

Behind the Video: Going Deeper into the story of RELUFA and Communal Grain Banks

Christi Boyd, PC(USA) Mission Co-Worker with RELUFA in Cameroon provides information that steps us behind what is depicted and described in the video to prompt further reflection and discussion.



Cameroonian women and children benefitting from the grain banks, photo Christi Boyd, RELUFA

What problems are facing northern Cameroonian farming families?

They are trapped by poverty and suffer from chronic hunger

What caused this problem?

- The climate doesn't allow for abundant food production.
- Poverty makes farmers sell part of their already marginal food production to merchants
- Merchants hoard up on food and create shortages on the market
- Merchants use market mechanisms to speculate on food, driving food prices up
- Their stocks depleted, families sell the little assets they have or take loans from usurers to whom they become dependent.
- Altogether the families become poorer and/or go hungry

How did the community/partners determine an appropriate solution? What did they do?

- People from the affected area served as resources and guides to better understand the root of the problems and other issues at stake.
- Other specialist programs were identified, studied and visited for their approaches and outcomes to determine their strengths and weaknesses.
- A "think tank" of personal resources from the field analyzed the outcome of the study and designed an approach that would take on the problem by its roots, effectively produce long term results and ensure the greatest stewardship of limited resources.
- Altogether they came with a strategy that would unlock the poverty trap, break dependency from those exploiting their poverty, and render back the power of self-governance to the very people who are suffering the consequences of the exploitation

What was the church's role?

Speaking about the PCUSA:

- To recognize that problems and solutions are best identified by personal resources from the locality
- To enable partners to provide a platform for study, analysis and planning by personal resources
- To equip partners and communities with the personal and financial resources needed to realize the needed response

- It may not be clear from the content of the video, but to equip and assign mission workers as liaisons with partners AND the communities, to learn and to interpret back to US churches about the issues and communities at stake
- Altogether the role of the church becomes then also to better equip our Presbyterians constituency with insights and understanding.
- Constituting the Church at large, Presbyterians together can become, this way, better stewards for a more effective witnesses of God's love and concern for the hungry, poor and oppressed be it through financial support or as advocates

Who controls the grain banks?

- The members of the grain bank cooperative, i.e. the community, controls the grain bank by electing from among themselves a management committee that will take decisions on behalf of the community itself

What have the grain banks ensured?

- accessibility to food for all
- self governance of food supplies by the community
- restoration of self-worth to the community members and the community at large

Besides alleviating hunger, what other impact do the community grain banks have for the families involved?

- Lower child mortality rate
- Resources (livestock, money) are spared and serve other needs with as result:
 - o More children in school, with better school supplies, creating higher literacy levels
 - o Greater health in the families
- Less migration of the male population during the lean season, with as result:
 - o Greater family cohesion
 - o Male population attend to their own fields rather than work as laborers in the fields
 - o Better food production for the family
 - o Less risks of STD's and HIV/AIDS transmission

How do these grain banks differ from the grain banks Joseph set up for Pharaoh in Genesis?

- Joseph's grain banks were set up centralized in cities, while with the community grain banks the stocks remain in the village itself. This gives a great difference in accessibility, the efforts and costs involved in obtaining the food. Also possible loopholes for misuse by influential people who might buy up food and resell at higher price.
- With Joseph's grain banks, a single ruler or manager takes decisions. Decision making in the community grain banks lies with the community. This democratic model ensures fairer distribution for the sake of the most vulnerable in the community
- Decision making processes in Joseph's model rips people from their feeling of self-worth and installs a sense of powerlessness, while in the community grain bank model people feel dignified and empowered
- Joseph's grain banks impoverish the hungry, makes them dependant and eventually enslaves them. The community grain banks allow hungry families to maintain and increase their resources and they keep their independence such that they can work their own field and not become laborers or slaves to work for other people.
- Joseph's grain bank model only depletes the granaries. The community grain bank model replenishes the village granary every year.

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