaching (overcrowded classrooms and buildings in a poor state of repair), especially for *Masai* children. We have been impressed by the dynamism and responsiveness of our local partners and we intend to continue working in a country wracked by poverty: 80% of Tanzanians live on less than 2 \$ a day.

You have now had an overview of some of our past accomplishments and the signposts to the future. Let us ensure that humanitarian action doesn't go out of fashion at a time when the world needs it more than ever. **Our endowment fund PARTENAIRES SOLIDAIRES** is well-established and has been operational for eight years ([www.partenaires-association.org/fr/aidez-nous/legs-donations](http://www.partenaires-association.org/fr/aidez-nous/legs-donations)) **with Deloitte as auditor. It ensures the long-term continuity of our activities, which are always pragmatic and directly impactful.**

If you like what we do, your donation or bequest will be welcome so we can continue our work TOGETHER!



**MALAWI** An old beneficiary with her goats



**TANZANIA** The Lukema school teaches and feeds 72 children. For a cost of only 6000 € PARTENAIRES repaired the roof, finished the construction of a third classroom, paved the playground and built a small room for the teachers.



**ETHIOPIA** Inauguration of a bathroom/kitchen unit in Gondar