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ACT Against Corruption: A Project to mobilize Church leaders from Christian and Muslim communities to fight corruption and promote just governance in Cameroon

"Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe makes people blind to what is right and ruins the cause of those who are innocent." (Exodus 23:8)

A project of the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) and in partnership with the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Bafoussam (JPCDB) under the leadership of Bishop Dieudonné WATIO and auxiliary Bishop Emmanuel DASSI YOUFANG. This project was made possible by the financial support from Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities.

A VICTIM APPROACH TO END AND PREVENT CORRUPTION IN INSTITUTIONS WITHIN THE DIOCESE OF BAFOUSSAM IN THE REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON



Some of the participants – Bishop Emmanuel DASSI YOUFANG and officials of the Diocese of Bafoussam, Protestant Clergy, Muslim Imams, Heads of Institutions within Bafoussam, AFJN staff and Representatives of Civil Society Groups—Photo AFJN

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Program implementation in Cameroon – Diocese of Bafoussam



What this report is and is not

This is a progress report of activities on anti-corruption in the diocese of Bafoussam in Cameroon. It is a snapshot of what is happening in institutions run by the Catholic Diocese of Bafoussam with a view to applying appropriate remedies. It is not a systematic study of corruption in Cameroon. The academic work on the definition, causes, consequences and possible cures is overwhelming and publicly available. We do not intend to duplicate what has been done, but build on it to bring about change.

The Blame and Shame Game for Corruption

The general opinion is that corruption in Cameroon is so massive, systemic and complex that people have given up on the possibility of ending it because of its enormous political dimension. Transparency International and other organizations which track corruption have ranked Cameroon among the most corrupt countries in the world. In general whenever corruption in Cameroon is evoked, all the attention and the blame are assigned to government officials. However, a careful examination reveals that while corruption is overtly manifested in the political arena, it is pervasive and entrenched in almost every aspect of social, economic, educational and health care of the country. Unless everyone takes responsibility or is held accountable for his or her part in perpetuating this evil, corruption will continue. Corruption is simply an abuse of power, no matter the level of one's authority or the reasons why you do it.

Establishing Facts in Order to Lead by Example



Ahead of the launch of the Zero Corruption campaign in the Diocese of Bafoussam which took place from July 3-5, 2019, Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) and the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Bafoussam (JPCDB) conducted a study of the problem in two primary schools, two high schools and two health centers. The goal was to establish preliminary facts about its existence, impacts on individuals, institutions and society, manifestations, who are the perpetrators and the victims and finally find solutions. The conclusion of the survey which was published in French shows that corruption is not just a perception, but it is practiced in institutions run by the Diocese of Bafoussam. For this reason a diocesan Zero Corruption campaign has been launched because doing nothing is no longer an option.

Manifestation of Corruption in the Diocese of Bafoussam



In Schools

- Hiring staff based on ethnicity, bribes, friendships or family ties.
- School principals complicate the recruitment process to get parents to give bribe:

Principals demand unauthorized payments to enroll a child in a school. At times people are told that the classroom is full. But if parents add money to the child's files, all of a sudden the principal "creates" space for their child.

- During school inspections, principals bribe inspectors. If they do not give anything, inspectors ask for it because it has become an expectation
- List of school supplies sent by school and paid for by parents does not correspond to the list given to children. Children are given less than is on the list
- Parents offer money or gifts to teachers to influence them to, among other things, offer special treatment to their children which includes placing the child on front row seats in crowded classrooms.
- Parents ask teachers to falsify students' transcripts in order to facilitate their enrollment in higher grade or to facilitate their enrollment in a school abroad.
- Parents bribe school principals and or discipline supervisors to get student's disciplinary measures dismissed.
- Teachers oblige sex from female students for better scores or female students propose sex to teachers for the same purpose.
- Students give the money to the teachers to have the test questions in advance.
- Delinquent students bribe the class leader or the class leader requests gifts from students promising them impunity including not to report them to the teacher or school's authorities when they make noise in class or violate other classroom rules.
- Bright students receive money from less bright classmates to get help with tests.

Hospital



- Hiring staff based on ethnicity, bribes, friendships or family ties.
- Healthcare personnel deliberately delay care to entice patients or worried loved

ones to offer bribes. Certainly the more money is given, the faster and better the treatment.

- If a patient is hospitalized and needs timely and better service, the pressure to motivate- bribe all involved in the care process becomes high.
- Hospital receptions whose job is to ensure those who come first are served first use their position to reserve seats for those who come later and offer some money. In other cases, some who give money to the receptionist do not need to wait in line before service.
- Even in places where healthcare centers have implemented the system of picking up numbers upon arrival (first come first served) in the outpatient department, the receptionists bypass the system.
- Hospital staff issue false medical records (certificate of hospitalization of children or death certificates and many more) to those who need them for different purposes.
- Pharmacists run parallel drug markets selling their personal medicines instead of those from the health center's pharmacy.
- Lab technicians delay services in order to ask or receive without asking bribes to expedite patients' medical tests.

In Parishes



Participants also discussed corruption beyond what is happening in schools and hospitals. In parishes corruption is manifested through:

- Sales of sacraments: priest agreeing to celebrate private masses for people who have money.
- Also, some people who have money get the priest to celebrate funeral masses for

their departed loved ones who never practiced their faith.

- Inflated prices by project coordinators and embezzlement of funds destined for parish projects
- Unclear nominations of parish's group leaders
- Parish workers hired not on the basis of merit but because of connections and relationships

Some reasons given by participants for the perpetuation of corruption at the lower levels of society



- Very low wages, poverty, lack of fairness, injustice, favoritism, desire for self enrichment, impunity, tribalism and nepotism among the higher ups
- Crowded classrooms, insufficient number of schools
- Incompetence, under staffing, poor service delivery system, lack of clear work ethic
- Disregard for the rule of law, lack of mechanisms to report corruption
- Lack of protection for potential whistleblowers
- Customers' lack of access to information about actual cost of services
- Poor working conditions, bad example from the higher-ups
- Pressure from bosses who expect a share from bribes collected by subordinates
- Lack of supervision, and lack of professionalism

Possible Solutions Against Corruption



On the long list of corruption prevention mechanisms, we highlight the following:

- Severe sanctions against all who are found guilty
- Awareness of the consequences of corruption, and a call to resist corruption in all its manifestations and by all means
- Hire and promote workers based on competencies
- Conduct regular audit of institutions
- Offer fair wages and where possible give benefits to workers as part of improving their life conditions. For example, free tuition for one or two children of school staff or free healthcare for a spouse and children of a health center staff
- Publish service fees to empower customers so that they can ask questions when they suspect overcharging or bribes are demanded
- Create a hotline and a suggestion box for those who wish to lodge a complaint
- Given the strong link between family and corruption in schools and health centers it is imperative, among other things, to include anti-corruption programs in the diocesan family pastoral care. The family ministry against corruption should include a strong formation on integrity, parenting to guide children to value merit, responsibility for a better society and to build a country rooted in the rule of law so as to promote and protect the common good.

Participants stress that the family ministry needs serious reforms to function

efficiently.

- To end corruption in various projects in parishes, participants suggested the formation of a committee of integrity to oversee contracts and payments. This committee would audit all project budgets before they are carried out because kickbacks are sometimes included in these budgets through overpriced items. They would also ensure projects are not given based on personal relations, but on competence.
- All matters of corruption which implicate priests will be reported to the Bishop for further follow up in addressing the Problem. Given the role of priest in the parish, it is important to extend the anti-corruption campaign to the clergy. For corruption to be eradicated in church institutions the spiritual leaders of the church must set the example. Thus, the parish must be a model of zero corruption.

Preliminary Outcome

Media Coverage



Media coverage amplified the event and the discussion by participants to the population in and beyond the boundaries of the Western Region where Diocese of Bafoussam is located. A national Television (CBS) covered the event and interviewed participants. The Justice and Peace Commission Director and other officials of the Diocese received congratulatory phone calls for courageously taking on this important issue. Phone calls came from as far as Bamenda (North Western Region).

The social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp further amplified the message

beyond Cameroon to other African countries, the United States and Europe.

Local Media coverage includes:

- Radio Vox Ecclesia: This is the radio channel that belongs to the diocese.
- Radio Batcham
- DBS TV Channel
- Radio Communautaire de Bafoussam
- Nouvelle Expression (Print Media)
- Le Point (Print Media)

The publicity of the event by the media and the input by the Bishop and other speakers has raised awareness on the issue. Stakeholders are now aware that there will no longer be business as usual. A number of school principals some of whom did not make it to the gathering have been calling the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission Office to find out if there are any guidelines to better prepare for next school year which will start in August. The guidelines are in the making and will be promulgated by the Bishop.

Two civil society groups which have been working on corruption in public schools have expressed interest to join forces to share not only best practices, but also campaign together against corruption.

Many leaders and members of the Justice and Peace Commission offices at the parish level in the diocese have become aware of the campaign and called our partner office to encourage and support the effort. This is a dangerous work because it touches people's financial interests.

At the conclusion of the general gathering, participants issued the following communiqué and statement of commitment to the cause:

A STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT BY PARTICIPANTS AND WAY FORWARD IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN OUR INSTITUTIONS

After a careful analysis and prayerful reflection on the ills of corruption and how it has negatively impacted us, how it has permeated our educational system, our health care, our social, our political and our family lives, and indeed every fabric of our relations and transactions, we realize that we cannot allow this to continue. This is leading us to doom, and to destruction.

We believe in leaving a legacy for our children and future generations to come and a better society that our children will be proud of.

We therefore commit ourselves to be agents of change. We commit ourselves to fight corruption in our institutions, using our knowledge and talents, and all the means available to us, so as to restore justice and sanity to our families, to our communities and to our country.

To successfully carry out this task, we call on parents, teachers, health care providers, members of all faith communities, and all people of goodwill to join hands with us to tackle this menace; this cancer that is destroying the health of our communal life.

This task might seem daunting but we recall here an African proverb which reminds us that “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” Together we can tie up this lion called corruption. So help us God.

Amen!

Action Plan for Positive Outcome



Before the end of August, AFJN working with the Justice and Peace Commission will have submitted the code of conduct to Bishop Emmanuel Dassi Youfang for approval and promulgation. Every school and hospital administrator and heads of other institutions will receive a copy which he or she will have to distribute to staff and hold a meeting on the enforcement of the “code of conduct.”

Institutions will conduct an anti corruption workshop for staff as part of the required staff

ongoing education. Upon the completion of the later the staff will be required to sign a Zero Corruption pledge.

APPENDIX

Corruption Surrounding Birth Certificates

PROVINCE
 PROVINCE *de la sud*

DEPARTEMENT
 DIVISION *de Nozean*

ARRONDISSEMENT
 SUBDIVISION *de Bipindi*

CENTRE D'ETAT CIVIL
 CIVIL STATUS REGISTRATION CENTRE
 de - of *La commune de Bipindi*

ACTE DE NAISSANCE
 BIRTH CERTIFICATE

N° *121/2006*

REPUBLIQUE DU CAMEROUN
 REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON

Many Cameroonians are issued incorrect birth certificates purposely. Unbeknownst to them they accept the incorrect document issued to them and only realize this much later when they want to enroll in schools, get a job, obtain a passport to travel abroad or conduct other transactions requiring proof of citizenship. The process of rectifying this is cumbersome and involves a lot of officials. Residents within of the Diocese of Bafoussam who do not have their correct birth certificate because of corruption are many. In rural areas many do not know that they need a birth certificate as a proof of citizenship so they are denied common basic rights of citizens. This is a birthright issue. Participants wondered how this can be tackled, given the centralized pervasiveness of this evil.

AFJN is joining hands with the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Bafoussam to build capacity to tackle the issue of corruption surrounding the issuance of Birth Certificates which affects thousands of victims.

Agenda of the Anti-Corruption Gathering

Day 1: Presentation of the Survey Outcome



Thirty-two people representing institutions which were surveyed, priests, nuns, justice and peace commission leaders and members, teachers, principals, hospital administrators and workers took part in a private briefing on the results of the research. The data were collected in two primary schools, one high school and two health centers. The goal was to let them know about the status of affairs on corruption in these institutions and the diocese, get further feedback to expand the findings and prepare for the public and official launch of the Zero Corruption campaign the next day.

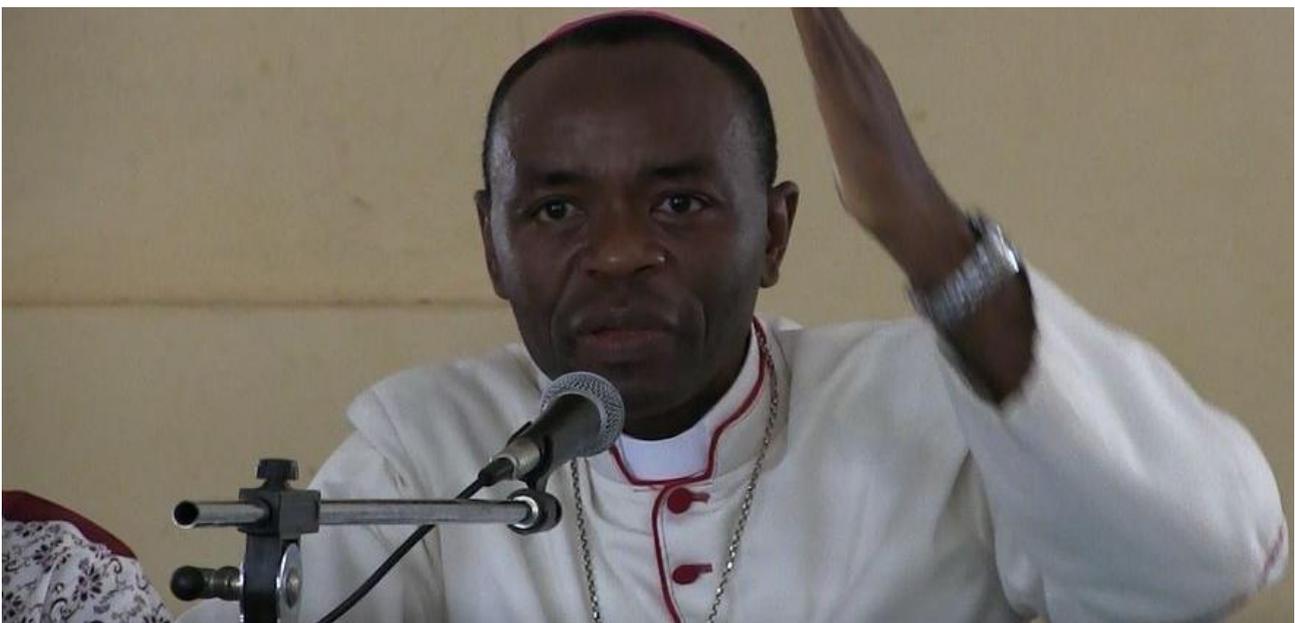
Day 2: The Public Launch of the zero corruption campaign

On this day additional members representing different catholic institutions joined and also civil society groups, media, protestant church pastors and Muslim Imams. The diocese's hospitals and schools are used not just by Catholics but also by Muslims and members of protestant churches. And so local Imams and protestant pastors were invited and were active participants in the workshops. Their collaboration and contributions especially in the working groups have further enriched the process.

Africa Faith and Justice Network's (AFJN) Executive Director Fr. Aniedi Okure and AFJN's Policy Analyst Ntama Bahati presented our outcome based on work in different countries in Africa and called for action against corruption without delay because doing nothing is not an option.



The Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Bafoussam Most Rev. Emmanuel DASSI YOUFANG, to whom the Justice and Peace Commission reports, condemned the practice of corruption and called it a cancer which if not treated will kill the diocesan institutions and reputation, society and the nation. Addressing corruption is part of evangelization, he insisted. He called on



everyone, Christians and Muslims and all people of good will to get involved and bring their contribution so they can collectively tackle this menace. He pledged the support of the Bishop of the Diocese of Bafoussam, and his own support as head of the Justice and Peace commission, to work for Zero Corruption in the diocese.

The Chaplain of the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission office, Fr. Philbert-Dior Ngonsi and the coordinator of the same office Madame Massa Ferrancide presented the work of their office and called on all the participants to join hands to deliver once again the results for the people of the diocese of Bafoussam. Madame Massa presented the outcome of a survey done in 4 schools and two health centers.

After discussion participants were divided into different groups. The groups expanded the understanding of the manifestations, causes and consequences of corruption beyond schools and hospitals to include parish's structures and also offered some solutions.

Day 3: Evaluation of the launch and Establishment of Implementation Strategies



Representatives from Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) and the Coordinator of the diocesan Justice and Peace Commission met with the Auxiliary Bishop Most Rev. Emmanuel Dassi Youfang to discuss ways to deliver a positive outcome for this campaign.

After the meeting, it was decided that the two organizations would submit to him a code of conduct for all concerned personnel within the diocese which he, after consultation with his collaborators and other stakeholders, will promulgate and ask for compliance. We are also considering a proposal for clergy training on this issue.

Day 4: Recap and review of recommendations by participants



Armed with the support of the Auxiliary Bishop, the team met again to study, organize and further improve the suggestions and recommendations given by the participants at the gathering in preparation for the writing of the code of conduct to be promulgated by the bishop.

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