



Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa
Programme des Relations Islamo-Chrétiennes en Afrique



PROCMURA'S INTERVENTION IN THE WAKE OF COVID - 19 PANDEMIC



LAUNCHING OF THE INITIATIVE BY PROCMURA'S EXECUTIVE STAFF

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no gain in repeating the obvious that the Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic has put the world on its knees. Nations and their peoples are anxious and afraid of the worst as infections and loss of lives are on the rise daily in several countries. As this reality takes its toll, there is loss of livelihood, with the poor and vulnerable suffering depression and groaning on how to find something to eat and feed their families.

Reports from PROCMURA's constituencies filed in by the PROCMURA Area Committees to the Central office, provide an overview of the situation on the ground around Africa. Although the pandemic has affected people across the spectrum, its impact is most devastating in the informal settlements in urban areas and villages where health and hygiene standards are very poor across the continent. Christian and Muslim Religious Leaders from these communities face daily demands for assistance from their respective communities and the wider communities at large.

The majority of persons from these vulnerable areas are not able to live up to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and their government directives of social distancing and washing of hands regularly with water and soap, as water itself is a rear commodity in their vicinities. The need for regular sanitisation of hands and wearing of face masks is a requirement that most of these communities cannot fulfil. The directive of social distancing is somewhat not feasible as most residents live in crowded households. The hygienic conditions in such informal settlements are deplorable as toilet facilities are shared by all members of the community thus generally increasing risks of all sorts of infectious diseases of which COVID – 19 is the most lethal. In addition to these, the requirement of “staying at home” is not practicable in most of these communities where livelihood depends on daily earnings that enable some of them to live - be it from hand to mouth. The worst scenario in all these is that children in the communities are more vulnerable as they play around with one another without any kind of protection such as face masks.

PROCMURA in line with its vision of peace, justice and reconciliation towards the wholistic (holistic) development of the human family across religious lines recognised that COVID – 19 in essence is an anathema to this vision. It therefore employed its programme of diapraxis (tangible action) with Muslims together and where that was not feasible to ensure that it's Area Committees become active in providing humanitarian aid. This report highlights what the PROCMURA Central office has done thus far, and what some of its Area Committees have been involved in.

2. THE CENTRAL OFFICE RESPONSE TO COVID – 19.

The PROCMURA Central Office team visited the kamukunji informal settlement in Nairobi, which has a fairly reasonable amount of vulnerable communities composed of both Christians and Muslims; an important demography for its programmatic focus. The team sought to establish the live experiences and challenges of the community in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic. Their findings corroborated the reports from various Area Committees across the continent, on the excruciating experiences of the people especially; widows, orphans, physically challenged persons, single mothers, and the elderly.



A widow with 8 children narrates to the PROCMURA Team about the poor living conditions and starvation



Upon visiting the Slum, The PROCMURA Team established that there was no hand washing point in this part of the community

2.1 PHASE ONE: PROVISION OF PROCMURA'S COVID - 19 KITTY

Moved by its vision, and the reality on the ground, PROCMURA Central office held discussions on what they should do. It was resolved that it was time to act and not time to talk. A team was formed to come up with a COVID 19 kitty, to facilitate and respond to the needs of vulnerable communities. PROCMURA called upon its Area Committees, churches, friends and, well-wishers to make a contribution to this course. The response was favourable from people of good will. This stimulated PROCMURA as it had hoped, and it decided to join the fight against the pandemic in practical ways.

2.1.1 Focus on Kamukunji Nairobi and the Deployment of Diapaxis

Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya happens to have a large population living in informal settlements; unemployed youth, widows, and single parents who are unable to provide basic needs for their families and have been significantly affected by COVID - 19. Currently the City is under lockdown and facing a dawn to dusk curfew that has affected the economic activities of the entire country.

Responding to the needs of the kamukunji community in Nairobi, PROCMURA employed its diapaxis model of programme implementation by ensuring that Christians and Muslims from within the community participated and benefited in the initiative. It also ensured that its principle of consultation with state actors and seeking their endorsement of community action was followed by seeking official permission and support from the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC) of kamukunji, who doubles as the vice chairperson of the COVID -19 response committee in the area.



PROCMURA Team in a planning meeting with the DCC of kamukunji on the intervention strategies

Having raised a substantive amount of money in its COVID 19 Kitty, PROCMURA staff on the 16th of May 2020 assembled at the shauri Moyo Baptist church compound to begin their interventions. A number of activities were conducted:

ACTIVITY ONE

PROCMURA distributed food items to pre-identified families from the community. In order to respect the directives of social distancing, the distribution was done outdoor where fifty (50) beneficiaries received the food package at the shauri Moyo Baptist compound, while the rest of the families received their food privately in their houses. PROCMURA was assisted by the leaders of the Kamukunji Community Peace Network (composed of Christians and Muslims) in the distribution.



Beneficiaries walk away with food items.

ACTIVITY TWO

The second activity was the installation of drums for washing of hands. The drums are to serve as sanitation points. Six (6) washing hands points were installed, accompanied with gallons of sanitizers/soap, in strategic areas within the community, with various community groups, tasked to continuously fill the drums with water and sensitize community members to wash their hands frequently.

Awareness raising messages were scripted on the drums, in addition to the messages on fliers, stickers, bags, and t-shirts in a bid to increase knowledge about the pandemic.



PROCMURA Team install hand washing points

ACTIVITY THREE

The final intervention targeted children and was dubbed “LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND”. Children from the ages of three years old were happy to finally have face masks to wear. Five thousand (5,000) washable face masks were handed over to the Kamukunji community peace network to share among the children in the community.



Face masks distribution for children

1. Samples of Some Area Committees Responses

Members of some Area Committees of PROCMURA have been working in collaboration with various churches or actually mobilising their own congregations to provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable persons in their communities. Reports reaching the Central Office indicates in countries where Area Committees are unable to mobilise funds for humanitarian aid, they get involved in raising awareness about the pandemic and preventive measure in their communities. Some Area Committees and committee members have produced awareness messages in local language on radios to sensitize the population.

In addition to this some Area Committee members have organised and participated in radio talk shows in a bid to raise awareness about the pandemic and educate the population on safety measures. They also use this time to caution Christians and Muslims in various communities to be good neighbours to each other, by assisting and sharing items such as food stuff during this time of need. For COVID -19 does not know if one is a Christian or Muslim. It is a pandemic that face all human beings.

Below is a pictorial view of humanitarian aid in four different countries where PROCMURA chairpersons and the consultant helped initiate and were actively involved.

TOGO



The Chairperson of the Togo Area Committee, Mr. Apadou Onyami, distributing food to vulnerable persons in Togo

LIBERIA



The Chairperson of the Liberia Area Committee, Rev. Dr. Emmanuel F. Johnson distributing food and sanitation items

SIERRA LEONE



The Chairperson of the Sierra Leone Area Committee, Rev. Christiana Sutton-Koroma supporting vulnerable persons

Rev. Christiana Sutton-Koroma Brings Goodwill messages from the church and sensitized the population in a radio station in Freetown .

GHANA



The PROCMURA Consultant, Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah Mobilised his congregation in Accra to provide humanitarian aid to the vulnerable

The Women leadership of the congregation prepare to hand over the final food packages to Dr . Mbillah and his church elder.

A. PROJECT OUTPUT/IMPACT

- *Awareness raising on the pandemic:* The PROCMURA team accompanied by some members of the Kamukunji community peace network, were dressed in T-shirts with a message on COVID 19 as they moved into the community. People in the community who do not have access to radio, internet and television, got messages on prevention scripted on the T- shirts and on the drums installed at the hand washing points. Also, others got messages through radio programmes in local languages and other materials as in the case of Sierra Leone.
- *Immediate utilisation of donations:* the community immediately started washing their hands after the drums were installed. The children who had received the face masks wore them immediately. This communicated that we meet the needs of the people in their backyards. This eventually will curb the spread of the virus.
- *Hope was restored:* Donating food items to these highly dependent people in the various communities and countries (Togo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Kenya has prevented them from hunger for a period of time and has put a smile on their faces.
- *Christian-Muslim relations (diapraxis):* This intervention did not only address humanitarian aid, but also Christian-Muslim relations, which is an important area of PROCMURA's work. Christians and Muslim benefited from this initiative in the Kamukunji Area in Kenya and where the distribution was carried out in Sierra Leone, Muslims are the majority. Some of the Muslims from the Kamukunji community in Kenya were amazed by this initiative as it was organised by a Christian organisation (PROCMURA) which stretches a hand of friendship to Muslims in Africa. Some of them were hearing and experiencing what PROCMURA does for the first time. It was fascinating to see Christians and Muslims handing to each other food items donated by PROCMURA. This singular act elicited the feelings of togetherness and evoked a new consciousness of our common humanity.

B. LESSONS LEARNT/ APPEAL

- People all over Africa are seriously affected in diverse ways, but many people in the informal settlements are starving.
- Houses of worship are closed and many people are able to worship online and follow the teachings of their religious leaders on the same platforms, however this is not the case in the informal settlements, where pastors and imams are visited daily by the membership of their respective religious communities, requesting for food which they themselves do not have.
- The poverty level in the informal settlements leaves the children more vulnerable, as parents cannot provide masks to the number of children they have. They therefore decide to secure masks for themselves, leaving out the children.
- Governments, civil society organisations, churches, Muslim institutions and individuals have provided assistance to such communities, but the assistance could not reach everyone and sometimes, the assistance does not get to the most needy.
- PROCMURA continues to appeal to its constituents to collaborate with the churches and other agencies, to reach out to as many people as possible with preventive messages as well as humanitarian aid.
- A small gift can make a huge difference and give hope to someone in a hopeless condition.

CONCLUSION

- PROCMURA, *we care* was the # tag of this project. Recipients were grateful that PROCMURA leadership at the Central Office braved the risk to come to them in the slums to be of help. *We care*, ensuring that the identified persons in need received the humanitarian aid. This required the PROCMURA team to participate in the distribution, which the team diligently executed, thereby articulating more practically the slogan, we care.
- We appreciate that our Area Committees, churches and mosques and those who buy into the PROCMURA ideals and goals across the continent journeyed with us. Most especial, we appreciate the Shauri Moyo Baptist Church in Kenya, for allowing the PROCMURA team to use their premises during this precarious times.
- Our thanks go to the office of the DCC, and other government agencies across the continent, not forgetting the leadership of kamukunji community peace network for their unwavering support.
- Special gratitude goes to the well-wishers who contributed funds into the first phase of the COVID 19 kitty as this enabled us actualise our dream. We are looking forward to phase two of the project and hope that others come along and join this noble course.
- The joy and expression of gratitude by the beneficiaries and the instant use of some of the items donated, left us humbled and satisfied for touching many lives at such a time like this.
- We would like to do more and call upon those willing, to join us in the fight against the corona virus to do so. we care.
- Finally and all in all, we thank God who provides direction and insight in all that we do, we acknowledge with the Psalmist that: unless the lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain” (psalm 127:1a).



The PROCMURA Team.

PHOTO GALLERY

