

EERN Covid-19 response

Context

The Eglise Evangelique de la Republique du Niger (EERN) has within the last year opened a new congregation on property that is shared with its newly established Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Department. While being the largest and oldest indigenous Protestant church in Niger, the EERN remains a small Christian community within the 97% Muslim country. The EERN has historically focused on evangelism and church planting, but recently leadership has begun expanding towards a more holistic ministry that includes a WASH department. One goal of the WASH work is the establishment of a training centre that will enable Nigeriennes to be able to better serve themselves with access to safe WASH. Both the new congregation and the new training Centre are prepared to work together to address a Covid-19 intervention within the surrounding community which is inhabited by Nigeriennes of all ethnicities and of all economic statuses. Interventions for decreasing the spread of Covid-19 will be able to introduce both the Church and the Centre to its community to establish relationships with their neighbors.

Four kms east of the Airport EERN Church is the Basra Quartier, one of the poorest sections of Niamey and a group to whom the EERN particularly feels called to serve. Parts of Basra are within the 'Centure Vert' or 'Green Belt', a kilometer-wide strip of planned forested land where high density temporary residences of families of primarily day-labourers have been built within the shade from the trees. Inhabitants of those residences come from all Nigerienne ethnic groups as well as from neighboring African countries. As is true throughout Niger, Basra is an area with a very high fertility rate, with a younger population that is slightly higher in number of women than men. Due to the high-density living situation with poor water, sanitation, and hygiene resources, this population will be highly vulnerable to the Covid-19 virus.

A military base is located within this section of Basra, as well as 2 public primary schools and a secondary education complex. However, there are no commercial services, no public health center, and few private medical offices within the quartier. There are no true markets in the area as well. ("Bassora-bassora or the serving of a peripheral district in Niamey" Yaye Saidou Hadiara, Canadian Journal of Tropical Geography, April 15. 2019)

<https://www3.laurentian.ca/rcgt-cjtg/volume-6-numero-1/bassora-bassora-ou-la-desserte-dun-quartier-peripherique-aniamey/>). For these reasons, the EERN feels a special call to take specific action within this Basra community in addition to addressing emergency Covid-19 issues within the households that are located in the area of the Church and Centre.

Interventions:

Trainings will be made at the EERN WASH Centre by one-on-one meetings with preferably female leadership within the communities where the interventions will take place. The leaders will be given messaging materials and WASH items such as handwashing facilities, soap, and water filters for distribution within their immediate neighbors.

Training leadership in messaging and distribution of materials at household level will include:

- Simple handwashing stations with soap supplied to households
- Water filters for safe drinking water

Distribution of locally produced masks

Commercial handwashing stations can be established in areas where people gather – run by women.

How to access short term foodstuffs from the Church and Centre for those who are quarantined

Each participant will be given soap for handwashing, and a handwashing set that has been made from a 5 litre plastic container as a reservoir into which a plastic bottle with a hole in the bottom can be dipped for filling. Hanging the bottle allows enough water to pour from this hole to wash hands thoroughly for the 20 seconds needed. This set can be easily replicated within the community as it is made of articles that are typically disposed of when emptied.

The distribution of water filters will provide safe water at the household level in cases where it is not sure that water sources are safe or where water becomes recontaminated in transport or storage. A secondary reason to distribute filters at this time is to begin to reach a “critical mass” of users who will want to continue using filters also after the time of the virus, in this case building up a commercial supply chain of affordable household water filters and spare parts so supporting sustainable use of filters in the future.

Masks that will be locally produced will be purchased and distributed to individuals within the targeted communities.

Women who will be able to run the commercial handwashing stations will be identified and supported through help from the local leadership.

Families of day labourers who are not able to work will be assisted with ½ bag of maize, and a ½ bag of rice to help them in times when they are not able to go out and search for work. They will be identified through the leadership and confirmed through one-on-one meetings with family. This is a trial that we expect to be able to expand through other grants.