



AFRICA/MADAGASCAR - The Malagasy population of Tolagnaro continues to die of thirst

Fort Dauphin (Agenzia Fides) – The drought has always the cause of periods of severe famine and epidemics that have plagued the people of Fort Dauphin, or Tolagnaro in the Malagasy language. According to local missionary sources, the population of the Diocese of Tolagnaro, located in the extreme south of Madagascar, is experiencing a period of great famine. This region of Madagascar, which has an area of 45 000 sq km, is the poorest, least developed, least educated in the Country with little infrastructure which is decaying, in short - abandoned by the Government. The population of almost one million inhabitants, of which 11% are Catholic, takes care of livestock in the higher areas in the north, farming in the south and fisheries in coastal areas. Since this is a rocky and sandy area, where it doesn't rain for most of the year, life is very hard and, with a prolonged dry season, it becomes an ever-increasingly daily struggle for survival due to the scarcity of water.

This dramatic reality was experienced first-hand by Bishop Odon M. Razanakolona of Antananarivo during his last visit to the region, where he often met long lines of people who walked for miles just to draw some water from the small river. According to local missionaries, there are often cases where groups of people leave the most remote and drought devastated areas and head for the city of Tolagnaro, because for them “it is better to die there of hunger than thirst at home.” The situation is further worsened by the ancestral traditions and still very popular superstitions: for example, polygamy and forced marriages at an early age are very common. Or, according to an ethnic tradition of the Tandroy, which dominates the district of Androy, when a head of the family dies, all the cattle are killed and the houses are burned down, forcing the other members of the families to start over from nothing.

In summary, according to the Bishop, the faith planted by the Lazarus missionaries, the first evangelisers in the region, has developed over the last 55 years with the creation of the diocese, bringing its fruits and enlivening the faith of this simple people. The diocesan Catholic radio network also carries its function of communication and evangelisation. (AP) (22/1/2011 Agenzia Fides)