

Minimum packages to schools in West is LAFABA's contribution to fight against poverty - Kwame Honoré, president of LAFABA

Kwame Honoré, president of the Bamileke community based in Dallas/Fortworth in the United States (LAFABA), says their yearly offer of minimum packages to pupils of government bilingual primary schools in the West is to fight against poverty back home. He says their choice of bilingual schools is to reach the poor and encourage bilingualism. He spoke to Tendong David in Bangangte after this year's prize-award ceremony.

You have just awarded prize to the best 30 pupils of Government Bilingual Primary School Bangante, what is this prize award all about?

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to express myself in this very important newspaper *The Herald* we read through the website every time in the United States. I want to tell you that this newspaper covers the national territory, from the experience gathered.

Coming back to your question. You know that when you invest in the youth you are investing in our future, that is why we chose the youths. I will also like to tell you that this prize award is in its 2nd edition! Last academic year (LAFABA), *La famille Bamileke* of Dallas/Fortworth metropolis in USA carried out the same gesture in Government Bilingual Primary school Mbouda in the Bamoutos Division where the best pupils from classes one to seven had all their class needs.

Who are those behind these prize awards?

These prizes awarded are the initiative of the sons and daughters of Bamileke origin living in Dallas/Fortworth metropolis Texas in USA. I will like to say that back in the early 80s sons/daughters of Bamileke living in Dallas/Fortworth decided to come together as a family. Our motive at that time was just to know and welcome our brothers and sisters who came to the United States. But in 2001,

LAFABA became a non-profit association, a political and Non Governmental organisation. It is this development that prompted us to think of some projects to help our parents and children back home.

Which are these projects you are carrying out back home?

I will start by saying that LAFABA has short and long-term projects. The short-term ones are the minimum packages to primary schools which are in their second edition, and the long-term ones are basically in the area of health. Here we will in future supply health institutions with drugs and equipment in the West Province. While the health project is maturing, I will like to say that the Minimum package to schools will continue in all the eight divisions of the west province in the years ahead. We have contacted some organisations that will offer us drugs and hospital subsidies.

Last year you were in GBPS Mbouda, and this year the minimum package was offered to Government Bilingual Primary School Bangante. Why only government bilingual primary schools?

If LAFABA for the moment has concentrated its attention on government bilingual schools, it is because it came to our notice that these schools, especially those in the West province, were neglected. This study was carried out

by our home-based representatives who are sons and daughters of the West. So that is why we chose government bilingual schools. Also LAFABA is committed to encouraging bilingualism to a higher level back home. The third reason for limiting this initiative to bilingual schools is that our home-based representatives thought that it would benefit the poor since the wealthier parents send their children to mission and private schools.

What is actually behind

these actions of LAFABA?

Thank you again for that very logical and intelligent question. I am the president of LAFABA and I will like to tell you that I do not do politics. Some people may link this action to many things, but our action is just to fight poverty back home in Cameroon, and West province our main target in particular. I think everyone will agree with me that the economic situation in Cameroon especially with some parents is not the best. I therefore thought that our

own little way to fight poverty was through this minimum package, which on the one hand has reduced the financial burden on parents.

Why has LAFABA so far concentrated its attention only to the West Province?

This is an annual voluntary contribution to schools, allocated by LAFABA members, who want to remind their sisters and brothers back home of their existence in Dallas USA. The main target of LAFABA is to assist in the development of their province, which is the West province. Members who elected me their president chose the West which is their province of origin because they had at the back of their minds the saying that «charity begins at home, and that when your brother climbs up a plum tree you eat the blackest». You see that most of the pupils who benefitted from the last two editions were of Anglophone origin. That only indicates that in future we may extend our assistance to other areas or provinces. For example, if we have medical equipment that can be used in a special hospital out of the West we will not hesitate handing it to that special centre.

Which division will benefit from next year's minimum package?

For now I cannot precisely say, because the selection is done by ballot.

At the ceremony, some parents expressed complete dissatisfaction with the prizes awarded.

What actually happened?

That is true, some parents expressed their discontent with the prizes awarded. But I want to say that the problems arose as a result of poor communication between myself and the headmaster which resulted in him earmarking 10 peoples per class which far outstripped the budget we allocated.

Anyway I managed to solve that problem at my own level by paying PTA fee for some of those who received invitations among the first ten of each class.

What message are you carrying back to Dallas/Fortworth?

I think it is a message of satisfaction, that we came and offered gifts which I think explains the link between the population and poverty. We know that because of hardship and with the increase in population, government cannot provide the needs of the population, like education and employment. Another important thing is that it is the poorest who tend to have more children in the West province because of the polygamous nature as culture provides. So the impact of population growth is even harder on the poorest, and that also creates a cycle of poverty. That is why when we come and offer these gifts we feel very happy back in Dallas, that LAFABA has joined the fight against poverty in Cameroon by helping parents to provide their children with education.



Kwame: Concerned with plight of the West's poor

Pidgin: Douala's informal business language

By Ntaryike Divine Jr. in Douala

Pidgin, generally described as a derivative of Shakespeare's English language, and a Lingua Franca for coastal peoples in the Colonial era, has been progressively given new twists in Douala.

With demographic projections indicating that Douala's population is fast kissing three million inhabitants, the dynamic and energetic economic centre of Cameroon which is a whirlpool of diverse cultures and home of the super-rich and desolately poor has seen the emergence of many

varieties of pidgin.

But as sure as eggs are eggs, pidgin has fast taken over as the informal commercial language for buyers and sellers who pour into the metropolis from every nook and cranny of the country, and even beyond.

While buyam-sellers were initially identified as the principal vectors of pidgin, variety in form has been injected by other classes of traders and city dwellers. A couple of days of interaction in the city's several quarters and in the company of the different

strata of Douala's society beautifully unveils the existing peculiarities.

At the Central Market, the «Okrika» vendors, the pickpockets and mainly female buyam-sellers have their version based principally on new appellations for coins, and bank notes. The pidgin variety spoken at the Newbell prison and within the ranks of criminals and actors of the underworld, parallels that spoken by artists, Lapiro de Mbanga, with expressions that are neither derived from French nor English.

In Bonaberi, where Anglophones form a good chunk of the population, the version of pidgin spoken is considered «clean» and based mainly on English and chip-ins of vernaculars from the North West and South West provinces. In mainly Sawa territory, the intonation, pronunciation and manner of pidgin expression readily spurs laughter within Anglophone circles. Similarly, other characteristic varieties can be readily identified for musicians, the Nigerian automobile parts traders at

Camp Yabassi, the fishermen at Youpwe and Manoka, taximen and bendskin riders, hawkers, parkboys and hawkers.

Purists have severally described Douala's new and vibrant pidgin as enemy language, but are apparently helpless as it has finally cut across the verbiage of all societal strata. Urbanized in the majority of cases, it has gone on the radio airwaves, into households as most housewives would testify, and even the most rigid school systems.

And so it would be normal to hear what may be considered a cultured student say «nangdi kel me» (i'm feeling sleepy), or an Okrika vendor, at the top of her voice, «Douala fan, na hos dear» (Douala's good but houses are too expensive). The forces of law and order have refined strategies in the identification of suspected Nigerians. They hold up three fingers and ask their suspects to pronounce. The suspects easily run into trouble when they say «thra» in usual Igbo fashion, instead of three.