



## **Terrible times for West Africa**

The dreadful Ebola epidemic continues to dominate the news from West Africa. Though Mali has so far thankfully escaped rampant infection, some cases – and deaths – have been reported and constant public health vigilance is required. Mali shares a long border with Guinea, including in the Yanfolila region, where Jeunesse et Développement, our main Malian partner works intensively with local communities at risk.

Mamadou Kone reports that the team in Yanfolila, led by our old friend Tiori Diarra has been making an active contribution to prevention work, and Lios McGilchrist of Living Earth, a long standing friend of MDG, has recently been to Bamako. She reports that :

'In positive news, Mali seems to have a very good handle on the Ebola situation. The French have been very involved – sending out medical personnel and logistical support – and all in all people are running a tight operation'.

This is really encouraging and from the UK end we have been trying to find international NGOs with Ebola prevention programmes in the hope that we can link them up with J&D to use to good effect their embedded local community relationships. J&D are now following up these leads inside Mali and are already incorporating Ebola health education and prevention into their on-going work. Elsewhere in this newsletter you will find details of our own discussion within MDG about shifting priorities in our support for J&D, itself prompted in part by the Ebola crisis.

Life of course goes on and I hope you enjoy reading about our continuing work both to support development work in Mali and to raise the profile of that special country here in the UK. My thanks are due to my MDG colleagues and friends from our committee and working groups, and to all our members and supporters who have helped us with this work over the last year. May we all hope for better times in 2015, both here and in Africa.

**Andy Benson**  
*Chair*

## **Urgent Appeal: The Yanfolila Programme**

Between 2010 and 2013 J&D, funded by MRDF, ran an extremely successful economic and health development programme in Yanfolila - led on the ground by Tiori Diarra, an old friend of MDG, known to many of our visitors in past years.

This programme was externally evaluated and the findings were impressive.

- The activities were women focused and put women in control of decisions
- The Village Savings and Loans scheme was a huge success and planned to have 70 groups. There were 200 in the end with 5,000 members. MDG's Second Step projects have helped some of those groups to expand into further economic activities.



*Village savings scheme*

- Effective work was also done on nutrition, hygiene and child care - among other schemes each village identified its 'best mums' and J&D enabled them to share their skills. Follow up work showed that this worked extremely effectively.

### The last piece in the Jigsaw

The final stage of the overall project was the development of a Mutuelle - a district wide community health insurance scheme which interacted with the public health service and would provide the financial security for people to seek proper help with their health needs.

Local health clinics, and District Referral centres (small hospitals like the one MDG helped in Kolindieba) constitute a reasonable local health structure in Mali, but people have to pay for treatment, and in the absence of an insurance scheme many choose not to go for help - relying instead on traditional methods or just hoping for the best!

The Mutuelle has had a very difficult start – as it began the coup in Mali took place, and the conflict in the north of Mali intensified. Confidence dropped and funding from MRDF ceased despite the recommendations of the Evaluation Report. Despite all this Diarra and his team have continued to sustain the new Mutuelle as best they can. As the two following case histories show the Mutuelle can make a big difference.

### Fanta's story

Fanta Sidibé is from the village of Dalada, situated 25 kilometers from the town of Yanfolila. She is 25 years old and married with 5 children, 4 boys and a girl.

She cultivates just over an acre of land, given to her by her father and on this grows peanuts, which she both sells and uses for the family. She also grows and sells other vegetables.

She has been a member of the savings and credit association in her village since 2010, and she started subscribing to the Mutuelle in 2013.



Before she joined she could not afford things from the dispensary, and instead was using traditional herbal remedies, but these did not work well and she regularly fell ill with malaria. Since joining the Mutuelle things have been much better. As she says:

'This year I have been to the community health centre in Yanfolila in February and in July because of malaria. My prescription costs were 6330 FCFA (just over £8) and 15850 FCFA (just over £20).'

She paid herself, from her savings, a total of just over £7 for the two consultations and prescriptions and the Mutuelle paid the rest (just over £21). This has made a huge difference to her access to health services - as she says:

'My last illness was a severe case of malaria, I arrived at the health clinic in Yanfolila sitting on a moped, almost lying on the driver, exhausted and weak. That day the doctor gave me serum. If I hadn't subscribed to the mutuelle I would not have managed to face all these expenses.'

### Fousseyni's story

Fousseyni Bagayogo is from Balanfina, a village situated 33 km from Yanfolila. He is 37, and married with five children. He is from a blacksmith family whose main activity is based on making agricultural tools. With the modernisation of agriculture Fousseyni has also had to start cultivating corn to meet his financial needs and cope with health expenses.

In the past, Fousseyni didn't visit his village's health centre. He was healing himself with medicinal herbs. As he said:

'They are free and grow everywhere. This enabled me to save money, as my income did not allow for health care costs'

Last year one of his children suffered from severe complications from malaria and was evacuated to the Medical Centre at Yanfolila. That day all his savings were spent and he went into debt, by having to pay for transport and prescription costs. He was in financial difficulty for the rest of the year, struggling to meet the family's needs.

This was the reason he joined the Mutuelle, and since then has been able to cope with his health costs and feels much happier by knowing that he can get his children the treatment they need if they get ill.

Fousseyni has been going door to door in his village to raise awareness about subscribing to the Mutuelle and for members to pay their subscriptions. His wife and children are on his subscription card. The subscription fees are payable quarterly, 600 FCFA (about 78p) per policy holder (covers the subscriber and their dependants).

## Where does MDG and its members fit into all this?

Mamadou Kone, J&D's Director, and Sue Upton, at our 2014 AGM have made it very clear that keeping the Mutuelle going through this next difficult year is J&D's absolutely top priority - if it can consolidate and begin to grow then it will be the long term keystone for the health and well being of the whole Yanfolila area.

J&D have always particularly valued MDG's flexibility and responsiveness to changing needs. For this reason the MDG committee, with Kone's agreement has put other projects on hold, or a reduced basis over the next year. During that year we will also work with J&D to bid for larger funds to support an ambitious integrated project to help not only the Mutuelle, but use it as the basis for extensive Ebola and Malaria prevention campaigns over a 3 year period.

First off, though we have to keep the Mutuelle going. This is going to stretch us to the limits and we need your help - effectively to go up a gear! We already have pledges totalling £5,000 but we need much more - at least another £20,000. We need every member to dig deep. We tend to take our own access to health through the NHS for granted at times - developing countries have to take other routes and overcome other barriers. There is no doubt that the Mutuelle will save many lives, especially among poorer people, and by helping you can transform thousands of lives in southern Mali over the coming years.

**Please give as much as you can manage - one off donations, monthly standing orders, and 'promises for later' are all really helpful, as it helps us to know what we can expect, so that we can plan. We have made a good start but its vital that we build the fund as quickly as possible. It would be great if all our members could take part on this big effort. Remember anything you give will attract further funding from Gift Aid.**

**We really hope you can help - and on behalf of the people of Yanfolila a very big thank you!**

Please let us know what you can give by contacting Janice Hedge:

Email: [janicehedge@btinternet.com](mailto:janicehedge@btinternet.com)

If you would like more details about the project please contact John Hedge (Secretary)

Tel: 01787 311590

Email: [john.hedge@malidg.org.uk](mailto:john.hedge@malidg.org.uk)

## Public Affairs

It has been a period of transition for the Public Affairs team at MDG and our work has expanded into even more areas. Firstly, we have a new member by the name of Jonathan Marriott. Jonathan is bringing many new skills and ideas to the team, particularly in the area of research, writing, translation and event organisation. Dan Price has moved on from co-ordinator to a consultancy role, with Sam Garbett (that's me) taking on the position of co-ordinator in addition to his cultural and music focus. This new dynamic has made the job of raising awareness about Mali and MDG's work there even more rewarding.

One of the most exciting recent developments is the evolving role of our Mali Interest Hub website [www.mali-interest-hub.com](http://www.mali-interest-hub.com). Our key features of news, analysis and ever-popular 'Song of the Week' are still central to the Hub's content, like Jonathan's excellent review of Malian President Ibrahim Keita's first year in office: <http://www.mali-interest-hub.com/?p=4133>. Going forward, it is our aim to use the Hub more successfully to enable organisations engaged in Mali and the UK to connect more easily; to share ideas and facilitate work on shared interests – so watch this space!

Over 2014, the Public Affairs team were at several Malian music gigs to meet music lovers to discuss the current situation in Mali and see if they wanted to learn more about what we at MDG do. After great successes we are continuing this into the New Year starting with the **Songhoy Blues gig on the 2nd of February.**

Finally, a huge milestone this year will be MDGs involvement in an international conference on Mali to be held in London. Our efforts in this regard have been co-ordinated excellently by Jonathan and preparations are going well. The event, lead by the UK's Malian Consulate, will have a range of different government, business and community stakeholders present and is set to be a major boost to UK-Mali relations.



*Sam with two members of the Songhoy Blues Band*



## Finance and Fundraising Group

The last part of the year is usually our busiest time, trying to capitalise on Christmas events and spending, but we were also very active in November so that we managed to raise about £3,800 in the last 3 months of 2014. Many thanks to all of those who contributed by buying things and tickets, cooking, selling, serving, planning, donating their winter fuel allowance, moving the staging at Dorchester Abbey and replacing the choir stalls, good humour and companionship. Happy New Year to you all.

If anyone would like to join the group, has ideas for other ways of raising funds or would like some support to do something themselves, please contact:

Email: [linda.king@malidg.org.uk](mailto:linda.king@malidg.org.uk)

## News from Kader Keita and the children of Pensions à Demain



Kader has been in touch to report the latest news from his project based at the Timsuejohncentre in Commune IV of Bamako.

Kader has been very concerned about Ebola risk to the children and colleagues. PAD instituted a detailed washing and cleaning regime, and adapted activities and menus to reduce risk still further.

The Centre has been running its second intake of street children and over the weeks of its operation the Centre was visited by representatives from the ministries concerned, and also by the local commissioner of Police - this is really important as Police are often the first people to deal with children sleeping on the streets, and awareness of the Centre is therefore very important.

The latest course has gone very well - in 2014 and 15 funding through MDG from the Patsy Wood Trust is enabling a wider range of arts activity to be undertaken, and we are very grateful to the Trust for their ongoing help.

Kader also reports that the covered shelter, which the project has wanted for so long, as a way of having more activities in the open air is now under construction with financial support from a French community organisation called MALIANCE. They have provided all the money for



*Covered shelter under construction*

this project and it is really good news that PAD is now beginning to broaden its funders. MDG, though, remains the principal funder of this important work with some of Mali's most disadvantaged children.

In November there was a sale of the Bogolan work done by the children and this was held at the Malian French Institute.



Kader's project continues to deliver some great child centred work in Bamako, and we need your help in sustaining our support. If you would like to be involved, or would just like more information please contact:

John Hedge (Secretary)

Tel: 01787 311590

email: [john.hedge@malidg.org.uk](mailto:john.hedge@malidg.org.uk)

Website: <http://www.kaderkeita.org>

*We hope you have enjoyed reading our latest newsletter. We work hard at keeping our friends and members informed of our projects and fund raising activities, and with this in mind, our new and improved website is under construction at the moment. However, you can still access our present website where you can read our latest annual report. ([www.malidg.org.uk](http://www.malidg.org.uk)). If you would like to speak directly to one of our committee members then please do not hesitate to contact us directly by phoning Janice Hedge, Communications Group, on 0208 992 2531. Thank you.*