

Onderwerp: KULMASA UPDATES-6MONTHS ON.....

1 April 2021

Dear All,

With great joy on this Maudy Thursday, I write to update you on life and Mission in Kulmasa. Today 1st April, we are exactly 6 months here! And so much has happened within these six months. We are grateful for your support in many ways and are happy to share with you part of the story.....

CHILDREN AND VERY BASIC NEEDS:

As shared in previous updates, hunger especially for the children has been and continues to be a challenge. We had hoped that when schools reopened things will get better because most public basic schools are under the government school feeding programme. But to our greatest disappointment, we found out that the R/C school here is not included in this programme. Fr. Tanti our Parish Priest said he has followed it up severally and nothing seems to happen. So these children who really need this kind of help are deprived of it. Every now and then, we share something with them. And we do make it a point always especially to cook a balanced diet for those who help us with any kind of work. Unfortunately, it is not only the children, even if the adults meet us eating and we politely invite them, very few refuse. What to do?

Most of the children we have encountered lack tooth brushes and paste, bathing soap and basic toiletries. Skin diseases like ring worms and body sores are so common. With funds from Germany and MDC, we respond as much as we are able to. But we are also encouraged by their generosity of heart and spirit, their willingness to 'help' us and we are great collaborators in mission! They continue to fetch water for us since we have no water. Even little ones like Cindy want to help fetch water for us! (see photos).

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ECO DEMO FARM:

The Women's Empowerment Project and the Eco demo farm have been priority on our list. Projects have been written and we are hoping that in May, we can begin all these. Martin Wilde, our who is helping us together with Gail to raise funds had visited Horstel Parish in Germany and by accident discovered that, it is a twin Parish of Kulmasa. The people have been so great to accept with Martin's help to raise initial funds for the beginning of both Eco demo farm and the Women Empowerment Project. The Women Empowerment Project in the long term is to have different opportunities for income generation, provide general health and hygiene education as well as education on issues of Women Reproductive Health, basic book keeping skills and basic literacy, and also other basic life skills and more effective ways of processing sheanuts into shea butter and adding value to locally made food products so that their incomes can increase. But for now, we hope to begin with soap making interspersed with basic health education and literacy programmes.

The Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters has already provided funding for our first borehole which will enable us begin the Eco demo farm. Again, the Horstel parish are elated by the concept of the Project and again have taken it upon themselves to raise funds for this farm with the help of Martin. This Eco demo farm is the beginnings of a bigger agri-business which is meant to produce food and animal products in commercial quantities to support the operations of the clinic in such a poor and deprived area. A German Agriculturist in the

Horstel Parish is keen and ready to come to Kulmasa and help us start the Eco demo farm as soon as he is able to travel. He comes under the auspices of SES (Senior Expert Services). We have already started practising in our small compound using droppings from goats and we have nice spinach and other local vegetables, enough to share with neighbours in need.

YOUTH AND EDUCATION:

There are many school dropouts; lack of funds for the boys and push into marriage for the girls. The Parish has really been trying but the situation of the girls is so bad and discouraging. But we are not discouraged. We have hope that it takes a few to change the status quo and so we can! The young people need real accompaniment. Each girl's story is so unique, one cannot put all of them in one basket! An example is Mavis who did well in her exams but to continue to Senior High School was a challenge. When others were going to school and she was still at home, we visited her home and had a chat with the parents. With some support which we provided, she is now happily in school. Sr. Jane had even sewn her blue checked uniform! Some of the parents do not help matters; some parents (both men and women) drink heavily, using much needed money that can support the entire family to buy liquor. We have established some relationships with such parents already and we hope to help them see that, with their help, the vicious cycle of poverty can be broken.

The Kulmasa Youth Association has written officially to invite us to their meeting this weekend. We deem it very important and so we will attend and grant them audience. We hope that it will become the beginning of a more solid collaboration.

OUT STATION VISITATIONS:

We have been visiting the Outstations of the Parish with the Priest on Sundays. Some are close by, others are not too far but the roads are bad so it seems long. Some of the places are completely cut off during the months of rains. With women in all these places, we have talked and they will all participate in the Empowerment programmes. Whenever we speak to the women after mass, some men will also stay on and listen and support us as we encourage the women! It is so encouraging! In fact, many of the outstations are more vibrant than Kulmasa itself. But the different cultural backgrounds affect them in diverse ways. For example, in Kulmasa itself, the women are allowed to pick the sheanuts wherever they are and they process them. But in some communities, the women cannot pick the sheanuts on the farm of the husband. They belong to him! So they have to walk deep into the bushes to search for their own! Often at the peril of snake bites and others. The women have no voice on any leadership group. These are deeply cultural and we are approaching them with great caution and understanding. We need to have all on board and then 'face' the challenges together.

WIDOWS; A SURPRISE:

One day, we had visited an Outstation and after speaking to them about the Women Empowerment Project, one woman had a question; 'what about we the widows? If we leave our farms to participate in the Project, who will farm for us?' That was our hint! We decided to have a headcount of widows present and we counted thirteen! And they told us many had not come to church that day. We have decided to keep track of them at the various stations and get a general picture and then.....

PUBLIC HEALTH:

The Holy Spirit was really with us when we were inspired to begin with Public Health while we work towards the Clinic itself. Public Health issues run through everything. When I send Ursula Maier some of the pictures of the children for very different reasons, straightway she sees the malnourished ones, the anaemic ones, the ones who need dewormers and many such.

On Sunday 21st March, we had gone with Fr. Tanti to an Outstation called Sofaateng. It is one of the places cut off during the months of rains. So we did not want to miss the opportunity. The church was so small with no windows. Fr. opted that due to covid-19, we have the mass outside, so with cutlasses, we cleared a space under a tree and there we had mass! During mass, I saw one girl sitting on the ground. There was something odd about her so I decided to enquire about her after mass. She was a bit 'off' they said. The father was not Catholic and so was not around. But we were sent to his house to see him. He is a Traditionalist. He gave us a long history of how the mother run down to greener pastures (Galamsay-illegal mining) in the south some years back and has never returned. The girl is epileptic, and it had started only three years ago. He tried local medicine and has given up. We asked if he would welcome orthodox medicine and intervention for the girl and he welcomed it. I showed the photo of Ama to Ursula and with just a look, she diagnosed her. The girl is called Ama (pictured with me in one of the photos). We will follow up. I wonder how many 'Amas' are there.

Again, I have been surprised by the number of people I have heard of who are epileptic here. I was alarmed if it was something in the environment but I am assured it can not be. These are Public Health issues we will follow up. One pretty and hardworking lady had approached us to help her learn how to bake. She makes small pastries and sells sometimes after mass. We were happy and were going to help her until she had one epileptic fitting attack in the sacristy after mass..... Will she not burn herself while frying or baking her pastries and gets these attacks? We are on hold with her until an intervention is staged. It's also not an easy topic to broach so we are giving her time.

In one of the photos from Ama's village, Ursula had spotted an albino boy who was squinting from the sun as he queued to get his share of candies which we are giving to all the children. Ursula has already given me skin lotion and sunglasses to protect his eyes. Thinking back, I remember how many of such have I seen around walking about without shades for their eyes with the ultimate end of going blind?

A team has already visited our house to give us Ivermectin tablets for the prevention of river blindness. So this is already an issue in the area. Just on Sunday 28th March, I was on a public transport to Techiman. A man and the wife joined us in one village. Just about 15 minutes after, the woman began to wail. There was some commotion in the car only to find out, the baby at her back had just died..... They had been referred to the nearest hospital. Only God knows for how long they had been waiting for the car. It also means the baby's condition had been critical but they had just been sent off like that! Here was a mother with a dead baby at the back. Had to carry the dead baby and wait for the next car to return to her village. This was out of the domain of Kulmasa but such a situation is not only peculiar to that village but to many more like it.

These are discoveries though not good ones. But it shows the extent of work to be done. And so we are really eager to begin our Public Health Programmes too. Vrienden has given us funds to start off and we are so grateful. To be able to have the staff, the equipment and resources to make a difference is what matters. If not, then it's the same end for many like this dead baby, Ama, the albino boy, the malnourished children, the untreated epileptics walking about one attack after the other.....

THE BIG MEETING:

On Wednesday 24th March, we had a meeting with the Regional Health Director of the Savannah Region, the Regional Health Administrator and the Bishop in Damongo. It was a very good and encouraging meeting and the Regional Team is happy to have us on board. And they are ready to support us in whatever way they can.

PRIMARY EVANGELISATION:

As has been shared before, the Diocese of Damongo is an area of primary Evangelisation. Sometimes, the separation between the traditional beliefs for some and the Christian faith is so thin. Some easily move in between the two. We are encouraged by how the local church in her wisdom tries to use inculturation to nurture the faith of the people. For example, they bring crosses to church for blessing which they plant on their farms as a sign of protection and blessing for good yield instead of the fetish stuff they would have gone for and planted on the farm. They also bring seeds for sowing for blessing....

Some of the people are so green to the faith such that, they can even barely respond to the prayers at mass. They challenge our faith and we hope that by our lives, we can also help their faith to grow. One day, the bore hole from which we fetch water broke down. We needed drinking water. So we went to a local 'sachet water' manufacturing place to buy water. When we gave money to the man, he was so angry! He said, how can you even think of it! This was a Moslem man! He completely refused to accept the money. Thankfully, the borehole was repaired within days and so we have water, which we boil before we drink.

THE WALL FENCE:

Fencing the entire Land for the Project has become such a priority. In the many months of no rain, all animals; cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, fowls of all kinds are let loose to find food. No one survives outside. Even now, we have not been able to keep compost because the animals eat anything and everything! No Eco farm will survive when it is not protected. Also, bushfires are common. Year after year, people set fires to the bush for their own reasons. But for herdsmen with cattle, it is believed that, once the bush is burnt, with dew or little rain, fresh grass grows so that their herds can find grass to graze, and this is their priority to the peril of loss of lives and property. A fence is needed to protect lives and property. Looking at the resources going into the project, it is worth protecting all the equipment, machinery, medical equipment and supplies as well as products related to all other components of the project.

THE BIG LAUNCH:

Next month, we hope to launch the entire project. The platform is to be used to bring stakeholders together, to give them an overview of the entire Integrated Health Project so that all stakeholders can know their part to play and support the various components of the Project. We hope that this can happen in May.

Photos often tell more of the story. May you feel connected with us here through the photos and hope and pray with us so that through this Project, change for the better will come to many. Thank you for your prayers and support in many ways. And we are particularly grateful to MDC, UNA PR, Unit Germany (Kristina, Mariotte, Ursula P and now Ursula M in Ghana and the entire Unit Membership), Vrienden, all of you on this mail list for your involvement in the 'friend raising' and fundraising efforts. Not forgetting my able Kulmasa Steering Group Members Gail and Martin. You are awesome! As for Rosemary and Gertrude, we can't start the story here. We thank you and we are not done yet! Thank you! Wishing you all a blessed Triduum and eventually a Happy Easter.

Best Wishes,
Rita Amponsaa-Owusu