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Sister Grace Njau, a member of the Missionary Sisters of Precious Blood, is being helped with food and hygienic items during a June 12, 2020, collection for poor and needy families in Nairobi, Kenya. (CNS/Francis Njuguna)

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Sister Grace Njau, a member of the Missionary Sisters of Precious Blood, is being helped with food and hygienic items during a June 12, 2020, collection for poor and needy families in Nairobi, Kenya. (CNS/Francis Njuguna)

Normally, the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood feed about 200 children in Nairobi's informal settlements of Kawangware and Riruta.

But with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown, the sisters are expanding their reach.

“We are using the telephone contacts of the children to reach these poor and needy families,” Precious Blood Sister Grace Njau told Catholic News Service during a mid-June distribution.

The sisters set up distribution tents outside Amani Rehabilitation Center/Primary School, where the children normally go for breakfast and lunch.

When a name was called out, a parent or guardian would step forward to collect the packaged assorted items, gathered from donors. About 14 families received food that day.

Esther Njeri, a single mother, told CNS upon receiving her share: “I am happy with our sisters ... through our children, they have fed the entire family. May the good Lord bless where this has come from.”

Hassan Kariuki Warui, a Muslim and teacher at the school, told CNS the system was designed so “that every ‘grain of wheat’ goes to the intended poor and needy family.”

Kenya’s bishops anticipated that the food needs would be great with the lockdown. In late May, they predicted the pandemic would hit the nation’s most vulnerable people the hardest, including the 2.5 million people living in informal settlements.

They asked for donations of money, food and nonfood items “to support and save the lives of the affected population. In-kind donations (dry food and nonfood items) can be channeled through our parishes, diocesan and national offices and other church institutions,” the bishops said.

By June 29, Kenya had reported more than 6,000 cases of COVID-19, but fewer than 150 deaths.

“We hope we shall go back to our system of feeding these families via their children in our rehab center and primary school when the current coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown finally come to an end,” Njau said as she helped coordinate the distribution.

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