

From Jaen to Turkana

Everything started with a small program of solidarity in the school and now we are helping a big number of people in Togo and Kenya.

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It's been many years since I have been working as a teacher at the Altocastillo School in Jaen (Spain). I have always been very keen on my students and their families developing the virtue of solidarity, making them aware of how much we

possess and how little, unfortunately, others don't.

Not neglecting my day-to-day school duties, and with the help of some parents, we began to be engaged in some solidarity activities which allowed their children to experience how other people suffer, are lonely or poor, adapting each activity to the age of the participants. Since then, each academic year we make food collection campaigns; we pay for needy families' urgent expenses; we accompany homeless people, providing them with blankets, conversation and coffee, we visit elderly persons who are lonely; we contribute to campaigns aimed at helping third world countries.

In 2014 we started our own NGO, based in the school. We call it *Cooperación Escolar* (Schooling Cooperation). We became a school that helps other needy schools.

Since then, we have been involved in solidarity projects of our own: we started by collaborating with the Takeli Foundation in Togo, which is run by Ramon, a supernumerary who has guided us from the beginnings of the NGO. We made a development plan for the area of Tchebebé and Bodjoundé installing a water well powered by solar panels. We helped in developing a school in Bodjoundé and a vocational school in Tchebebé. We provided electricity with renewable energies to some classrooms, which also had an impact in the whole area. We enlarged the first well, because it was not big enough. We set up a poultry farm. Last year we provided new school uniforms to all the children of both towns. In addition to Togo. We have also been involved in Ivory Coast, Congo and Morocco.

The Altocastillo's families have been very supportive of each of these

campaigns and make sure that their children take part in them, from the youngest to the oldest, because they understand that this is one of the most important lessons that can mark the life of a person. Every year we organize charity dinners, paellas (a typical Spanish dish made with enriched rice), and many other activities in which many families of the school participate.

During the last winter I contacted Javier. He is involved in a project with the Turkana tribe in Kenya. This tribe lives in one of the places in the world that are most affected by climate change, where there is famine, desertification and where to get water, one has to scratch the ground.

Given the great problems these people are facing, we are planning to help them by constructing a building that can house up to 200 children

and setting up an early childhood education center where the most basic needs of the children in the area can be covered, thus improving their difficult day-to-day life. They will be provided with education, food and medical care to combat the malnutrition affecting most of them.

From the first moment we set foot on Turkana soil we were aware that from this very special area of the planet there may come out people who can change the course of their own and our history. This is our new goal!
