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www.malidg.org.uk

Welcome to our Spring newsletter which brings you the highlights of what we have been up to in the dark days of winter. The start of the year saw us galvanised into action by award of the Comic Relief grant for Yanfolila's Health Insurance Scheme. Much progress has been made in this first phase of the project, details of which follow, alongside an account of Sue Upton's visit to Mali and to Yanfolila to help with the setting up.

Meanwhile other work and projects continue. We have just received the latest report from Kader Keita's project 'Pensions à Demain' and we will put this up on our website malidg.org.uk for you all to see; fundraising events have been happening and there is a full programme stretching into the summer, thanks to Linda King and her events volunteers; Sam Garbett continues to astonish by turning out 'Song of the Week' like clockwork.

We decided not to visit Mali in February because of continuing concerns about the security situation but are planning instead to bring delegates from Jeunesse et Développement here to the UK. This will give us the opportunity to renew our personal links and finalise agreements about our support to J&D over the next three years.

I hope you enjoy reading about our work and I want to say thanks to all of you who so steadfastly support our work.

Andy Benson, Chair

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The year is passing quickly and it will soon be that time to hold MDG's Annual General Meeting. As in recent years the meeting will be held at Merton College Recreation Ground

11am 4th September 2016

**Merton College Recreation Ground
Manor Road (behind St Catherine's College)
Oxford**



Following the AGM there will be a charity cricket match between Bank of Montreal and MDG which is usually a great fund raiser for MDG, so please do come along.

Normally there is a guest speaker at the meeting to talk about interesting developments in Mali. This year the committee have decided to keep the meeting to the bare bones and not invite a speaker on that day. This is because the committee is planning to hold a discussion day for the committee and members to talk about how they see MDG developing over the next few years. This, the committee feels, will give the opportunity not only to invite guest speakers, but also for everyone to give their thoughts on the future for MDG particularly after completion of the Comic Relief project.

Mali visit Spring 2016

I went to Mali for two weeks in March mainly to help J&D to get the Comic Relief project up and running. Comic Relief is providing three year's funding for J&D's work with the community run Mutual Health Insurance scheme in Yanfolila, by which time the scheme should be self-supporting. I was there to meet the new project team and attend the launch of the base line study which is designed to fix the starting point for the indicators that will measure project progress.



Base line study team

The team of six field workers is led by Fatoumata Diakite. They are working in 36 villages from their new office in Yanfolila, in collaboration with six community health centres and local government services. The scheme aims to have 10,000 paid up members, who will benefit from reduced fees for health care and prescriptions. The hope is that a viable working model can eventually be duplicated in neighbouring districts. The challenge is to ensure that the scheme is accessible to poor families, works effectively and can run independently at the end of three years. During my 5 days in Yanfolila we prepared for the base line study, including visits to villages to test the tools to collect the required information. The project team, plus local representatives, then spent three weeks implementing the study in the 36 villages, which also served to inform the population that the "Mutuelle" is a going concern.



Bogolan from Kader's centre

Back in Bamako I made several visits to Kader Keita's centre for children living on the streets (Pensions à Demain). Here, the children learn bogolan fabric design, dance, theatre and basic literacy over a three month period, after which they move on to various activities, some returning to their families and others continuing to attend the centre. I brought back a collection of bogolan fabric to sell to support the centre. Bogolan is created using the iron-rich mud of the river Niger to draw designs on cloth died with leaves from the Galama tree. The children start out using stencils made from old medical X-rays, given away by hospitals in Mali. However a charge is now being made – so if anyone knows of a source of free X-rays I would be happy to take them to Mali later in the year. Kader was excited about several new partnerships, one with a national mobile phone company and another with Sami-Social, a larger organisation working with street children in Bamako. These will complement ongoing collaboration with the local council, several French organisations and MDG, with the aim of more diversified funding so that MDG does not continue to bear the major funding responsibility in the long term.

I was also in Bamako for J&D's Annual General Meeting, where Nouhoum Haidara was confirmed as Director, Danseni Koné became president and a number of new appointments were made to the management committee, including Violet Diallo as general secretary. A decision was made to use some financial reserves to start building J&D's new office on land purchased over several years. The new office will save on rent and utilities in the long term and will, in time, incorporate a local youth centre. The most notable aspect of the AGM was its air of positive enthusiasm in contrast to several years of crisis in the face of diminishing resources. With Comic Relief funding underway and several other new projects in the pipe line, J&D is starting to talk about "post crisis" and moving forward into a new phase. MDG has played a major role in this through its ongoing financial support and encouragement and not least, through its role in enabling the Comic Relief partnership. J&D members have also committed considerable personal time and effort to ensure the effectiveness of the organisation.

While the overall political and security situation in Mali remains precarious, life goes on and Malians continue to cope with whatever life throws at them. There is little faith in politicians, but a deeply held belief in living together, mutual support and love of life, plus unfailing optimism that, in-sha'allah, things will get better.

Sue Upton (supton2005@yahoo.co.uk for any X-ray donations!)

Sue Upton

Public Affairs

In February, we were grateful attendees at a special screening of the fantastic film *'They Will Have to Kill Us First'* directed by Johanna Schwartz. The feature-length documentary, with an original Malian soundtrack, follows different musicians in the wake of the 2012 jihadist capture of an area of Mali the size of the UK and France combined. Music was subsequently banned as part of a violent imposition of a radical and corrupted interpretation of Sharia Law. As many of you will know, music is an essential means of communication in Mali. The film tracks the profound effect this ban had on Malian people amidst the conflict. Rather than lay down their instruments, Mali's musicians fought back. MDG is proud to help spread the message and our new film club will be organising a screening near Oxford soon.

One of the stars of the film was Songhoy Blues, whose story is so strongly linked to the big-break they got in the UK where they quickly gathered a huge fan following. In the band's own words MDG's newest volunteering recruit – Joseph Glover – was their "first fan" and it was great to catch up with them and him in March when the band stopped off in London before their recent US tour. The photo below, shows Joseph, a qualified doctor, jamming with Songhoy Blues drummer Nathaniel Dembele and bassist Oumar Touré. Oumar revealed in a conversation with us about MDG's work that he had studied Irrigation and Agricultural Management at University. We were obviously very impressed, but not surprised; the band repeatedly shows in their music and in interview that they are a group of very intelligent young people. He was very interested MDG's flood barrier construction projects in the villages of Mafele and Soromba and was knowledgeable about the important impacts that these would be having on their communities. This made for fantastic, insightful conversation and a welcome endorsement of our work!

Joseph has got straight on with showing the tremendous value he brings to the charity. In addition to his passion for Malian culture and his generous nature, he has medical expertise, experience of working in the developing world and a good understanding of French. Together, these skills make him a great asset to both the Public Affairs Group and Project Group, especially in helping oversee the 'Mutuelle' health project. Bienvenue Joseph!

Sam Garbett



Fundraising Group

News of the successful Comic Relief bid is of course pretty amazing, but all of the money goes on one huge project that otherwise would have folded, and that due to its size, we could not have funded otherwise. So our usual fundraising must continue if we are to keep supporting the kinds of smaller schemes and village groups that we have always done. We have so many energetic and resourceful people who enjoy themselves whilst they work hard to raise money for us. One of the latest successes was a quiz in Stadhampton which made over £1000. It was a great night out with some wonderful food cooked and served by the MDG Catering Corps. You can taste their cakes at Dorchester Abbey Tea Rooms (OX10 7HH) on Sat 30th April and Sat Jun 11th both from 2.30 - 5.00. MDG will get the profits from both openings.

We have our first husband and wife team undertaking Ride London 100 on our behalf on 31st July this year. Liz and Al Sim are not regular cyclists but are putting in some serious training for this event. If you would like to sponsor them, go to our website www.malidg.com or their page at www.maligiving.com/sims. They have also very generously offered the use of their apartment near Morzine for a week. The Tour de France passes nearby this year. Further details about how this will be auctioned will be sent by email shortly.

And finally, if you fancy a day out in Buckinghamshire on either 6th or 7th August (or both!) and would like to see some steam engines, we'd be glad of volunteer car park attendants for the Bucks Steam Rally. Those who have done it before enjoy it (and are coming back for more!) and we receive a donation from the event organisers.

Please contact linda.king@malidg.org.uk

Linda King

Project Group

We have received the annual report for Pensons à Demain. The project continues to provide an important and vital service for disenfranchised young people living on the streets of Bamako. During the year 2015-2016 the project provided training in literacy and bogolan art. At the TimJohnSue centre young people have also engaged in other activities, including the building of musical instruments, dance and choreography. The project has also been able to accommodate 55 young people during the year.

Luke Hedge

Finance

In the financial year ended 31st March 2016 our regular income amounted to approximately £33,200. This was lower than the same period in the previous year. However, higher revenue was received from fund raising activities. We were able to fulfil our financial commitments to meet the ongoing needs of our partners in Mali.

The successful Comic Relief bid meant we received our first infusion of £88,543, of which £59,964 was sent to J & D, in January 2016, to get the project underway. Subject to compliance with Comic Relief's terms and conditions, an undertaking exists to transfer a total of £365,943 with the remaining £277,400 to be distributed over coming years up to a final payment date of 1st February 2019. Comic Relief funds are segregated in a separate bank account.

With regard to the normal activities of MDG and future funding requirements, the new Work Plan covering the next three years will determine this. MDG and partners are currently working on this Plan taking account of funding needs and priorities.

David Hedge, Treasurer

London Marathon on 24th April

Thank you for the kindness and generosity in sponsoring me in the 2016 London Marathon, where I was number 4317. I am a relative veteran at marathon running, focussed more on finishing and participating than chasing a personal best. Most of the runners in the London Marathon seem to have much the same attitude. The majority of the runners were running for charity and in comparison with the other marathons I have ran, there is much more of a collective spirit in London. The variety of costumes was a constant source of entertainment and for much of the race I was pacing myself with a man dressed in a full gorilla suit. I overtook and was overtaken by dinosaurs, traffic cones, cats, dogs, bears, a man running as Jesus on the cross for Medicins sans Frontiers and groups running in canoes, a mock fire engine and Viking long ships. Though I don't particularly have a strong competitive spirit I did speed up quite a lot over the last kilometre or so with the sole aim of preventing a full size Sponge Bob square pants featuring in my finish line photo.

The start, at Blackheath, was extremely cold and it was really good to set off from the blue zone and warm up. In my mind I had split the marathon into four parts. The first part through Greenwich ending at the Cutty Sark, the next through Rotherhithe, Bermondsey and over Tower Bridge, the third through Canary Wharf and the final part to the finish line. The first two parts were relatively easy and enjoyable. The third part was ok, but around mile 17 I felt exhausted and this feeling of exhaustion lasted for 4 miles or so. This is where the crowd really become important. Providing sustaining jelly babies and encouragement they really help you to get through the difficult bits. "Dig deep

4317" someone from the crowd shouted and this was the point that everything felt better and I got my energy back. The last section was tiring and sore, but I was buoyed by the crowd and by the sense of solidarity and camaraderie with the other runners. When I got to the end I was met by an excited official telling me that former Prime Minister John Major was watching two metres to my right. It turned out to be the real person, rather than a runner in a "Major" costume.

At the end there were many tears and quite a lot of emotion from many people. Though I was relieved to have finished the race, the sense of being part of something incredible largely remained. The London marathon is, I understand, the biggest fundraising event in the world and the feeling was very powerful and humbling.

I am so grateful for the kindness and generosity of MDG members. The money donated makes a significant contribution to the work undertaken by our partners J&D and PAD and to the people of Mali. Bamako has previously held full marathons events (the last, I understand, in 2014) and though I doubt I will ever participate in this, I am encouraged that this has been possible in recent years. The work of PAD and J&D strengthens and promotes solidarity amongst the peoples of Mali and with the support of MDG members great things can be achieved. Thank you for your support.

Luke Hedge

