

Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 in rural Toga West Africa Churches and Communities

Project submitted by: New Harvest Missions International (NHMI)

Project Country: Togo West Africa

Project Location: Lomé Presbytery in South and Kara Presbytery in North

Project duration: August -December 2020

Project Beneficiaries: A special attention will be given to church members, individuals, NHMI pastors, church planters, evangelists, and their families in rural areas in both Presbyteries. Strong focus on the children and their households facing hunger.

Existing problem affecting rural communities and the churches.

In response to the pandemic, most governments in West Africa have closed borders, restricted travel, closed schools, churches, markets and ordered families to stay at home. This leaves those within the West African context with no support system outside of immediate families and/or their local communities for help. The most vulnerable are living day to day with no one to assist them. The poor and marginalized Christians in the areas we are serving are crying out to the church for immediate help.

COVID-19 has made an already tenuous situation even more dire, yet the church lacks the resources and funding to provide the most basic needs its members. Church leaders are facing enormous burdens and tremendous difficulties with nowhere to turn.

People's lives have been upended in ways that are hard to comprehend. This is especially true on the mission field where the impact is felt on an even greater level and the situation is worsening. The church in Muslim West Africa has been scattered, stressed, and struggling; pretty much shut down in many regions of the countries.

The pandemic has raised serious challenges and has negatively impacted our churches and leadership at all levels.

The Impact on the rural churches and church members

For the Church in Togo, the income of the pastor or a church planter comes from the meager offerings and donations of their congregations. Now, with the government closure of the market, that meager source of income has all but stopped. Churches are in lockdown for 8 months, Christians cannot gather for worship and therefore, church members have nothing to give. This leaves

Pastors, church planters and their families in desperate need, but especially those in rural settings. Presbytery leaders are facing tremendous challenges and enormous burdens to provide for their leaders, but they have nowhere to turn for help.

Economic impact in rural communities and churches

The economic impact in many towns and villages as a result of COVID19 is already changing the face of the church and the congregations. Many of the church members have earned their daily bread by selling food and other goods at the roadside. Although these incomes were small, they did provide just enough money to feed their families. However, these lockdowns have now cut them off from almost all resources to survive.

In addition to the lockdown challenges, most of the rural population in Togo depend on subsistence and small-scale agriculture for their food security and incomes. The agricultural sector is already constrained by unfavorable policies of the government, drought, lack of access to adequate market, storage transportation, and lack of access to finance.

The pandemic has matters only worse, not only to food security and incomes of our church members who are rural farmers, but also to the entire country's economy. There is no doubt that the scourge will continue to put the rural church members who are farmers, particularly women-headed households, in extreme poverty.

The Impact on education of the children in rural communities

For children, the impact on their education has been catastrophic, with schools closed for over 8 months and not due to open again until end of October 2020. (Senior year classes were allowed to return for final exams to avoid an educational crisis in the country). Considering continued closure of our schools, NHMI team in Togo will continue working with the school to help with foods and schoolwork to the students in their villages. Also, all our faculty and staff are continuing to receive compensation. The villages where our students live are poor communities with little or no health capacity to fight against coronavirus.

How will this project help to address the need?

The struggle for survival is not isolated. In many churches across all regions, the pandemic has launched a vicious cycle, leaving church members in need to turn to the church for support. Our Project will help address these multiple crises in two presbyteries with 58 churches; most in rural setting.

Our role as ministry is crucial in reaching remote communities quickly. Serving in the region for many years gives us the ability to reach families and households and churches members to provide them with food and hygiene packs to help them survive.

Since many of our pastors and church members live in rural villages, we can efficiently undertake relief activities and distribute food packs and hygiene packs immediately. We can serve 58 churches in 33 villages, reach out to 10,000 families with food packages. We can care for 85 church planters, pastors, evangelists, and their families by distributing masks, soap, oil, sanitary products and water in the areas where they are most needed. Funds will also provide an excellent education opportunity to 148 underprivileged children in northern Togo with essential food and sanitary kits until normalization in the lives of the children and their families returns.

Project outcomes:

- This project will have a serious impact in the lives of the beneficiaries and churches in both presbyteries for the Kingdom of God in Togo Muslim West Africa.
- Church planters, pastors, evangelists, and church members we are serving will be greatly encouraged.
- Through this project, difficult Islamic communities will become more receptive to our church planters and evangelists. This will further our ability to share the gospel and accelerate the outreach activities and will result in new church planting in our targeted areas

Children education for 140 children and household size of 5 totaling 750 beneficiaries

- \$110 can provide a nutritious meal for a week to 140 children
- \$440 can provide a nutritious meal for a month to 140 children
- \$ 1,320 can provide a meal for the next three months to 140 children

For 85 church planters, pastors, with a household size of 5 totaling 425 beneficiaries

It will provide 5kg rice and 5kg corn flour, black eye beans, cooking oil, and feed one household size of 5 for one month

- \$60 for one pastors/church planter's household food survival pack for a month
- \$180 for one pastor /church planter's household food pack for three months

- \$15,300 will feed a household size of 5 for 85 pastors church planters for the next three months

For 33 rural villages containing food essentials kits like Rice, corn meal, beans, cooking oil, soap, for 58 churches totaling 7000 church members

- \$900 will provide food pack for a congregation with average of 120 church members in a month
- \$29,700 will provide food pack in 33 villages, 58 churches for a month and feed approximately 10,000 people
- With \$ 46,320, this project will serve almost 10,000 people, 33 villages, 58 churches in two presbyteries for a period of three months.