

Letter from Denis Kumbo

## **Project Officer of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC)**

**Written to Rev. Jeff Boyd, mission co-worker in Cameroon, Regional Liaison for Central Africa**

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for your correspondence on the world food crisis and your question about how this is affecting Cameroon. I thank God that Christians and the leadership of PC(USA) are devoting time, energy and resources to reflect on this very disturbing global challenge.

From my point of view, the world food crisis has a multifaceted dimension which includes political reasons, economic manipulations, technical inadequacies and even cultural limitations and this therefore calls for a more profound action to be able to redress the situation.

In Cameroon for instance, I think the international aid architecture towards agriculture is too prescriptive and crowned with a lot of **conditionalities** which sometimes do not take the ground realities into consideration, but rather seek to impose international standards.

The extension and training project of the Presbyterian Rural Training Centre (PRTC) in Kumba was faring well and engaging with grassroots farmers to increase food production, enhance soil fertility, ensure increased yield, promote sustainable agriculture, improve animal husbandry, etc. Even the evaluation reports of this project highlighted the high impact of this project to food production in Cameroon. But unfortunately, Bread for the World – a German funding organisation, started bringing in all kinds of conditionalities, which while meeting international standards, were not realistic for this project. For example, that they will only fund activities but not recurrent costs, that the project should generate its own funding to become sustainable, that trainings should only be village-based and the centre-based trainings should end. With these, any Extension and Training project will simply collapse. This is what happened with the project when the project could not meet all their conditionalities, and they withdrew their funding. Also the Economic Partnership Agreements [*regional agreements similar to the regional Free Trade Agreements like North American Free Trade Agreement*] between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries is making the already fragile sector of agriculture more vulnerable since European farmers receive subsidies while the farmers in the south do not.

So how can trade between unequal partners flourish?

The World Trade Organisation is also manipulating world prices creating price fluctuations, which either encourage or discourage the continued production of certain crops. This was the situation for instance with cocoa and coffee in Cameroon.

For the short run, I think extension and training for rural farming populations should be supported to help increase food production through the promotion of better farming methods, the use of high-yielding species, the adoption of local soil fertility methods and assistance towards

the provision and use of storage facilities as well as trainings on better preservation methods. Let me also use this opportunity to note that the Church is engaging with local people in many places where government is yet to reach.

In the long run, the construction or rehabilitation of road systems, especially farm to market roads, need to be supported in order that the tons of food crops produced in enclaved areas can reach the urban centres.

There is a whole lot more, but I thought not to wait but to respond immediately to your email and so set the ball rolling for further discussion around this subject matter.

Otherwise, do accept my warm personal regards and greetings to your family too. My family is doing fine and we thank God for his Grace.

Sincerely yours,

Denis Kumbo