NIGER
Saved from noma, now they are helping others

SENEGAL
Bineta’s brave journey to independence

SWITZERLAND
Sentinelles’ historic archives
The longest humanitarian crisis in Africa

In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, one of the world’s most fragile states, the Kivu region has been plagued by violence for almost three decades. It harbours no less than 100 armed groups, including particularly active foreign units. And although some of these groups agreed a ceasefire at the end of last year following talks with Congolese officials, the fighting and torture continues. The longest humanitarian crisis in Africa, which has caused its share of horror and injustice, continues to create victims among the civilian population.

And, you ask, what effect is this having on sanitary conditions and food security? Infant and maternal mortality rates are reaching alarming levels. The region is regularly struck by cholera epidemics and recently suffered outbreaks of Ebola and measles. The dead can be counted in their thousands. Under-resourced healthcare centres make access to medical treatment difficult. In certain areas, the clay-based soil is of poor quality and erratic rainfall limits agricultural production. Year after year, people are gripped by hunger.

Many of the region’s inhabitants work purely to survive. Men leave their homes to work in the mines in extreme conditions and sometimes, due to a lack of alternatives, they volunteer to join local militias. Women stay with their children who, despite all their efforts, they are barely able to feed. When the opportunity arises, they resort to informal methods of earning money which, although not always enabling them to escape their poverty, forge bonds and strengthen the system of mutual aid.

What reforms are needed to deal with these endless conflicts? To bring an end to the impunity of members of armed groups? To ensure that families have better living conditions? We are still waiting for significant advances in social policies and for the rule of law to be consolidated. And if local solidarity and the loyal commitment of organisations like Sentinelles, which has been helping women who care for their children alone in South Kivu since 2007, are changing things for the better, the task remains immense.

IN BRIEF

| MADAGASCAR |

News of Cynthia

Seven years ago, Cynthia was 19 years old and she endured a physical and sexual assault of a rare violence that left her between life and death for several weeks with severe sequelae: tetraplegia, sphincter dysfunction, cranio-facial trauma and damage to her vertebrae.

As she comes from a farming region without any appropriate medical infrastructure, her family, though quite poor, has her transferred to a hospital in Antananarivo and requests Sentinelles’ support. After a delicate operation in the neurology department, many months of treatment, years of intensive physiotherapy and, most important, lots of willpower, Cynthia has gradually recovered her motor function. She is nowadays able to walk, and she does her rehabilitation exercises on her own at home.

In parallel to her ordeal, the young woman was able to complete secondary school two years after the assault and to be integrated into high school. She passed her A-levels last year and, after passing the entrance exam with our support, she has just been admitted to university where she’ll attend the business management curriculum. This is a wonderful example of courage and persistence!
You were deeply moved by Sahila (Sentinelles, #267, December 2019), this 4-year old girl who came from Nigeria affected on three quarters of her face. We have good news of her. Onsite medical care was able to stop the flow of cephalorachidial liquid that was threatening her life. The Swiss and Nigerian embassies had assured us of their full support whenever needed. Today, Sahila is ever so bubbly, full of life and even sometimes cheeky.

Unfortunately, our Zinder teams are recording new worrying admissions. The figures are clear: there are more and more cases at very advanced stages of the condition. It generates new difficulties to provide surgical care to children who are younger and whose life is threatened by noma, which require extremely difficult reconstructions. As a matter of fact, face reconstruction when large parts of the soft and hard tissues are lost are particularly complex when the face is still developing. Fortunately for them, we co-operate closely with the most experienced surgeons in the fight against noma.

Michel Caspary, Director of the Jorat Theatre, is associating Sentinelles with the performances of La Locandiera, quasi comme, by Carlo Goldoni, with Brigide Rosset and Christian Scheidt, on May 28 and 29 (*). We will be able to present our work on both occasions, especially during the official day of the Theatre on Friday, May 29 (*), a real privilege. We heartily invite you to join us in Mézières (VD). You will without a doubt spend an unforgettable moment with Goldoni and his Mirandolina, one of the first feminine title roles in the Italian Commedia. (*) subject to change

www.theatredujorat.ch

CHOOSING A PROFESSIONAL PATH CAN GENERATE BOTH ANXIETY AND EXPECTATIONS.

At the Minas Centre in Colombia, our psychologist is assisting young girls and boys during this critical step of their life path. Diego is 17 years old today and, even though he was finding it difficult to project himself forward and was anxious at the idea of leaving our structure, he now dreams of independence. Of an introvert and humble nature, he values hard work and efforts. His farming training with our neighbour, Don Hernan, has taught Diego discipline and the desire to excel. A strong friendship has developed between both men, a milestone in terms of self-confidence and self-surpassing. As a matter of fact, Diego has experienced neglect and later abandon, and he now feels a painful emotional void that is hard to fill. After exploring several professional paths, he eventually chose to become a barber and he dreams of owning his own salon in Minas. To this effect, he will study two academic years condensed into one to pass his O-levels and simultaneously he will start his vocational training on weekends in Medellin, the department’s head city.

Sahila and new victims of noma

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COLOMBIA

On the way to independence

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SWITZERLAND

The Jorat Theatre is celebrating Sentinelles’ 40th birthday

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NIGER

Sahila and new victims of noma

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Bineta, a blind person in the service of her family

Bineta Dione is a 38-year old woman. She belongs to our Children leading blind people programme in the Mbour region in Senegal. She lost her parents when she was still a teenager and she is left alone with her brother and three sisters she will need to take care of.

Bineta wasn’t born a blind person. She lost her sight in 1996 after suffering from headaches and limited eyesight during several years, without any precise diagnosis of the sickness that left her blind.

Despite her handicap, Bineta didn’t choose to become a beggar and she continues to run a small household products business.

In 2004, she gets married to a man who is also blind, as is often the case in this community. Together they have two girls, Aminata and Aïda.

After living together for ten years, Bineta and her husband get a divorce. He continues to contribute to the household expenses but, as the blind people’s income is generally very low, the parents aren’t able to send the girls to school and it is unfortunately very difficult to pay for medical care when they need it.

In 2016, during a meeting of the blind people association of Mbour, its president, Assane Ndiaye, refers Bineta to Sentinelles so her children can be taken care of. After a screening carried out by the social worker in charge of the ECA programme in Mbour, Bineta joins the Sentinelles programme. The foundation takes care of Aminata’s schooling fees, medical costs and school support. Her sister Aïda lives with her aunt who pays for her school fees.

Bineta will later say that “Sentinelles is a lifesaver and a comforter to the family wellbeing and social welfare that took her out of despair.”

Bineta is a courageous person. Despite her handicap, she wants to work and sustain herself. In July 2017, she benefits from a Sentinelles sponsorship to buy a fridge for selling juice and ice-cream. Her activity is off to a good start, but the income is not stable enough depending on the seasons and cannot cover all family expenses. Although this work is easier on the young woman, it unfortunately doesn’t enable her to project herself in the long term.

At the beginning of 2019, as Sentinelles decides to increase the family progression to autonomy through income generating activities, Bineta obtains a second grant to develop a more substantial activity. After training given in our premises, she chooses to start a business raising chicks in the courtyard of her house.

The Sentinelles team helps her build a chicken barn and, through regular follow-up, supports her in managing her project.

The poultry farming is doing well and becomes profitable very fast. Bineta starts...
with 25 chicks and then decides to reinvest her first returns by increasing the number of birds. She then manages to save enough to start new farming cycles every 40 days with a set total of 40 chicks.

Today, after her 10th cycle, Bineta still manages to find customers to buy all her chickens. She has now regular customers, among which several restaurant owners, a butcher and close neighbours. She can also preserve her poultry thanks to her fridge, which avoids waste.

Finally, Bineta is able to open an Orange Money account on which she saves part of her gains, the other part being used for the day-to-day expenses.

Thanks to her tenacity, the now poultry farmer was able to pay her daughter Aminata’s school fees for the last October term by herself and she also contributes to half her school support tuition. Even more cheery news is that she is now able to take back her second daughter Aïda, to support her and even pay for her school tuition fees. The family is finally reunited, and its full autonomy is on a very good way. By the end of the 2020 school term, Bineta will probably be able to be on her own with full serenity.

Income Generating Activities have become one of the pillars of the psycho-social support offered by Sentinelles, with the intention of improving the living conditions and autonomy of families.

In Senegal, IGA that are implemented for families supported by Sentinelles are mostly poultry farming, for people who can and cannot see. Certain sighted women also start selling grocery products or the preparation and selling of breakfast, while blind people go for smaller coal, perfume, water bags or ice cream businesses.

For nearly two years, our team has been working according to a new approach in the implementation and follow-up of IGA, adapting to the evolution of the conditions of families with nowadays more sighted women. Today, the Sentinelles team and the people concerned themselves enthusiastically notice the positive changes due to this approach. The activities are profitable very fast, and the parents manage to save enough not only to consolidate their activity but also to pay for the school fees and/or medical costs for their children.

Other activities also reinforce the traditional IGA implemented by Sentinelles.

Young people have the opportunity to attend vocational training programmes. Several young women have for example attended sewing courses. When they have completed it, Sentinelles supports them buying a sewing machine so they can set up a small sewing studio at home.

Young men will rather choose training in carpentry or mechanics. They are also granted a “starter kit” comprising of tools and equipment enabling them to practice what they have learned if they are not lucky enough to be immediately hired in a workshop.

Income Generating Activities (IGA)
Portraits of New Lives

Principally affecting young children from poor families, noma is a particularly unjust disease which should have already been eradicated. It leads to physical deformities and psychological problems which are hard for the victims and their families to bear, making their reconstruction and social integration very difficult.

In this issue, we want to present you the portraits of three young people who marked us in 2019, three young people whose courage is an example to others and who are now committing themselves, in different ways, to the fight against noma.

**ALZOUMA, 29 YEARS OLD**

Alzouma was admitted to the Sentinelles Centre in Zinder in October 2016, at the age of 25. Coming from Niamey and with Malian origins, he was referred to us by the NGO Hilfsaktion Noma, which at the time was not taking on adults, and had been suffering from large noma lesions since early infancy. He underwent reconstructive facial surgery no less than four times, in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 with Dr Issa Ousmane Hamady, Dr Andreas Schmidt and Professor Dominique Martin. When he was first admitted, Alzouma hid himself under a turban and was afraid to show his face to other people at the Centre, even more so in public. Because noma is often experienced as a double punishment, even a curse. After the disease comes isolation, rejection and a feeling of shame by those suffering from it.

Following the different operations, Alzouma has been totally transformed, not only physically but also psychologically. Smiling and enthusiastic, he decided to stay with us at Zinder and is currently training as a tailor with Human Appeal International (HAI). He has completely accepted his new face and his lessons take place outside the walls of the Sentinelles Centre with other trainees from all over the region. Highly motivated, he is an example to other patients, looks after children at the Centre and helps the Sentinelles team whenever he can.

To ensure that he has a future, we are continuing to support him so that he can finish his training, with a view to opening his own workshop in Niamey. Or maybe in Zinder, who knows?

**LAOURÉ, 23 YEARS OLD**

Laouré was admitted to the Zinder centre in August 2002. At the time she was six years old. Having contracted noma when she was younger, the little girl’s jaws had become totally constricted and she was unable to open her mouth to either feed herself or communicate clearly.

She underwent her first operation in Europe in 2002, followed by intensive physiotherapy when she returned to help conserve her mouth opening. Treated and educated with the help of our teams, Laouré was making very good progress at school. Assiduous, dependable and hard-working, she was driven by a desire to succeed. Unfortunately, in 2012 her jaws became constricted again and, despite her young age, she fell pregnant. Our local
collaborators then acted as her lawyers. They spoke for her before a judge to ensure that her rights were asserted and that, by allowing her to continue her education, she and her unborn child had a future. This situation delayed the transfer for the surgery which she still needed. Laouré was eventually operated on in Niamey during the surgical mission Sentinelles organised in 2005. After the operation, our team of social workers took over to ensure that she was monitored as soon as she returned to her family.

Having enrolled at her village school the following year, Zeinabou proved to be full of energy and ready to embrace life again. In 2012, she obtained her final-year certificate with a good grade, then she passed her diploma at the Aziz Educational Complex. Unfortunately, the same year she lost her father following a long illness, then the family home collapsed during heavy rainfall. Sentinelles was able to provide help to rebuild the house.

Zeanbou’s family situation meant that she could no longer continue her studies. However, with our support, she chose to enrol on a community healthcare training course. She is currently training to be a health worker and will finish her course this year.

She often visits the Centre to talk to the nurses, sit down with accompanying persons or play with the children. During one of her visits, she spoke to us about her wish to specialise in community healthcare.

In this way, Zeinabou is going to work to help others. There is no doubt that this desire is linked to her own experiences with Sentinelles.

These three success stories were made possible thanks to your support!

Today, Laouré is back at the Zinder centre, not as a victim of noma, but working as an instructor. Because, with her diploma in hand and the extraordinary work she has accomplished, the young woman is going to run a sewing and embroidery training workshop.

Her salary will enable her to fund her workshop and to train the people we assist so that they, in turn, can develop income-generating activities. Laouré will be responsible for training 30 beneficiaries at the Zinder centre.

**ZEINABOU, 19 YEARS OLD**

Zeanbou was born in 2000 in the Zinder region’s Gouré department. She is the fourth child of a sedentary Touareg family and contracted noma at the extremely early age of one. When she arrived at the Zinder centre in 2001, the Sentinelles duty nurse described her state as follows: “Admission the 16/10/2001 of an acute case of noma. The little girl arrived with a necrosis above her upper lip and a bone sequestrum (a bone that has lost its vascularization and innervation), which has become detached inside her mouth, causing feeding difficulties. She only weighs 7 kilograms.” After her condition had been stabilised, Zeinabou was operated on in Niamey during the surgical mission Sentinelles organised in 2005. After the operation, our team of social workers took over to ensure that she was monitored as soon as she returned to her family.

Zeinabou’s family situation meant that she could no longer continue her studies. However, with our support, she chose to enrol on a community healthcare training course. She is currently training to be a health worker and will finish her course this year.

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Sentinelles open their archives

Began three years ago, the processing of the Foundation's historical archives is coming to an end!

The year 2020 is the fortieth anniversary of Sentinelles’ creation by Edmond Kaiser. We wanted to mark this important date by making our historical archives accessible to the public.

Thanks to the support and advice of Mr Gilbert Coutaz, then director of the Vaud Cantonal Archives (VCA), we were able to make a start with this project in January 2017, after having received the formal agreement of VCA that our archives, including the period between the creation of Sentinelles in 1980 and the death of its creator in 2000, be entrusted to them. Thus guaranteeing a better development and optimal conditions for conservation.

These are twenty years of struggles, often pioneering, against sexual mutilation, honour killings, paedophilia, and infanticide. Twenty years of assistance to those most in need: child prisoners, child slaves, underage coal miners, martyred children, the malnourished, abandoned and children suffering from noma.

The perseverance of our team, which is primarily composed of volunteers, has allowed us to gather, analyse, restructure and trace thousands of documents. Our archives are thus made up of letters, work reports, agreements, but also of audio-visual documents such as photographs, slides, audio and video tapes which are testament to the programmes put in place by Sentinelles to come to the rescue during multiple instances of suffering in a large number of countries. We have also gathered and alphabetically listed several thousand individual files of people being cared for to facilitate research of personal information.

The inventory of Sentinelles’ archives will soon be accessible online on the ACV website (www.davel.vd.ch) under the heading “Fondation Sentinelles” (cote PP 1111) and the documents will be available for consultation on request to Archives cantonales vaudoises, rue de la Mouline 32, 1022 Chavannes.

Would you like to offer a new life to clothing and sport shoes that your children don’t wear any longer?

So that other children and teenagers in Africa and Colombia, who need them so much, can use them, you can bring them, send them or call Sentinelles.

Thank you on their behalf.