

Africa Newsletter – Autumn 2021

Welcome to our annual newsletter and update from our sisters in Africa!

COVID UPDATE - Rwanda and DR Congo

This time last year (2020), we were hearing news of rising infection rates and COVID-related deaths in the UK but we had little to report on this subject from our African sisters, either officially or anecdotally. What was very apparent, however, was that the consequences of lockdown measures, and effect on poverty levels and food circulation, were likely to be much graver than those of the virus itself.

Twelve months on, the picture is just that - rising poverty levels and food insecurity. In both Pories in DR Congo, the situation appears to be exacerbating the risk of unrest, with armed attacks and theft of crops from the fields which the sisters tend. In Goma, one of our sisters was abducted; thankfully now released. On top of that flash flooding and effects of climate change appear to be more apparent.

When we asked about COVID, our sisters say that they are seeing more cases now but that people who are dealing with poverty, conflict, trauma, and natural emergencies, have other priorities than coronavirus.



We will give an update from each Pory in this newsletter but before that it might be of interest to look at World Health Organisation statistics on vaccination rates in both Rwanda and DR Congo. It is quite a challenge to make sense of statistics but as vaccine inequity in poorer nations is much in the news, it is interesting to compare where we are.

The table below shows WHO stats for October 2021. We have included approximate population figures. The number of fully vaccinated people in the UK is around 80% as compared with Rwanda - approx. 15% - and in DR Congo it is negligible (less than 0.1% - the lowest rate in the world). The vaccination statistics below speak for themselves, but the comparative figures of confirmed cases and reported COVID deaths raise questions.

In DR Congo, the health system is fragile and there is inadequate testing, so in reality the actual rate of infection and COVID deaths are unknown. Poor infrastructure and healthcare mean vaccination is challenging. The civil conflict has led to many people being displaced and they are difficult to access. The country is having to cope with other serious epidemics simultaneously.

There has been a new outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu for example, not to mention measles and malaria. There are so many other issues to deal with – people’s livelihoods affected by restriction imposed and poverty levels rising. One of the biggest challenges though is reticence to have the vaccine and mistrust of the State and of ‘outside’ intervention, fuelled by fake news.

Rwanda’s healthcare system is better organised, and the country is much smaller. There have been some COVID cases amongst the sisters but no COVID-related deaths. Many of the sisters in Rwanda have now received at least one vaccine and there is exciting news that the country is to host Africa’s first COVID 19 vaccine plant (in partnership with the German company BioNTech) to manufacture the vaccine, which will help shorten the supply chain of the vaccine for Africa as a whole. Construction of the production site is due to commence mid-2022.

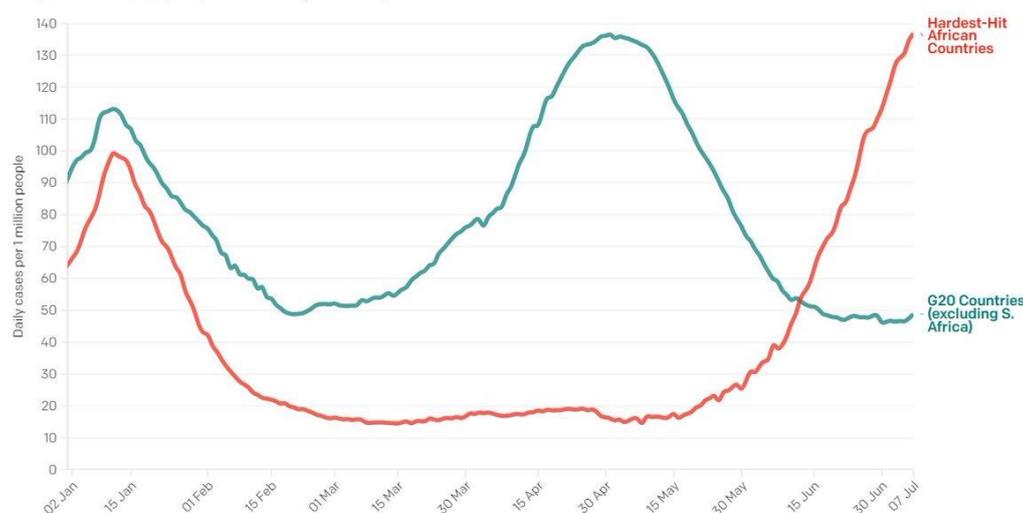
WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION STATS Oct 2021	UK	Rwanda	DR Congo	
Population	67,000,000	13,000,000	89,600,000	
<i>Confirmed cases</i>	8,809,778	99,249	57,453	
<i>Deaths reported</i>	139,571	1,320	1,091	
Vaccine doses administered	94,800,164	5,179,627	147,734	
Fully vaccinated	45,261,635	1,744,937	38,155	

If you would like to keep updated on vaccine rollouts in Africa, you may be interested in this and other informative articles in ‘The Conversation’: [Want to know about vaccine rollouts in Africa? Click on a country here and find out \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/want-to-know-about-vaccine-rollouts-in-africa-click-on-a-country-here-and-find-out-181111)

This graph from ‘Our World in Data’ shows the rapid upturn in reported COVID cases in Africa in a third wave, as compared with G20 countries.

Third-wave in hardest hit African countries

Daily cases are rapidly increasing in many African countries



Source: [Analysis by The ONE Campaign](#). Cases data from [Our World in Data](#). The "Hardest-Hit" African countries are countries reporting rapid increases in daily confirmed cases. The 10 countries chosen for this chart are: South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Rwanda, Botswana, Mozambique, Tunisia, and Kenya



MIRHI-BUKAVU PRIORY, DRC

Reports from the Priory at Mirhi describe the effect the pandemic has had on the sisters and the people around them. There is much insecurity – stress and anguish, concern about the ‘unknown’ - and a worsening *physical* insecurity. During the lockdown the sisters had to work the fields on their own, without their usual workers to help. Their crops have been reduced due to attacks from armed robbers; neighbours stealing because of food poverty. In July, a sister was abducted in Goma after a visit to the market. She was later released. S. Francine was traumatised by the event but unharmed. Such abductions are becoming more common across sub-Saharan Africa – it is a worrying development. The pandemic has intensified levels of poverty and people are now in dire financial difficulty.

The education system is in a state of disarray and school closures have had a serious effect on young people. Once schools reopened, many teachers stayed at home as they weren’t getting paid, so education has been severely disrupted. The sisters who are teachers have continued where they can, but the levels of poverty have meant that the income derived from education in order to sustain the schools has been severely affected.

The Community are continuing their other activities where they can at their medical centres and care for the malnourished, though with depleted funds and rising costs.

At the beginning of the pandemic in Lent, the oldest member of their Community, S M Goretti died and another sister, S. Monique and they had restrictions imposed for funeral attendance. We were also greatly saddened to hear of the death of S. Salomé Byanjira Belonza. She was killed by bus on the way to the school where she was teaching.

In lockdown, the prayer life of the Community intensified and sustained them as they reflected on the pandemic and followed more closely what was happening in the rest of the world. It has strengthened their life in community.



Goma

One of the houses which is part of the Mirhi Community, is in Goma. This is where S. Therese, known to many of our readers, is currently situated.

On 22 May this year, we received a Whatsapp message from S. Therese to say that the volcano (Mount Nyiragongo) was erupting and that everyone was on the road fleeing Goma in the direction of Sake towards Bukavu. She was asking for prayers.

"Chères soeurs, veuillez avertir que nous sommes menacées par le volcan. Nous tous avec tout le peuple en route. Nous avons pris la direction de Sake vers Bukavu. Priez pour nous."



Many of you will be aware of the work the sisters are doing in Goma. You have supported this initiative, and others, with generous donations. The financial assistance has allowed them to help the most needy in Goma – orphans, malnourished children, the sick with no means to pay for medical attention, war-displaced people and refugees. Amongst them are those who have been victims of sexual violence, who are psychologically and physically vulnerable. The Community feed, provide clothing and care for them at a Centre which belongs to the Diocese.



Therese tells us that the majority of the people they are seeing have made a long journey before arriving at the Centre. They arrive very hungry and tired. On Mondays and Fridays the sisters assess their condition, give advice and food. Those who are weak and vulnerable, are kept at the Centre for surveillance, the malnourished are given milk and medicines if necessary. She describes seeing the change in the children as their condition improves – they see them smile and play.

The volcanic eruption, she describes as a truly terrible moment, bringing great misery on all the inhabitants of the area, particularly the poorest people. It happened at night and in the chaos several children were lost, having been separated from their parents. Some people were killed in road accidents when several lorries came off the road, others burned by the lava.



Three sisters, including Therese, returned to Goma in June to help and care for people. There are less earth tremors now and people are slowly coming back - ill, exhausted, starving. They are looking to the sisters with hope, but there isn't enough food or medicines to go around. At the Centre some of the rooms where they cared for the sick have been destroyed by the earth tremors including the rooms where the sisters had been sleeping.



The volcanic eruption has exacerbated levels of malnutrition and there are increasing cases of COVID-19. These have recently reported that they are now seeing what they know to be COVID-related deaths, especially between July and September. They haven't had the vaccine, in fact there isn't any available there and in any case people are out on the road all day, in search of food. The situation is too desperate in other ways for people to think of masks or distancing.

At the moment, their objective is to provide emergency help for those in the most need but they do have plans for the future. The sisters envisage having their own Centre in Goma – they have their own land but not the funds to build. The current Centre belongs to the Diocese and so they are reliant on others for its future. Several of the children don't go to school as it is just not possible for them, so the sisters are thinking about at least helping the children learn to read and write. They want to help the women with activities which will benefit their children and to continue to visit the families to help and guide them. However, it is a question as always of funding.

KINDU PRIORY, DRC

The new Priory in Kindu now has 19 sisters, 6 novices and 6 postulants. Kindu is difficult to access, particularly in the rainy season and they have reported not just hugely inflated prices but lack of supplies and food.



As well coping with the effects of the pandemic, in March last year they also had to deal with a humanitarian disaster in their area. The River Congo burst its banks as a result of heavy rain and many families had to evacuate their homes due to flooding. Thousands of homes were destroyed and flood water contaminated drinking water points. This has led to an increase in disease.

The sisters have increased the amount of crops they grow, such as soybean and cowpea. It is hard work for the sisters but helps them to be more self-sufficient and also to assist the local people. Like Mirhi Priory they have also experienced theft of their crops. They are seeing more cases of malnutrition.

The picture below shows S. Jacqueline and some of the local people working in the fields to help feed the malnourished.



The maternity care and dispensary service which the sisters offer to the local community is going well – they have been given all the legal documents which help the smooth operation of the pharmacy. They are helping to deliver approximately 5 babies a month.

They have also opened a small-scale dispensary for veterinary products which has been well received by the locals. The sisters have been able to share their expertise in rearing pigs and hens.



One of the big issues in the Kindu area is the lack of water at certain times of the year, and in particular clean drinking water. You may remember back in 2016 S. Anne Marie reported an outbreak of cholera due to water sources drying up and forcing people to drink from the river.

The sisters set up a system of linking barrels to collect water for the dry season. They have now developed a water purification system and are working with a local factory. They are producing 5 litre water cannisters which carry their own label – Soeurs de la Resurrection, Kindu.



The sisters go on regular visits to the local community. This next image shows them visiting the elderly to take them a 'high energy' porridge – made with a flour (mix of maize, soya and sugar), an initiative led by S. Jacqueline (Prioress in Kindu) who is a nutritionist by training.



In more recent times, the Community have been joined by a good number of local people at morning Mass and young people come to pray the Office and to sing with them three times a week.

RWANDA PRIORY

The Community in Rwanda have had confirmed cases of COVID.19 but fortunately none too serious and no deaths.

The school in Masaka was allowed to re-open after meeting the government conditions – constructing electronic handwashing points and purchasing thermometers etc. The sisters added masks to their usual uniform-making for the school children. There was a staged return to school with the older students returning first.



There has been some help provided by the State for those affected by the pandemic but the sisters in Rwanda are also witnessing rising levels of poverty and have had many people asking them for food, so they do what they can to help. People also have difficulty paying their school fees.

In a report from the Priory, the sisters spoke of how the lockdown had allowed them to deepen their prayer and community life. There was more time for personal prayer and liturgy. They were more able to keep abreast of international news and had time to share news from their families and exchange ideas. During the day, they did all the manual work themselves and were happy together.

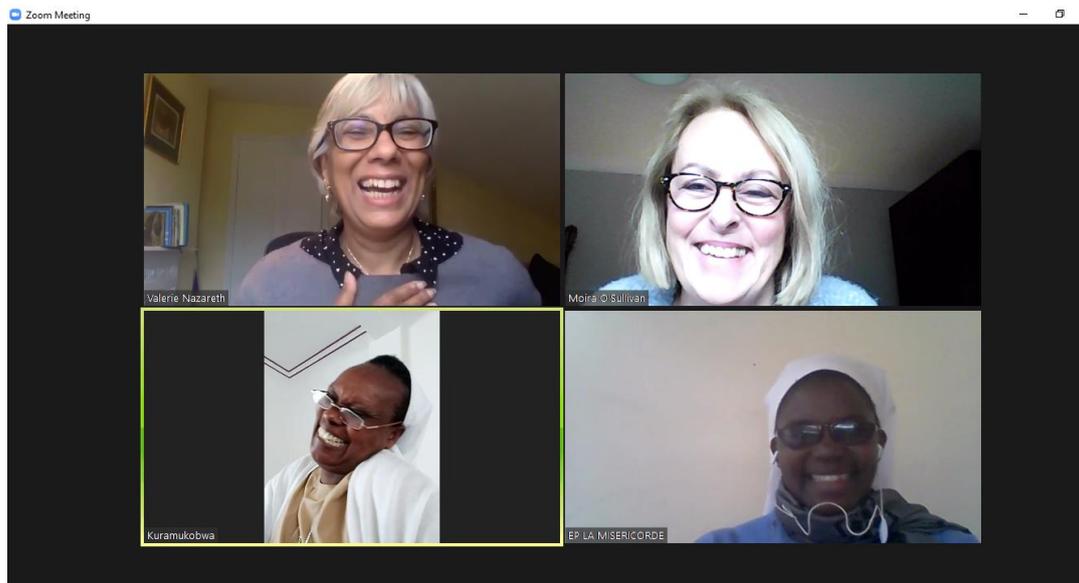


Congo-Nil, where the medical centre is, of course, has been kept busy throughout. S. Beatrice (pictured above on the left) who is in charge of the Centre, did recently find time to celebrate her 25 years in the Community. In Muhanga, the sisters moved in to live alongside the disabled young people. Not an easy time for them. But there has been progress to report in Muhanga. The school and Centre for the Disabled has benefitted from some overseas funding which has allowed them to finish building of a refectory and a kitchen – so necessary and such good news. Mme Léoncie, the lady who founded the Centre for the Disabled and asked the sisters to take it over, sadly died the year before last. She would have been so proud of the progress they have made.



The sisters in Muhanga are also very grateful to Valerie Nazareth, who was one of our volunteers teaching English to the sisters in Rwanda back in 2018. Over the past 3 years Valerie and friends, including from her parish in London, made a commitment to give regular donations for 2 years, which has provided money for food and sanitary products for the disabled young people in Muhanga. This venture was due to finish in 2020 but the group decided to extend the period for a year to help the sisters at the start of the pandemic. It is now due to finish at the end of 2021.

The picture below captures the moment we connected for the first time by Zoom with S. Marie Rose (Prioress) and S. Pelagie (based in Muhanga), together with Valerie. Despite their sadness and concern about future funding, the Community in Rwanda expressed their extreme gratitude to Valerie and her group for the reassurance this regular income had afforded them. It has been literally a life-saver for them.



OTHER FUNDRAISING

The sisters both in DR Congo and Rwanda unite in their gratitude toward everyone who has given money – both individual donations and group fundraising activities - over the past 12 months. They ask for your continued prayer and help. As always, there have been some wonderful initiatives which have helped provide some relief. Huge thanks to all for your support.

TEABOXES

Particular thanks to the Clayton-Everett family for preparing tea-boxes for a second year, and to the willing drivers who delivered them. The initiative raised around £4,000 for our projects in Africa as well as giving joy to the purchasers of the boxes! Thank you to all those who arranged and supported this venture.



LIGHT A CANDLE FOR AFRICA APPEAL – ADVENT 2021

We were overwhelmed by people's generosity in supporting last year's Advent appeal which raised £3,400. We are running the campaign again this year to coincide with the start of Advent.

The three little children in the picture below were cared for at one of the sisters' Nutrition Centres and they have all now got better, due to the intervention of the sisters. The sisters say this is because of the support they get from people such as our readers. These children represent an increasing number of children whom the sisters are trying to help.

Our Advent campaign will raise funds for them and for other projects in DR Congo and Rwanda, such as the ones mentioned in this newsletter.

The way it works:

- You donate whatever you are able by using the DONATE button (on CONTACT page) on our website – [Donations - Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre](#) – and put in the description 'LIGHT A CANDLE FOR AFRICA'
- Or send a cheque payable to Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre to the Community at 74, Howe Close, Colchester CO4 3XD - put 'LIGHT A CANDLE FOR AFRICA' on the envelope.
- Send your prayer intentions to the Community, via email projects@canonesses.co.uk or addressed to Pauline McAloone at above address.
- The Community will light a candle every week of Advent and will pray for your intentions and for the sisters in Africa.



Light a candle
for Africa

The Community will light a candle for Africa and pray for your intentions during Advent

Send to projects@canonesses.co.uk:

Your name:

Your email:

Intention/message:

Donation: use DONATE button on website or by cheque to 'Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre' (send to 74, Howe Close, Colchester CO4 3XD)

All donations will be a Christmas 'gift' for Africa - 100% of the proceeds go directly to our sisters in Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo

www.canonesses.co.uk  Charity no: 1167869

THANK YOU ALL.