

2 May 2020

Esonge – Update of work with our sister organization, Essoungue, to help the village of Dioula prevent COVID-19 infections

The village of Dioula is located in a very remote region of southeastern Cameroon, 30 kilometers from the border with Congo (Republic of Congo, Brazzaville). This region is approximately 1,000 miles from the Cameroonian capital, Yaoundé. There is no reliable medical care in this region. As a result, the only possible response to the global COVID-19 pandemic is to try to protect people from becoming infected with the virus at all.

Esonge – Working Together for All has been partnering with our sister organization, Essoungue, which is the legalized women’s association of the village of Dioula, to support their actions to prevent infection by COVID-19.

The following discussion provides an outline of the steps we have taken to support Essoungue as the women organize to mitigate against the arrival of the virus.

We laid out a plan for taking care of the villagers of Dioula, preparing everyone for the potential arrival of COVID-19:

- > Essoungue will play an important role in disseminating information to both the villagers of Dioula, and potentially reaching out to other villages by disseminating information. We are in the process of trying to figure out how Essoungue can help disseminate information about the virus, and about how to prevent infections, without requiring any personal travel to these villages. Information would have to be written by hand and then delivered to other villages, mitigating social contact.
- > Essoungue will distribute soap to each household in Dioula, and teach each family how to wash hands properly (pouring water from a cup for each person to wash hands with fresh water, instead of having people dip their hands into a common bucket);
- > Esonge (USA) has sent detailed information, in French, from the World Health Organization concerning COVID-19, including information for people living in rural regions of the world. Stephanie and Philippe are translating this information into Bangando, Baka, and Bakwélé; Stephanie is designing flyers of this information to distribute to all of the villages in the region.
- > Esonge (USA) also translated patterns for how to sew face masks into French, so that the women of Essoungue, as well as tailors located in a nearby town, could begin to make hygienic masks.

Here are the concrete steps that Esonge-Essoungue have taken include:

- > Transfer of \$1,000.00 to Essoungue = 578,890 CFA
 - o We executed this transfer through WorldRemit. It was exceedingly time consuming, both for Pascaline (the president of Essoungue) and for me. But in the end, it worked! I think that we figured out the pitfalls that we need to avoid, to be able to make transfers more easily in the future.

- > Pascaline has bought enough soap to distribute to the families of Dioula (15 boxes of soap, 60 blocks per box @ 18,000 CFA per box = \$30.00/box = 270,000 CFA or \$447.50, for a total of 900 blocks of soap (½ kg. per block).
- > Pascaline has negotiated for a tailor to make masks, enough for two masks per family, with several dozen in reserve = 250 masks in all.
- > She has also identified a potential pre-made mask, and is assessing whether to purchase the pre-made masks or the hand-made masks from the tailor.
- > There are 110 households in Dioula. We estimated 500 CFA per mask for the cost to the tailor, but Pascaline managed to negotiate the price to 350 CFA per mask. 350 CFA/mask x 250 masks = 87,500 CFA = \$145.00
- > Pascaline also purchased the following food supplies for the women of Essoungue to keep in reserve, so that they can prepare food for any quarantined sick people, and to feed the isolated elderly:
 - o 4 sacks of rice (200 kg) 88,000 CFA
 - o 2 large jugs of cooking oil (20 liters) 50,000 CFA
 - o 5 sacks of salt (90 kg) 175,000 CFA
 - o 15 packages of bullion cubes 22,500 CFA
 - o 1 carton of bleach, as a disinfectant (12 liters) (price not clear)

335,500 CFA = \$556.00

Total cost of supplies = \$1,148.50

Pascaline is a miracle worker! I am not sure how she managed to purchase \$1,148.50 worth of supplies with \$1,000 that I sent her! She is an excellent negotiator, and managed to purchase \$1,148.50 worth of supplies with \$1,000 that I sent her on behalf of Esonge.

Here are the plans that we discussed for the health and safety of the village:

Plans for isolation:

A. Quarantine

- > Each family would name one person who would serve as the primary caregiver if someone (or more than one person) falls sick in their family, so as to limit the infection within families;
- > If villagers begin to fall sick, they would be brought to the primary school to create a quarantine space.
- > The primary school is right across the logging road from the Essoungue House, where Essoungue women could prepare meals for the infected people and their caregivers, arranging a contact-less passing over of the food to the quarantined patients and caregivers.

B. Isolation of the Elderly

- > We also discussed the possibility of having the elderly people of Dioula move to a collective household, where the Essoungue women and some caregivers from their

families, would cook and care for them. This temporary isolation of the elderly would be an attempt to keep them safe and healthy during COVID-19. We talked about the possibility of creating a camp for the elderly near a river called Naholoholo, which is a lovely place to the west of Dioula (the school/quarantine is on the east side of the logging road)

C. Isolation of anyone arriving from cities/towns

- > We discussed the importance of having anyone arriving from towns/cities isolate themselves from the rest of the village for two weeks.

D. Other COVID-19 details

- > We talked about the necessity of having Essoungue women who cook for the sick – as well as the caregivers, of course – change their clothes, wash their clothes, and bathe each day after they work with anyone who might be infected.
- > We discussed the risks of having people share pit toilets, because the COVID-19 virus sheds through stools. We discussed the importance of getting everyone in Dioula to sprinkle ashes into their pit toilet after they have a bowel movement, to tamp down the spread of the stool particles. We're not certain this method will be extremely effective, but it's better than nothing. We also discussed the possibility of having Esonge sponsor the building of a separate toilet for infected people to use near the quarantine at the school, and then fill it in once the COVID crisis is over.
- > Philippe (who is the political head of Dioula) is going to convene, together with the chief (the customary head of Dioula) an all-village meeting on Saturday, 18 April to discuss plans for preventing COVID-19 from arriving and infecting Dioula village. Philippe will share the information that I have been sending to Pascaline; Essoungue will distribute soap. Masks, food supplies, bleach, and extra soap will be kept in reserve, and locked, in the Essoungue House.
- > We also discussed the POSSIBILITY that the women of Dioula could also gather at least soap and information to share with women of other villages. Perhaps we could get WWF to partner with Essoungue, assisting them in the distribution of soap and information. At the same time, this COVID partnership between Essoungue and WWF would demonstrate that the women of Dioula are leaders in community-based efforts.
- > Philippe, the head of Dioula village, said that he estimates that the amount that Esonge-USA is funding Essoungue for COVID-19 protection amounts to 55% of the total COVID-19 funding that WWF is supplying for the region (!).

Here are photos so that you can visualize the Esonge-USA contributions to helping Essoungue-Dioula prepare for COVID-19:



Pascaline collecting – and carefully counting! – the money sent by Esonge-USA to Essoungue-Dioula, to prepare for COVID-19. She is at the office of Express Union, the money transfer agency that is in Moloundou (30 km. from Dioula).



Pascaline modeling one of the masks that they were considering. I asked her to check that it closes tightly under the chin. In the end they opted for the masks sewn by the local tailor, which ties better under the chin and has a better strap. I also sent diagrams about how to wear a mask properly.



Pascaline overseeing the purchase of supplies (above) and the loading of the truck (below). She negotiated transportation as part of the cost of the items.

