

Celestin Habiyambere, Superintendent of Kinyaga Conference of Église Méthodiste Libre au Rwanda (EMLR) says that although the mission of his Church is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, liberation of the people from all forces of infliction such as poverty, ignorance and disease was regarded critical.

Therefore, to achieve the goal of creating a holistic Christian, EMLR prioritizes investing in the four pillars – education, health, economic development and supporting the most vulnerable. Since the Methodist Church arrived in Rwanda in 1942, it has directed enormous efforts towards enlightenment of its followers and Rwandans in general on various socioeconomic issues with the aim of empowering them to deliver themselves from poor living standards.



Celestin Habiyambere, Superintendent of Kinyaga Conference of Église Méthodiste Libre au Rwanda (EMLR)

Historic background

In 1942, the Gospel had already arrived on the African Continent and Christian missionaries were spreading it to as many parts as possible. At the time, American missionaries Frank and his wife Hazel Adamson set up the first Free Methodist mission station at Kibogora in Nyamasheke District in South Western Rwanda.

In 1982, the missionaries planted a Church at Kamembe which doubled as the first Parish. Since then, Kinyaga Conference has been expanding from one Parish to 19 Parishes and 97 local Churches as of 2022.

Pastor Habiyambere revealed that there are at least 460 groups under the local churches. Each group constitutes of about three to nine homes.

Kinyaga Conference of the EMLR has presence in the sectors of Rusizi except Rwimbogo, and in the five sectors of Nyamasheke – Karengera, Ruharambuga, Nyabitekere, Bushenge and Shange. According to EMLR's action plan, the Church will reach all villages.



The Free Methodist Church has expanded by leaps and bounds in terms of the numbers of Christians and geographical spread as we have seen above. The expansion signifies that Jesus Christ's Gospel is being spread, which is the key pillar

of EMLR.

In addition, EMLR/Kinyaga Conference has recorded fundamental achievements in Education and Health over the time. Ignorance and illiteracy will not only affect the wellbeing of the people but also the total liberation of a person since the issues present major threats to their socio-economic development. In response, EMLR/Kinyaga Conference directed enormous efforts to establish schools right from Pre-Primary.

Investing in Education

Today, there are 37 Nursery schools either at the premises of the 12 Primary schools or the Churches. With the exception of one private primary school, 11 Primary schools are government aided. To this effect, Pastor Habiyambere extends gratitude to the government of Rwanda for the unfailing support in the area of education.



“The Church partners with the government in increasing access to education. They have for instance helped with infrastructure development, teachers, instructional materials among others,” he observes.

EMLR/Kinyaga Conference is currently responding to the needs of University education in this region. Rusizi District as we speak is lacking a Private University. Students have not escaped constraints and challenges of studying from far away. At all odds, some students study at Kibogora Polytechnic in Nyamasheke while others go to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Hostel fees and transport are some of the outstanding challenges the learners are facing today.

At this backdrop, EMLR/Kinyaga Conference is building a University that will double as a branch of Kibogora Polytechnic. The management of EMLR/Kinyaga Conference is optimistic that the completion of this University will enhance access to University education in Rusizi for not only the followers of the Free Methodist Church but all Rwandans in general.

Adult education is another area invested in to help promote literacy among the adults. The classes manned by qualified teachers are mobilized at the Church premises.

“We have qualified teachers and relevant modules and facilities, and beneficiaries

receive a certificate on completion of the short courses of adult education,” noted the Superintendent of EMLR/Kinyaga Conference.

He reveals that preaching of the Gospel is one of the major activities conducted in all the Church owned schools.

Healthcare

To create a holistic person, Église Méthodiste Libre au Rwanda (EMLR) also considers increased access to healthcare as critical in ensuring followers and Rwandan people enjoy healthy lives. The Church achieves this goal through establishing health posts and boosting awareness about prevention of diseases and teaching about the importance of having healthy diets.



Currently, EMLR/Kinyaga Conference owns and runs at least eight (8) health posts, and two (2) Hospitals in Gikundamvura and Kamonyi. The leader of EMLR/Kinyaga Conference told Rwanda Dispatch Magazine during an exclusive interview in February that the two hospitals have already assumed the status of a University Teaching Hospital.

“We sponsor trainings aimed at buttressing and popularizing a health culture among the residents where we have presence. They learn the importance of proper hand washing as part of hygiene lessons. Besides, we teach how to prepare health diets and link between healthy feeding and prevention of diseases,” he says.

Mass awareness about hygiene and sanitation starts from the top and trickles down to the local churches and Christian fellowships (groups) in the villages.

Community development

Over the years, EMLR/Kinyaga Conference has been responding to a horde of problems that confine residents of Kinyaga region to poor living standards. These range from grinding poverty and unemployment to ignorance, lack of shelter and food insecurity.

“We encouraged and mobilized members of the Church to create saving groups. And, when the funds grew to amounts that they could not efficiently handle according to rules and regulations governing savings groups we encouraged them

to come together and form a Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) whose formal registration is in advanced stage,” says Pastor Habiyambere.



The SACCO brings together all residents – both believers of EMLR/Kinyaga Conference, Christians belonging to other denominations and nonbelievers. Members can access loans and are fast becoming more bankable.

During the interview the Superintendent of EMLR/Kinyaga Conference revealed that they had already contacted Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) and the central bank (BNR) for official registration of the SACCO in the pipeline. He said that local authorities at the sector and Rusizi District recommended them to the relevant authorities including RCA.

With the growth of the Savings and Credit Cooperative, they are optimistic that many of the members will enjoy financial inclusion and the facility will continue to solve the problem of access to finance by members who need to solve day-to-day needs such as school fees, community health insurance known locally as mutuelle de sante, household items, building a house among others.

To jump out of the circle of poor harvests and food insecurity, the EMLR/Kinyaga Conference mobilized its members to start an Agriculture Project that promotes organic farming through making liquid organic fertilizers. The development came on the heels of inability by a considerable number of Christians to engage in productive, commercial modern farming, as they could not afford to buy industrial fertilizers.

Pastor Habiyambere says that the mixture of the liquid fertilizers and the organic manure is a better fertilizer that has solved the problem of lack of fertilizers. The programme that has so far spread in three sectors of Rusizi and three sectors of Nyamasheke will roll out to all sectors in the two districts.

Productivity per unit of land has increased as a result of applying the locally made fertilizer whose efficacy is much more than the industrial fertilizers.

However, stressed that there is uneven pace of individual development. Some Christians and residents were lagging behind in development with some still homeless. Moreover, it is the principle of EMLR not to leave any person behind in development.

EMLR/Kinyaga Conference considers the plight of the needy people and pays medical insurance for the most vulnerable people in collaboration with the local authorities that identify them.

“Local leaders, right from the village to the district, cooperate with the Church by identifying the most deserving beneficiaries from the bracket of the most vulnerable residents. As a Church we help build a house for one homeless resident every year, which we hand over to them before the local authorities who make records of all the beneficiaries of our charity work,” he says

The leader of EMLR/Kinyaga Conference, however, decried the widespread mindset that is still a problem on the way to development. He said that some residents don't have land where they can cultivate and the Church is sensitizing them to think of other economic activities that they can engage in rather than limiting their minds to agriculture. He said mega efforts have been directed to deal with mindset issues.