



A BIG THANKYOU!

We wrote to all members in the New Year asking for help with our appeal to rescue the Yanfolila Mutuelle - the vital health scheme, which enables people in 35 villages to access health care and also delivers prevention work on Ebola and Malaria. The response has been magnificent. So far we have raised over £15,000.

A heartfelt thank you, on behalf of Tiori Diarra, the Project Manager from J&D, Mariam Diallo, the President of the Mutuelle, and everyone involved in the Yanfolila work. We still need more donations, so if you have not given yet, it's not too late!



Tiori Diarra, Project Manager



Mariam Diallo, President



The Mutuelle committee and the village council in Goulala village

Later in this issue, John Hedge provides an update of the Mutuelle's work for the months of January to March, and we will have further regular reports as the year goes on. The plan is that the Mutuelle becomes self sufficient by the end of 2015, but we want to support the longer - term ambition to ramp up the project's wider health prevention work, especially in relation to Malaria and the continuing threat from Ebola. To fund this, in conjunction with J&D, we are designing a three year project (2016-18). In the first instance we are applying to Comic Relief for funding for this work.

Big change at J&D



The big news at J&D is the departure of 'Kone' (Mamadou Kone) as Director. Kone, who with his friend and colleague 'Madou' (Mahamadou Diarra) – set up Jeunesse et Développement many years ago when they returned, as young men, from their education in Russia. Determined to make a difference, they built J&D into a vibrant and effective home-grown 'non-governmental organisation (NGO)'. In a country with few public services NGOs like J&D are key players in development work. Under Kone's wise leadership, J&D has helped to improve the lives of thousands of people in local communities within Bamako and in the South West of Mali. It is no mean feat to lead and manage an organisation like J&D in a country where meeting people's basic needs are a constant struggle and the resources available never sufficient. Kone's skills have steered J&D through good times and bad, and his commitment has been exemplary. We will miss him greatly but wish him every success in his future.

In his place as Director we welcome 'Nou' (Nouhoun Haidara). No stranger to J&D – he has worked within the organisation as Finance Director for many years – Nou comes into post at a challenging time for the organisation and for development support groups generally. From all at MDG we welcome him to his new position and very much look forward to working closely with him.

Andy Benson, Chair

NEWS ABOUT THE MUTUELLE AND AN UPDATE FROM THE FRONT LINE

This update gives the latest news for the months of January to March, and we will have further regular reports as the year goes on. The plan is that the Mutuelle is self sufficient by the end of 2015, but to support its longer - term ambition to do wider prevention work we are also bidding, with J&D for funding from Comic Relief for a 3 year project between 2016 -18.

Responding to the Crisis

The Mutuelle did face major problems last year - to do with problems with the availability of medicines, and a resultant lack of confidence from members, which led to people dropping out or not paying subscriptions.

Over 100 people came to a General Assembly to discuss with the Mutuelle Council how to put things right. Every village was represented. They heard that receipts for last year were 5,771,560 CFA (about £7,700) and outgoings 6,112,025 CFA (about £8,150) so there was a deficit of 340,465 CFA (about £454.00) This may not seem huge in our terms but it meant the Mutuelle had no reserves, and if faced with an epidemic with a big increase in demand, it would not have been able to deliver the benefits members had paid for - indeed for a time benefits were suspended, and this was a major cause of the big drop in confidence which threatened the whole scheme.

The Assembly felt that two main things needed to happen:

- A reduced rate of reimbursement to members of their prescription costs – down from 75% to 70%, and an increased subscription rate of 6,000 CFA.
- A big campaign to improve confidence in the Mutuelle.

The committee later decided that as part of rewarding and motivating members who had kept up to date through the interruption of services they would be given a payment break for an equivalent period this year, and all membership was extended for a further year, so that although a high proportion remain in arrears, total membership is now over 3,000, with 21 new members in the early part of 2015.

The Action Plan

Tiori Diarra and the MDG link worker Tanty Samake, who is now based in Yanfolila helped the Committee develop an action plan of priorities for the first 3 months of the year.

Reinvigorating the village committees.

These are crucial to the Mutuelle having a high level of visibility and the capacity to follow up subscriptions more effectively. Tiori Diarra reports that 11 villages have now got the new model in place and the remaining 24 will be worked with as soon as possible. As you will see from the photo above, Mariam Diallo, the President has been fully involved in this work.



Mariam Diallo, President of the Mutuelle explaining the role of the committee to local people

Promotional work and awareness raising campaign

The plan is to work with and through the Yanfolila Mairie, or Council Offices, and through the Mango industry's Centre for Economic and Agricultural development (CEDIAM). They also plan to involve the internationally known Malian singer Oumou Sangare, known as the Songbird of Was-salou, which should be very exciting. Also highly appropriate for the Mutuelle which was started by women and is largely managed by women. Oumou Sangare began singing as a child to raise money for her mother and family after her father left them.



Oumare Sangare

Raising more income

The plan is to buy a grain-grinding mill whose revenues can be used to support people who have short term difficulty in finding subscriptions, but will also be used to meet administrative costs and hopefully in time help build a permanent centre for the Mutuelle. J&D are very experienced at setting this kind of project up - indeed MDG has funded most of the mills which women's groups have been using in the area up to now.

Links with the Health District

Monthly meetings have been set up between the health district and the management of the Mutuelle, to check out the quality of services and monitor progress.

Prevention work

Work has already been going on for some time in response to the recent Ebola crisis. Tiori Diarra reports that people have been trained from each village, using material from the Red Cross and UNICEF. The material is based around 10 short modules - so far 1083 people have taken part - mostly women. Attendance has been very good, with 97% of people taking part in at least 7 of the 10 sessions. .



Prevention work in response to the Ebola crisis

Looking ahead

There is a long way to go. As Tiori Diarra makes clear in his report they are at a stage where a new plan is being applied, with new learning and a great deal of change, so things remain fragile, not only financially, but in rebuilding the Mutuelle's reputation. Nonetheless a start has been made and hopefully things will continue to move in the right direction.

MDG's support is central to this recovery plan and it would not have been possible without your help. You have had a direct involvement in making all these activities happen and Tiori and Tanty send their heartfelt thanks. We will be reporting in detail again in the next newsletter.

John Hedge, Secretary

Gift Aid

We are happy to confirm that, following receipt of a £3,446.84 tax refund for the year ending 31 August 2014, another submission to HMRC is being made for the remaining 7 months of the 2014/15 financial year to 31 March 2015. MDG's latest claim will exceed £2,850 and so the value of Gift Aid refunds remains a highly valuable source of income for us. This assisted overall revenue to rise about 10% for the latest financial year.

Thank you for your generosity and, for Gift Aid record purposes, please tell us if a donor ceases to become a tax payer.

David Hedge, Treasurer

Finance and Fundraising Group

The group has been busy with various activities since the last newsletter trying to supplement your standing orders and kind donations to fund the health Mutuelle. We held a very successful quiz in South Oxfordshire which raised around £1000. Our band of caterers has also been asked to provide food for a variety of events and celebrations. People like the idea of home cooked food and benefitting a charity when they pay for it. We have now catered for a wedding, a funeral, a 50th, 70th and 80th birthday, a buffet for the Rotary Club and are booked to do a Golden Wedding party.

We will also be taking over the tea rooms in Dorchester Abbey (Oxon) on Sunday 14th June from 2.30 - 5.00 if you would like to support us by eating cake and drinking tea!

We are always looking for help either regularly or one off. Dates coming up are putting away the staging at Dorchester Abbey on Sat 20th June and car parking duties at a steam rally in Bucks on 1st and 2nd Aug which includes free entry to the rally. If you think you might be interested, or would like some support in holding your own fundraising event, please contact linda.king@malidg.org.uk

We also have some people making big individual efforts to raise money for us. Jess Garbett is taking part in an open water swimming event on 20th June, the Great East Swim. On her birthday she's swimming 1 mile in Alton Water, Ipswich. She could do with both cheering support on the day and financial support which you can do at <https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/jessgarbett> where you can also see some pretty cool photos of her.

Then my own little brothers (62 and 58 respectively) are cycling together on Aug 2nd for 100 miles from the Olympic Park in London to take part in Ride London 100, along with thousands of others. However they will be the only cyclists hoping to raise money for the Mali Development Group

They do not venture that far south very often, so they are looking for encouragement at www.maligiving.com/steve and www.maligiving.com/pete.

Linda King, Fundraising



Pete



Steve

Project Group Update

Much of the current focus of the project group is on accessing funding for the Health Mutuelle, details of which are described elsewhere. Other projects supported through MDG continue to focus on core aims of supporting community development, providing disenfranchised young people with opportunities to learn and develop and promoting dialogue between communities in Mali and the UK.

These are described briefly as follows, though this is not an exhaustive list.

Second Step Projects:

MDG continues to support a number of grass roots projects in the south of Mali, with a particular focus on women's groups to develop commercial activities, including market gardens. MDG has previously supported these groups by obtaining grain mills, which save women a large amount of time that can be devoted to commercial activities supporting development of their communities. A legacy of this continues to be greater levels of participation in education amongst children and a number of these projects have been able to raise a significant amount of income to support further community development.

Pensons à Demain:

MDG continues to fund the core costs for Pensons à Demain, a Bamako based charity working with young people in extreme difficulty, most notably homeless children previously living on the streets of Bamako. Well respected by the Malian Government, which makes a contribution by paying the electricity and water bills for the project, the focus is on training young people in arts and on building resilience. The project sits under the tutelage of Kader Keita, an internationally respected artist and master of the Malian art of Bogolan painting. The project is currently expanding and a new building is being constructed, providing further education and studio space.



Kader Keita

Twinning of Sudbury/Yanfolila:

MDG has a history of linking schools going back some 15 years. Most recently as part of the twinning between Sudbury, in Suffolk, and Yanfolila, started by Rob Spivey in his mayoral year, a link has been started between the Lycée in Yanfolila and Thomas Gainsborough School at Great Cornard. Professor Kevin Macdonald of University College London, who is an international authority on Malian archaeology and history recently gave a talk to over 200 students at the school, and also spoke on Malian history at Sudbury Library.



Further activities to highlight Malian culture are planned in the coming months, including a bogolan workshop led by MDG member, Tim Öelman.

Update on Building/Infrastructure Projects:

A previous focus of MDG has been on supporting building and infrastructure projects for local communities. Though this is not the current focus of our work, it has been inspiring to see how these have further been developed by local communities over the last year. A school funded by MDG for examples has subsequently increased in size to support the education of increasing numbers of young people. In 2012/2013 MDG supported the building of two hospital maternity units in Kolondieba, leading to better care and lower rates of child mortality. In 2014, 336 children were born in these units.

There are many other examples that demonstrate how MDG supports the establishment of projects in Mali, which are then managed and further developed by local communities for the benefit of all.

These projects are identified and managed by our partner agency in Mali, Jeunesse et Développement, a long established Mali based organisation.

Luke Hedge, Project Group