

## **The Bamenda – Portsmouth link “The live wire of the Social Welfare/Caritas service of Bamenda”**

The Social Welfare/Caritas Coordination Office of the Archdiocese of Bamenda was created in May 2007 by His Grace, Cornelius Fontem Esua, Archbishop of Bamenda with the appointment of the Archdiocesan Coordinator of the service. The office is not a commission identified as a pastoral structure in the Provincial Pastoral Plan, but the coordination service of all social welfare/caritas action of the Archdiocese of Bamenda. From its inception, the team of this office was charged with ensuring the social pastoral care of the people especially the underprivileged living within the Archdiocese. This was to be done through the formation and training of social welfare/caritas commissions at all levels, from the small Christian Communities through Mission Stations, Parishes, and Deaneries up to the Archdiocesan level, to enable them continue the social welfare ministry of Jesus Christ (feeding the hungry, touching the unclean (lepers), and healing them; helping widows and orphans, liberating prisoners, upholding the dignity of women and children by empowering them, as emphasized by various popes like John XXIII who emphasizes the necessity for everyone especially public authorities, to provide essential principal services needed by all to grassroots communities,... (Mater et Magitra 127)

The Social Welfare/Caritas Office of the Archdiocese of Bamenda is doing this through sensitization, mobilization, education, and organization of grassroots communities, building solidarity and helping them to engage in human and community development, which will address their social welfare needs, as well as their socio-economic needs. The Social Welfare/Caritas Office of Bamenda Archdiocese has covered some grounds from May 2007 to June 2013, thanks to the Bamenda – Portsmouth link. When the first coordinator was appointed in May 2007, she was handed the keys to an unfurnished 2 rooms office. There was neither furniture nor office equipment of any sort, but thanks to the financial support of 1,400,000FCFA local currency being the equivalence of £2000 donated in 2010 by the Portsmouth diocese. The Archdiocesan Coordinator was able to acquire some basic furniture and equipment for the office (2 used computers, 1 3in1 printer, a storage cupboard, 1 office desk, 7 chairs and a double wall file shelf). Sampled below:



Picture of desk/file shelves & staff



Picture of storage cupboard



Besides the acquisition of this basic furniture and office equipment which enhanced the services rendered to the people, the coordinator and rural animator were also able to visit some of the rural parishes and sensitise, form and train Social Welfare/Caritas Commissions in 12 mission stations of Santa, Widikum, Esu and Benakuma parishes. Two parish commissions were also trained in Bambili and Njimafor and members helped to identify their community needs and problems and ways of meeting the needs and solving the problems. Some of the training carried out with help from the Portsmouth “Bamenda Sunday” campaign is sampled in the following pictures from parishes.

Training in Bambili



Wum Deanery Executive



Njimafor training



Njimafor Exco





Egbea-chuk mission station



Big Ambelle mission station commission



Beba mission station commission



Azire parish commission



Batibo main mission

Thanks to the Bamenda – Portsmouth link that enabled the Social Welfare/Caritas Office to support the grassroots communities of 3 villages in Ambelle zone of Widikum parish, to solve one of the problems they identified during the training of their mission station commissions. The three villages of Egbea-chuk, Big Ambelle and Baraminchang I identified lack of toilets (primary sanitation), lack of good drinking water, a health centre and a catholic primary school as their needs/problems. The lack of toilets was chosen as the first need to be addressed, because it was very crucial to the primary health of the communities. The Social Welfare/Caritas Office was

convinced that mobilization and helping the communities to construct pit toilets would eventually eliminate sources of contamination and diseases and enhance the health of the communities, so it requested help through the Bamenda – Portsmouth committee for funds to support the construction of community toilets in the three villages. In response to our request, Portsmouth diocese donated 2,250,000FCFA local currency being equivalence of £3000 in 2011 towards the Ambelle zone sanitation project aimed at constructing 6 pit toilets.

The generosity of the faithful of Portsmouth diocese awakened the interest of our Ambelle zone communities and facilitated the mobilization process to enable them provide all local materials (sand, gravel, stones, mud blocks and timber) as well as pay 50% of the digging cost either in cash or kind (palm oil). The funds from Portsmouth were used to purchase and transport cement, iron rods and zinc and also paid 50% digging costs and skilled labour. Part of the cement and rods was used to construct a spring catchment in Egbea-chuk at the request of the community to protect it so they can have a clean source of drinking water. Constructing 6 pit toilets was envisaged in the 3 villages, but during the execution of the project, 10 toilets including 3 for disabled persons near their own houses were constructed, as people saw the importance of good sanitation and settlements were far between.

The pictures below depict samples of the construction work and finished toilet as well as the construction of the Egbea-chuck spring catchment.

Casting toilet foundation



Toilet slabs in place with squothing holes marked



Constructed toilet



Constructing Egbea-chuk spring catchment



Laying bamboo pipe line to collection point



Constructing spring collection chamber



The Social Welfare/Caritas office team of the Archdiocese of Bamenda and the Ambelle zone grassroots communities are very grateful to the people of God in Portsmouth diocese for the change the sanitation project has brought to their communities in general and to individual families and the enhancement of their health. For all that the Bamenda – Portsmouth link has enabled the Social Welfare/Caritas office of Bamenda to achieve for the underprivileged communities of Egbea-chuck, Big Ambelle and Baraminchang I, we remain grateful.

The Bamenda – Portsmouth link is indeed the live wire of the Social Welfare/Caritas office of the Archdiocese of Bamenda. In 2012 this office applied again to Portsmouth diocese for funds to enable it support the construction of a Youths/Women Empowerment Centre in Esu parish, another underprivileged grassroots community in the Archdiocese of Bamenda, to train the over 2000 single mothers, school dropouts and women in various crafts and income generating activities as well as give adult education classes to interested men and women who have never been to school, is to be constructed in 3 phases. The first phase comprising a block of 4 rooms (a sewing and machine embroidery room, a knitting room, a showroom for finishing products and a laundry/WC room). In 2012 we received funds from Portsmouth diocese amounting to 3,750,000FCFA local currency being the equivalence of £5000 to enable us commence construction of this first phase, and in 2013 we have received a further 5,250,000FCF for the building which as seen from the pictures below is near completion.



Jo on site



Esu youth Empowerment project



Yes indeed, the underprivileged rural communities of the Archdiocese of Bamenda are among the beneficiaries of the fruits of the Bamenda-Portsmouth Ruby Jubilee Link which we celebrate in 2014. The financial support provided by the people of God (the faithful) in Portsmouth diocese has enabled the Social Welfare/Caritas office of the Archdiocese of Bamenda to mobilize, animate and instill in the lives of the grassroots communities of Ambelle zone and Esu a sense of solidarity and community spirit. Through this the communities have been and are being empowered to engage in their community projects. In Ambelle zone for instance, the tools bought for preparing stones and gravel for their pit toilet project was used by 3 villages – passed on to the other village by one after use. Since the completion of the toilets project, the 3 villages have worked together with the Social Welfare/Caritas office technician to identify a common water catchment source that would provide potable water to 4 villages and have actually excavated the spring source and are working to construct the catchment while we elaborate a project to resource funds. Working together to find a solution to their problem of the lack of a good source of water has been learned thanks to the support from Portsmouth diocese to realize the first community development project in that enclave part of the Widikum parish. The grassroots population has also learned to be involved in their project by making contributions in either cash or kind (oil to be sold to get the cash). This has helped to raise their dignity as collaborators to their own development. They have been empowered and are now proud to undertake development initiatives before resourcing external help.

The current Youths/Women Empowerment Centre project construction in Esu parish has also enhanced the community spirit of the grassroots population. At the start of the project in 2012, days were set by the traditional ruler (the Fon) and his collaborators (the quarter heads) for the population to do community work on the site and so the clearing of the entire site was done, and



the excavation of the foundation of the first block done. There was no access road to the building site to facilitate materials to be dropped there, so the Fon and his quarter heads called on the men folk to open an access road, which they did. Then the village development association and the Archdiocesan Social Welfare/Caritas office paid for a bulldozer to lower a steep hill, to facilitate the movement of Lorries (tippers) to drop sand on the site.

Access road



Sand on site



The access road to the Empowerment Centre site has attracted people to extend settlements along the road so the quarter where the centre is located is increasing in size. The presence of the Empowerment Centre in Esu has raised the interest of the Moslem hierarchy (the Ado – traditional ruler of the Aku graziers) in education not only of Youths and Women but also of children. The Ado told the coordinator that they need a children’s school to train their children (boys and girls) so they do not grow up to be illiterate like them whose parents refused to educate.

Thanks to the Bamenda – Portsmouth Link which has enabled the Social Welfare/Caritas Office of the Archdiocese of Bamenda to bring hope to the ‘hopeless’ population in some of the most marginalized villages in the North West Region of Cameroon. There is great hope and expectation in Esu as the Empowerment Centre is seen as a bridge to embrace and unite young and old, Moslems, Christians and none Christians – people of all creeds and cultures. The centre will help break barriers and raise the dignity of women as well as the living standards of all who will use it.

As we celebrate the Ruby Jubilee – 40 years of the Bamenda-Portsmouth Link, I would like our brothers and sisters, the people of God in Portsmouth Diocese to know that by helping their diocese to help the Archdiocese of Bamenda help its people, they have and are all contributing to the integral development of our underprivileged grassroots communities where they sponsor projects. As Pope Paul VI clearly says, *“It can even be affirmed that economic growth depends in the very first place upon social progress; thus basic education is the primary object of any plan of development. Indeed, hunger for education is no less debasing than hunger for food: an*

*illiterate is a person with an undernourished mind. To be able to read and write, to acquire a professional formation means to recover confidence in oneself and to discover that one can progress along with the others”.* (Populorum Progressio No. 35).

Thus any Social Welfare/Caritas project undertaken in Bamenda is planned to develop not only the body (economic) but also the mind, (intellectual), social (relational), the heart (emotional) and the psyche/spirit (psychological and the spiritual), as the Bamenda Provincial Pastoral Plan puts it. (Quoted from *Ecclesia in Africa*). The liberation which the Gospel announces cannot be restricted to economic, political, social or cultural life. It must envisage the whole human being, in all his aspects, right up to, and including his openness to God. (*Ecclesia in Africa* No. 68). Thank you, Portsmouth for collaborating with Bamenda to help the Social Welfare/Caritas office achieves its social action.

The Social Welfare/Caritas coordination office of the Archdiocese of Bamenda wishes Portsmouth diocese a Happy Ruby Jubilee celebration.



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