

The Walking Egg non-profit organisation

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Abstract

The Walking Egg non-profit organisation (npo) was founded in 2010 by scientists and an artist to realise the Arusha Project which strives to implement accessible infertility programmes in resource-poor countries. Right from the start The Walking Egg has opted for a multidisciplinary and global approach towards the problem of infertility and in cooperation with the Special Task Force (STF) on “Developing countries and infertility” of the European Society of Human reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE) and the WHO, it gathers medical, social and economical scientists and experts along with artists to discuss and work together towards its goal. The project aims to raise awareness surrounding childlessness in resource-poor countries and to make infertility care in all its aspects, including assisted reproductive technologies, available and accessible for a much larger part of the population.

Key words: Accessible, assisted reproduction, childlessness, infertility care, resource-poor countries.

Short history

The history of the organisation dates back from 1997 when the cooperation between scientist Willem Ombelet and artist Koen Vanmechelen resulted in an enigmatic glass egg with the legs of a chicken, ‘The Walking Egg’ which gave first its name to an international magazine and finally, 13 years later, had its name and logo adopted by The Walking Egg npo. In 2006 Willem Ombelet became the coordinator of a Special Task Force (STF) on “Developing countries and infertility” within the European Society of Human reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE). In December 2007 a scientific-artistic project in cooperation with the ESHRE STF and the WHO gathered 37 experts in Arusha to discuss the problem of childlessness and infertility care in resource-poor countries, resulting in the Arusha Project which strives to implement accessible infertility programmes in resource-poor countries. The Walking Egg foundation was founded to realise the Arusha Project. The philosophy of artistic-scientific cross-fertilisation remains at the very core of this organisation.

Objectives and approach

The ultimate goal of The Walking Egg and the ESHRE STF is to work towards a world with less suffering caused by infertility. In order to do this the following objectives were set out from the very beginning:

- (1) To raise the awareness surrounding the problem of childlessness in resource-poor countries within
 - a. The donor community, politicians, funding agencies and research organisations through lobbying and publishing.
 - a. The general population through information, education and counselling on infertility and its consequences.
- (2) To study the ethical, socio-cultural and economical aspects surrounding the topic of childlessness and infertility care in resource-poor countries
- (3) To make infertility diagnosis and infertility treatment including assisted reproductive technologies available and accessible for a much larger part of the population, by



Fig. 1. — First issue of the international magazine “The Walking Egg”, published in March 2000.

- a. Simplifying the diagnostic procedures.
 - b. Simplifying and modifying the ovarian stimulation protocols and the IVF procedures.
- (4) To work together with other organisations and societies working in the field of reproductive health to reach the goal of “global access to infertility care”

The Walking Egg npo aims to integrate infertility care within the concept of family planning, emphasizing that family planning is not only preventing of unwanted pregnancies but also includes promoting the chance of pregnancy in case of involuntary childlessness.

Past activities

In the aftermath of the Arusha conference several study groups and working groups were established to develop all the different aspects including the social, financial, political, and clinical and laboratory aspects of the Arusha project. The Study Group Social Sciences (one of the four study groups) held expert meetings in 2009 and 2011 to discuss the social aspects of infertility care in developing countries. The first meeting in 2009 resulted in a Monograph published in ‘Facts, Views & Vision in ObGyn’.

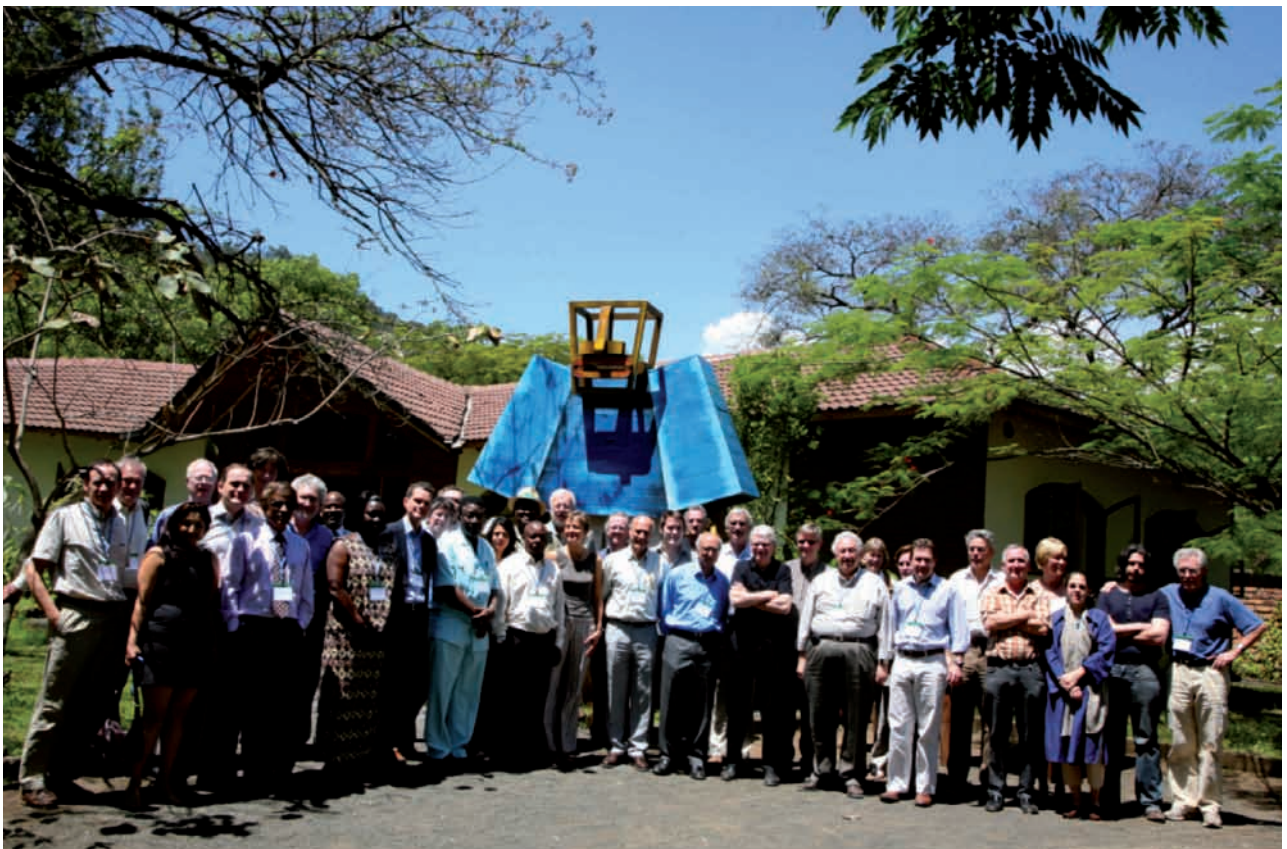


Fig. 2. — Arusha meeting with 37 experts from different disciplines and 21 different countries: the Arusha Project was born!

Furthermore, the ESHRE STF organised pre-congress courses at the annual ESHRE meetings in Barcelona (2008) and Rome (2010) on the topic of infertility care in developing countries.

An impressive list of scientific papers was published from 2006 until 2011 and Willem Ombelet has been invited to lecture on the Arusha project on several international conferences.

Present and future activities

Currently, a first trial to examine the value and effectiveness of a new laboratory method for low-cost IVF is taking place at the Genk Institute for Fertility Technology and will start in January 2012.

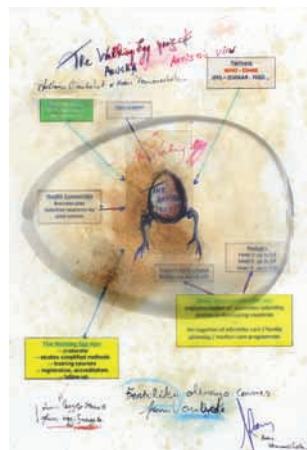
If the results are reassuring, we plan to start similar studies in different centers in resource-poor

countries. The selection of centers will depend on different factors such as budget for education in that specific country, the availability of effective family planning facilities, a trustable person who can coordinate the study, interest for sociological support (before, during and after treatment), etc.

References

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Willem Ombelet & Koen Vanmechelen®
2011