

YOU YOURSELVES GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO READ

"Utiliser tous les moyens de communication sociale, la presse, la radio, la télévision et le cinéma pour répandre le message de l'Évangile et pour promouvoir la dignité de chaque personne", telle est la vocation des "Filles de Saint-Paul". Ainsi ont-elles développé depuis 1980 en Afrique de l'Est une maison d'édition "St. Paul Publications-Africa" (SPPA) dont le catalogue propose aujourd'hui plus de 100 titres en trois langues: Anglais, Portugais et Swahili distribués dans plus de 15 pays africains. Mais pour la grande majorité de la population de l'Afrique, le livre reste un produit de luxe, souvent hors prix même lorsqu'il est subsidié. Alors comment diffuser des livres qui promeuvent les valeurs humaines et chrétiennes dans cette situation ? C'est pourquoi en 1985, à partir de l'Ouganda les Filles de Saint-Paul ont lancé l'idée de mini-bibliothèques : il suffit d'une armoire pour déposer les livres, d'une boîte pour ranger les cartes des lecteurs ou d'une pièce où les gens peuvent lire... Aujourd'hui plus de 1500 mini-bibliothèques d'au moins 60 titres ont été ouvertes dans 15 pays d'Afrique et dans les lieux les plus divers: paroisses, écoles, hôpitaux, groupes de jeunes, organisations, prisons, centres pastoraux, maisons de retraite, etc.

Sr. Teresa Marcazzan is in charge of "Saint Paul Publications-Africa", Nairobi. CAMECO asked her to present the readers of our Bulletin the project of mini-libraries initiated by the Daughters of Saint Paul in Africa.

The project of the mini-libraries took off in Uganda in 1985, amidst war and political unrest. A Protestant organization called "Feeds the Minds" granted 2,000 pounds to St. Paul Book Centre of Kampala for 40 mini-libraries to be given free of charge to schools or any educational or religious body to offer good reading material to people who had, otherwise, no possibility to buy books.

In 1986, a similar request was sent to "Feed the Minds" from Kenya. Kenya, in fact, is a country with different faces as all the African countries which are market by:

- the phenomenon of urbanization with all consequences which this reality brings about (separation of families, the creation of slum dwellers, struggle to survive, prostitution, violence, etc);
- the new mentality brought about by the social means of communication, affecting the style of life of people and creating a consumeristic mentality;
- the reality of a population with 50% under 25 years;
- the challenges posed by the plague of AIDS, of the exploitation of workers by the multi-national organizations, the social-political changes, etc;

What could we do to meet the needs of people? How to help people to become more aware of the problems and how to help them to give a proper answer to the problems?

Our publications activity aims at answering these questions and in these years we produced and are still publishing books and booklets to promote the dignity of all people and to announce the Good News of salvation. But, though the books can be sold at very low price thanks to their subsidization by the International Funding Organizations, still many people, especially many young persons, have no possibility to buy them.

Our request to "Feed the Minds" was answered. With the first grant we prepared 40 mini-libraries and designed a letter to present the project.

Immediately we received many applications. Slowly the news about this project passed the boundaries of Kenya and we started receiving applications also from other African countries. The money granted by "Feed the Minds" (who supported us also in following years) was still not enough to provide mini-libraries for all. We prepared therefore a leaflet for benefactors which was diffused mainly in Italy and the answer was very encouraging.

THE PROJECT

The project in itself is very simple. We send out letters to advertise the project or take the chance to talk to people coming in the Book Centres run by our communities (Kampala, Dar es Salaam, Maputo and Nairobi).

The condition to obtain a mini-library are few:

- 1) The application has to be signed by a person who could be trusted and well-known (usually a religious person and preferably a missionary or the parish priest);
- 2) The books are not to be sold, but made available to people for reading (in a reading room or rented out);
- 3) A person has to be in charge of the project (keeping record of the books taken or assisting people in the reading room).

THE QUALITY OF BOOKS

The books provided with these mini-libraries are all books published by "Saint Paul Publications-Africa": books written by Africans or by people working in Africa and relevant for the African people. The policy of "Saint Paul Publications-Africa" is to spread the Gospel and to promote the dignity of all people. Particular care is given to catechesis, biblical studies, formation, lives of saints, theology and justice & peace issues. The readership aimed at is youth, families and leaders.

Since these books are very cheap, a mini-library for the value of US\$ 80.00 can comprehend even 60 or more titles. According to request, we choose the books. If the mini-library is for youth, the selection of books will be for youth, if it is for the parish, then the books can be different.

THE CHART OF DISTRIBUTION

The diffusion of mini-libraries started in Uganda, and soon after in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. From Kenya it spread to many other African countries. It is from Nairobi that we prepared and send mini-libraries to Zambia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Seychelles, Zaire, Malawi, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa.

The mini-libraries were given mostly to parishes (843), schools(177), youth centres (156), pastoral centres (89) and also religious institutions (160). Though the number of mini-libraries given to other centres are fewer, still they are very significant: prisons (15), hospitals (21), barracks (7) or refugee camps as in Mozambique, though we do not have precise figures.

THE ANSWER FROM THE BENEFICIARIES

It is difficult to summarize all the answers we received from the people. We report

here only few comments which can be representative:

"Our youth need something good to read. We have managed to send our children to school and to teach them how to read. Now we need to give them something to read" (Fr. Lamberti from Mwea Parish).

"Most girls were particularly helped by books that explained the Catholic faith in simple stories. The book '*A Catholic? You must be crazy!*' was appreciated together with '*Are you saved?*'. There is a great need for more books that explain matters of faith in simple experiential style which is also more interesting because Catechisms are more serviceable for teaching the faith or for adults. Youth benefit from the former much more. The collection had a lot of saints books. These were great inspiration for most of those who read them. The same goes for books like '*Lilian's Diary*' and '*Sexuality and Fertility Awareness*', since these are relevant to their experiences. The collection was noticeably lacking in prayer books. The girls have been asking for books that give examples of how to pray. However, we have been so much helped by these books that we are making efforts to add a few more to the library as we go along" (Sr. Edel Churu, State House Catholic Girls, Kenya).

Concerning the use of a mini-library in hospitals Sr. Hendrickx, MMS, reports: "For para and quadraplegic patients of a Spinal Injury Hospital it is such a help and joy to be able to read, or have someone read for them. I made a small cupboard and I am in the process of setting up a proper library system, otherwise the books go from hand to hand and disappear. For our situation I would like to suggest that may be in future some Kiswahili books could be given. Also some good novels or other recreational books".

We like to conclude the review with a letter from Mutare, Zimbabwe. Fr. Anthony Amadi: "We are running a small mobile library. Once every month we are carrying the books right to the people. Now we cannot run it much more frequently than monthly because we have not enough books. With once a month, we will keep them going till we get more help. At the moment we offer our service at least to 20 people during a month, and then a similar number in the following month. While we thank you for the good work you have done, we still ask for more help".

Sr. Teresa Marcazzan, F.S.P.