



WOMEN IN
CHURCH AND
SOCIETY
THE LUTHERAN
WORLD FEDERATION

From the LWF Institutional Memory

Women on the Move - Her Story:



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| Name: | Colette Bouka Coula |
| Country of origin: | Cameroon |
| Date of Birth: | 10 September 1951 |
| Church: | Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon |
| Period of Mandate: | 1990-2015: A delegate at the Curitiba Assembly, elected Council member in 1990, appointed at the LWF Department for Mission and Development in the 90s, as LWF field representative in the 2000, finally in Geneva at the service of the Department for World Service |

Short biography:

Born in a family of 11, the last but one child (8 female & 3 male) of a father who was nurse and a mother “house wife”, who for many years devoted time to train other women who would gather at her home, in sowing cloths. The family comes from the nobility in a locality called Ngambé-Tikar in Cameroon, Central Region. My parents have been deeply involved in the life of their local church during their life time, and also raised their children and others, in their faith.

My whole primary, secondary and university education was done in Cameroon, followed by further university studies in France with a doctorate degree obtained in 1985, after which I returned back home. I have been involved in voluntary work upon returning in Cameroon, mainly within my local parish for several years; have served as a church elder in my local parish (as well as during my years in Nairobi and Addis Ababa), was engaged in the church women’s fellowship, took part in a couple of evaluations of the church projects, served also as translator for visitors to the parish. In 1990-1991, I work in my church high school in Ngaoundéré as French, English and religion teacher for a year.

My first encounter with the LWF was in 1989, when I was hired as a junior translator during the All Africa Pre-Assembly in Yaoundé. The big surprise came when I was elected at the Curitiba LWF Assembly in 1990 as one among the Africa Council members, though I was not a delegate. This led me to serve on the LWF Council for a year, in the DMD Program Committee. This was quite an experience, sitting for the first time in such an important governance body, trying to understand and learn, while at the same time trying to also contribute. The events that unfolded later on after the Assembly and the restructuring in the LWF office in Geneva when regional desks were created, the will to work on balancing the gender at various positions, led to opening new staff positions. I was then encouraged by my church leadership to apply and was recruited in the Department for Mission and Development (DMD) as Assistant Africa Secretary. I later on joined the LWF staff in Geneva in September 1991. Since then, I have had the opportunity to serve within the Organization at various levels, both in Geneva and in Africa. Ten year spent in DMD, 5 in Geneva and 5 other based in Nairobi to work with our member churches in the region. One highlight has been accompanying the churches as they were coming closer together and build up their sub-regional communions. This assignment also gave me the opportunity to visit many of our member churches and to try to understand them better. I still feel privileged. Another turning point in my life came in early 2001 when I applied for a position of LWF representative in the Department for World Service (DWS). This has led me to serve in such a position in Ethiopia (February 2001- September 2004) and in Mauritania September 2004-February 2008). This has added to my development orientation, the whole aspects of humanitarian work, direct involvement in assistance to refugees and displaced populations. Caring for the dignity of those we serve has been a fundamental drive throughout those years. Since February 2008, I have been back to Geneva as Program Officer in the Department for World Service, supervising a few LWF country programs in Africa, as I look forward to retire soon. I still remember some anecdotes during those years, such as the reaction of a few people, their surprise to find an African woman, holding such a position as country representative. There have also been instances during my many field visits to some rural communities that being a woman, in those positions, has been an inspiration to mothers regarding their daughters. It has been a privilege to be connected and work with the LWF during these years. Looking back, it has never been in my plans to be involved in such an organization as the LWF, and do the work I have been doing ever since. I can only be grateful to what I have lived, as I believe, I have received more than I have given, and this is a blessing. My life has been shaped by my parents as models; having a deep sense of family and respect for others, they gave opportunity to all their children female and male alike, educating us without any discrimination, to grow and reach out to our individual capacities.