



CARITAS GHANA

COVID-19 RESPONSE INTERVENTIONS: SOME TALKING POINTS BETWEEN THE DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON 1ST MARCH, 2021

Introduction

The Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) put in place a nine-month Covid-19 Comprehensive Response Plan from April to December, 2020 to guide various sectors of the Church's specific interventions. The Plan has since been extended by another one year from January to December, 2021. The GCBC's Response Plan was generally aimed at complementing the national Covid-19 Response Plan of the Government of Ghana.

Caritas Ghana's specific interventions were driven by its specific mission for humanitarian, relief, socioeconomic and public policy advocacy to the extent made possible by its resource mobilization. The sudden and unexpected occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana in the March 2020, meant that no prior plans and budgeting had been anticipated hence every aspect of the interventions adopted emergency and crises approach.

Nevertheless, some significant inroads were made by Caritas Ghana in bringing relief (food, shelter and first aid) to many indigent poor. At the realm of Advocacy and Campaigning, Caritas Ghana sustained public awareness for desirable behavior change to stem the pandemic and proactively engaged Government to ensure protection and safeguards for the poor and homeless especially during the period of the lockdown. Caritas Ghana adopted a proactive partnership model with other Faith Groups through the Interfaith Network, National Civil Society Coalitions and diverse local and international Funding Agencies. The support of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Caritas International, through their Covid-19 Response Fund (CRF) and facilitation of donations to Caritas Ghana was very notable among all the collaborative efforts. Other Donors to Caritas Ghana's efforts were the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) / Government of Germany (BMZ), Embassy of France in Ghana, Catholic Relief Services in Ghana, STAR Ghana Foundation (Pooled funding for National Civil Society) and Government of Taiwan.

Overview of Actions

All actions undertaken by Caritas Ghana were geared towards the realization of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference Covid-19 Response Plan. Fortunately, our collaborative approaches and successes in resource mobilization enabled Caritas Ghana to accomplish the following for the Local Church:

a) Services

- I. In collaboration with CRS and the Caritas Organizations of the Archdioceses of Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast which were directly under lockdown, we provided temporary shelter to over 3,500 indigent poor and homeless in Accra, Kumasi and Kasoa.

- II. Food rations also reached over 10,000 very needy persons in the three Archdioceses which were under lockdown, also with the support of CRS and Ghana Association of Bankers (GAB).
- III. All (except 3) Arch/Dioceses received a total of 4,500 pieces of medical facemasks from Caritas Ghana to serve their health and other personnel, which was donated by the Government of Taiwan. In all, some 100,000 pieces of medical facemasks were distributed by Caritas Ghana.
- IV. Three Dioceses in the Northern Province (Wa, Tamale & Navrongo-Bolgatanga) received targeted support of PPEs, Sanitizers and Public Educational Materials on Covid-19 from the Embassy of France in Ghana through Caritas Ghana.
- V. All the 20 Arch/Dioceses, The Catholic Standard and the NCS' Department of Social Communications (DEPSOCOM) received regular monthly cash support for five months (April – August, 2020) from Caritas Ghana to undertake public awareness and psychosocial messaging through radio and other social and print media to influence positive behaviors in respect of Covid-19. Caritas Ghana also supported other Faith Groups (Office of the National Chief Imam, Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches, Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Ghana (FOMWAG) to do same. The funding came from the STAR Ghana Foundation.
- VI. Caritas Ghana further supported the four Archdioceses in Ghana (Accra, Kumasi, Cape Coast & Tamale) with funds, PPEs, Sanitation and Medicines through the funding from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Caritas International Covid-19 Response Fund (CRF). This initiative received wide media interest both locally and internationally.
- VII. Caritas Ghana provided direct cash transfers to 2,474 poor families whose livelihoods were negatively affected by Covid-19 in the slumps in Accra and further provided economic empowerment to displaced Kayayee (Head Porter Girls) in Madina and Agbogbloshie through alternative skills training and resettlement in Tamale to work on our Plastic Preprocessing Plant in Tamale. Caritas Ghana has learned from this experience to expand our Social Impact Investing initiatives in Electronic and Plastic Recycling to create more decent jobs and Skills training for many youth in the informal sector who have been displaced by Covid-19 related impact.

b) Advocacy

- I. Caritas Ghana facilitated participatory monitoring by citizens groups of Government's Social Protection Programmes in 16 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), according to the national Covid-19 Response Plan. The exercise provided independent feedback to Government on its own commitments to safeguarding the poor and vulnerable in the Covid-19 situation.
- II. Caritas Ghana has launched a Debt Cancellation Campaign in Ghana (RETHINKING SOVEREIGN DEBT) in November, 2020 to free resources and create fiscal space for the Government of Ghana to address health and other social services of the population; as a result of huge budget deficit caused by Covid-19 and its related impacts. This Campaign

initiated locally has now gained Africa-wide support with the participation of many Actors with the Church in Africa.

- III. Caritas Ghana has been very active in the national discourse on the introduction of vaccines to stem the Covid-19 pandemic. Caritas Ghana's voice on **Access and Acceptance for Equity** in the distribution of the vaccines has received wide media attention locally and internationally.

Challenges

- I. Covid-19 has worsened the youth unemployment situation in Ghana leading to an escalation of social vices by these desperate youth.
- II. Government and Dioceses are facing a serious budget crunch which affects their ability to provide critical social services to the population.
- III. Covid-19 has dramatically affected conventional human resource management and general work culture and practice. Yet our Church institutions are less prepared to respond adequately, both in attributional change and required resources like IT and internet facilities.

Conclusion

While Ghana is being toasted globally for making early efforts to acquire the Covid-19 vaccines, there remain widespread skepticism and conspiracy theories about the vaccines which pose a serious challenge to its effective roll out. There are also concerns about the lack of a transparent rollout plan for distribution to ensure equity and justice. This is one of the greatest challenges facing Religious Leaders at this material moment to ensure social justices in this important service.

One of the examples of best practice for the Local Church has been the instrumentality of its own Charity Agency – Caritas Ghana. Because of its compliance with both Ecclesial and State regulations, it was easier to forge collaborative partnerships for resource mobilization from both State and Non-State Actors for the GCBC's Covid-19 Response while enjoying all the tax reliefs from Government Agencies.

In conclusion, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference continue to value both the practical and strategic support provided by the Holy See to stem the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Practical support includes the facilitation of funding and donation of critical resources (equipment and know-how) to our Agencies like Caritas Ghana. In a more strategic way, the influence and voice of the Holy See will help shape international discourses and decisions on vaccines, debt and new economic models that will empower poor Governments like Ghana to be able to respond to the crises now and in the long term. The GCBC will like to affirm the need for international solidarity to stem the Covid-19 pandemic that includes everyone.

PRESENTED BY:

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