

Corona virus in Cameroon and My Work.

Cameroon and COVID -19

I am Togho Lumumba Mukong, Mission 21 Country Coordinator. Mission 21, formerly Basel Mission has been in Cameroon for a hundred plus years, working in the domains of evangelism, health, education and crafts development. Since 1957, Mission 21 has been and remains an all-time development partner of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. Supporting the work of the PCC through the various departments of the church – Women, Men, Youth, Communication, Lay Training and Teaching as well as different institutions especially the Presbyterian General Hospital in Manyemen.

The political crisis in the North West and South West Regions, brought a twist to the development of and partner relationships of Mission 21 in Cameroon. The needs of people displaced due to this crisis, became a call for concern and Mission 21 saw it fit to help a people with whom she has had a long history. From then, Mission 21 moved into the humanitarian domain. Since 2018, the work has had its own challenges trying to meet the needs of displaced persons in and out of the affected areas.

Then at the end of 2019, the threat of corona virus was announced, it seemed far away and for some months remained so. The government, and to a very large extend the population, saw it as a joke, a Caucasian disease, a disease for cold areas not harmful in the tropics. On the 6th of March the story sounded different with first case confirmed in Cameroon. Again it was a Cameroonian who lives in France, hence a 'not our thing' attitude. It took the Government 11 days to swing into action, and on the 17th of March the government through the Prime Minister announced 11 measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19. These measures include closure of schools and sporting activities, restriction of movement (self-discipline), washing of hands, social distancing and all measures promoted by the World Health Organisation.

Today we count 685 confirmed cases, 9 deaths and 60 recovered cases. Many people now know the disease is real and is no longer for colder areas or for the rich or those who travel abroad. We have started having community transmission. There is more fear of the disease and lack of appropriate information. People continue to spread only the bad news – new cases and number of deaths – forgetting to mention recovery possibilities and potentials.

Our Programmes

The pandemic and government response has affected our programmes really hard. Programmes with schools on HIV education can no longer take place, experts who come in from outside cannot travel. The internally displaced are very stressed, running from war to a disease in an area where living conditions are not favourable. Social distancing and the encouragement to stay home is making distribution of support material challenging in terms of time and resources needed. We now move from place to place giving essential support, which in the past people use to come in large groups to receive support. Businesses are gradually closing and many more people are moving into the needy bracket, the future is challenging. Capacity building programmes must respect social distancing; events have to rescheduled.

The problems will come, for now they seem to have taken everyone unprepared, we are already in the water, we must swim. At the level of the coordination office, we are passing on correct and timely information to our partners, countering the fear factor. We adjust programmes to meet beneficiaries at safest places, our staff and partners go out with mask, using sanitisers and spreading the message of hope. Following the encouragements of the Coordination office some local partners have supported beneficiaries with hand sanitizers they have produced and carried out educational

sessions on COVID19 demonstrating proper hand washing. Those involved in vocational training have temporarily halted activities on our advice.

We are now in discussion with our partners on how to enhance education through various online apps, use of online avenues for conferences, bulk buying to reduce movements to crowded places and as much as possible we are seeking office delivery of material, the field, supporting partners with additional man power to reach more people as quickly as possible.

We cannot shutdown completely, the lives of the target population matters and for some we are their life line. We continue to trust God for protection and do our best to stay safe and respect all health guidelines. In the mist of the fear and despair there is hope. On the 3rd of April 2020, our hearts were lifted with joy with birth of a child to our displaced family, we are reaching out to them with medical assistance.

There is hope

There are things we can do and control and for others we have no control. Whether we have total or no control, it is all in the hands of the Almighty. At this time, more than ever, I encourage myself and others with words of 1 Peter 5:7 NIV reads
6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Are you weak and heavy laden, take it to the Lord in prayer.

God cares to the extent of giving His Son for our salvation, then what are earthly concerns. Oh yes, we have earthly concerns, but the Lord says bring them to me; forget about them, be patient and see my Mighty Hand at work.

As believers in God through Jesus Christ, we should take our cares, worries and anxieties to God, in:

- i. Humility, not been boastful and proud
- ii. Doing what we can, knowing (acknowledging) it is through the enablement of the Holy Spirit
- iii. Making use of our time, energies and talents (not been idle and lazy).

The Lord bless us as we reflect on the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf. Amen