

## “We Are Doing This Work with Our Heart”

**Rollo Romig**

March 16, 2025

**Rollo Romig:** I'm from the US. I'm a researcher, and I'm studying eyeglass distribution. You are working as a mobilizer, yes?

**Victor:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Also you're taking the electronic record?

**Victor:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** What is your name?

**Victor:** My name is Victor, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Can you tell me about the mobilizing work? What do you do?

 **Victor:** I have to go house to house to inform people about the eyeglasses. Then, coming to the field where we do work, I have to arrange them in order, then talk to them in such a way that they will understand the reason why we are there to do that work. I explain everything to them for them to understand the reason why we are there to do the work.

**Rollo Romig:** Do people need a lot of explanation, or do they understand quickly?

**Victor:** They do understand quickly. I notice that many people have this eye challenge. Immediately they hear that we are coming for the eyeglasses, so they are always happy to come to give us their time.

**Rollo Romig:** Because they know that they need eyeglasses?

↗ **Victor:** Yes, sir. They really love it whenever they hear that we are coming. Like where I'm living, some will be calling me on the phone, when are you guys coming to so and so location, because they really need it.

**Rollo Romig:** What do they use the eyeglasses for? Why do they need them?

**Victor:** Most of them, especially the age group from 40 above, some of them find it very difficult to look into their phone very well.

**Rollo Romig:** On the phone?

↗ **Victor:** Yes, and some to read, they find it very difficult. When we explain that, we say reading glasses, they pick interest and they love it because some still want to read, some still want to work with their phones. Some still want to, at least old women, pack some things. When they want to help themselves by packing some things, they love it. When we explain to them, they really love coming to see whether they can have a chance to have one for themselves.

**Rollo Romig:** You go door to door in the town, yes?

🎙 **Victor:** Yes, sir. Initially, where I'm working. I have a speaker, there's a town announcer in my community, so me and him, we have an agreement. Whenever we are going out to a certain community, I will go to his place and collect his loudspeaker to announce that tomorrow we are coming here, but maybe we'll be sitting inside of a church or in a school. To let the community understand that we are coming tomorrow, but maybe we'll not be going here, here, but we'll be sitting in a church or in a community. Many understand that today we are coming to this place. Before we go to that place, some people will be waiting for us.

**Rollo Romig:** Because they're also spreading the word, yes?

**Victor:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** What is the name of this town?

**Victor:** The name of this town is Aliade.

**Rollo Romig:** And this church is SS Peter and Paul?

**Victor:** Yes, sir. This very one, we are sitting here. Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** How much are you paid to do this work?



**Victor:** Sir, initially, when we went to the workshop, they only asked us to go into the field and do the work, but we'll be paid. After some weeks, I received a pay of ₦25,000. My colleagues too, the same thing they received. That is what we're paid.

**Rollo Romig:** Then, also you have money for travel?



**Victor:** No, sir. That is a big challenge we are facing. I want to say the plain truth because we are helping people. Let me say this, this is the church work, so it's good I've voiced out my mind. I was getting tired, because sometimes when I'm from my place to work, it costs me ₦4,000 or ₦5,000. Sometimes I would go from my community to here in the assembly center to pick the glasses. Going home, it costs me ₦5,000. I calculate what I received, what they paid me last, and what I am spending. I was somehow feeling weak.

The only thing that gave me joy is I later on concluded that I am helping people. Because one thing is to say the plain truth, people are calling every day. People are calling my phone, "When are you people coming to our place? We really need this thing." That is the only thing that gave me joy in doing this work. Apart from that, the pay is very poor compared to what we are spending. It's very, very poor. *[NOTE: In response to this and other similar feedback, CHAN raised the stipend amount for volunteers from ₦25,000 to ₦72,000 a month.]*

**Rollo Romig:** You are spending a lot of the money on transport.

**Victor:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** The ₦25,000, that is for how many days of work?

**Victor:** After the workshop, we started the following day. When they paid us, it was around seven to eight days.



**Rollo Romig:** Did you also learn how to screen?

**Victor:** Yes, sir. I want to help my people so that we make work easy. I learned it. When I went to the workshop, they taught all of us.

**Rollo Romig:** Do you ever do the screening also?

**Victor:** Yes, sir. I normally do it almost on a daily basis.

**Rollo Romig:** Are you trained as a community health worker?

**Victor:** No, I am only trained as a mobilizer and trained how to screen people.

**Rollo Romig:** How was the training for the screening? How long did it take? Was it one day, two days?



**Victor:** It was just a three-hour training.

**Rollo Romig:** Did you feel that you learned everything you needed to know?

**Victor:** At least they tried. They tried because to say the plain truth, they teach us the most important things that we really need to work in the field. By God's grace, we are trying. Everything is working well.

**Rollo Romig:** Is there any way the training could have been better?

**Victor:** For me, I am very okay, but I came to notice that other people find it very difficult to do what they were supposed to do because of the short time the training took place. Some people really understand it very well, but some find it very difficult. Some will call me for help. In my community, there are some communities close to me, they will normally come for me to assist them. By God's grace, we are doing it.

I discovered that some find it very difficult that very day we went to training. They find it very difficult to understand it fast, but they catch up now because they are not afraid of asking questions. Now, at least they are doing it better.

**Rollo Romig:** They catch up later by asking questions?

**Victor:** Yes, sir. Our bosses give us numbers for help. Maybe you are finding something very difficult, you can call this number for help, and they have been doing it. I believe that some of them, I see they work online and they are doing practice.

**Rollo Romig:** You feel that it would be better if the training were longer, or is it okay?

**Victor:** For me, it's okay, but if there is any chance, I see that some still need the training. For me, I'm okay, and for my team, I believe our whole team.

**Rollo Romig:** Even if the training is too short for them, they can catch up by asking questions?

**Victor:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Then they learn from each other also?



**Victor:** Yes. One big challenge, majorly in Benue here, is distance. Distance is a problem. You hear them mentioning, you use transport of ₦5,000 to a community. If you compare it, the distance is something we need to look into. You can see how people are plenty here.

**Rollo Romig:** Yes, plenty.

**Victor:** More are still coming.

**Rollo Romig:** Yes, 50 or 100 people just came in right now. Are there any other challenges?



**Victor:** This challenge, I don't know, but I just want to bring this one out. My own community is a big community, and we have one team. Sometimes we find it very difficult to cover other places. I believe other communities too, they are finding it very difficult, because there was a day we went for one outreach before my boss went back to where he was staying. I was talking to this guy where we went to outreach, and he was telling me that from his place to where he came here today, he spent a lot of money and he cannot even complete the work here today. I'm saying that if there's any way to attach other teams, it would be better, if there's any way.

**Rollo Romig:** Because the need is very high.

**Victor:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** All the people who come today, will you be able to screen everyone who comes today, or will you run out of time?



**Victor:** To screen them, we can do it, but then it will take us a lot of time, because we want to know the power that will suit your eye, so we don't rush the work. We try to do things the way they teach us. It really takes time.

**Rollo Romig:** Do you have enough supply? Are you getting the glasses you need, or do you run out sometimes?

**Victor:** For me, what I need, I have it.

**Rollo Romig:** You have enough supplies?

**Victor:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Okay, good. Is there anything else you need that you don't have?

**Victor:** Oh, no, I don't think. That is the main challenge, transport.

**Rollo Romig:** Thank you so much for talking with me. I very much appreciate your honesty and telling it straight. I appreciate your hard work on this.

**Father Vitalis:** Hi. I'm Father Vitalis. Nice to see you here.

**Rollo Romig:** You're the pastor of this church? You had two services just now, this morning, yes?

**Father Vitalis:** Just now, yes.

**Rollo Romig:** What denomination is this church?

**Father Vitalis:** Catholic.

**Rollo Romig:** You just got reading glasses?

**Father Vitalis:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Did you have glasses before?

**Father Vitalis:** I had but it broke, so I bought this local one in the market.

**Rollo Romig:** You had one before. Where did you get the first one?

**Father Vitalis:** It was at an optical center.

**Rollo Romig:** Do you remember how much it cost?

**Father Vitalis:** I think it was around ₦19,000 or something like that.

**Rollo Romig:** When was that?

**Father Vitalis:** It was about five years ago.

**Rollo Romig:** Then they broke at some point?

**Father Vitalis:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** This new one that you got, is it a stronger power, or is it the same as the one you had before?

**Father Vitalis:** This one is a little bit stronger.

**Rollo Romig:** A little bit stronger, so that's good too. In your work, it must be very important to have these reading glasses, yes?

**Father Vitalis:** Yes, I need to read everyday.

**Rollo Romig:** What else are you reading besides the Bible?

**Father Vitalis:** Aside from the Bible, we have to give conferences, we have to give talks, we have to address people. Constantly we are talking to different groups and categories.

**Rollo Romig:** You're also writing your sermons.

**Father Vitalis:** Exactly. I write my sermons and everything.

**Rollo Romig:** It's a big challenge if you don't have the glasses.

**Father Vitalis:** Yes, exactly. If I can't read, I can't even celebrate a mass.

**Rollo Romig:** For this screening event today, did you help tell your parishioners about it?

↗ **Father Vitalis:** Since they told me last time, we kept announcing and announcing and then it did not work. When this announcement came through the doctor, we kept telling the parishioners. Most of the people who are here, I'm the one who told them.

**Rollo Romig:** But last time it didn't work?

**Father Vitalis:** No, [the screeners] did not come. They announced, and then the crowd came, but nobody came [to screen]. But I kept believing and I kept announcing and announcing. I kept telling the people.

**Rollo Romig:** The other time when they couldn't come, do you know why they couldn't come? What went wrong that time?

**Father Vitalis:** We couldn't have any information. One of the workers came and announced. Then, we didn't hear any messages again, and then nobody came. When he came and told me, I believed him, so I convinced all the people that are here, and all of them, you see them here.

**Rollo Romig:** When you told the parishioners about the screening, did they ask you questions?

**Father Vitalis:** No, they didn't.

**Rollo Romig:** They were just looking forward to it.

↗ **Father Vitalis:** Yes. They were excited, and everybody was looking forward to it.

**Rollo Romig:** Why is it important to them to get the glasses? Is it mostly for reading the Bible?

**Father Vitalis:** It's for reading Bible. We have a challenge here with reading. Eyes are very sensitive. You see people giving you wrong prescription or wrong whatever. They are looking forward to a genuine person who will give us a genuine result for our eyes. Like me now. Everywhere I go, I know I'm having that challenge. The moment I got opportunity, I'm going to get something genuine for my eyes. That is why, even me, I'm here now.

**Rollo Romig:** Because they took their time with you to make sure you got the right power, yes?

**Father Vitalis:** Yes, they took that. I looked at it until it came to a point where I could see clearly.

**Rollo Romig:** It's a good feeling when you can finally see it.

**Father Vitalis:** Very, very nice. [laughter] Very nice. I'm looking forward to reading.

**Rollo Romig:** Was there ever a screening event here before, or is this the first one?

**Father Vitalis:** This is the first one.

**Rollo Romig:** Are people coming from other communities also, or is everyone here from your church community?

 **Father Vitalis:** It's not only for this community. [People are coming] from outside too. We also had a program here that it caught at first not only within the town, but there was another program that was going on and they were all here too. During that program, I also announced it.

**Rollo Romig:** Oh, good. What was that program?

 **Father Vitalis:** The film actors. There are many different kinds of annual events. It took place for three days. They did an awards show and all that, and the news went around outside the community here.

**Rollo Romig:** You took the opportunity just to make the announcement.

**Father Vitalis:** Yes, make the announcement.

**Rollo Romig:** What day was that?

**Father Vitalis:** Four days ago. I've been doing that activity for three days, so I used the opportunity.

**Rollo Romig:** That's good. Thank you so much, Father Vitalis. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

 **Father Vitalis:** To me, it's exciting and it's nice. I'm happy to see you here, too. Anything that can be of help to my people, and anything to myself too, I really appreciate it. Also, eyeglasses are very expensive. For you to get a genuine eyeglass, not everybody can afford it. You see people just getting anything, anywhere. For us to have this now, I think it has elongated the life of my people, so we are very grateful for this. Most interesting for them to get it for free. We're not expecting that. I don't normally get free things.

**Rollo Romig:** Free things are rare in life. Yes, that's true. [laughter] Thank you, Father. I appreciate it.

**Father Vitalis:** I appreciate it. Till we meet again.

**Rollo Romig:** Could I talk to the screener? I hate to interrupt her. I'll try to make it very fast because many, many people are waiting.



**Anointed David:** It will take them until 4:00 PM. It takes about five minutes to screen one person.

**Elizabeth:** Hi. How are you?

**Rollo Romig:** I won't keep you too long. I know you're very busy. My name is Rollo. I'm a researcher from the US. What is your name?

**Elizabeth:** Elizabeth.

**Rollo Romig:** You are a community health worker?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Are you from this community here?

**Elizabeth:** No.

**Rollo Romig:** Where do you live?

**Elizabeth:** Close to Makurdi.

**Rollo Romig:** Okay, so closer to the city. When did you receive the training for screening?

**Elizabeth:** It was 11th of February.



**Rollo Romig:** How long was the training? Was it all in one day?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir. It started at around 10:00, and then 3:00 PM.

**Rollo Romig:** Did you learn everything you needed to learn?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** When you started doing the screening, what were the challenges? Was there anything that was difficult?

**Elizabeth:** We are having challenges in the field.

**Rollo Romig:** What challenges?

**Elizabeth:** The cost of transportation. The distances are far, and it is expensive to travel.

**Rollo Romig:** How much are you paid for this work?



**Elizabeth:** It's ₦25,000.

**Rollo Romig:** Does the money for transportation come out of the ₦25,000, or do you get more money for transportation?

**Elizabeth:** No, he said use the ₦25,000 for transportation.

**Rollo Romig:** How much are you spending for transportation?

**Elizabeth:** I didn't calculate for this.

**Rollo Romig:** Do you think that ₦25,000 is the right amount of money, or should it be a different amount of money?

**Elizabeth:** If there is any means where you can increase the money, we'll be happy, because the ₦25,000 is small.

**Rollo Romig:** What do you think would be the right amount of money?

**Elizabeth:** If you can make it to ₦70,000 or ₦50,000.

*[NOTE: In response to this and other similar feedback, CHAN raised the stipend amount for volunteers from ₦25,000 to ₦72,000 a month.]*

**Rollo Romig:** Did you get screened for glasses also?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Did you need the glasses?

**Elizabeth:** No, sir. No. Of course not.

**Rollo Romig:** You're too young. Are there other challenges?



**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir. We need more teams, because we have a lot of people where we're staying, and we're supposed to be going in the communities. We had a lot of people, and we are only three, so it took us so much time.

**Rollo Romig:** Because so many people need it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Is it difficult to reach everybody who needs it?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Because the people are very spread out, yes?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** I see. When you talk to the people who are getting the screening, what do they tell you about getting the glasses?

 **Elizabeth:** They appreciate it. They like it so much. There are people that want to collect more than one, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Are most people getting glasses for the first time?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, all of them. Almost most of them.

**Rollo Romig:** Maybe just a few people had glasses before?

**Elizabeth:** It's only a few. They bought it at the market.

**Rollo Romig:** What is the cost at the market?

**Elizabeth:** We didn't ask.

 **Rollo Romig:** What kinds of questions do people have for you when they come for the screening? Do they ask you a lot of questions?

**Elizabeth:** Yes, sir. They ask how long we are doing the program.

**Rollo Romig:** Do they have questions about the glasses or about their eyes?

**Elizabeth:** They ask about the side effects.

**Rollo Romig:** What do you tell them?

**Elizabeth:** We told them how to use it. We said, if you're using the glasses and you're having headaches or if you're having some other challenges, then you should stop using the glasses and go for a proper medical check-up.

**Rollo Romig:** Thank you. I don't want to take any more time because I know you're very busy. Thank you so much, Elizabeth.

**Rollo Romig:** Hello. I'm from the US. I'm a researcher. What is your name?

**Michael:** Michael.



**Rollo Romig:** You are helping keep records, yes?

**Michael:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Did they also train you for screening?

**Michael:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Do you sometimes screen too?

**Michael:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Today, you are focused on taking records?

**Michael:** Yes, I'm writing.

**Rollo Romig:** She is doing all the screening?

**Michael:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** When did you get the training? In February?

**Michael:** Yes, it was in February.

**Rollo Romig:** How was the training?

**Michael:** Very, very well, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** You learned everything you needed to know?

**Michael:** Everything was good, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** All of you got the training together.

**Michael:** Yes, sir, we were together.

**Rollo Romig:** Then, are you also mobilizing too, or are you focused on the record-keeping?

**Michael:** We mobilize.

**Rollo Romig:** Oh, you mobilize also?

**Michael:** I mobilize too, yes. We combine. We do the same thing.

**Rollo Romig:** When you mobilize, tell me what you do.



**Michael:** When we mobilize, we tell them to come for these glasses and that these glasses are for free. We want to help people, those that cannot see the nearby things, or they cannot differentiate maybe stones and any other thing, or they cannot read, they should come and assess. When they come, we assess them. When they got the one they want to use, we give it to them.

**Rollo Romig:** Who do you talk to? Where do you go, and how do you spread the word?

**Michael:** We spread the word through. We meet the chiefs. We meet the prominent sons, we meet the associations. We have so many associations. We have the women association, we have the men, the youths, so we talk to them to help us spread the message. That is how we get these clients.

**Rollo Romig:** The priests also, yes?

**Michael:** Of course.

**Rollo Romig:** How much are you paid for this work?



**Michael:** Sir, they give us ₦25,000 at first. Looking at that ₦25,000, sir, it's money, but compared to the economy of this country now, that ₦25,000, sir, is very, very small.

**Rollo Romig:** It's very small.

**Michael:** Yes, because the transportation almost eats everything up.

**Rollo Romig:** What do you think would be a better amount to get? What would be the right amount, do you think?

**Michael:** Sir, I don't know, but if you can increase it to maybe from ₦50,000 to ₦70,000.

*[NOTE: In response to this and other similar feedback, CHAN raised the stipend amount for volunteers from ₦25,000 to ₦72,000 a month.]*

**Rollo Romig:** It would be easier to do the work.

**Michael:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** Did you also get screened for presbyopia?

**Michael:** I was screened, but I don't have any problem.

**Rollo Romig:** You're young.

**Michael:** Sir, I'm 40.

**Rollo Romig:** Is there anything you would like to add?

↗ **Michael:** I would like to add this thing that if you can extend this, I don't know how this program will last, but if they can extend it so that many people will access this.

**Rollo Romig:** Because there's a lot of demand?

**Michael:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Right now, it's too small to reach everybody?

**Michael:** Yes. If more teams will be added too, so that we can spread this out.

**Rollo Romig:** Are you also a community health worker?

**Michael:** Yes, sir.

**Rollo Romig:** What other sorts of health problems do you work on?

**Michael:** I attend so many things, sir. Family planning. Many things.

**Rollo Romig:** Is this usually how you are paid? Different projects will pay you for working on that project?

**Michael:** Yes, they pay differently.

**Rollo Romig:** Thank you.

**Anointed David:** There's a client here.

**Rollo Romig:** Hello. My name is Rollo. I'm a researcher from the US. Are you playing Ludo on your phone?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** It's a good game. You got glasses today.

**Participant:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Was that the first time you got glasses?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Before you came, did you know you needed glasses? Were you having trouble seeing things?

**Participant:** I have cataracts.

**Rollo Romig:** Have you seen a doctor about the cataracts?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** The doctor is helping you?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** The glasses, how will they be helpful to you?

**Participant:** Before, I can't see closer, but with the glass, I can see very clear.

**Rollo Romig:** For which activities will you use it?

**Participant:** For reading.

**Rollo Romig:** What is your work?

**Participant:** I'm working with NSCDC, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps. A law enforcement agency.

**Rollo Romig:** I see. It must be helpful for your work, and also helpful for playing Ludo.

**Participant:** [laughter] Thank you.

**Rollo Romig:** Thank you so much for talking to me.

**Participant:** Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

**Rollo Romig:** I'm a researcher from the US. What is your name?

**Blessed:** Blessed.

**Rollo Romig:** Good to meet you today. Is this the first time you got glasses?

**Blessed:** No.

**Rollo Romig:** You had glasses before?

**Blessed:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** Also reading glasses?

**Blessed:** Yes.

**Rollo Romig:** When did you get those?

**Blessed:** I think two years now.

**Rollo Romig:** Two years. This one is stronger?

**Blessed:** I think so.

**Rollo Romig:** How is it helpful to you?

**Blessed:** It's good for me to read. Then, create things, and use the needle. Put thread for needle.

**Rollo Romig:** What do you like to read?

**Blessed:** Bible and other stories.

**Rollo Romig:** How was the experience today?

**Blessed:** The experience is okay.

**Rollo Romig:** Any difficulties?

**Blessed:** No. It's okay because if I used to read with the other one, it would feel like it's blurring my eyes. This one, I think it's okay.

**Rollo Romig:** Thank you so much for taking time with me.

## ICON LEGEND



Advocacy



Money



Supply



Demand generation



Partnerships



Technology



Distribution channel



Regulation



Training



Media campaigns and marketing



Screening

*Rollo Romig (he/him) is the author of *I Am on the Hit List: A Journalist's Murder and the Rise of Autocracy in India*.*

\* This interview has been edited and condensed.