



Dear Members and Friends of Mali Development Group

Welcome everyone to our Summer 22 newsletter. It's been a while since we were in touch with our members but we haven't been resting! As you can see, our projects are sustained by our partners in Mali through our financial support here, and regular contact via Zoom and email. Wilfred Willey a committee member and long standing friend of MDG visited Mali earlier in the year and has produced an interesting diary of his time there. We have an update from Kader and Tante with some photos to support the report.

SAVE THE DATE!

Our Annual General Meeting will be held online on the 18th September at 10am. More details about how to join us will be sent out nearer the time.

News from J&D

We have very recently had an updating report from Tanty Samake, our link worker on the various projects she continues to support. Here are some of the key developments with the Second Step Projects.

New investment

At Bounounko the market garden now has a new group of financial partners, which has brought in additional funding. The women now have 2 hectares, with a borehole, solar panels, and four water reservoirs for watering plants. It's great that we were able to fund the development of the project and that it is now

growing towards a bigger and very sustainable future. The gardens are in full operation and the main crops are cucumber, okra, and peppers.



Coping with demand for plots

In the Falico market garden more than 100 women are involved and they too are producing okra and cucumber. They have 25 women on the waiting list, and they have decided to take away plots from those who have not paid their membership subscription and give the spaces to those who have been waiting. This is their way of motivating members and getting maximum use of the garden.

Vegetables for the market

In the villages of Tomoni Tora and Solona the gardens are producing a very wide range of crops – yams, peppers, sweet potatoes, squash and aubergine. Both have good supplies of water, which is a major factor always with the

market gardens. Both projects enable the women to sell produce at local markets in their own villages and beyond.



Solona – Mums watch a very junior gardener!

Problems with heat

In the Djèguènina and Djilifing shea butter processing project there has been a real problem

caused by very high temperatures- the women report long periods at 44° C.

In those conditions shea butter cannot be stored in the firm state required. Tanty is visiting again to consider with them what options there might be. This is one of the first occasions we have had news of climate change consequences within the projects, and we have asked Tanty for more information on how people are adapting. The women from this project have decided that they will instead plough their fields and go back to processing and storage later.

Roadworks!

The Kolondieba mill project has been affected by the construction of the national road from

Zantièbougou to Kolondieba. The mill building has had to be used as a dormitory for the

workers involved. The women have asked the Mayor to provide a suitable alternative, but there is a delay - again Tanty is visiting to support their approach to the Mayor so that this problem can be solved and work resumed. Again, we will keep members informed of developments.

The Youth Centre- Commune IV Bamako

The other main area of Tanty's work at the moment is the preparation for the new Youth Centre at J&D's building in Commune IV. The premises are now ready and J&D are working with the local community to decide which activities will take place there and how best they can be supported. The MDG committee sees the new work plan with J&D as being focused primarily on this project and activities in Bamako, and we will be sure to keep you informed of developments and the ways in which you will be able to help.

John Hedge

News from PAD



Kader with youngsters on the street in Bamako – Children begging traditionally use

these tomato paste tins to collect food or money

Work continues as normal at PAD. Kader and his staff are standardising their data collection and recording in order to gain a wider picture of the ongoing and changing

issues confronting

the youngsters they work with, and the impact of PAD's activities. MDG is supporting this and

we have started analysing some of the completed records. This extra work is being funded by

the Angus Lawson Memorial Trust. It is the first time that they have funded a project in Mali and we are grateful for their support and excited to be working with them. Initial analysis has been discussed with Kader and some changes introduced for the current intake of children. At the end of the year, we hope to be able to be able to share an analysis of the nature of the problems facing the children coming to PAD, and continued tracking over time will help to assess how effective their rehabilitation has been once they have left and returned to their own communities.



Sewing teaching in progress with young mothers at PAD

Kader recently told me about a worrying situation with a young woman who joined the sewing course from her home in Manankoro in the South of Mali. Her parents were keen to arrange a marriage for her, but an advocate helped her negotiate their consent for her to complete the training with PAD, and then marry a man of her choice. However, 5 months into learning with PAD, she disappeared and no trace of her can be found. There is little PAD can do in this situation other than report her disappearance to the police and follow up with them regularly.

On a happier note, the last time I spoke to Kader he had just returned from a trip to Segou when he took two boys who had been lodging at PAD back to their families for a hopefully successful re-integration at home. He will follow up with them and be available to help resolve any issues that arise.

Current PAD activities include ongoing literacy learning, making bogolan cloth, and the sewing course for young mums. Twice a week there is a session about hygiene, reproductive health and how to get on well with other people. Kader also said they are starting some work with two schools in July and on July 22nd there is an exhibition of the children's work sponsored by the US Embassy as a prelude to the Embassy offering some financial support for PAD. The longstanding partnership between PAD and the Dutch NGO Samu Social is working well – Samu Social refer young people that they encounter on their night runs round Bamako and cover the costs of medical care when needed.

Kader hopes that the theatre troupe funded by MDG will be able to start operating soon. They are all around and hoping to perform the skits and plays they have developed to support young people learning about how to stay safe, but COVID and consequent bans on gathering people in groups has made it difficult to get going as they planned. Kader will keep us updated.

As the festival of Tabaski (Eid al-Adha) approaches (9th July) Bamako is waiting with baited breath to see if the price of the traditional sacrificial ram will fall – currently running at twice the price of previous years, the hope is that sellers will drop the price immediately before the holiday..., otherwise many households will not be having roast meat this year. Kader explained that the cost-of-living crisis is affecting Bamako and everything is more expensive by the day.

by Sue Upton

My trip to Mali by Wilfred Willey

Last year, I took a trip to my home country Mali which turned out to be an

interesting adventure for me. I had not travelled to Mali for 2 years due to the pandemic, all this time also working from home. It started off in December when the Omicron, the new arrival in the COVID19 family, was on the rise and figures suggested it was only going to get worse. I booked 1 month of annual leave and decided to take my work laptop with me, just in case things got to a stage where returning to the UK would have been hindered by this new variant. Little did I know that Omicron would be the last thing on my mind during my stay in Bamako; that I would have to soak myself in the local and regional political wrangling involving Mali's own actors, ECOWAS member states, France, the EU and the UN.

Merely 3 days before I was due to fly back to London via Paris, ECOWAS members held an extraordinary summit in Accra (Ghana) and decided to take sanctions against Mali and its government, including a ban on all flights to and from member states. In retaliation, Mali also decided to ban all flights to and from ECOWAS member states to pass over its vast territory. The next day, Air France, under pressure from the French government (who holds 14% stake in the airline), decided to cancel all its flights to and from Bamako until further notice. I got stranded in Bamako. But I was not worried or too bothered to buy a ticket on another airline (Ethiopian and Turkish Airlines were still flying). I certainly did not panic because I was able to connect my laptop and work from home. Despite some minor electricity supply issues, the WiFi connection was good enough to allow me to do just that.

By the end of January I realised that I had been in Bamako for almost 2 months, the longest I had been there since leaving to go to university in the USSR in 1989! I had already been to Segou to visit friends, but now I contemplated going to the festival on the Niger (the Segou Festival), something I hadn't been able to do since my first time in 2007. I believe John Hedge was also in Segou at that edition. So I returned to Segou for the second time in a month for the festival weekend. It was just great. The food, the crowd (more than half of which came from Bamako), the arts and most importantly the music all made it an amazing

experience.

We were all aware of the security issues in the country, but this did not stop people from mingling and enjoying themselves. I was sad to leave Segou after the festival ended.

In February, my best friend in London from Guinea phoned me to tell he had arrived in Conakry, Guinea, and asked if I would be interested in joining him there for a few days. In the meantime Guinea had had a military coup as well and was under sanctions, so the flights ban from ECOWAS did not apply to Conakry which is just a 1hr flight from Bamako. I could not let such opportunity pass me by. I booked a flight a few days later and spent 10 days in this beautiful country which is where my mother is originally from and which I ought to visit more often! It was a trip within a trip.

Around the 17th of February Air France resumed their flights, so I waited for 2 weeks for an email or a text message which never came. I decided to call them and booked a flight to return to London the beginning of March or exactly 3 months after I had left London.

During this prolonged stay in Mali, I became closer to my family and friends there, I renewed some contacts and even made some new friends. It also opened up some opportunities to do business in Mali at a time when all that we hear about is the lack of security, jihadist and terrorist attacks. But Mali is more than all that, it has an extraordinarily resilient population with some of the nicest people I've met in my life. I will definitely go back for another long stay to continue the adventure. Thank you Air France!

by Wilfred Willey

Fundraising



Some of the Babs team with Linda (3rd from left) helping at a wedding in Oxfordshire

The band of us raising money by making cakes and related cooking has been in full swing in recent months. We provided food for two birthday parties, both of which had been postponed since 2020 due to covid restrictions. They were a 102nd birthday lunch and a 120th birthday evening do, the result of 2 people celebrating being 60!

A new recruit to our number has started to provide supper for a local Film Club

which meets monthly. This makes it a relaxing and enjoyable evening for the film goers as well as making money for MDG

A local garden which is open by appointment under the National Gardens Scheme uses us to provide the teas. So it gives us a good chance to raise money, have a good chat, enjoy the views and sample the product to ensure it's up to scratch!

by Linda King

Treasurer

Earlier this year, we received an extremely generous legacy of £3,000 from the estate of Ray Fishbourne who had been closely involved with the charity for many years. We are very grateful to Ray for remembering us.

The Patsy Wood Trust is, after many years, closing and we recently received £2,681 as their final donation to us. Thank you for supporting us over the years.

A more detailed financial account will be in the Annual Report in October.

David Hedge

We hope you have found the newsletter interesting and if you wish to contact us please visit our website www.malidg.org.uk where you can contact us using the link.

With many thanks for your continued interest and support.

Janice Hedge
Communications