

Beninese members' national peace campaign to renew families and society

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Benin is a nation of about eleven million people on the southern coast of West Africa. Benin's shape resembles a key. It has a 121-kilometer-long coast on the Gulf of Guinea on the underside of the West African "bulge."

Benin's eastern and western borderlines rise from the coast straight north from there, roughly parallel, 120-some kilometers apart, like the shaft of the key, for about 190 miles (305 km) and then the territory broadens out in a shape that is roughly reminiscent of the head of the key. It is similar in size to Honduras, Bulgaria and Cuba.

Benin had once been Dahomey, a kingdom that arose in the 1600s and was a regional power when France began gradually asserting her military power in West Africa. By the late 1880s, Benin came under French control. France incorporated Benin into French West Africa in 1904.

French Dahomey achieved independence in 1960; it changed its name to the Republic of Benin in 1975. In that year, it became one of our original 1975 mission countries. The official language of Benin is French. The most common native languages in the south, where the vast majority of the population resides, are Fon and Yoruba and at least six other vernacular languages are common in the north.

Benin uses a three-tier geographic organization. The nation has twelve departments, which are like prefectures, provinces or states; seventy-seven communes -- smaller units within departments and 545 arrondissements within the communes, which may contain rural villages or urban districts or neighborhoods. Her capital is Porto-Novo and the seat of government is Cotonou.

Our movement in Benin

Benin has about two thousand members. Members are active in the main cities of the country from north to south. They have a huge church center in Cotonou, covering about three thousand square meters. As early as 2006, Benin was one of the first nations in the world to have appointed thirty times more ambassadors for peace (2,490), than they had parliamentarians (83), a goal True Father had given to each nation at that time.

A French member familiar with the movement in Benin describes it as "highly organized with clear departments and good interaction between the leaders and their members."

Kathy Rigney arrived in Benin on May 1, 1975 as one of the original missionaries and is still active as the Cheon Il Guk special envoy to Africa. The special envoy for Benin, Rev. Sasaki Tatsuo, who likewise has spent four decades in Africa, has also been instrumental. Some of the dedicated Beninese leaders (per a late 2016 report) are Rev. Emmanuel Allognon, president of FFWPU; Rev. Yvon Oke Godonou, vice-president of FFWPU; Mr. and Mrs. Pascal Degby, head of the Blessed Family Department; Dr. Honore Anagonou, secretary general of UPF; Mr. Ange Dannon, president of CARP; and Mr. Gaetan Dandjesso, president of YFWP.



Beninese national efforts

Nationwide, Beninese members are undertaking a peace campaign, which we call the National Campaign for the Renewal of Families, the Reconstruction of the Nation and the Creation of a Society of Interdependence, Shared Prosperity and Universal Values. This campaign has three main pillars. Promotion of good family values, promotion of good health practices -- including healthy social interaction and relationships -- and promotion of other activities that aid sustainable development, which we do in cooperation with concerned citizens, private organizations or official agencies.

The central event is the Family Festival for Peace, which we hold in cooperation with government officers who make official announcements about our campaigns. We inculcate family values through Family Festivals and the education of couples. We include youth education in our family values outreach. We promote good health and other projects to help individuals, families and communities.

Although we address a wide range of issues, the core foundation remains the family. Everything starts with the family and everything must also have the family at the center and then extend to communities, villages, and the society at higher levels.

The cooperation of the authorities at various levels is an important factor of success. Nevertheless, the key factor remains the involvement of each our couples and each family. The major challenge was to follow-up with the couples. The actors guiding the campaign need to maintain a good and deep motivation, determination and perseverance to surmount all difficulties while keeping a clear vision and a high sense of altruism. Our leaders at each level had to develop the qualities of persevering with commitment until the end. Their efforts have borne fruit that people can proudly welcome.

My health, my responsibility

Civil authorities at various levels are involved in improving public health. We need everyone to be responsible to maintain good personal and family health. Indeed, you manage your bank account yourself. Health is a much more valuable asset than money. We have reached out to couples regarding self-help health, through our My Health in My Hands Project.

We promote good practices for optimal health (controlling one's inner state, cultivating a sense of forgiveness and love, healthy eating, a healthy environment, walking, avoiding a sedentary life and proper use of water. The family provides the best environment to maintain good health. We encourage eating foods and plants of high nutritive value, for example, using various extracts from Moringa trees, which are common in tropical and subtropical areas, as well as therapeutic food such as lemon, garlic, ginger and small kola nuts. We teach couples about conjugal relations and sexual health. We teach good health practices to men, women and children.

Our broader vision

We are introducing health based socio-economic activities, which entails establishing production and processing units as well as developing a simple, cheap and efficient distribution system for health products. We are opening health food stores and natural health and wellness centers.

We are encouraging the establishment of Moringa orchards and farms producing medicinal plants. We

have also developed a Happy Health approach involving education and use of the Happy Health machines. In each village, we are promoting reflexology, a means of treating pain, nerve problems and some diseases by therapeutic massage of the reflex zones on the soles of the feet.

We have also developed various training programs through which members of the community can receive professional training and obtain a certificate of completion or a diploma. We seek expertise at the international, national and local levels to support these initiatives. Indeed, our project leaders themselves have the proper knowledge and skills.



Aiding sustainable development

In addition to the planting of Moringa orchards, which we are preparing to take up in a rural area family cooperative, we spread "Moringa culture," helping as many people as possible to see the health advantages of this natural remedy. We also encourage the use of organic fertilizers and insecticides, which do not harm human health or the natural environment. We are working to help fifty impoverished farmers through the Zogbodomey City Hall and Domè Arrondissement to establish a partnership with promoters of these organic fertilizers and insecticides.

A study is underway and we are seeking financing for the installation of solar panels. We support solar energy use in arrondissement offices in lighting and secretarial areas. We also have a project to install devices and facilitate families' access to solar energy: Small lighting equipment with a mobile phone charging system, solar panels, etc., through the Family Cooperative for Peace and Development for groupings of thirteen families. Another possibility is using solar energy in irrigation systems for agriculture in cooperatives and Moringa orchards.

We wish to establish youth and family centers in cooperation with arrondissements, with a possibility of evening classes for students in the rural areas. Students who have to pass exams will have priority. These centers will serve as arrondissement- level headquarters for FFWPU and as a base for coordinating natural health and well-being shops in villages.

Microcredit

We have contacted Microfinance Institutions or NGOs to facilitate the access to microcredits for groups of families. Maintaining an ongoing relationship with the borrowers reduces the risk on the borrowers defaulting on the loans. So much of what we learn in the unification movement revolves around loving relationships in which we care for one another as family.

This program will reach a substantial scale in 2017. Already, a group received a loan of 900,000 FCFA (FCFA, a currency guaranteed by the French treasury; this amount is equivalent to US\$1,500) from the Hunger Project Microcredit Program based in Avlamè. We contact at least three financial institutions. The groups choose the institutions that they consider more relevant for their situation and their income-generating activities.

Through the Family Cooperative for Peace and Development, we will mobilize a substantial fund for the

creation of a saving bank, managed by professionals and according to the regulations in force in the Republic of Benin.



Our 2017 master plan

One: Hold Family Intercultural Festivals for Peace -- small meetings with couples in villages twice a month based on themes related to family reinforcement. Conform to the law of giving and receiving, exemplify the ideal of the family as the school of love and peace. Identify causes and resolve conflicts. Live in the service of peace; be a model to follow.

Two: Launch of the Education and Youth Development Program, which entails conducting consciousness raising campaigns on various themes in schools and in villages. Hold meetings on the theme: Love your hometown. Love your homeland, and foster their development. Conduct sports and recreation activities and activities and foster entrepreneurship.

Create a Youth Volunteer Service, by building a network of committed young volunteers.

Three: Conduct community activities such as cleaning and improving public areas and improving rural trails. Provide training in agriculture and the rearing of livestock. Promote Moringa culture. Do charitable works. Conduct a variety of peace initiatives (inter-religious dialogue, Peace Road 2017, activities related to the celebration of the UN commemorative days, sports events and Arts for Peace. Launch economic Initiatives.

Four: Provide education as a means of serving others; make financial and material contributions. Foster a spirit of volunteering. Encourage others to make voluntary contributions for works of peace and development. Conduct activities that result in solidarity and express generosity.

Five: Teach health care using natural methods to prevent illness. Encourage hygienic practice and teach others how to care for the environment.

Six: Develop the Family Cooperative for Peace and Development.

Seven: Facilitate access to microcredit for groups as a means of alleviating poverty, promoting self-initiation and development.

Eight: Hold at least one community project per semester, 2017–2020, in accord with intervention priority areas.

Nine: Approach others about becoming partners for the development of the community.

Ten: Substantiate the Zogbodomey Showcase Project (Write its history. Produce written and audio-visual materials lauding the Zogbodomey advantages and potential. Create a Zogbodomey shopping center.)

Eleven: Support City Halls and develop arrondissement projects in education. Advance the culture of peace, human welfare and development.

Twelve: Collaborate with decentralized structures, NGOs and associations involved in Zogbodomey to help the population.