

General Secretary: Nick Linney



www.malidg.org.uk

'Keep on keeping on' is message from MDG's Grand Review

On February 11th, twenty MDG committee members, friends and supporters gathered on a freezing Saturday at Stadhampton Village Hall at St John's to ask - 'are we still doing the right things and where should MDG go in the future?'

The meeting was called because there have been changes in the last couple of years, both within MDG itself and with our main partner in Mali, Jeunesse et Developpement (J&D). In addition we have, for the past year, been managing the large grant from Comic Relief for J&D's work in Southern Mali, and this has been something of a game changer. We felt the time was right to have a think about the present and the future.

Our spirited discussions ranged over the history of the group, how and why people had become involved, the work that has been supported, and the ways in which we have organised ourselves. We talked about the conflict and tension in Mali, and there was strong support for our decision to hang in with our Malian partners, at a time when other funders were withdrawing from the country. Many contributions also re-affirmed the values and the approach that MDG has used in its work – to value first and foremost the views of our partners about the work to be done and the priorities for this, underpinned by a commitment to continuity and longevity, flexibility and informality, all built on respectful personal relationships.

Many positive statements were made about the value of MDG and its work, its achievements over 16 years and how this event had helped to remind us of why we're doing what we're doing. The end result was support for a strategy of 'keeping on keeping on', whilst at the same time recognising that our capacity is limited, we could use more people and practical involvement and that the potential for our future work both in Mali and within the UK is great. These conclusions will now go back to our committee so we can put in hand the practical steps that can come from this most productive day. A note of our discussions will appear shortly on our website, but if you'd like to know more before that then please get back to me at andy@independentaction.net

Andy Benson
Chair



Penny runs through the plan of MDG's Grand Review



MDG has a new General Secretary, Nick Linney. He joined MDG in September 2016. Nick is originally from California and has been living in London for just over 2 years. He has a background in charity work, currently working for the Wimbledon Guild of Social Welfare, as the Volunteer Coordinator. This is his first experience working in international aid and development, but is excited to learn and to be a part of MDG and their valuable work. Hopefully, one day he'll get to travel to Mali and see firsthand the impact MDG is having.

Our December trip to Mali...

"Your application for a visit visa to the UK has been refused.... I am not satisfied that you have demonstrated sufficient ties to Mali that would encourage you to leave the United Kingdom upon completion of your proposed visit." (UK Visas and Immigration 4/10/16).

So began our trip to Mali last December. We had intended to bring Nouhoum Hairara and Tiori Diarra from our partner group Jeunesse et Developpement (J&D) to the UK, but, sadly, the UK government's punitive and incoherent immigration policy scotched that one. So Sue Upton and I went to Bamako instead.

MDG's relationship with J&D and our other partners has always been close and rooted in personal contact and respect. Changes both ends over the last year or so, and the fact that no-one from MDG had visited Mali for some years meant that we have felt increasingly in need of some 'face-to-face' time. We also had things to discuss as we reached the end of the first year of the Comic Relief grant we have been administering for J&D's work on the Wassoulou-Balle 'Mutuelle'. This is a community-based insurance scheme, aimed at extending access to health care for people in 35 villages around Yanfolila, a rural area near the Guinea border. And we were in need of talking to J&D about a new three plan to set out our intentions and commitments for the coming period.

As usual, Mali worked its magic. Despite the Foreign Office advice not to travel there and the rather alarming attempts to get quotes for kidnap and ransom insurance, our Malian hosts were as welcoming as ever, along with the golden morning sunshine and the ubiquitous red dust. After a couple of days settling in and planning the rest of our stay with J&D director Nou, Tanty (our MDG link worker) and their colleagues, we set off South to Yanfolila, to see how the project there was developing. Here we visited two villages and a health centre, and had discussions with Fatim, the Team Leader there, and the six members of the J&D team.

At a practical level it is clear that the work is proceeding and the mutuelle developing. Village management committees are in place in 80% of the villages in the scheme, as well as the Commune-level monitoring committee and training has been completed at the various levels of the scheme's infrastructure. Relationships with the local health centres have been consolidated. Membership of the mutuelle has risen from just under 1,600 to over 2,600 over this first year of the team's work. It was said that people are beginning to join up rather more easily than before, as people's experience of the scheme becomes better known.

We visited Goualala, one of the villages in the mutuelle, and the health centre situated within the village but also serving other villages in the area. The clinical and other staff at the health centre told us that the scheme is working well by enabling more people to access health care, reducing poverty and supporting development. Some 50 mutuelle patients had been treated there in November, malaria being the main illness involved.

They estimated that about 65% of their patients from the immediately surrounding villages were mutuelle members. Some training on prescribing practices had been received as part of the project and more is planned; relationships and the administrative arrangements were said to be working well.



Goualala Health Centre treating Mutuelle patients

Our visit to the village of Goualala was the usual mix of ceremonial exchanges, village hospitality and some time for business and discussion about the project. We were also able to see the grain grinding mill which has been installed in the village and is about to start working.



Mutuelle members at their new grain-grinding mill at Goualala village

This will create additional revenue to support the mutuelle. A meeting was convened of around 50 mutuelle members, mostly women and including the village chief and a few members from a neighbouring village, the Goualala village chief, the President of the Women's Association and the President of the mutuelle overall. Speeches of thanks and exhortations to expand and develop the scheme further were followed by a brief



Andy's first lesson on the Hunter's n'goni

question-and-answer session. After the ceremonials, we were able to talk individually to a number of women who told us of their positive experience of the mutuelle.

We also visited Bounogou, another village in the area, and where we are funding the costs involved in creating a new market garden for women in the village. There we were greeted by 30 or so women and were able to discuss with them their support for the new garden. This project is one of a number that MDG intends to support as part of our new three year strategy. The detail of that strategy was the main issue dealt with on our return to Bamako. This document is now being finalised (and will then be posted on our website). The essence of this agreement is our commitment to continue funding:

- activities that directly benefit local people and communities (like grain grinding mills and equipment for market gardens);
- support to J&D's fieldwork (such as their support to the mutuelle); and
- support to J&D's management and organisational infrastructure (like vehicle and building costs).



J&D's new office and youth centre building under way

In relation to the last point we were able to see the start of work on J&D's new building. With the help of the Patsy Wood Trust we have been able to pay for the cost of solar panels for this venture and the meeting room.

Our visit provided the opportunity to restate our mutual commitment, remind ourselves of the character of the relationship and simply spend some personal time together. I think and hope that this will benefit both parties over the year to come and that we should prepare for the next visit, perhaps towards the end of 2017.

A Very Special Mali Independence Day

On the 22nd of September, Mali marks its Independence from France – the date in 1960 it became the Independent Republic of Mali. An important event in the calendar for Malians at home and abroad, each year the occasion is celebrated with food and music in true Malian style. I was delighted to accept invitation from La Coordination des Associations Maliennes du Royaume-Uni to their Independence Day celebrations this year. To have

such a warm welcome by the Malians, other West Africans, and their families in attendance was very special.

A huge thank you has to go to Wilfred Willey. Not only for his great service to his community but also for inviting me up and translating the few words I had to say about the work of Mali Development Group and allow me to express our continued solidarity with Mali and its people. It was great to hear about the busy lives of Malians settled in London and other UK cities and, most importantly, get the inside track on who's up-and-coming in Mali's music scene!

'If I didn't go to a party they'd say "Malick, how could you not turn up?"' – Malick Sidibé

In 2016 many much-loved and notable cultural figures passed away, leaving incredible legacies. Mali and much of the world mourned the passing of the legendary photographer Malick Sidibé, who died on 14th April 2016. Somerset House are currently holding a wonderful exhibition in tribute to the great man, which will run until February 26th. It's the first solo exhibition of his work in the UK and entry is free.

Those of you that may not be familiar with Sidibé's work, here are some words from Robert Storr, art critic & former MoMa curator, which emphasise how special he was: "No African artist has done more to enhance photography's stature in the region, contribute to its history, enrich its image archive or increase our awareness of the textures and transformations of African culture in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st than Malick Sidibé."

The exhibition has a range of his work on display including some of his most famous images which capture the energy and promise of Mali's youth in the 1960's – grasping that exuberant post-independence optimism that was flowing through the country at the time. It was a wonderful and warming sight and definitely worth the trip down to bank of the Thames. He was the life and soul of Mali's party so, as Sidibé says, how could you not turn up to this exceptional exhibition?

To find out more visit Somerset House's website: <https://www.somersetthouse.org.uk/whats-on/malick-sidibe>

Sam Garbett,
Public Affairs Group



Sam and Jess Garbett with Wilfred Willey from the Malian Community Council at the Independence Day Celebrations

Fundraising Group

There are lots of people who contribute in so many ways either by making donations or doing something that results in us making money from some kind of activity. Janet Longstaff has been a member of MDG since the beginning. She and her husband live in Church Stretton in Shropshire, far away from the majority of our supporters. Janet regularly gives talks to local WI and other groups and sends us the fees she gets paid for this. She also collects her 5p s for us. Thanks very much Janet for continuing to think of us.



A more recent supporter is William Lay who will be running in this year's London Marathon for MDG. This will be William's first official Marathon, so if you'd like to help him on his way his donation's page is <http://make-a-donation.org/fundraisers/william-lay-1>

Linda king
Fundraising Group

Financial Update

During the 2016 calendar year, MDG received a total sum £41,985 to fund core MDG activities mainly comprised of small donations, member subscriptions, fund raising and Gift Aid tax refunds. This excludes the Comic Relief grant.

It is worth itemizing some of these sizeable income receipts:

- The Patsy Wood Trust £15,000
- Just Trust £3,000
- Abingdon PCC St Helen's £1,250
- Winter Fuel payments about £700
- The London Marathon
- Prudential RideLondon 100
- BMO annual cricket match
- Quiz and Race Nights
- Gift Aid tax refunds

David Hedge
Treasurer