

# Eight per thousand project for the Waldensian church in the central part of Africa

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To the Editors,

This letter briefly presents the role of the Italian Waldensian Church "Eight for One Thousand Project" funds in the implementation of some projects in Central Africa.

The Italian Waldensian Church (Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches) Eight per Thousand (8‰=0.8%) funds is the percentage of income tax that Italian citizens can assign to the State or to a religious denomination to support activities of the social and cultural importance of non-profit organizations. These funds are exclusively intended for the implementation of educational, social, health, humanitarian, and cultural interventions in Italy and abroad. Applicants, such as organizations belonging to the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches national and international ecumenical organizations, associations (associations, committees, NGOs, and non-profit organizations, provided that the grant requested is used for the purposes of Law 409 of 1993, *i.e.*, for charitable, humanitarian, cultural and non-profit purposes), may receive 8 per thousand grants.

The projects were financed for 2018 by the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches through the 8 per thousand funds, divided into 454 projects abroad and 673 projects in Italy. Over the years, the number of projects financed by this fund has increased, in 2020 the number of applications rose from 3974 to 4596 (3560 for Italy, 1036 for abroad) (<https://www.ottopermillevaldese.org/english-version/>). It is interesting to note that the number of projects for environmental protection has almost doubled. In 2022, the funds were used to finance 450 projects abroad and 1107 projects in Italy in the educational, humanitarian, socio-medical, and cultural fields. Africa was among the largest projects approved abroad (<https://www.ottopermillevaldese.org/progetti-approvati-2022/>).

The geographical distribution shows that in 2019 among the projects financed outside Italy, the distribution of funds in Africa

was as follows 18.8% went to West Africa, 5.05% to Central Africa, 8.08% to Southern Africa, and 11.11% to East Africa and the Horn of Africa.

In 2020, Central Africa received 4.86% of externally funded projects, with an increase in 2021 (7% for Central Africa). The beneficiary countries of these funds were the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and Chad (Figure 1) in all the above-mentioned action sections, especially for technological innovation and health improvement.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches has increased a section linked to the COVID-19 emergency fund, of which 4.37% (€1,070,000) in 2020 and 2% (€1,700,000) in 2021 will be used for externally funded projects. In Central Africa, funds for COVID-19 were directed towards the COVID-19 Contagion Prevention Campaigns and Technology Transfer and International Health Cooperation for COVID-19 Prevention. Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening the capacity of health workers to diagnose and treat people. This 8 per thousand initiative is an example to be encouraged particularly in African countries to support education, health, and rural development projects. In the last call, a proposal was presented to promote rural development in a west Cameroonian department through the strengthening of the local tomato productions/transformation chain, and the reduction of postharvest losses supporting the involvement of women cooperatives.

In particular, in Chad, the funds received by the Italian Geographical Society (a non-profit organization) have been used to reinforce the Laboratory for Major Tropical Epidemics (LAGET) allowing the serological surveillance of COVID-19 infection in the capital city N'Djamena and in other ten provinces of Chad. The data obtained showed a high level of circulation of the virus in 2021 and 2022, which is surprising considering the low level of morbidity and mortality caused by COVID-19 in Chad. The LAGET, inaugurated on 12 December 2020 in the presence of the General Director of the Ministry of Public Health and

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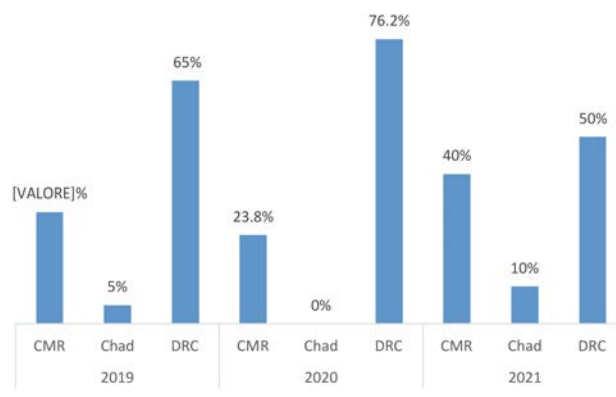


Figure 1. Distribution of funds for selected participants in Central Africa 2019-2021. CMR, Cameroon; DRC, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Solidarity of Chad, Dr. Ismael Barh Bachar, is a biomedical analysis laboratory created to support the efforts of Chad and its partners in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Realized by the MAGIS Foundation, a non-governmental organization of the Euro-Mediterranean Province of the Society of Jesus, and financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), today it is active in the fight against hepatitis B and C, AIDS, and drug resistance. It is committed to prevention, epidemiological surveillance, and treatment of diseases to ensure a healthy life and promote the well-being of all at all ages (2030 Agenda, SDGs 3), to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases. It functions to combat hepatitis and other communicable diseases, a place of training for biologists, laboratory technicians, and medical students at the Le Bon Samaritain University-Hospital Complex in N'Djamena, in Walia suburban district, run by the Jesuit Fathers. At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic touched Europe, with catastrophic predictions by the World Health Organisation on developing countries, MAGIS Foundation, as a missionary organization of the Society of Jesus,

has not closed in on itself but relaunched cooperation with external partners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by sending funds to purchase personal protection devices, health equipment, and basic supplies to alleviate the damages caused by the pandemic. Substantial efforts have been directed at Chad, where many hospitals and health services are also run by religious communities, which are recognized in all respects as key actors in community participation activities, with a health model that focuses on prevention, disease treatment, and training of health personnel, particularly nurses, laboratory technicians, and doctors. Religious leaders, active despite the low resources of the Chadian socio-economic context, have been working for years to mitigate the disastrous situation that an epidemic can do, committed to removing the structural causes of underdevelopment with a medium- to long-term approach offered by quality education. The goal is always to improve human conditions and, indeed, the case in Chad has shown that religious truths, scientific truths, and government policies have not been mutually exclusive but rather have worked together for the common good and the well-being of all.

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