



MINUTE FOR MISSION

May 15, 2007

Keeping Bellies Full

Fourteen-year-old Miyel Sanga beams as he speaks for the children of Metchezleo, where subsistence farmers are now collaborating to bank food to cover the lean months.

"We thank our mothers. This year, they have made us many sorghum balls," he says, referring to a starchy mixture that is a staple food in the region. Miyel knows how to appreciate the better times.

Poor rains, depleted soil, and locust infestations are constant threats in Metchezleo, where they ruin the already meager harvests of farmers in this Saharan region. Once crops are harvested, some of the yield is sold off to merchants who store it. During the lean months of the summer, the merchants drive up prices in the cereal markets just as farmers are running out of their own foodstuffs.

Wealth for a few makes the poor go hungry. When the market tightens, mothers have to ration food to bridge the lean months before the next harvest. This means no sorghum balls, only a thin porridge made with a bit of flour for the children to drink. In most towns like Metchezleo, the porridge is a child's single meal of the day. Some eat only every other day.

The RELUFA Network of Cameroon—the Joining Hands partner—is educating eighteen communities to manage their own food supplies and escape the manipulation of commodity traders. Subsistence farmers are now running small village granaries as cooperative grain banks. When food runs out at home, members of the banks take grain for their families on credit.



These young boys in Metchezleo, Cameroon, have enjoyed many sorghum balls this year thanks to the work of RELUFA.



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These young boys in Metchezleo, Cameroon, have enjoyed many sorghum balls this year thanks to the work of RELUFA.

Loans are reimbursed from the next harvest, with a small interest measured in grain.

These revolving stocks secure the community's food needs for the next year, and parents can use any money left over for their children's other needs. Jean Srabanai says that the sixty-six families in Metchezleo had a very different year this year. "Our children have eaten in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Normally, we sold chickens and goats to buy food. But because we had sorghum this year, we used that money to send more children to school. In our group alone, thirty children who had to stay home from school a year ago were able to attend again this year."

Lord, our God, our Father and our Mother,

We magnify and glorify you! We adore you. Forgive us the deafness of our hearts and our spiritual near-sightedness. Open our eyes to the miracles of your infinite love and teach us to share with all your children Jesus, God's Son, our Brother and Redeemer.

We bring before you all these children who are bowed down by labor, under burdens that are too heavy for them, all those who live in a harsh and desolate environment.

Strengthen their efforts with your arm and multiply the fruit of their hardship as you have done on the shore of Lake Tiberias with the bread and fish of the small boy.

Holy God, may your goodness descend on all of us.

Amen.

Material was supplied by Christi Boyd, PC(USA) mission worker and Joining Hands facilitator in Cameroon; The prayer is by the Rev. Louise Tappa, RELUFA Network of Cameroon

To donate to the work of the Joining Hands initiative, visit the web site at www.pcusa.org/joininghands/support.htm.

Do you have a mission story to tell? Would you like to read inspiring stories of Presbyterians in mission? Visit the Witness Season Web site: www.pcusa.org/witness. New minutes for mission are posted on the 1st and 15th of each month.

For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-7228, ext. 5689, or Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org.

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