**Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis:**

**Partners in the process of Sustainable Development**

The Tertiary Sisters of Saint Francis (TSSF) bound by the gospel, has as mission to be an empowering presence through our various ministries in different parts of our world. Our Development strategy is sustained through our Charism which is to live contemplatively as apostolic religious in the present moment so as to recognize the will of God in the signs and needs of our time. More than 75 years today, the Tertiary Sisters of St. Francis have served the local communities consistently to uplift the dignity of the needy. Our religious orientation is rooted in the gospel value. The Province of the TSSF covers an entire geographical area spread through 7 Regions in Cameroon. Every year the good Lord adds to our numbers, postulants, novices and the young sisters. The number of young girls joining the Franciscan life has been on the rise. This has spurred a new dynamism in the formation process, whereby the congregation takes into view our present reality in the pastoral ministry. At the moment we are more than 300 sisters constituted in 11 Dioceses.

In line with our Franciscan values our religious communities and institutions are established in far to reach and disadvantaged communities. Our internal and external development frameworks are orientate on policies put in place by the Provincial Administration, guided towards reaching out effectively to the needs of the underprivileged communities. The sisters contribute sustainably in the attainment of our strategic development directions. They are involved in the different ministries and contribute sustainably to the growth of our communities through the various ministries.

We aim through the frequent capacity strengthening programs with the sisters to harness our human resource potentials, in order to improve sufficiently our organizational output in view to better service delivery towards a wider community. Considering our diverse milieu of interventions and with the changing needs of our times, we educate our sisters to uphold to the challenges and needs posed in the exercise of their duties. Through this, we have been able to enhance the expansion of our health care facilities in far to reach communities, rehabilitation centers for the poor, in reaching diversely to our charism through our educational infrastructures and expanding on the services of the orphanages etc. Most of the sisters are seen as outreach personnel, managers, principals, directress, nurses Doctors Eetc. This has spurred continuity in sustaining our development agenda, through active participation.

With regards to our sustainable development agenda, we have developed strategic directions which are orientate towards reaching out extensively to our Charism. Our sustainable development strategies adopt holistic interventions which are exhaustive towards attaining more agreeably the needs of the underserved communities. We highly associate therefore our services towards improving upon human development, specifically enabling and improving upon academic participation and guaranteeing the health of underprivileged families in distant communities through accessible health needs.

Caregiving to orphans and underprivileged children is sustained through our vocational and rehabilitative centres. Economic and social threats account for the increase number of street children we find in our communities today. HIV/AIDs have brought a more complicated milieu as the number of orphans and vulnerable children are on the rise. This has led to increase of child abuse, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, increase in child debt bondage and force marriages etc. It remains more renascent as families become more vulnerable with the increase in parental irresponsibility. The girl child remains the victim as most are forced into prostitution - the process is continuous. The skills gained from the trainings are quite applicable in our environment and serves as a sustainable platform for many and their families. A more enhanced and suitable development measure is enhanced through this forum.

Apart from the St. Francis Home for Skills Training, we also have vocational training Centers in the St. Joseph Children and Adult Home, St. Therese Bangang, Maria Huber girls formation Centre in Dziguilao and Pitoa with similar objectives Far North of Cameroon This shows the involement of the TSSF as major stakeholders, in restoring the dignity and improving upon the living standard of the underpriviledge children and families. The skills imparted to children through the various workshops found in the vocational training institutions, guarantees them livelihood oppurtunities upon the completion of the training program.

Through our health centres we create a greater sense of awareness and strengthening capacities of those living with HIV/AIDs and caregivers of children living with HIV/AIDs. We provide surgery and rehabilitation for children and adults with handicaps and strokes. At the moment we are facilitating the contruction of a rehabilitation Centre for persons with strokes. The congregation reaching out closely to the health needs of the communities have in existence 4 hospitals, 17 health Centres and 1 cardiac Centre (being the lone Cardiac Centre in the whole of West Africa).

In education, we operate 7 comprehensive schools that include academic, vocational and technical education. Education for underpriviledged communities has been prime in our development agenda. Through our schools, we have been able to increase girls attendance and the academic participation of the communities. More children lacking access to education have an increase attendance. This guarantees in the short and long-term a change in community mindsets and propose a new dawn for our communities through development initiatives.

Under the social/pastoral domain, we work in parishes. We also train women and the marginalized in self-reliance skills. Women in most of our communities contribute sufficiently to the development of families and the communities as a whole. However important the role they in sustaining the development needs of their communities, they often are relegated. Recognizing the role women contribute in ensuring development of communities, we train them with self-reliance skills. Most exercise business skills and are entrepreneurs in their distinct domains of trade.

In papal Nunciatures and Dioceses, we provide professionals in finance, secretarial, health, education and domestic services and also offer spiritual accompaniment to priests, religious and lay people. As Franciscans we care for mother earth and are currently developing our agricultural program. We are also involved in Prison/military ministry.

In order to provide a greater sense of coherence and to effectively attain our developmental goals and measures, our development interventions are coordinated through the Development Commission. This Commission ensures proper planning, timely execution to development stretagies (in respect to our mission) and ensures a comparative data through assessment of the effects and the impact created by the our planned strategic development agenda. In this manner we have been able to sustain a beneficial leaning in our development agenda.

Generally health, education and economic factors are seen as major challenges in our development strategic directions. However, these challenges are on the other hand seen as the reasons for our existence and on which our charism is founded. More specifically, these factors affect children most. We have an increase in the number of orphans and vulnerable children stemming from weak and vulnerable family backgrounds. This causes more of social and economic problems as there is an impending need to be satisfied. Always it is said when illness strikes a home, the children are the most vulnerable. Cognizance of this need, we strive through our various rehabilitation Centres to impart in these children skills to be self-reliant. This on the other hand averts the social and economic limitations and guarantees a livelihood for these children. Lack of attendance to the needs of these children conversely will affect the development of our families and communities as a whole in the long-term. We therefore are securing a better future and sustaining more, our development agenda through improving and guaranteeing a livelihood to these children.

Sr. Roberta Feh

Provincial Superior, TSSF