

COVID-19 in South Sudan



An update of Rev. Dr. Bernard Suwa, Country Coordinator South Sudan of Mission 21, April 7, 2020

The Corona Lament

(Anonymous author)

Corona Virus! Whatever your name is, please know that in African we do not have your name in our mother tongues, so that we can use 'juju' (witchcraft) to deal with. That means we in Africa do not have any problems with you. But if you have problems with us, please try again later. We are not ready for your trouble. Or if you have missed your direction, that's why you are in Africa, please tell us so we can show you your way. Please don't kill us I beg.

A monster called Corona in South Sudan

A few weeks ago, we here in South Sudan thought, like the man who has written this lament, that we do not have the name of Corona in our mother tongues and that we here in South Sudan have no problems with this Monster called Corona, with a surname Virus.

We thought that were not ready for the troubles that come with the visit of Corona Virus, because we thought we have suffered enough from the effects of the war of the last seven years! Or we thought this monster might have missed its direction and that we could show him or her the way to go.

We were wrong! To our dismay, last week our government here in Juba announced that the Corona Virus has at last visited us like many other countries. Suddenly, we realized that after all, we are not an island but part of the global community. It surely has come to kill!

Consequently, as I write, we too, in this country have gone into partial lockdown, where occasions such as religious gatherings, funerals, weddings, and other social gatherings have been banned by the government. This includes the closure of schools, colleges, universities and shops, except those that sell food items.

Many workers are advised to work from home, in spite of lack of internet connectivity for so many people. In a country where there is only one referral hospital which is already struggling to cope, means that the country is ill prepared to confront this monster called, Corona Virus.

It's now 8:30 pm and I am writing from my 'hideout' room, and from tomorrow, our compound is going to be in total lockdown where there would be no getting out and no coming in for the next two weeks!

What about the partners of Mission 21 in South Sudan?

I can only imagine! It's tough on all of us but could be worse for communities that do not have access to enough funds to stock food or even just to buy a bottle of sanitizer! To make it worse, there has not been enough sensitization on the dangers of this pandemic virus such as social distancing and others. Our prisons are crowded; our markets are crowded and people are going about their lives as if it is 'business as usual'.

At program levels, the close of schools and colleges means that the Midwifery school that we sponsor in Kakuma refugee camps have been closed and students sent home. This also applies to Giffen Theological Institute, and also to the Kakuma refugee camps in northern Kenya.

Similarly, the Nile Theological College in Juba has also been closed. And like any other schools, the primary schools under the Education Department of Presbyterian Church in South Sudan have also been closed, together with all government schools. I can only guess how difficult it must be for Muhaba Children's Centre in Renk, as they try to implement the social distance measures!

I can only assume that all these schools and Colleges will have to readjust their semesters and terms due to the disruptions caused by the Corona pandemic. Such adjustments will also apply to other programs such as community agriculture in Pochala, and peace building programs, as well as youth outreach. Women's regular fellowship which use to offer church women 'safe zone' has also been affected by this pandemic.

We do not know how long this shutdown will take, therefore the readjustment program will be enormous, requiring additional funds to meet the gaps that have been created by the disruption. This will also require patience on our part, as our partners will need ample time to recover and find their new compass.

Best regards from South Sudan,

Rev. Dr. Bernard Suwa



Children at the Muhabba Children's Centre: Children who are living on the streets with no support whatsoever are at especially high risk to get the virus. The centre gives them a home.