



Image for cover – Germaine carrying water in a jerry can.

## **Welcoming IDP's with water in DR Congo / Reverend Kimbila**

What does it take for an internally displaced person in DR Congo to become stable?

Reverend Antoine Kimbila, general secretary of the Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo, shares about the needs of this growing community and how the church is supporting those who have been displaced by violence.

Voiceover recording for Germaine by Joyfrida Anindo  
Translation by Jacob Yoder

Kimbila: The borehole project is especially important because water is life. And even our body is 70% Water. Without water there's no life.

\*sounds of water/borehole

Christy: The sounds you heard are of a new, clean water source in the town of Kikwit, in the Democratic Republic of Congo that's providing water to internally displaced people who fled from violence in Kasai.

Reverend Antoine Kimbila is the general secretary of the Community of Mennonite brethren Churches in the DR Congo. You will hear this group of churches referred to as its French acronym, CEFMC, MCC's partner working to provide support to this growing community. Clean water is just one step on the way to a stable life for an internally displaced person.

I'm Christy Kauffman, and you are listening to Relief, Development and Podcast. A production of Mennonite Central committee.

Intro theme\*

Christy: Germaine is an internally displaced person in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She fled from the violence in the Kasai region in 2017 to save her own life, and her five children. Her story that you are about to hear is graphic and has descriptions of violence. If that is something that may trigger you, you may want to skip this episode.

Germaine is a strong and joyful women. Despite the trauma she has experienced, she was often laughing with Mama Kafuti, the woman who took in Germaine and her family when they arrived in Kikwit. When telling me her story, she began to break down. We asked her if she would like to stop, if it was too hard for her to recall these moments, and she says, "I am courageous and I want to continue." She wanted us to hear her story and share it with others.

Germaine (voice of Joyfrida Anindo)

My husband was a pastor. It was a Sunday, and we had gone to church to pray. When we had come home, rebels came and my husband was being arrested. There was one of them who took the machete and beheaded him in front of me. They took his body along with his head and put it in a shallow grave. Then they looked for me, but I was hiding in the bush. There was no way for me to come out. Other neighbors came to me and told me to leave immediately and to go to the other side of the river. Me and my children went on foot. All of my belongings in my house were taken. It took two weeks to arrive at the river on foot. There was someone who had brought a collection of socks and had thrown them on the ground. I picked them up and sold them so that I had some money to continue on my journey.

When we arrived in Tschikapa, it was terrible. I met a kind of soldiers I had never seen before in my life. I told them about my situation, and they responded, "Do you know the number of soldiers who we have lost during the war. Do you think your situation is one we should care about?"

\*Tears

We were all drinking dirty water. The kids were falling ill with diarrhea, belly pains. This is the way we arrived in Kikwit. We were received by Kafuti, who took us into her house for the first time. After that, another group of displaced people arrived. The number was increasing one day after the other.

My kids have been so affected by this situation. It really breaks their hearts. I'm doing my best to advise them as Kafuti has brought us to the church

Now they have a new life, they don't have to think again about what has already passed. God will find a solution for them.

From now on, I'm feeling a bit OK. There is a great change. The system of MCC through CEFMC that gave us fields to plant, takes care of education of my kids, gives access to water sources. That is why we have hope, we are in the hands of our friends that will take care of us.

\*Bring back in how great thou art in the church as a transition

Christy: Today you'll hear a conversation I had with Reverend Antoine Kimbila, from the MCC partner that Germain was talking about, CEFMC. My conversation with Kimbila is through the translation of MCC representative for DR Congo, Jacob Yoder. Most of what you will hear is Jacob's voice translating what Reverend Kimbila was saying. Now to that conversation.

Christy: When the violence happened in Kasai how did that affect the community here?

So the war that was in Kasai, which made people in a difficult situation. They were displaced from their province to the province of Kwilu. So we receive friends that were from Kasai, but also people from Kwilu that were living in Kasai.

Christy: Who was the first person that came from that conflict that you met here?

Kimbila: We met a group of displaced people that had been received by a few mamas of Kikwit. There is one woman we can cite, the Mama Kafuti. She is a nurse and also a member of the local committee. She was among the first mamas who received displaced people here.

Christy: What were the needs that you saw when those people came to your home?

Kimbila: When these people came, as you know, they lost everything there. First of all they needed housing. Where to sleep that was the first problem. What to eat was the second issue. And how to be taken care of in terms of health care was the third need. And then how to be employed and find work. And how to ensure that their children had access to education was another problem. These were the essential needs.

Christy: Can you tell me more about the health needs, was it physical health was it mental health, what were those needs?

Kimbila: Both of these needs were present there certainly those who had medical needs because there were those who had been burned. They came with wounds because they had been cut with machetes. And on their way by roads, with all the burden that they had, they also became tired. There were those there were those who had sort of primary care needs but also those who needed more serious surgical interventions. Also there were women that had babies that needed their babies to be taken care of, and there were women coming from there that were pregnant. So we needed to give health care to all these people there. And so it was through our hospital in Kanzombi, that the church, with the help of MCC, has now been able to address these medical needs.

Christy: I know that there's education projects, and there's health projects and agriculture projects. And there's also water projects. I was wondering if you could tell me about the water project. What was the need you saw there?

Kimbila: I think that you've been in the town for several days. After seeing the town of Kanzombi, you feel there are neighborhoods where there's a need for water. If you had the chance to see where people go to draw water, you're gonna feel that it's really not easy. Of course, there is areas where REGIDESO, which is the government supplier of water functions, but there are others where it doesn't.

And even in areas where REGIDESO is accessible, it's not accessible in terms of price. The cost of paying is too high to be able to afford water. It's therefore the reason that these boreholes are important because it allows displaced people access to water because of the reduced price.

In relation to some of the other projects, the borehole project is especially important because water is life. And even our body is 70% water. Without water there's no life.

Christy: How do each of these projects work together?

Kimbila: You know, a person is like a plant. If you plant a plant, you need to nourish this plant with manure or compost. Because a human needs to be able to live, water in our body; and health treats diseases and education helps us to understand and agriculture helps us eat. So all of these projects around need water to be able to help humans survive. That's why all these projects together have a humanitarian character because that helps us humans to live.

Christy: You are a part of a church. Is it the church's responsibility to meet some of these needs?

Kimbila: There is a verse in the Bible that says, he came and he preached the gospel and Christ posed a question to them, what do you have? And they responded by saying

we don't have anything, but there is a child over here who has two fish. He took this fish and he took this bread and distributed it. It's to say that man came not just save the soul, but the body. Salvation is total and salvation is holistic. God takes care of us, not just spiritually, but physically also. It's for this reason, that us as the church work with partners to save people holistically.

Christy: As a Mennonite in this context, what does peace mean to you?

Kimbila: Peace is a synonym of Shalom. And when we say Shalom in Hebrew, it is the total salvation of mankind. What you bring to us in the community as projects, and when that's married with the word of Christ, that brings peace to humankind. Peace does not simply mean resolving conflicts. Peace also means bringing solutions to humankind in their lives. It's in this way, beyond the projects that we do, we give teachings on how to live, how to resolve a conflict, how to live together with others. All of this together so that peace is complete, it's holistic. Because It's difficult to bring someone that is hungry to peace.

Christy: Yeah, so peace is not a passive thing; it's an active thing?

Kimbila: Yes we say that it is not passive. Peace is active, there is actions that accompany the word. Go in peace, even while he is hungry. That is not peace. And in

Christy: You can say it's our country, I won't take offence (laughs). What are some things that you wish people outside of DRC understood about the context?

Kimbila: There is a lot of things but not necessarily that I've experienced them but there are a lot of things. I'd say that my response is contextual because I live here and now. So it's in this way that I will be able to talk about some of the things that my community is currently experiencing here in Kikwit. Generally, what is primary and most pressing is food needs. Congolese normally consume \$2.70 a day and that's the average. Of course there is some Congolese that have more than that. But the average Congolese has \$2.70, less than 3 dollars a day. There is high unemployment, lack of work. And for education it is only primary school that is free. But if you want to send your children to secondary school, you need to be a strong man. And if these children are able to finish, then there is no work. It is for this reason we have the phenomenon called Kuluna, which is the bandits. We have lost a lot of children to Kuluna. They are there to steal, to massacre and to bother people. There's a lot of them especially in Kinshasa, but also here in Kikwit. And it's difficult to be able to help these people because they don't have an alternative—they have to go to banditry. And so, where there's inability to be able to take care of these children, they have bad habits. In all of the towns in Congo you'll find children that have been abandoned, they are sleeping outside. Women who are married young. Children that are not in school.

Christy: There's some hard things to see.

Kimbila: Yeah it's difficult to see, but that's how it is. There are a lot of things that are done to get money, but they're bad practices.

Christy: When the IDP's are coming into your community, are they deciding to stay? Are they looking to go back, what are they looking to do?

Kimbila: I would say yes and no. Among the displaced people, there are certain ways of categorizing them. There are people who have been displaced, but haven't lost so much. So these people have a way to return. There are also people who have lost everything. There is another group who has lost their brothers, their sisters, their parents. It's in this way that this desire to return, for those who have come from Kasai, and know they'll have a way to return to Kasai and live there. But there are also others who don't want to return because of bad memories. They were traumatized. They've seen blood flowing. They lost their brothers, their parents, their children. And these bad memories do not allow them to consider moving. It's for this reason we have a large number of displaced here who do not want to return to Kasai.

Christy: Yeah. Your community really has to increase the capacity for more people in general here.

Kimbila: The community does, the church does need to be able increase capacity and also its funding to be able to accompany the displaced people.

Christy: It's incredible how you've responded as a church and a community to that need.

Kimbila: I know that, since we began, before MCC arrived, the church itself had initiated humanitarian action. We gave our clothes to the displaced. We gave flour to the displaced. But finding ourselves in a county of crisis, we found it difficult to continue as a church to continue in a humanitarian response. Thanks to our partnership with you that we are able to continue to be able to serve these people.

And in this context, the objective is just to show people this is what you can be able to do. Beyond food assistance, we need to be able to show people how they can get out of the poverty of displacement. It's like a tree, we need to put manure or compost around a tree. Small actions around this tree in order for the people to be able to grow.

Christy: You talked about stability. How have you seen IDPs that you've interacted with become more stable?

Kimbila: I think this process is already there and is continuing, because since they came here, they completely lacked a lot of things, but now they have first the joy. Because they are at our side. They feel there are people who love them with whom they can live. It's already a process for life.

Second of all, people are searching for ways to make their life stable, by the projects already executed. There are displaced people who are already stable.

Christy: I've seen a little bit of that while I am here. Are you proud of that work?

Kimbila: Yes, because the work of pastoring is also a work of life also. Because the projects heal the physical needs, but my work also heals the spiritual needs as well. And I'm very proud of the work that has been fought for by CEFMC because there is a positive impact.

Christy: What motivated you to become a pastor?

Kimbila: When I was in secondary school, I received Christ. And I was to teach in a school where I was a student. And so I decided that I needed to open like a cell group, a prayer group. When I began this small group there, I had the desire to preach to my friends. It's there I developed this desire for a vocation to preach to others. After a couple years, I decided to submit my file and CEFMC decided to send me to Kinshasa to do theology. It was this desire to be able to serve young people because I was young during that time that I became a pastor.

Christy: It seems like you've gone beyond being a pastor in your community?

Kimbila: Those other responsibilities are just functions. But at the core I'm a pastor.

Christy: Anything you would want to tell me that I haven't asked you?

Kimbila: One point that is not so big, this phenomenon of partnership, you are a partner. Me now if I can ask you a question, what are you finding with us that is good and what is bad?

(chuckles)

Christy: That's a good question. I have gotten just a few days of observing your work here at CEFMC, and what I have observed is that the people in your committee know your community. The displaced people we met have been grateful for the welcome they have received. I'm pretty amazed at how they've lived together and have become one community. So, I'm impressed. What would you hope for someone to observe about your work?

Kimbila: First of all, our organization. Because I tell myself the Mennonite community here in Congo, I would first like to say thank you [for] encouraging the Mennonites especially here. In the past five years, we have understood that MCC brings partners to a development that is concrete, that is solid. MCC had the desire to help partners develop and to be empowered to be able to address the needs of displaced people. MCC remains for us a transformational organization. We will pray that MCC continues to move forward so that the displaced community can continue to benefit and to truly be transformed.

And I should finish by saying that this team put in place a system, a way of working that allows us to work well with MCC. And to finish, in the name of the Church, CEFMC, we thank MCC.

\*Kimpwanza women's choir

Christy

Thanks for listening, For those of you who made donations to help support water projects with MCC, those funds would be going to projects like this new borehole in Kikwit. This story is one of a person and community that been impacted by your gift, a community that can now support more people because of new water access. We are glad you are a part of this story.

This episode of Relief Development and Podcast was produced on the traditional land of the Algonquin, Lenape, Nanticoke, Piscataway, Shawnee and Susquehannock people groups.

It was recorded and produced by me, Christy Kauffman, and the head producer is Emily Loewen.

I want to thank our translator Jacob Yoder, and Joyfrida Anindo for lending her voice to share Germiane's story in the start of the episode.

I'm going to let the women's choir from the Mennonite Brethren church, Kimpwanza in Kikwit DR Congo sing us out.

May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.

Thanks and take good care.

\* Kimpwanza Women's choir