



newsletter nº 14

Written by Annette Helle
2 June 2020

Dear friends, supporters and other interested readers,
Let me start with an update on the coronavirus situation. So far 458 people have tested positive for Covid-19 on Cape Verde. Two islands are affected: Santiago, which has 397 acute infections at the time of writing, and São Vicente, with a single case. The pandemic first came to Cape Verde on 16 March, specifically to Boavista, but now there are no more cases there. The national state of emergency has now been lifted for all the islands, including those where there are still people who are infected. It was initially maintained on those islands with cases so as to prevent the virus spreading elsewhere in the country. However, the assumption now seems to be that all that needs to be done is to track chains of infection as and when they occur. We all hope this assumption proved right!

In many areas of life, normality has (at least in part) resumed: public authorities, shops and restaurants have reopened, and passenger ferry services between the islands are now operating again. Teaching has resumed

at universities and for upper secondary pupils, although primary schools will remain closed until after the summer holidays, i.e. until September. The ban on gatherings has also been lifted and most beaches have been reopened.

Precautionary measures are in force, such as mandatory mask-wearing in public places such as public authorities and

on ferries; vehicles (including any goods) are disinfected before embarking. Passengers are required to have their temperature taken. Mobile hand-washing



stations have been set up in many towns, and public authorities provide hand disinfectants in the form of alcohol or vinegar. But all major sporting and cultural events remain cancelled, and as yet there is no talk of borders being reopened.

However, as in Europe, the people here are thoroughly fed up with the social isolation of recent weeks – yesterday’s morning paper reported that hundreds of inhabitants of the town of Mindelo had “overrun” the municipal beach, Praia de Laginha, on the island of São Vicente.

The absence that is most bitterly felt is, of course, that of tourists. A large part of the economy is built on this sector, and now this business has completely dried up. The last few years in particular have seen many people, especially Cape Verdeans, invest their money in opening a restaurant, a small bar or guest rooms, and they now have absolutely no income, while ongoing costs still have to be met. Many other people, whether they have an occupation or not, are currently struggling with existential financial difficulties – drivers without passengers, all kinds of service providers and traders who lack customers, farmers not longer able to sell their produce, those in the fishing sector facing a drastic decline in their sales markets, and many others besides. Fortunately, this crisis prompted broad displays of solidarity on the part of those less badly affected; in the following weeks a wealth of initiatives were set up offering immediate assistance for people in need. In most cases, the aim was emergency provision of basic foodstuffs which takes the form of what is locally called a *cesta basica* (literally, ‘basic basket’). These care packages generally contain rice, beans or other dried pulses, flour, salt, sugar, oil and pasta/noodles, and may include other items as well.

We at ‘Dar as Mãos’ have also put in place our own emergency response, since Tarrafal and its two neighbouring communities are ‘at the back of beyond’ and there is great need for food aid. Our initial response involved spending €1,500 at a wholesaler’s in Porto Novo: we bought 750 kg of rice, 100 kg of lentils, 100 kg of sugar, 100 kg of salt, 200 kg of pasta/noodles, 100 kg of wholemeal flour, 50 kg of onions, nine crates (108 bottles) of olive oil, nine crates (108 bottles) of soya oil, 1,500 stock cubes, 100 bars of soap, three bulk packs of toilet



paper, 100 used flour and rice sacks for individual bagging, and – unfortunately but necessarily – a great many plastic bags. Here in Tarrafal we topped up our ‘big shop’ with a few small units, and then the large-scale weighing and bagging operation went into action. In a joint effort with some of our *bolseiros* (school pupils in receipt of scholarships), we weighed and bagged the bulk packs into smaller units: the

rice into 5 kg bags, the other foodstuffs in 1 kg units. One bag of each product joined other items in a big sack – and yet another *cesta basica* intended for a family was ready for dispatch. Especially large families were given an additional 5 kg of rice. This meant we were able to provide many families with



essential supplies: on 16 May, 14 families up in the hill country of the Planalto Norte plateau, and on 17 May, a further 90 families here in Tarrafal.



And we didn't forget another neighbouring community, Monte Trigo, which is even more remote than we are – it's accessible only by sea (a one-hour trip) on foot (a four-hour hike). The Germany-based charitable association 'Amigos de Monte Trigo'

(www.amigos-montetrigo.de) met the costs of

a *cesta basica* for all 60 families that needed

this assistance, and we at DaM did the shopping. On 29 May, these supplies were shipped to Monte Trigo and handed over to Osvaldo, a teacher who is the local coordinator of the 'Amigos' charity. He supervised the bagging and distribution.



We are very grateful – on behalf of DaM and, in particular, the recipients – to everyone involved who made this response possible. We expect to have to provide *cesta basica* care packages at least one more time, if not twice more, over the next two or three months. Everyone who wishes to help destitute families in Tarrafal receive essential food and supplies is welcome to make a donation to our German supporting organization, using the following bank account:

Account holder / Kontoinhaber: Förderverein Dar as Maos e.V.
Account no. / Konto-Nr.: 41 06 72 79 00
IBAN: DE83 4306 0967 4106 7279 00
BIC: GENODEM1GLS (GLS Bank)

The supporting organization (Förderverein) will be happy to issue tax-deductible receipts for donations; its (and our) charitable status makes this possible. Thank you!