

# Tokombéré

## A Project for Human Development founded on faith

Every community needs to organise in order to deal better with the daily issues it has to face. Our under-developed, or rather developing countries experience various problems and have become an experimental field for many NGOs who claim to be experts in development. The assessment of the results is, however, sad: failure at almost all levels. Development theory as it is understood and applied by numerous experts has only brought dissatisfaction where it has been tried out. The reason for this failure? In our opinion, the failure is explained by the principle component of any true development project - human beings - being pushed to one side. No development project can give signs of hope if it has not regarded people as the agents of their own development. Human beings must be considered from every aspect, with all their capacities and deficiencies. This poses the problem of Faith: faith in humankind (because, since they are created in the image of God, human beings have capacities which must not be neglected) and faith in God (the principle source of all positive inspiration).

In Tokombéré, the Project for Human Promotion (PfHP) has understood this, so that it is faith which is enabling a whole people to continue inexorably on its way towards the integral development of the human being. Faith is the plinth, so to speak, the base of the Project for Human Promotion at Tokombéré. The word “faith” is understood here not only as belief in God but also as that which allows one to remain hopeful and expectant and as the power which gives people the capacity and the necessary strength to view or consider the human being (divine creature and therefore sacred) as a tree to be tended or as a construction site in which to invest. The men and women of Tokombéré have placed their faith centre stage to justify all their actions in favour of the development of the region. And in such a situation, the result isn't long in coming, even if the way is long and sometimes full of disappointments and difficulties of all sorts (jealousy, lack of understanding...)

In order better to understand the reality of the “Tokombéré Project” we must go back into history, through some memorable events.

In 1959, one of the first Cameroonian missionaries, Simon Mpeke, set off to explore Northern Cameroon where there were three dominant religious practices: the religion of the mountains, Islam and Christianity. The followers of the religion of the mountains live “naturally” and are called “*Kirdi*” by the Muslims, which means “heretic”, “without religion”, “unbelievers”. To everyone's surprise, this priest who had come to evangelise admitted that he didn't know what to teach the Kirdi, because they knew God already: “I have found people who lead a natural life to unite them to God” (televised interview with Michel Farin, 1972). “If it weren't for the fact of Jesus Christ which seemed to me something new, which completes creation, I would have gone back home” (Interview with J.B. Baskouda.)

Father Mpeke was adopted by the mountain population who gave him the name of “Baba” (which means Papa) because he seemed anxious to see people live fraternally, hand in hand, beyond all religious or ethnic affiliation. For him human beings had to be the focus of concern in all activity, whatever religion they came from. Moreover, he said so in these terms: “For me, Jesus Christ is not a Jew, for me, Jesus Christ is a man... For me, Jesus Christ is a Kirdi but one who is insufficiently aware of his condition and I reveal him to himself: that is Jesus Christ” (unpublished interview with Jean Baptiste Baskouda 1975).

Baba Simon (as he was called from then on) did not envisage any activity without the participation of the Kirdi; everything had to be done with them, often by them and for them. Everything had to be done with faith and devotion to the gospel message based on love of one's neighbour. Each person was important for him: the ill, the despised, men, women, the misunderstood.... Life is commitment, the struggle for each person to grow. He set up a

primary school to give the Kirdi enough education to enable them to open themselves up to the whole world.

In Tokombéré, Baba Simon's mission companion was Dr. Guiseppe Maggi, who himself had set up a bush hospital where common illnesses (wounds, coughs, digestive problems) were treated. A team of local nurses supported Dr. Maggie in taking the health of the population in hand. This little hospital was to continue until 1975, the date when Dr. Christian Aurenche arrived to take it over to continue the work of Dr. Maggie. Undoubtedly influenced by the philosophy of Baba Simon, Father Christian Aurenche prepared the ground for a new vision of health. Very soon (in the same year) the hospital of Tokombéré became the Health Promotion Centre (HPC) with a primary health care orientation: "Health is found in the village", as people liked to say.

This was the point of departure, the first step towards the formalisation of the Baba Simon's concern: to take people just as they are, in their life context and to involve them in different actions with a view to their development. One could thus say that the words of Baba Simon have influenced the new view, the new concept of health adopted in the HPC. The transformation of the hospital of Tokombéré into an HPC was also a great event and a decisive stage for the whole of the Tokombéré Project as it is experienced today. It was from the HPC that ideas would emerge and give shape to what today are commonly called the "structures" of the Tokombéré Project, for an integral development of the human being as the actor and beneficiary of this development.

Since the arrival of Baba Simon, a team of catechists from different backgrounds, has been meeting every Saturday to meditate and have a discussion based on the Gospel which they try to make concrete or applicable in our villages. They also tackle important questions concerning village development. Thus it isn't surprising that during a catechists' meeting questions are asked about how to avoid the famine which is hovering on the horizon or what to do to avoid our young people falling into the misfortune of AIDS.... This shows that they do not limit themselves only to prayer with the priest or to meditation but they reflect on the concrete questions which arise for the human community in general and for the Christian community in particular.

Today it is clearly accepted that faith is the motivation of the people who carry out the Tokombéré Project. It is onto faith that every suggestion, every new idea for accompanying the Project is grafted. It is also clearly accepted that the human being remains the turntable of the Tokombéré Project, a project which works thanks to people and with people for people's development.

Concretely, how is the Project for Human Promotion experienced? What do the people themselves do? What actions do they take? With what resources, what difficulties? How are they accompanied? What is the follow-up? For what result(s)?

To answer all these questions we think it would be wise to allow the person responsible for the project to speak in order to describe the aims to us before we go round the different structures which complement each other and display certain similarities, even if they concern different aspects of daily life (health, education, youth, agriculture, women's promotion, alpha and micro financiers ...). In addition, let us point out that in order to carry out our work successfully we have done some interviews and used documents, published or not, about Tokombéré.

Father Christian Aurenche: "Following on from Baba Simon and supported by the Gospel, the project accompanies the populations of Tokombéré towards real fulfilment, in all domains, spiritual and human, technical and economic. To stand people up and "walk with them along the road".

Through pastoral action as well as through the structures such as the Health Promotion Centres of Tokombéré, the Baba Simon College, the Peasant Farmer's House, the Youth Project.... Each tries hard with the same Gospel truth, even if they aren't all Christians, to bring together all the members of the community, particularly the young people, while paying special attention to the poorest, the most fragile. The spirit of service and sharing thus comes first and this assumes a real commitment on the part of the workers to respect everyone, exercise tolerance and acknowledge differences. The project, which serves a very poor population, is poor itself. It tries to find resources on the spot by charging for services but as cheaply as possible because of the surrounding poverty. Since it has no help from public authorities it needs to mobilise Christian and international solidarity.

## **The health structure**

Father Christian Aurenche calls the eighth chapter of his book *"Tokombéré in the Country of the Great Priests"*: "Health is life". The health project was born, as we mentioned above, in 1975. According to the new concept of health it was a matter of taking all aspects of illness into consideration: prevention, cure, accompaniment and social integration. But was this possible, since everyone knew that the hospital was the place where illnesses were cured? How could we make the village peoples understand that the nurse could only succeed in doing his work better if the people felt involved in the work of such a qualified health worker?

According to Jean Marc Ela in *"My faith as an African"*, p.115 : "The struggle for health should be seen from now on in the context of the struggle for another society, another human being, another system of production, another way of living among people, as much at the heart of the family as in the global society." (Jean Marc Ela and Christian Aurenche worked together as priests in the same parish, Christian being at the same time the head doctor of the hospital of Tokombéré.)

The health project concerned the whole population (today 90,000 inhabitants). With this new concept of health, a profound reform was going to start, both in the hospital and in the villages: the nurse had to devote one part of his/her work to giving treatment and the other in the villages, in his/her "sector".

As for the people, they had to organise themselves to participate in taking charge of their own health. In concrete terms, the villagers, whose average annual income is 100,000 CFA (150 Euros), were involved in this process. They set up health committees which were "self-managed" but under the friendly eye of the nurse in charge of the sector whose role is to encourage the committees by preventative action and human promotion. In one village there can be several health committees (one per district). Since then, the nurse has been called "the itinerant agent" (IA) - the transmission belt between the hospital and the villages. The villagers commit themselves to the six areas of the health project (pre-natal, *PMI*, nutrition, school health, vaccination and effective re-adaptation of disabled people) by assuring the work at the grassroots. This is done in collaboration with the hospital which provides their training, their refresher courses and their accompaniment. They are called "the Village Health Leaders" (VHL). At the beginning, these leaders were almost all illiterate. The rate of schooling at that time was not more than 10 per cent of the population. But they were people capable of reflection and analysis and of showing initiative and solidarity – indispensable qualities to take a lead in the changes. Their appointment and their recognition by the community were the result of long discussions.

The meeting of the itinerant agent with a health committee is an occasion for listening and exchange. The IA "leads" on various themes relating to the priorities of the moment: weighing, new health habits, how to make forecasts to avoid famine, the problem of infant mortality, of pre-natal consultation, the usefulness of vaccination. It is also the moment when

the villagers present the IA with their problems relating to all aspects of the life of the village, for example: What should they do in order to have drinking water in the district, in the village? What should they do to escape from the exorbitant demands of the administrative authorities? How should they tackle a certain case of sorcery in the district? What should they do to interest the young people in village problems? Etc.

To ensure better co-ordination of all health activities, there are “forums” of the IA. On these occasions, all the IA use a meeting to share their difficulties, the questions repeatedly asked by the villagers and the beginnings of solutions which they have proposed for this or that problem.... This practice allows the supervisory team to assess the problems at the grassroots and to reflect on the decisions to be taken to resolve the problems which have arisen.

At the same time, each year there is a big meeting called a “Health Conference” which brings together about a thousand people, each of whom has some responsibility in the health project (secretary, president of the health committee, VHL, midwife etc.) around a theme and questions. Everyone reflects and suggests ways forward to the supervisory group, insisting on priorities and asking for favours... For ten years the Health Conferences have been replaced every other time by “Human Promotion Conferences” which gather together, as well as all the VHL, all those who have any responsibility whatever in the Tokombéré Project: IA of the Youth Project, teachers, literacy teachers, women’s promotion etc.

What is striking here is how ready the villagers are to commit themselves to health activities in partnership with the hospital. It is a willingness inspired by the divine word and rooted in the culture of the Kirdi peoples, for how can it be explained except by saying that these people use their faith to move this development activity forward without receiving the least payment? Yes, they have understood, our people of the mountains, that such activity in favour of development concerns them, that they are the beneficiaries of it and so they must be the principle actors.

How can we ignore the fact that it is from this change in how one views people, from this reorientation of the concept of health, from these multiple and tiring meetings proposed and accepted willingly and voluntarily by our people that other sections of the PfHP have been able to be spring up in order to respond to the different requests of the grassroots population, in order to take up the challenge of the future? Dr. Souleymanou Mohamadou, a Muslim, and a doctor of the HPC, thinks that: “Human promotion in Tokombéré is inspired by the word of God and rooted in the local culture, with a vision for the future of integrated and sustainable human development. It is also above all faith in humankind in all its dimensions. The human being is thus at the heart of this project, as the absolute priority. That is why it is appropriate to call the project a ‘Project for Human Promotion’”.

What do the beneficiaries think of it? One member of a health committee we met said without hesitation: “With the activity carried out by the HPC (Health Promotion Centre) of Tokombéré, we are protected from many a calamity. If the nurse hadn’t made the sacrifice to spend time with the villagers and if the villagers hadn’t been willing to join together to work for health, if we had only waited to go to the hospital to get treatment when we were ill, how many people would have died of cholera or bilharzia. Where would we be today?”

Another adds: “Before, I used to think that it was a matter for the Catholics and I didn’t want to get involved. The only thing which could have tempted me was if I had been offered a salary as an VHL. My wife went secretly to some meetings with the IA. There she learnt to make enriched baby cereal to avoid malnutrition. One night, one of my children had a worrying fever. As I didn’t take part in any activity to do with health, I could only wait until the next day to go to the hospital, even though in the district there is a village pharmacy for all those who join the health activities. That made me think. I became involved and I am proud of sharing this experience with my brothers.”

Of course all the administrative authorities who have followed one another in Tokombéré say the same sort of thing: “It is an invaluable opportunity for the people to have a development project like this one, which begins with health in order to end up with general well-being. Without this project no-one would ever talk about Tokombéré”.

As we have said before, the health project enabled certain delicate but very important questions for human and village development to arise. The IA and the VHL underlined the priorities which could not be set aside in order only to deal with the people’s health. Among others, there were the questions of the accompaniment of the young people and of food security. Thinking and thinking and taking into account the needs of the moment, a decision had to be taken.... This was done, giving birth to other structures of the Project for Human Promotion.

## **The Youth Project**

The question of supervision of the young people was a thorny one. What was going to become of the children coming out of Baba Simon’s school? At that time the nearest public secondary schools were 30 to 60 km away and the Catholic secondary school of the region was 500 km away. What was to be done? How were the children to be supervised who had taken the risk of leaving their families to venture into one of these schools? With the catechists and their parents, the parish thought out a system and, with the agreement of the parents, decided to try it out, following what Baba Simon had done for the primary school pupils: to find lodging in the far-off towns to which the pupils had to move and make available to them the minimum which would enable them to study.

Here too, the parish listened to the suggestions coming from the grassroots. It was thus that the “secondary *sarés*” (centres) were created in the towns where one could reckon with a dozen children from Tokombéré. The aims were very clear from the start:

- To help the youth to continue their studies to take their place as actors in the development of their region
- To help the youth to begin to take responsibility
- To teach the youth the requirements of community living.

It is the parents who are primarily responsible for the supervision of their children. It fell to them to decide how the *sarés* were to be structured while leaving an important space for the youth in the practical organisation of their daily life. Each *saré* is a “State” with its government. The young people themselves choose from among themselves those who are in charge of managing them (the president, the person responsible for studies, for health, for prayers, for cleanliness, for cooking and the bursar, the treasurer...) In the case of a dispute, the different people in charge meet to find a solution. If they cannot do this, it is the adults who regularly accompany them who have to resolve it. The parents supervise the young and are organised into voluntary teams of Accompaniers of *Sarés*. Each young person brings provisions for the term which they pool and which are then managed by the bursar who gives an account at each meeting. Clearly it wasn’t sufficient to supervise the children when they were at school and to leave them disorientated during the periods of breaks in the classes.

It was then that the parish managed to get the centre founded by Jean Marc Ela re-opened under the name “Aimé Césaire Centre”. This other place of education for the young had been closed by the administrative authorities who claimed that it had a subversive odour to it because of its innovatory programmes. It was thus re-opened in 1984 under the name of “Youth Centre of Tokombéré” (YCT). There, as well, it is the young people themselves who decide what they are going to do with their library, video library, reading club, theatre, traditional dances. They suggest ideas and ensure the implementation of them, respecting the aims defined in the statutes which they drew up during the General Assembly.

About 1,500 young people are affected by the activities of the Youth Centre. A management team called the “Youth Project Council” keeps a watch that things do not get out of control and that certain people are not excluded. This team plays the role of “supreme court” for the disputes which have not been resolved by the young people themselves, since it is the latter who are entirely responsible for their organisation. They have set up a monthly council called the “Permanent Council” which debates any problems which arise.

In August they organise a large gathering called “Youth Weeks” during which about 1,000 young people come to think about specific questions which revolve around a theme taken from the Gospel. This year (2003) they are on their 18<sup>th</sup> gathering. Three weeks after this gathering is the moment for the evaluation at what they call the “Youth General Assembly”, during which each person in charge of an activity explains to the youth what they have done and the joys and the difficulties encountered in the course of their activities.

Whether it is at the Permanent Council, the Youth Week, the General Assembly or the Youth Project Council, the management team always has the opportunity of listening, of exchanging views and of taking note of the young people’s priorities, the recurring issues which need some thought, the different structures to be set up and the directions to be decided about etc.

It should be noted here that the experience of the YCT has been transferred to the villages with the creation of Mini-Youth Centres (MYC). At the request of the young people themselves as well as of the adults, the Youth Project Council was persuaded to accept the creation of the MYC in order to let the village youth have places of entertainment, reflection and training... Today we can reckon with a good 20 MYCs. The Centres and the MYCs are entirely managed by the youth themselves with the support of the Youth Project Council and the Itinerary Agents of the Youth Project, who make the link between the village youth and the whole of the Human Promotion Project.

What is also striking here is that the young people themselves are already talking about development and feel concerned about this issue. They get involved and dedicate their time and resolve so that progress is made in both people’s way of thinking and the villages. This is in any case the impression which comes out of questioning some of them. Babaya, former youth president (17) replies here to the question about knowing the reason for working for the village: “We want the village to grow. We have a lot of needs and no-one will come from anywhere else to solve them. We are duty bound but also happy to put a lot into changing our living conditions.”

E. Patsakoy, President of the Youth Centre of the Plateau (YCP) and former minister of the Mini-Centres: “We work for the village because we want development; that is a feasible standard of living. We must improve conditions. We, the youth, have received life from our parents, thanks to God. We must use it for something lasting. The young person is the symbol of the dynamism of the village. If he doesn’t work, what is he going to leave for his children? How can he account to his parents?”

And what motivates a young woman to participate in such a project? Mangavé, present youth president answers: “Faith in God. Faith in the new Person. The Bible teaches us to love one another. It calls upon us to help each other. We, the young people, see how much our village has changed since people began to talk about the Tokombéré Project. I was not yet born in 1975 but I have read and I have heard accounts. I am convinced that people have worked very hard in order that we should be where we are today. Now we, too, find support in our faith to justify what is being done and to leave our mark on the development of our village.”

Another structure which concerns the youth but which has deliberately been detached from the Youth Project, is the area of education, through the primary schools and above all the

Baba Simon College (BSC). The College was set up in 1990 to respond to the dual need of training and education for young people. In the morning they learn classical subjects there (history, geography, maths, French...) and in the afternoon practical disciplines called “footbridges”. Here it is a question of giving the pupils the necessary intellectual and manual tools for the transformation of their living conditions. The pupils learn agriculture, building, carpentry, small live-stock farming, mechanics, health and social and family education, as well as their traditions, so that they can be well rooted in their culture and absorb the distinctive features of their customs in order better to prepare themselves for modernity.

With the creation of this college a solution has been found for another problem posed later by the grassroots communities: that of the lack of secondary schools in the village, which we referred to above. For the pupils it is a question of taking note of the needs of the village and of the region and of managing to meet them, together with the community, by learning trades which will be able to help them to do so. As soon as they return to the village, they must practice what they have learnt in the disciplines called “footbridges” (bridge between the school and the village). The aim is to make them work with the communities they come from, investing a lot into transforming life in the village. Here once again we have a development structure in the Tokombéré Project which particularly concerns the youth but whose activities extend as far as the village.

Once more, it is faith here which prevails over everything in order to be able to get innovative ideas going with a view to sustainable development. How can we describe it otherwise, since in the programmes of the BSC one hour a week is dedicated to catechism in all the classes and each morning the children pray before the lessons start! The catechism does not consist here only of learning to pray or to know the Bible. It is not education in Christian life either and even less a course in doctrine. It is much more about drawing the pupils’ attention to a spirit of solidarity, of service and commitment. Discussions and debates are organised around themes of daily life.

In this school system, the teacher has a dual identity, that of the morning teacher and the afternoon accompanier for the “footbridges”. This provides an opportunity to mingle with the pupils, to take them as they are, in order to shape the new face of the village with them. And, as if that was not enough, the teacher is also the itinerant agent in a sector. He is the “big brother” who has to go and meet the parents of his sector to discuss their problems and those of their children. It is another place for listening, exchanging views and dialoguing to find the best orientation for the young people’s education. The “big brother”, like all the IA of the PfHP of Tokombéré, is the transmission belt between the grassroots (the parents/community) and the management team.

In the light of the big brothers’ opinions, formed on the basis of meetings in the field with the grassroots committees, a theme is chosen to feed into a Parents’ General Assembly, during which several issues are presented to the educational community, which must not only supply the answers but make suggestions about the orientations to be adopted. There too, the parents and children discuss freely with the support and participation of the “big brother”, tackling all aspects and demands of school life and putting forward ideas to help a certain parent or family or to create such and such a consultative structure or way of meeting the objectives.

Here again, as everywhere else in the PfHP, we see dialogue and consultation for better supervision of the young people and even more for the creation of better conditions of village life. And here too the fruit begins to “ripen”. Some old pupils of the college have set up an association to ensure continuity, others, who haven’t had the chance to go further in their studies, have settled in the village to carry out agricultural, pastoral or handcraft activities there. They improve the soil in order to improve the yield, they fatten sheep to make them more competitive for sale ... and they thus ensure the needs of the family better than if they

had learnt nothing... Certainly having been at school they give a lot to the different groups which exist in the villages: health committees, *APE*, literacy...

Are they not frustrated or hurt to see school friends coming back from the town better dressed than them, often with big motorbikes? Let's let one of them speak: Sewya, an old pupil of the college has begun to raise animals at the same time as working the fields. He acknowledges: "I am proud of having been through the college. I learnt what I am putting into practice today and I am not disappointed, on the contrary! It's true that I have old school friends who have continued their studies. I wasn't able to but I think each person is important in the place where he is. I have my place in the village and I can give some help towards development. I actively participate in the activities suggested by the Tokombéré Project and I can see that life is changing around me. The housing is improving, the level of reflection is rising, the tribal quarrels which existed before the arrival of Baba Simon have disappeared and now everyone is working for the same cause: to improve village life.

The grassroots committees never stopped raising issues, attracting the attention of the IA of the health project. Even if they had gained their health, thanks to the health activity carried out throughout the area, even if their children had, from now on, places of supervision (YCT, MYC) there was still a lot to do: in the field of agriculture and women's promotion, and how should they give young people the means of setting up a micro-enterprise?

## **The agricultural project**

From time to time the population bemoaned the natural disasters (drought, poor soil, migratory locusts..) of which they were the victims and which reduced the annual agricultural yields. These bad yields caused malnutrition of children but also of women who were pregnant or breast feeding, and of old people. Multiple meetings with the committees gave food for thought to the project managers, with the support of some resource people. If the improvement of the yields was seen as a solution to the prevailing malnutrition, how then were they to resolve the problems of the yield? This was the question which everyone was asking. After many opinions and thanks to all the suggestions, the management team decided to provide the population with the agricultural project. Its management structure is called the "Peasant's House" (set up in 1987).

The peasant farmers organised themselves into "Peasant Groups" in all the geographical sectors of the area (about 150). They cultivate community fields together and put aside a reserve ("the child's part") in a granary called the "Child's Granary". This reserve will only be used exclusively in a period of scarcity between harvests when the famine is at its height.

At the Peasant's House training was carried out and information given, experiments were made and new techniques for agriculture and animal husbandry were disseminated, experiences were shared among the groups, care was taken not to marginalise the weakest (children, pregnant women), questions were raised about management of the common good. And it was the peasant farmers themselves who were the actors and who demanded reports from each group. The main concern of the agricultural project was not at first to learn to vary the crops for a balanced diet. It was to improve the local crops which form part of the people's age-old dietary habits. People had a go at planting fruit trees, they learned to graft, they created experimental fields, they learned to develop lands on the contour lines etc... Solutions were sought to improve yields, thanks to the support of qualified people.

Very soon the question was raised about the link between this "Peasant's House" and the youth – a question which provoked thought among the grassroots committees. These came to an agreement: the young had to learn the techniques of the "white man". They agreed,

too, to choose the young people who should benefit from a two-year training at the Peasant's House so as to be able to give back what they had learnt to be disseminated in the village. At the end of the two years training these young people received a mortgage, a plough, seeds and, if necessary, two oxen for the plough. Those who were trained did not have a diploma as is done elsewhere because it was necessary to avoid falling into the vicious circle of the relationship of the graduate to the villager, a relation which is similar to that of the master and the slave. The young person had to come back to his village after his training to work with his community for the good of all.

Very soon, the results proved satisfactory; the groups did not run out of initiatives, they diversified the crops, the products. Since food security was almost assured, the surplus had to be sold. Then came the creation of the "North/South Granary, in 1994. For the peasant farmers it was a question of pooling the products to sell them in the southern part of the country and of buying other products to re-sell them in North Cameroon. It was a fruitful experience because it allowed them on the one hand to avoid the greed of the rich Muslims called "Alhadji", who were in the habit of paying for all the stocks of the peasants' products (at a very low price) in order to sell them at three, four, even five times more in a period of scarcity between harvests. On the other hand it enabled them not only to introduce new dietary habits among the peasants but to make a reasonable profit besides, so as to provide for the other needs of their families and they were able, too, to learn to manage the products.

Here again it was the groups, through the mediation of the delegates whom they themselves had chosen, who decided what should be done and what priorities to set for their House. All these activities earned the agricultural project the official recognition of the administrative authorities, who welcomed the organisation of an agro-pastoral market in Tokombéré - a real fair during which all the groups had to show to everyone what they were capable of.

Today the groups function as a network and have regular meetings every year during which they debate their problems, prepare new ground, propose new directions and make an assessment of their activities in the field. This structure is called the "Peasants' Congress".

The experience of the North-South Granary served its time and, for various reasons, the activities had to be brought to a close: the partners in the south of the country had another vision of the project, which was normal, since they did not understand anything about it. They wanted rather to give priority to the economic aspect, which was going to lead the North-South Granary into a mercenary mentality which could have distorted the original objectives. Besides this, they had to have their own facilities in Yaoundé in order to receive the agricultural and animal husbandry products coming from Tokombéré, but, the North-South Granary having temporarily rented the premises, this was not the case.

The following experience in the setting of the Peasant's House shows very well how a spontaneous action undertaken to solve an urgent problem of the moment can be taken over by the people to become the beginning of a solid and lasting popular organisation. In 1998, a terrible famine raged in the region, killing numerous people. All the granaries were empty. Everybody looked at one another helplessly and did not know what to do any more, simply attending the burial, here of a neighbour, there of a family member. Everyone was wondering about the future. There was no greenery in the fields, the sign of a another impending famine.....

The parish and the Project of Tokombéré cried out for help to attract international solidarity. Friends of the project felt alerted by this situation, as if one was saying "What are you doing about your brothers?"

A sum of 20 million F CFA was quickly raised and sent to Tokombéré to save the people from the famine. The question was then asked about how to make good use of this money.

An idea was hit upon which today could be described as prophetic: to make this money available to the Peasant's House to stock important quantities of maize and distribute them to the population through the groups and village organisations. Two thousands sacks of maize were stocked and then distributed first to the people most affected and then to the others, so that they could escape from the famine. Each family which received ten kilos had to pay 15 back to their community, to their village group. This maize which had been paid back stayed in the community granary which existed in each village where there was a peasant group. The people who did not repay would not be able to claim any other help, of any nature whatsoever. The itinerant agents of the Peasant's House supervised the operation and assured the follow up of each group. At the present moment, all the beneficiaries have repaid and a surplus of 1,000 sacks of maize, ensuing from the interest, is lying in the village granaries. It is interesting to note here that simple humanitarian aid would have served to save the people from the famine but would have left them dependent in the case of another famine. In our case, the aid was taken over to become a real basis for development and organisation of the local population.

Today each group has its stock of maize in reserve in the community granary, over and above that which it gathers at the end of the harvest, which remains in the family granary. The community stock thus becomes a "security stock" which can provide safety if another famine looms on the horizon.

The Peasant's House found itself being challenged about the issue of the financial security of the groups and individuals. After much thought, the leadership accepted the suggestion of a feasibility study for the setting up of a Decentralised Rural Credit Project (DRCP), a study which was carried out by the INADES group.

In the field, this project consisted of installing self-managed savings and credit banks in the villages. The peasants were responsible for the banks and drew up their internal rules with the aid of a financial technician. They paid a contribution in money and building materials and were thus able to benefit from a building constructed by the DRCP with the assistance of the International Centre for Rural Development.

The main aim of the banks was to provide villagers with solutions regarding their multiple difficulties but also to help them to know how to manage their resources. The banks multiplied in the villages, thus giving the people the illusion of the satisfaction of their needs. The DRCP continues but today it is causing more misfortune than had been imagined: many heads of families have been investigated because they have not paid back the credit granted to them in time. Others have been forced to sell their plot of land or their harvest in order to escape imprisonment.

In our opinion, this project soon showed its limits because there was no real groundwork at the beginning with the people to make them aware of the dangers of such a structure. Unlike the structures of the PfHP, which have only been created as a result of a request coming from the grassroots population, these people were not included in any reflections. With DRCP the way of thinking changed direction, giving the results which we have described above.

## **And the women?**

In our traditional societies, the woman plays a great role, she carries heavy responsibility: doing domestic work, bringing up the children, managing the family, working in the fields.... Unfortunately these responsibilities are ignored by the man who is the absolute master of the house.

In the course of different meetings with the IA of the already existing structures of the PfHP, the question of the woman's place in the community began to become a very serious concern. The only aim of the little groups of women which existed in the districts was to struggle against nutritional problems through farming community fields. Once the situation had been assessed, concrete action was needed. In the light of proposals made by the women themselves, the management team decided to create the "women's promotion" embodied today in the "Woman's House". At the beginning the programmes were aimed at young women who had stopped studying. These women learned various activities with the support of some nuns. Very quickly they gained enthusiasm and a creative spirit. They are organised in groups in the districts. They take responsibility in the villages in the different health committees, the pupils' parents' association.... Today the aim is to show the woman that she is the kernel of her family and thus is capable of changing her living conditions.

In the field, apart from practical activities (agriculture, sewing, childcare, handwork...) the women organise sessions for reflection several times a year on diverse themes such as: "How can the woman spread peace in her home?" or "How can the woman contribute to the development of her region".

Nevertheless Madam Kokof (former president of the women's promotion) recognises that: "We still have to attract many women into the group who don't realise yet how important such a structure is for them, even though they know that the association is open to everyone, whatever their age, their religion or wherever they belong in society."

One former member expresses her recognition of the merits of these structures in this way: "At the beginning we had a lot of difficulties with our husbands because they saw our programmes as useless recreation but many husbands understand now that we learn important things there for the life of the couple, for the development of our region. What enabled us to convince them were the evaluations which we made publicly at the end of the mass and the exhibition of things we had made. Some of us who have learnt sewing don't need to look for a dressmaker/tailor any more. The money which we would have had to have given to the tailor can be used for something else in the family. I've learnt lots of things but I've chosen to make doughnuts to sell. I manage to meet some of the family's needs. In the discussions among women it's easy to pick out those who have been at the women's promotion and those who haven't been there, by the quality of their reflection. We must carry on because results are showing and they are encouraging. Each woman can do something by giving a lot of herself in the field with ideas for changing living conditions"

## **Literacy, a precious tool for development**

The actions in favour of development advance and multiply. The standard of living rises, new needs make themselves felt, an important flow of people between north and south is being noticed. Globalisation is demanding adaptation to new demands. All the partners should speak the same language to make their projects progress. The difficulties linked to language, which can form barriers, must be overcome.

"Development depends largely on knowledge acquired through information and training in new methods. Not to read and write becomes a real handicap in an activity for the development of a person in the environment in which they live," exclaims Madame Gayday Marie, in charge of literacy in the PfHP. Literacy in French at the heart of our community aims to make a person grow. It is intended for adults, men and women and young people who can no longer register at a school because they are too old.

Groups of 20 to 30 people have been set up in the field. Each group benefits from the supervision of a literacy teacher and works four mornings a week for four months. The

literacy teachers are, in most cases, chosen by the village. They give their service on a voluntary basis. The students of the literacy course contribute 0.5 Euros. Everyone pays themselves for their stationery (exercise books, biros, chalk, rubber etc...) The project provides the teaching materials and support. In these last years, we have noticed a high level of women's registration in the different literacy groups and they say this experience will be continued.

A former literacy student who today sells wicker-work goods, recounts: "Before I used to give in my products to the cottage industry at Tokombéré without knowing how many there were. The others used to write my address instead of me. It is always annoying to ask for a translation, to get someone else to help in order to discuss with a partner". Agnès does not regret having registered in the literacy course and today she does some calculations alone.

Other management structures exist and do the same work in the field with the local population to enable people really to flourish. These are, for example, the Association of Pupils' Parents, the Popular University of Tokombéré (PUT), the handcraft industry ARTOK, the young Chamber of Economics etc. Whatever the structure, there are always Itinerant Agents, real kingpins among the people and the management team; it is through them that information circulates in the two directions (project-villages).

## **Small enterprises to change the face of the village, of the region**

The standard of living changes, new needs are created. Nowadays, Tokombéré has become the sector with the highest level of schooling in the department and it has an abundance of high fliers. What is more normal, therefore, than to see people changing from walking as a means of getting around to a bicycle, to a motorbike and, little by little to a car? It is not surprising either to observe a change of eating habits in families. Well, changing one's eating habits presupposes that one can find what one wishes to eat! To travel by car or motorbike presupposes that one can find fuel and also mechanics to maintain the engine. .. So there was a need to create all these conditions to allow people to progress. Actions were thought about along these lines and today they are tangible. Small enterprises have been set up by the young people of Tokombéré who wanted to do this. A general store has become a reality in the form of a shop in the heart of the town, managed by a young man who offers various products for sale: from food to ironmongery, including stationery, office equipment, spare parts for small engines and clothes.

A firm for construction and public works has been set up by another to offer people his services in this field. A traditional bakery has come into being along with a restaurant-bar-hotel whose management is in the hands of young people, offering cooking of local as well as exotic dishes to the population, accommodation for possible outsiders passing through, a place for relaxation and leisure: that is the Kirdi.

One young man has opened a garage to fix and even repair engines and to sell spare parts and fuel. Other young people have gone into agricultural farming or into "modern" livestock rearing of sheep and pigs.

With these enterprises one has the impression of having suddenly made a leap forward because today we have on the spot what, ten years ago, we used to go and fetch from 50 km away. At that time the nearest service station, the nearest garage, the nearest ironmongers and restaurant were concentrated in Maroua, the provincial capital, 50 km away from Tokombéré! It should be noted that all these young people benefited at the beginning from financial support from the Tok Project but today they are autonomous and, no small feat, they are today

creating employment for other young people, whom they thus enable to guarantee certain stability for themselves and for their families.

Thus more problems have been resolved, starting from the needs of the grassroots community, by simple actions which become large-scale solutions.

## Conclusion

The success of the Tokombéré Project lies in the actions carried out at the beginning by Baba Simon, who showed us that we are all brothers and that we can only prosper by joining together. It lies, too, in the open attitude of the people of Tokombéré. Drawn in by health issues, they then presented other important problems which attracted the attention of the managers. It is our conviction that for a development project to succeed it is absolutely necessary to work in the field and live on a daily basis with the future beneficiaries. This is in order to understand them better, know their stories, their origins, their aspirations and their difficulties and to include them in the thinking which can give rise to a programme or an idea, instead of staying in offices and thinking up a programme which will be applied to people who will feel they are strangers!

Before they can benefit from a development activity, the people must be the principle actors of it, the ones who point out their own needs and who suggest ideas to solve them in reflection with others. The management structure must not be the source of ideas, it should be the sounding board which seeks to give a material form to the ideas coming from the grassroots. It should refrain from acting like the know-all and the one who can give lessons. It should let the people express themselves, give them the opportunity to say what they feel and how they mean to resolve a problem which they have presented.

They should get out of their envelope freely (to “de-envelope” = to “develop”) is exactly what Father Grégoire Cadore, curate of the parish of Tokombéré thinks: “No development without faith”, which means not a step forward without knowing where we are coming from and what we want to walk towards. And all this not for the short or medium term, as with most of the NGOs, who settle down for two, three or five years and then go back home once the work is “finished” with the feeling of the task being accomplished! Our term is the only one which is the true measure of humankind on the way to Eternity.

While it is true that people are at the centre of the project, that their faith is what most encourages them to act at the heart of their community in favour of development, and while it is true, too, that it is essential for all development activity to take people and their needs into consideration, it is still obvious that the financial aspect cannot be ignored.

All the structures of the global project of Tokombéré have only been created and are only able to work because they benefit from sure and stable financial support. It is not only useful but necessary to finance ideas, to stimulate proposals, so that they become reality. One cannot only count on people’s faith to witness the miracle! Human beings have needs which must be taken into account and provided for, so that they are able to think and become involved in such development activities and processes.

Furthermore, it is necessary to avoid falling into the habitual traps of numerous NGOs who, because they have funds, want to impose their development programmes. Our experience leads us to say that activities with such programmes and constraints are doomed to failure. Instead of financing programmes which are imposed on people, it would be better to finance programmes which the people themselves have thought up and to make sure that they are very closely associated with them, to ensure their real participation, so that they are convinced that it is they who will profit from them.

In short, all must be staked on the stability and sustainability of the actors of a project. A development project must be envisaged for the medium or long term and not for the short term because people must be allowed to become firmly rooted in the spirit of the project, to ponder on it and then to try it out, adapting it from day to day while keeping to the original aim.

The actors must be stable, that is they must have a certain guarantee which allows them really to commit themselves, without having the ulterior motive of doing work which will benefit anyone other than their family or community. They must, therefore, be guaranteed a reasonable and permanent income so that they can be freed from any inclination to go and look for something better elsewhere.

These two aspects (sustainability and stability) are very important elements of a development project because they enable progress rather than having to begin all over again each time.

If one were to make a diagram of the Human Promotion Project of Tokombéré, one could compare it to a tree whose roots are the local tradition and the people of the region. The Gospel, having inspired Baba Simon's philosophy, is the sap of this tree, the health project is the trunk and the different branches are the structures which have been created over time at the instigation of the population.

This is what Father Aurenche, the Project's leader, thinks: "For me, the people of Tokombéré are a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, watered by a life-giving source, the good news of Jesus, brought by Baba Simon. This seed has grown, grown until it has become a tree with many branches, on each of which different birds have made their nest: the health programme, the school, the management of the young people, the peasant farmer's world, the women of Tokombéré.... Each one shelters there, finds nourishment there and brings life to this great tree. One cannot do without the other, even if they don't know it. Each one draws from the source, even if he is not faithful to the word. All the songs of all the birds join in one and the same harmony and fill those who pass by at the foot of the tree with astonishment.... It is a vision of the world and a way of viewing people, the people of Tokombéré, who want to grow in the same way and along with the others to join in with the harmony."

"It is the way one human being sees another which allows people to flourish, to develop. They draw their ideas from the Gospel; this is the new perception of evangelisation, because hungry people cannot follow the Gospel. The ground for good living conditions must be prepared, which means recognition, freedom and the capacity to take initiatives in all areas", maintains Sababa Michel, a student in Yaoundé. For Nicole Payelle, Director of the Baba Simon College: "The Tokombéré Project is to walk to the rhythm of the people and to accompany them in their responsibilities, allowing them to be the agents of their future and encouraging them to commit themselves to their life and that of those around them."

We can agree with Ladé, a nurse that: "It is a project which makes people become aware by themselves of their situation and accompanies them in new directions (becoming responsible, autonomous)". "It is founded on faith in God and teaches each person the meaning of commitment, loyalty, and of love for one's neighbour" adds Madame Adèle Litini, leader of women's groups.

Etienne Zikra



**service** **Des communautés en tenue de**



# Des communautés en tenue de service

" Restez en tenue de service et gardez vos lampes allumées"  
*Luc 12,35*

## Etapas à suivre

- 1- Faire lire le texte et l'image *Lc 12,35-48*

## 2-Réflexion personnelle

- a) Quel est le service que tu as à rendre ? Où ?
- b) Quelles sont les exigences de ce service ?
- c) Tu es au service de qui ? qui va te demander de rendre compte de ton service ? Explique

### 3-Mise en commun en petits groupes

#### 4- représentez par un sketch le message reçu de l'Évangile

##### chant 1

Seigneur tu m'as confié ces talents,  
moi j'ai gagné ces autres talents

- 1- R / entre dans la joie dans la joie de ton maître ... (4 x)

##### Chant 2

2- R/ Seigneur, transforme notre vie en prière.  
Apprends-nous à aimer comme toi ( 2 x)

Seigneur, quand j'aurai faim  
Donne moi quelqu'un à nourrir  
Seigneur, quand j'aurai soif  
Donne moi quelqu'un à désaltérer

Seigneur quand j'aurai froid  
Donne moi quelqu'un à vêtir  
Seigneur quand je serai triste  
Donne moi quelqu'un à consoler

Seigneur quand je serai à terre  
Donne moi quelqu'un à relever  
Seigneur quand je serai lourd  
Donne moi quelqu'un à soulever

##### Chant 3

Dans la longue marche avec tous les hommes ( 2x)  
Pour ouvrir des chemins nouveaux

Nous avons osé reconnaître l'esprit de Dieu  
Nous avons appris connaître la main de Dieu

Dans la longue marche avec ceux qui luttent ( 2x)  
Pour défendre les opprimés

Nous avons osé reconnaître l'Esprit de Dieu  
Nous avons appris à connaître l'amour de Dieu

Dans la longue marche avec ceux qui peuvent ( bis)  
Et travaillent à se libérer

Nous avons osé reconnaître l'Esprit de Dieu  
Nous avons appris à connaître la vie de Dieu