

SERVING THE COMMUNITY WITH TIGHT HANDS

Dieudonne Tantoh Nforba alias Farmer Tantoh has returned to his Binju village in the North West of Cameroon from a scholarship awarded him in the United States of America by Tahoe-Baikal Institute. He carries back technics of water supply systems, watershed management and manual well drilling & equipping. He thinks he will be supported and certainly be an asset to his community but surprisingly, the hands of his people are tight due to influence of local politics.

By Ndi Derek Giyoh, September 2018

Kwepesa Mbong of Binshua, a neighbouring village to Nkambe wakes up at 3:00 AM to go and fetch water from Maagha, a watercourse located three kilometres away. Along her path, she crosses two bamboo bridges of what used to be streams. They are all dry.

“Maagha is our only hope and if one doesn’t go this early, one will not get clean water” she says. “Things were not like this. Recently our waters have been drying up and we don’t know why” she adds.

A few kilometres away, Tata Tango, the sub chief of Binju, also a neighbouring village to Nkambe, expresses his joy on how Farmer Tantoh has changed the lives of the Binju people with his new water technology. “Our women no longer trek far distances to fetch water” says the chief. Farmer has also provided water in our primary school. We are now free from water borne diseases and our livelihood has improved tremendously” he adds.



Famer with volunteers – Photo: Farmer Tantoh



Women now doing laundry better – Photos: Farmer Tantoh



Pupils happy with Farmer's donation – Photo: Farmer Tantoh

“Farmer also tells us to plant trees. He says they will protect our waters and increase our harvests. We have planted more than 10000 acacia trees and we are waiting to see his magic” says the sub chief in humour.



Farmer Tantoh teaching local inhabitants to plant trees in Binju- Photo: Farmer Tantoh)



Farmer Tantoh working with Tata Tango & AIESEC to plant trees in Binju- Photos: Farmer Tantoh)

“Our greatest problem now is that we can no longer predict the seasons. We use to plant our cash crops with the early rains in March but now this does not seem to work anymore. Rain may fall once in early march and only fall again in early May. This is not good for the crops and most of the time we end up with poor harvests” says the sub chief.

The cries of Kwepesa Mbong of Binshua and Tata Tango of Binju go beyond the boundaries of Binshua & Binju villages to the four corners of the world. It’s a cry for cooperation from all nations to fight climate change and make the world a better place for the children unborn. Their cries are similar to those of world leaders.

"Because we know that so many of the threats we face today - global terrorism, climate change, and unprecedented movements of people - do not respect national borders. So we must turn towards those multinational institutions like the UN and NATO that encourage international cooperation and partnership" says the British Prime Minister, Theresa May.



Theresa May – Photo: WENN

From Grass to Grace

“I fell in love with the Environment in 1996 when I was in secondary school. I was not a very bright student and spent most of my time working in my garden and planting trees, flowers & lawns in churches, homes and other public places for free. This earned me the name FARMER” Farmer Tantoh says amusingly. “I created the first environmental club in GBHS Nkambe where I schooled and the lone Botanic garden in Donga Mantung Division. I continued with my activities until one day I met one Gregor Moray Smith, a VSO Volunteer in 2001. This meeting changed my life. He connected me to his friends in the US and UK” Farmer recalls. “It was one of his friends that recommended me for the summer environmental programme organised by Tahoe-Baikal Institute in 2007” he says smiling.



Photos showing young Farmer Tantoh in his garden in 1996 – Photos: Farmer Tantoh’s archives

“Since I came back, I have been carrying out minor projects through Safe Your Future Association (SYFA), an NGO I created in 2005. Fortunately while in the US I was able to create SYFA-USA which is now helping to mobilize funds for my projects here” he says. “We have protected a total of seven watersheds throughout the Northwest in an effort to combat water scarcity and also constructed a water supply system in Bafut similar to the one we did in Binju” Famer Adds.

His works have not gone unnoticed as he has received the African International Achievers Award, the Green apple Award, World Echoes Award and he is an ASHOKA fellow.



Farmer’s Awards and recognitions: African Achievers, Green Apple, World Echoes, Ashoka – Photos: Farmer Tantoh’s achives

The enemy inside

On the other side of Farmer Tantoh's small community is do or die politics. It is a community dominated by the two main political parties in Cameroon, CPDM (ruling party) and the SDF (main opposition party). Everybody has become a politician.

"He has refused to cooperate with us" says Ta-shey Paah, a diehard CPDM supporter referring to Farmer Tantoh. "How can we support such a person?" he adds.

Ta-Shey is deeply disappointed at Farmer for refusing CPDM members to pretend as though they were the ones funding his projects. He sends a message which suggests that the government may not support Farmer's projects if he does not identify with CPDM.

"The SDF has also approached me for the same arrangement" Famer says. "Political rivalry has greatly hindered my work here and I think my people need to draw a line between political rivalry and development. My cry is that one day my people should realize this and fully support me so that together we can better protect our environment and continue this fight against climate change" he adds.