

GRAIL/PROMAICA IN ANGOLA

1. The past that helps to understand the present

In 1983, we, Tomázia and myself, went to Mozambique through the Bishops' invitation and in the frame of Caritas for training to transformation. We had a three years contract so in 1986 Tomázia came back to Portugal. I decided to continue for two reasons: the Grail in Mozambique was starting and the work we were supposed to do was not completely finished (the war and socio-political situation made difficult and slowed the program).

In 1987 it was held in Mozambique a Caritas meeting with the 5 Portuguese speaking African countries. When the Angolan people realized the work Tomázia and I had done in Mozambique and Monique in Cape Vert, they asked me to go to Angola to work with them in the same kind of training. So between 1989 and 1991 I was released from the work in Mozambique for two months to go to Angola.

Meanwhile with the more committed people from Mozambique and Angola we organised a visit to some Dioceses in Kenya (to see at work the fruits of Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's training). There we realized that most of the projects - were they for agriculture, better housing, collecting water, or foresting... - were carried out, mainly by women. What led the Mozambique National Secretary to ask the question: "Why do you work only with women?" And the answer came: "We work with everyone! When a project starts usually there are more men than women. But it is the women who stay firmly until the end!" This acknowledgement even made my colleagues from Mozambique confess: "Now we understand your idea to want to work more with women!"

A very committed woman from Angola participated in this visit to Kenya. So out of what she saw there and some workshops we organised specially for women, this woman and some more friends started in Angola, with the support of the Bishop of Benguela, a movement for the promotion of Angolan women : PROMAICA. This movement exists in all the dioceses and counts more than 20.000 organized women with great mobilization capacity.

During the war they worked in their own communities in their towns and gave support in refugee camps: picking up children from the streets, promoting literacy, nutrition and mother-child education programs, small husbandry and agriculture projects to support dislodged (displaced??) families. In same dioceses they have education programs in local radios.

With the coming of peace other perspectives are open, besides continuing with some of the already existing projects. During the months of July and August when I was there, I saw them very committed in solidarity campaigns with those who were still in the cantonments and collaborating for these people to return the soonest possible to their own places to rebuild there their families. They were specially asked for the preparation of those women who during the war years lived in the bush as well as the most important task of reconciliation.

2. Why this Training?

When I went there in 2000 for the first National meeting (10 years of life and Jubilee year), they asked me to give them more formation: the movement had grown too quickly and they felt the need to have in each diocese a well trained group to carry on the training for those who were already there and for the new ones. It was not possible to go immediately because of lack of funds. Only this year with the contributions of some Grail friends, some other people and also from a Portuguese Foundation it was possible to get the minimum to organize four workshops.

From each of the 15 dioceses came 2 or 3 delegates. In those places where the workshops were held some women from the municipalities and towns participated too. In all they were 140. We also had some meetings with the Sisters who work with these women.

With me went a young woman, Ana Borges, who works in the Grail Centre in Lisbon.

In the evaluations we did at the end of every workshop and at the very end with the national responsible people it was always asked a 2nd training stage, the country is living a special time in its history. Rebuilding has to be done everywhere. Besides infrastructures, it is needed to rebuild the family and moral and cultural values. And above all to reconcile this country devastated by 40 years of war. Will we have the means to go on with this collaboration? I'll like to!

Teresinha Taveres