

JESUIT CONFERENCE OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR

PRESS RELEASE

Nairobi| 15 May 2020:

African Governments must protect the poor and vulnerable from Covid-19 effects

The Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) made an unprecedented move and commitment to work together to accelerate social support for the urban poor in Africa amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

Effective social protection systems for the poor to ensure that they have access to basic life necessities such as water, housing and food are crucial when a crisis like COVID-19 hits, says the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM). The Jesuits are concerned that in many countries in Africa, such systems remain limited in coverage and will need significant upgrading to respond to a pandemic like COVID-19.

Having deployed their own emergency relief plan across the continent, the Jesuits in Africa believe that reaching out to the poor is an important preferential option as the effects of Covid-19 have been more severe on the poor, affecting families with low income, poor housing, and limited access to basic needs. But the Jesuits cautioned African governments that telling the poor to social distance without providing alternatives for them to access food and shelter is a serious lack of concern for the vulnerable and poor and failure to protect them.

According to Fr. Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator SJ, President of the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM), Jesuits together with their collaborators across Africa are reaching out to the vulnerable in response to the Christian call upon them to be compassionate, feed the hungry and provide shelter to the homeless and clothe the poor irrespective of their race, religion or culture.

Currently, while collaborating with other Jesuit networks across the continent, efforts by the Jesuits in Africa to assist the poor and vulnerable during the pandemic in at least 25 countries will reach some 24, 264 families in urban and peri-urban locations. In their work they are prioritizing the elderly, children, single-headed households, refugees and migrants and people living with chronic medical conditions who are the most vulnerable to the impacts of the disease.

"The inspiration behind the interventions of Jesuits in Africa is the prioritization of the most urgent and life-saving provision necessary to help governments and other men and women of goodwill to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on the poor and vulnerable," said Fr. Orobator. However, he noted that while Jesuits care about feeding the hungry, they also are concerned about the structural injustice and disparities that lead to poverty and hunger. "We do not end at giving bread to the hungry, we care about why the hungry are hungry," he said.

The Jesuit Superior for Zimbabwe and Mozambique, Fr. Chiedza Chimhanda SJ, lamented the unequal distribution of the continents surplus resources "As Jesuits we wish to urge all African governments to take steps to heal the inequality and poverty around so that every African is able to build resilience against any threat like COVID-19."

In Lagos, Nigeria, Fr. Chukwuyenum Afiawari SJ, Jesuit Superior of the North-West Africa Province said, in most urban settlements, many people who are daily wage earners in the informal sector have been sent on unpaid leave and staying at home means going without necessities like food and hygiene supplies.

Using the most recent data, the World Bank has predicted that the coronavirus is pushing 40-60 million people into extreme poverty globally and sub-Saharan Africa will be the hardest hit as 23 million of the populace pushed into poverty are projected to be in the sub-region.

The Jesuits serve in 34 of the 46 sub-Saharan countries that are home to the continent's largest slums and to some of the poorest populations, where most families thrive on a hand-to-mouth scale. Water access points are hard to find and are even harder to get to when restrictions on movement are in place in the hope of preventing further spread of the disease.

As one resident in Korogocho, Nairobi, Rose Mbone put it: "We don't have enough food to eat; we don't have enough water to drink and to cook our food, so where will we get water to wash our hands frequently?"

The Jesuits have called on both the African Union, individual African governments, and the international community to heal the injustice of poverty and its structural causes if they are to be successful in containing crises like COVID-19. They insist that if African countries and the international community are serious about eradicating diseases like COVID-19, then Governments in Africa and the international community must provide Ms. Mbone – and the more than 400 million extremely poor people in Africa like her – with continuous access to water, food and decent housing.

The Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) is the coordinating unit of common apostolic engagements for Jesuits in Africa. The JCAM secretariat is in Nairobi, Kenya.

For more information or inquiries contact:

Fr. Charlie B. Chilufya, S.J

Director - Justice and Ecology Office

Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar

260 Dagoretti Road

Karen

Tel/WhatsApp: +254 786 584 784/ +254 798 092 037

jeodirector@jesuits.africa