

**We're
in this
together**

**Mali
Development
Group
Annual Report
2021**





Mali Development Group
Charity number: 1088140

Linda King (Chair)
Judith Hartley (Secretary)
David Hedge (Treasurer)

Other committee members:

John Hedge,
Janice Hedge,
Luke Hedge
Sue Upton (co-opted)
Wilfred Willey

Cover: 'We are all in this together'
Andrea Hewes

I came up with the idea while away in Wales. I spent a lot of time by and in the river, sketching and just being in it! It seems to me that the pandemic has highlighted like never before how we are all interconnected and that the river is a metaphor for Life with all of us floating around precariously in boats. Hence the pirogue taken from the MDG logo and the river taken from an image by Kader Keita. Hope it's not too esoteric! That's what happens when you spend time in a river!

If you would like to help

MDG cheques should be payable to
Mali Development Group and sent to:

The Treasurer

26, Emanuel Avenue, London, W3 6JJ

Please ensure that you give us your name and address together with a statement that you want us to treat this and any other donations you make as Gift Aid donations and that you currently pay sufficient Income Tax and/or Capital gains Tax to cover the amounts given.

You can also access donation forms and membership forms on our web site:

www.malidg.org.uk

This also gives details of Standing Order arrangements – a great way to help us.

You can also now text a donation of £2, £5 or £10 by texting Mali22 to 70070, for example, Mali22 £5.

A message from John Hedge

Welcome to our 2021 Annual Report. The theme this year is that 'we are all in this together'. It is certainly a fact of modern life that we are all affected by climate change, by pandemic and by the consequences of political instability and terrorism. With lightning-fast communication and an array of mass media we can see and hear the noise, shock and grieving from any quarter of the world. It has certainly become a familiar idea that all nations must be involved in addressing these problems, and especially the wealthier countries of the developed world who consume a disproportionate amount of all resources and contribute massively to the climate emergency.

So are we 'in this together'? Not really. If we take the pandemic first it is certainly fair to say that Mali's own figures suggest a surprisingly low infection and death rate. This may well be due to the unreliability of data and certainly merits more attention than it has had. It is certainly not to do with massive vaccination. At the time of writing Mali had given 260,000 doses of vaccine, just over 86,000 were fully vaccinated amounting to 0.4% of the population against a worldwide 24.1%.

The pandemic's economic effect has been compounded by Mali's political crisis leading to recession. Real GDP is estimated to have contracted by 2% in 2020, reflecting the decline in global demand, supply challenges, and domestic restrictions. This situation is compounded by the decline in cotton production and the poor performance of the agricultural sector, factors that are exacerbating poverty, particularly in rural areas. Yet wealthier countries, preoccupied with their own recovery priorities have chosen this period to cut back their development funding massively reducing the capacity of NGOs to fund work in the poorest countries. Mali is highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, and this is

compounded by high population growth, diminished resilience and violent conflicts. Mali is forecast to become hotter with more erratic rainfall, impacting seasonal regularity and increasing the risk of droughts and floods. Moreover, conflict, political instability and weak government institutions undermine effective adaptation to climate change. In a country where 80% of livelihoods depend on agriculture the consequences of climate change are incredibly serious.

So, 'we are in it together' may be true in theory, but it will not feel like that in Mali or any of the other poorest countries of our world. Through all this charities, great and small, have a duty to keep going, persevere, and do their best to argue for a more inclusive and outward facing approach. Small charities like MDG matter especially, because they are based on relationships and the importance of solidarity. It has certainly been another tough year for MDG. We have continued to bid for funding to grant making bodies but many more organisations are now chasing fewer funds, and our activities have been massively reduced. Yet we have been able to meet our commitments to the core funding of our two partners J&D and PAD. That is due to the enormous generosity of our members. At a difficult time in your own lives, you have given us a lifeline. Your donations, standing orders, and willingness to find some extra money to keep us going have made our survival possible, and we are regularly told by Kader Keita and Tanty Samake how much that has mattered to the work they do. We have now known both of them for over 20 years, and through their organisations a huge amount has been accomplished. Solidarity and friendship matter so much at times like this, and with your help we can continue and hopefully develop our work into the future.



A message from John Hedge

(Cont'd)



Fatoumata Diawarra



Kader presents certificate to PAD graduate



Young mothers - students on PAD's sewing and tailoring course

There have been several unexpected bonuses as well. We have been receiving a year's donated royalties in quarterly instalments via Universal Music for a track on an album by Disclosure which features Fatoumata Diawarra. At a very tight time for all charities this contribution has been really valuable, together with generous sums from several trusts and grant making charities who have been regular supporters over the years.

Kader Keita and PAD have had a very effective year operating at full capacity to rescue and rehabilitate some of Mali's poorest children. The courses for girls are now well established and although the theatre troupe which MDG supported to help Kader promote awareness of child protection issues has been in abeyance because of COVID it is hoped that this work can begin again soon. Kader himself had a nasty road accident, and his trusty three-wheel motorbike was wrecked. We were able to help get him back in the road and he is now fully recovered. That kind of one-off payment can sometimes make all the difference and as a small and flexible charity MDG has always tried to respond in this type of crisis. Kader now wishes to develop the service to provide more follow up work with children who leave the project after their stay, and this will certainly help develop evidence of the impact of PAD's work. Sue Upton is working on bid writing to secure the money to do this, and we are hopeful that we can make it possible.

It has been another tough year for J&D. As a Malian NGO they have always worked in partnership with a number of international donors from different countries. Those projects have gradually come to an end and with the decline in development funding and a general retrenchment it is proving hard to find now funded programmes. This has led to massive cutbacks in staffing and at the moment Tanty Samake, our link worker is the only funded worker, though she is supported

by Madou Diarra, another old friend and founder member of J&D. As a respected international development consultant Madou is well placed to give that support. Some of the Second Step projects have been operating, and we are well aware of the need for more once we can find sufficient money to resume the programme. For now, maintaining Tanty's post is our top priority, though recently we have also been able to help with equipment for the Youth Centre which is still planned as part of the community provision within J&D's headquarters building. We are in regular contact, and it is also good to hear that Mamadou Kone, the former Director with whom we worked for so many years has now re-joined the J&D council. We hear fairly regularly from Tanty about the longer-term sustainability and impact of earlier projects. Generally, and with Tanty's long term encouragement they have continued to do well and make an impact. We have also heard about the Mutuelle health insurance programme in Yanfolila, which despite all the difficulties has managed to survive and we hope that they can grow and thrive in the future. As a mark of gratitude for the support they provided as the Mutuelle became self-sufficient the committee named the meeting room in their new Headquarters after Andy Benson our former chair. The room has a picture of him and of Judith Hartley and Michelle Chadwick who worked with Andy at a critical time in the Mutuelle's development.

MDG has always relied heavily on the skills and talents of its members, and many of them have been supporting us since we began- Andrea Hewes continues to produce these reports and our newsletters and it is a major contribution to our ability to stay in touch with members and funders. In the last year three of those contributors have sadly died. Earlier this year Heather Bolitho who helped with fundraising as well as visiting Mali in her 70s. More recently Martin Freeth, the film maker, who went to Mali and made a pro-

A message from Wilfred Willey

motional film for us, and Trevor Cowlett, who donated the costs of a small ambulance as well as running musical events for us in Kennington. We remember their commitment and enthusiasm, which was inspiring.

The committee has operated online throughout the year. Judith Hartley as Secretary has strengthened our financial planning; David Hedge has continued to serve as Treasurer and has been there since Day 1; Janice hedge, as communications secretary has enabled us to keep contact with members throughout the year; Wilfred Willey has played an important role in the past year keeping us all in touch with political and economic realities in Mali; Sue Upton has continued to give us direct contact with both our partners and has helped us navigate the development issues and dilemmas. Luke Hedge is standing down this year after a prolonged period on the committee and we are grateful for all his efforts, including participation as a delegate on several Mali visits. Linda King has continued to lead our fundraising efforts, though sadly little has been possible in the past year. As Covid 19 restrictions have eased she and her team are now resuming their catering- bookings are now coming in and if you have a special 'do' or party coming up do think about asking the MDG Catering Corps to help. They offer a terrific service.

Thank you to all our supporters. Each of you should know that whatever the wider issues of the pandemic and climate emergency- all those huge challenges- there are people and partners in Mali who know that you are trying to make that ideal of being 'in it together' actually mean something on a human scale.

Mali in 2021 - Politics, Pandemic and Basketball.

The year 2021 has been quite eventful in Mali. Amidst a difficult social and political situation and a precarious security environment, the country found itself in the limelight again in May 2021, all down to another coup. Yes, another change of head of state without elections, the second one in nine months! Although this time, it was an internal re-adjustment, not a putsch. The vice-president Col. Assimi Goïta deposed the transitional government led by President Bah N'Daw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouane, accusing them of not consulting him before a cabinet reshuffle that would have seen two of his close colleagues and fellow officers - the Defence and Security ministers - replaced. We remember that back in August 2020, mass street protests had led to the military overthrowing the elected president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in a bloodless coup. A transitional government was put in place at the time but came under a lot of criticism from the public, political, religious and union leaders.

On the 7th of June, Col. Goïta was sworn in and replaced Bah N'Daw as the new interim president. Since then a new, more inclusive government has been appointed and things seem to be moving forward slowly but surely. Talks with the teachers' unions that had stalled under previous governments have resumed recently; several corruption cases have been transferred to the Prosecutor's Office for trial and more importantly the military are fighting the jihadists groups on the ground. There have been some reports recently of attacks on villages and on military convoys in the centre of Mali. The government forces are also fighting back and with better equipment, winning several battles with the terrorists. But this is seldom reported on, as it does not sell well in the mainstream media. The UK deployed 300 or so troops in June to assist the UN and French "Barkhane" forces

fight terrorists further up in the Northern regions.

The COVID pandemic still lurks in the background, but the situation is more or less stable according to the official reports. There is no popular craze for the vaccine, so the uptake is low as a result. The restrictive measures of last year (semi-lockdown, curfew, mandatory masks in public places) fizzled out. In a country whose economy is mainly based on the informal sector and where everything happens outdoors, getting people to stay at home for any prolonged period of time is quite frankly suicidal. There are talks of an imminent and more violent wave, fuelled by the now famous Delta variant, sweeping through Mali and its neighbours. However, the alarm bells have not been ringing yet and Malians seem to go on about their business as usual, knowing that previous predictions of a hecatomb across Africa due to COVID-19 by the WHO did not materialise. Thank goodness!

I'm glad to say that it is not all doom and gloom in Mali, despite the serious challenges it has had in recent years and the ones it will face in a near future. The country is still standing and people, like myself, keep faith and believe in a brighter future for Mali. And why not?

In July and August 2021 the Malian male and female youth basketball teams took part in the World Cup and African Cup of Nations in the U19 and U16 categories respectively. The U19 boys finished the competition in 13th position while the girls finished 4th out of 16 national teams.



Malian female youth basketball team

A message from Linda King

Elsewhere, the U16 teams did better in the African Cup of Nations. The girls beat the host nation Egypt in the final to take the continental crown for the 7th time in a row, while the boys narrowly lost to the same Egypt (83-81) in the final to finish runners-up!

This may seem insignificant news, but it means a lot to a great many Malians who are used to seeing a lot of negative news about their country in mainstream news sites and social media. These kind of events contribute to brightening up a sky that's otherwise darkened by a lot of issues over which they have no control but which affects their lives nonetheless. They too aspire to a better life.



Pam and Wendy selling cakes in Summertown, Oxford recently

Babs in Lockdown

For some years I've been coordinating some of our efforts at fundraising. In last year's Annual Report, I gave an account of the many and varied things that we have done to bring money into MDG. In more recent years these have tended to involve cooking or catering of some kind. A few years ago, we helped serve and clear up for a wedding and became known as the Babses. This was because the guests wanted to call us by name and so we decided to all be called the same thing, Babs, so it would be easy for them to remember! She was a character in Acorn Antiques!

We had been building up a reputation in South Oxfordshire for our catering and help and so at the start of 2020, we had a number of activities in our diary, some of which, like the Ramblers Christmas lunch, a 100th birthday party and a 50th wedding anniversary would have brought in sizeable amounts of money. Despite several of the events being rearranged, they were all eventually cancelled and the sale room where we had been selling bacon rolls and hot drinks on a monthly basis did all their auctions on line. The Burns Night that we catered for in early 2020 was so successful we were booked immediately for 2021, but unfortunately that didn't happen.

More recently things are slowly getting going again. A local garden where we are the supplier of teas and cakes has had some visits booked, so we have been in business again there. We are booked for the Ramblers Christmas lunch and are optimistic that more things will come. The Babses always enjoy meeting up for our events and of course have to taste the cakes etc in order to ensure they're up to par!

A message from Sue and Tony Sloggit



Our introduction to MDG was at the lunch party in John and Gill Hedge's garden in Didcot twenty years ago at which the Group was founded, and so we have been involved right from the start. John's enthusiasm was both convincing and effective, and in the early years Sue was a committee member. We both have happy memories of meetings and parties at the Hedges' and the Kings', where we met Kone and other visitors from Mali and learnt more about the country, its people and its problems, as well as hearing fascinating accounts of members' visits there.

An additional reason for our initial interest and our ongoing support is the fact that Sue was born and brought up in Africa, and Tony had made several extended visits there, so we were always aware of some of the issues facing African countries. Those issues are as great or greater now than when MDG was founded, and given such factors as the reduction in government overseas aid that we have just seen, it is all the more important to maintain the contributions of charities such as ours, both to provide much needed, if modest, support and to show nations such as Mali that they are not forgotten by all in the West.

Tony has played for several years in the annual cricket match between MDG and the Bank of Montreal, and when the passing of time made this too challenging, switched to umpiring the match, which he still does. Sue meanwhile has got fully involved with Linda's Catering Corps, and has provided both food and service at many events. (Tony has occasionally been allowed to attend to serve the drinks!). We will continue to support MDG in any way possible, and wish the Group every success in the future.

Financial Report

David Hedge

Financial Report for year ended 31st March 2021

As a volunteer based charity, MDG has received approximately £1.3 million since its inception in 2001. This includes funding for the regular activities of our partners in Mali as well as a limited number of projects.

The largest project was funded by grant monies received from Comic Relief (CR) for a health initiative developed by J&D in southern Mali. Overall, CR funding for the project amounted to £365,943, with MDG acting in a liaison role between CR and J&D. As projected in the last Annual Report, MDG did not receive any such funds in the latest financial year as we have concluded involvement with the Comic Relief (CR) sponsored Community Health Insurance Scheme.

The charity has remained in regulatory compliance. An Independent Examiner provided a satisfactory financial overview.

Income:

Gross income for fiscal 2020/21 was £37,562 and this was slightly lower than in the prior year due to the absence of CR funding following conclusion of the project. Donations increased and MDG's financial position remained sound with reliable standing order income that currently equates to £500 per month (£6,000 annually). Also, there were generous donations received from a diverse range of Members and other stakeholders including Just Trust (£3,500), Migulay Prewell Trust (£1,800), Sarah Buxton (£5,000), Universal Music (about £6,000), Birchwood Hall Community (£750), Tim Hewes (£500) and Dr Hilary Wise (£900).

It should come as no surprise to report that fund raising activities remained difficult in 2020/21 due to the restrictions of COVID19. Given the importance of this valuable and diversified source of revenue in recent years, MDG will concentrate on

reinstating fund raising activities that have been very effectively managed by Linda King.

Additionally, the sum of £2,147 was received from HMRC in respect of a Gift Aid refund and another claim will be processed at the financial year-end.

We thank all individual, organisational and trust donors for their help in providing continued commitment. This provides assistance in underpinning our work and gives a strong foundation for our own fundraising activities.

Expenditure:

In the latest year, annual outgoings were mainly comprised of quarterly Malian transfers (totalling £42,225) to meet agreed funding needs of our partners, J&D and Association Culturelle Pensons A Demain (PAD).

MDG's general overheads were modest in conformity with the voluntary nature of the charity and regular quarterly transfers to J&D and PAD are made within all our agreed requirements. For monitoring purposes, MDG receives progress reports from our partners in Mali and this enables funding priorities to be adjusted, as applicable.

The Current Financial Year (2021/22)

Income:

The income raised during the initial five months of the current fiscal year has continued to be restrained by the negative impact of the current environment. MDG recorded total income of £5,350. During this period, the largest individual item was for £1,817 from Universal Music for a royalty contribution and the bulk of the remainder came from standing orders.

Gift Aid tax:

A claim is being prepared and this is expected to provide a refund comparable to that previously received.

Core outgoings:

These continued to be primarily for regular PAD quarterly transfers (£3,500) and J&D remittances (£10,620) in line with planned requirements including any identified projects. We continue to work closely with partners, and recognise that our on-going support is important in achieving their agreed priorities.

Total bank balances:

Current and Savings account balances, as at 31 August 2020, amounted to £12,100. These accounts are maintained at Lloyds Bank, for operations, and Virgin Savings.



www.malidg.org.uk