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# SENTINELLES

TO THE RESCUE OF WOUNDED INNOCENCE

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N° 276 / June 2021



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## MADAGASCAR

Pandemic :  
a poverty accelerator

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How to protect  
talibé children

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Artists' view  
on noma

# Editorial

## Colombia, between violence and environmental destruction

The beginning of this year has seen the most violent period in Colombia since the signing of the peace agreements with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) in 2016. In the countryside and on the Pacific coast, armed groups have overtaken the state in the re-conquest of areas previously occupied by this movement. The conservative government blames guerrillas who have distanced themselves from the peace process and drug trafficking for the deterioration of public order.

However, this situation is not only the product of the interests of groups on the fringes of the law. It is also part of a context of corruption, a humanitarian crisis on the border with Venezuela, unemployment, and the progressive destruction of the environment due to mining projects.

President Duque is betting on this industry for the country's economic development. In addition to opening some 40 large-scale projects, he has loudly announced a strategy to provide loans to artisanal miners who want to improve their extraction process. He has also made it clear, and just as loudly, that he will not allow illegal mining to taint this sector of the economy, which suggests that penalties for illegal mineral extraction will be tightened. This raises questions about the social and environmental impact on the Amaga coal mining region, where Sentinelles has been active for three decades. Mine closures, job losses and convictions or better protection for miners? And what about the quality of the air, water and soil in the event of increased mining activity?

However, despite the health conditions, nationwide mobilisations are taking place in the context of social violence and the degradation of the country's natural resources.



*Marlyse Morard*  
Managing Director

INDEPENDENT OF ANY IDEOLOGY, SENTINELLES, FOUNDED 1980  
BY EDMOND KAISER, WORKS TO RESCUE AND ACCOMPANY  
CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN DEEP DISTRESS.

## IN BRIEF



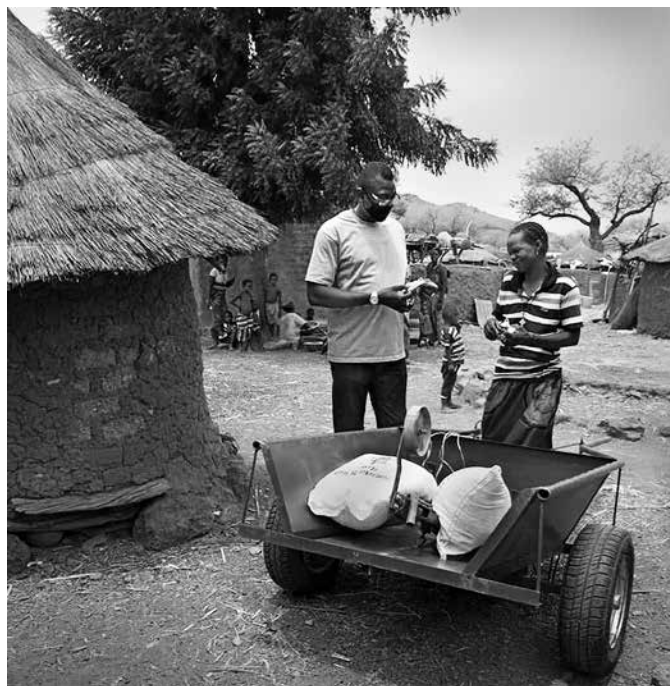
### I NIGER

## Child follow up: essential after recovering from noma

Severe malnutrition is an important risk factor for noma. But what is often forgotten is that adequate and balanced nutrition is also important for children who have survived noma. If they are not fed properly when they return to their families, they risk falling back into a state of malnutrition. Necrotizing gingivitis can then develop again, especially if oral hygiene measures are not followed. In addition, some parents who have seen their child cured of noma may sometimes trivialise the situation and not seek help quickly.

For these reasons, when the treated children leave the Zinder Centre to return to their villages, our social workers make regular visits to ensure that they are doing well, and that the advice given on nutrition and oral hygiene is being implemented by the parents. This is the case for 3-year-old Malika: a follow-up visit to her family detected moderate malnutrition by measuring her arm circumference, weight and height, and her grandmother then benefited from the social worker's advice as well as nutritional support. This work, done in close proximity to each child, can certainly prevent many complications.





## I BURKINA FASO

**32,182**

This is the number of kilometres travelled in 2020 by our team in Burkina Faso to follow up on children suffering from the after-effects of noma, as well as to carry out awareness-raising work with health and social promotion centre workers. This proximity is essential to guarantee a holistic follow-up of children and their families at home.

During the year, in addition to monitoring income-generating activities set up to improve the resources of families in the bush - most often in the form of agricultural or livestock aid - we distributed emergency food and health aid to the poorest households, as a relief measure against the effects of the pandemic and insecurity. A big thank you to David, our driver for many years, and to the whole team for their demanding journeys on the roads and tracks of Burkina Faso.

## I COLOMBIA

### Gardening and cooking with many hands

As half of the regular participants have expressed the desire to continue cooking together, Tierra de Vida (Sentinelles' name in Colombia) is reactivating the meetings between women in the "around the table" exchange and learning space. This time we plan to combine gardening and cooking. The initiation will start with the maintenance of the Centre's vegetable garden and the creation of recipes based on the harvested products. In a second phase, the workshops will take place in the homes of the participants, who will be able to build a family garden collectively. Each family will then have a growing space that guarantees its own consumption and will know how to cook the produce and prepare the plants needed for the following season. We look forward to sharing these good times and to reaping the fruits of our common work.



## I CONGO

### Kindergarten in the Bukavu prison

As part of the Swiss Solidarity-supported project to help women prisoners and their children, Sentinelles looks after the well-being of the children. The children are imprisoned with their mothers when they have no other means of care. Some were born in prison and have never known the outside world. This is the case of Christine, aged 6, who arrived at the prison one month after her birth; or Koko, who is now 4 years old, and was born in Kabare prison before his mother was transferred to Bukavu central prison. Sentinelles was able to set up a kindergarten, which allows them to play and benefit from early-learning activities, supervised by our social worker. The young children discovered this space dedicated to them with stars in their eyes.





## I MADAGASCAR

# Aggravation of poverty due to the pandemic

Madagascar was already in a precarious situation before the appearance of coronavirus. The number of infected persons and of deaths progresses, although official numbers have to be taken with a pinch of salt given the relatively low number of tests that have been performed. However, one noticeable consequence results from this: a clear augmentation of extreme poverty.

The measures of restriction and confinement taken in 2020 by the authorities, which are, on another note, very difficult to enforce in a country where the majority of the population is forced to do informal survival activities, signified for most of that population the sudden stop to any work and any kind of income, as well as sinking into a situation even more precarious than before. Even if help for the most destitute who cannot go to work has been set in motion by the authorities, it is difficult to evaluate its impact and its real efficiency, because a lot of these people have not had access to it.

**The health crisis has had many repercussions on the functioning of our programme in Madagascar. For months, most of our collaborators could not work full-time and an important number of our services had to be limited to urgent interventions. As home visits were impossible to do, the contact with a lot of beneficiaries was cut down.**

As soon as our full-time activities resumed, we could only notice the socioeconomic aggravation that most families accompanied in our several programmes had suffered. Faced with this, we have been forced to reinforce palliative and dietary help, as well as replenish some activities that generated incomes.





It is the case of Viviane who we had helped launch a little commercial project on discounted items through microcredit before the crisis. She made sure her activity worked well since its launch in August 2019. With a start-up fund of around 62'000 Ariary (around CHF 15.-), Viviane was able to respond to her family's needs and she was able to honour the reimbursement of her loan and she was also able to school her two youngest children. However, the pandemic dramatically changed the life of this household. As all sales were prohibited during the confinement, Viviane had to draw on the funds intended for her business. Her eldest daughter also lost her job. Consequently, we granted this family food assistance for 6 months and we gave the children the supplies necessary for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

Fortunately, the family owns their house, otherwise the situation would have been even worse. In March, Viviane was able to take over her small business, but as her working capital was insufficient, we took steps to replenish her business.



Tsiry, 17, is another one of our beneficiaries. He lives in Antananarivo with his family who were about to go back to their native village at 70 km from the capital. The father is a carpenter, and the job offer is more abundant in this region. Moreover, the family is the owner of a house and cultivable lands. Financial help for the purchase of carpentry materials was provided for the head of the family. However, confinement was decreed, which prohibited any kind of trip and Tsiry's family was forced to stay in Antananarivo, with all that this means regarding daily expenditure when work is lacking.

Even though the mother keeps her occupation as a washerwoman, we bring a palliative help to this family (food ration, medical monitoring, etc.) and give them flour and oil so that Tsiry and his mother can open a little donut shop.

The situation is improving little by little, but while awaiting a possible return to Ambatolampy, we continue to support the family's needs in Antananarivo.



Albertine, who is also followed by Sentinelles, had, before our encounter, some experience in the manufacturing and the sale of paint remover. Three years ago, we had helped her relaunch her job with a fund of 583'320 Ariary (around CHF 140.-). Despite her mental health problems, Albertine was doing well and was assuming all of her family needs as well as the reimbursement of her microcredit.

The health situation shook everything. Because she was presenting coronavirus symptoms, she followed a treatment and she had to stop her job. She relapsed into her psychiatric trauma and, moreover, she had to face a neighbourhood quarrel that ended up with a hearing at the courthouse. Seeing her running on empty, we supported her on all fronts: food help, frequent visits, medical and legal monitoring.

Today, Albertine is slowly starting her business again and we evaluate her capacity to pursue this work alone by freeing her from her microcredit or if we have to replenish her activity. ■



## I SENEGAL

# Opening up the daaras to their neighbourhood for the wellbeing of the talibés

Senegal is a well-organised country, divided into 14 regions and 45 departments. The Mbour department contains 8 communes, including the Mbour one where Sentinelles has its premises.

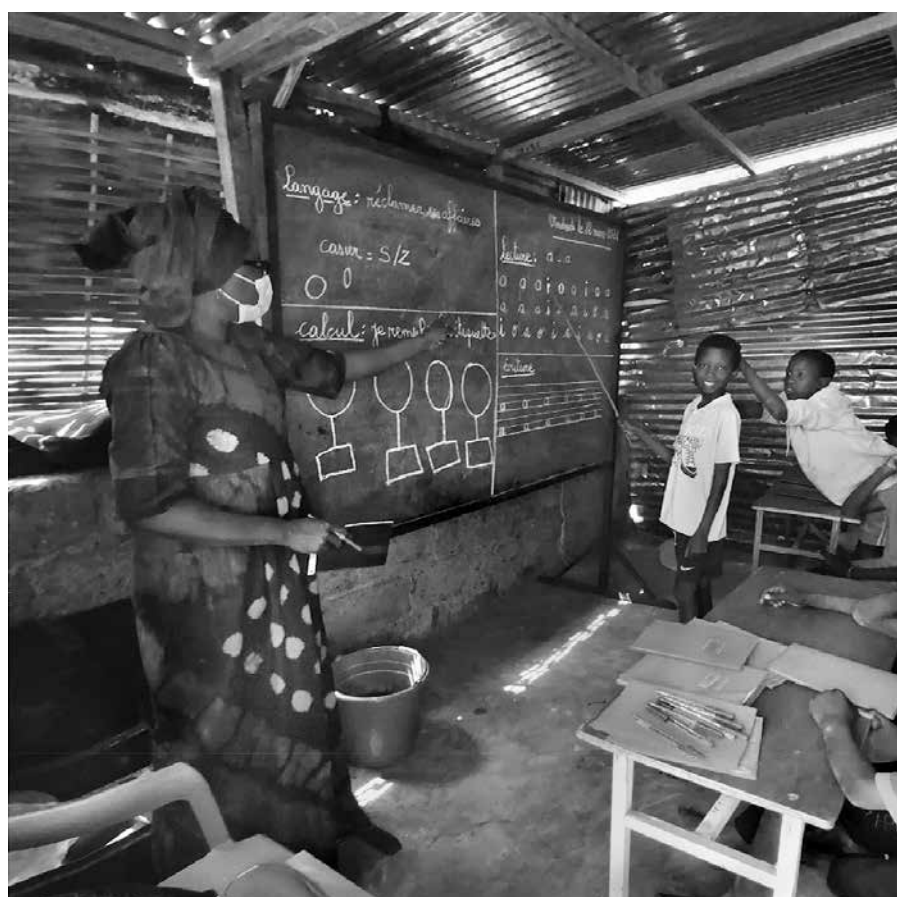
The communes are divided into neighbourhoods, run by the same actors. In each neighbourhood there is a neighbourhood Delegate and a Bajenu Gokh (neighbourhood godmother), appointed by the State. The neighbourhood delegate is the State representative, supervised by the departmental Prefect, while the mission of the Bajenu Gokh is to ensure social harmony and watch out for health issues and births within her neighbourhood.

The great majority of Senegal's daaras has no legal status. Any man can proclaim himself a koranic Master and open up his boarding daara. Yet the marabout has a great responsibility since he holds the legal function of guardian of the children living in his daara.

The talibés are children sent by their families to these daaras, often located very far from their villages in urban environments, to learn the Koran and receive a koranic education. It is however arguable that the only reason for the presence of a great number of daaras is child begging which benefits the marabouts. Thus, they are vulnerable in the public space. They cover great distances, are exposed to violence, the dangers of the road, roaming animals, contempt and rejection.

Far from being a fatality, the daaras could provide a suitably supportive framework for the wellbeing of the children within their walls.

Little 5-year-old Samba Sall is sent to an Mbour daara in 2014. He is split from his



parents who live in a distant village and did not see them again because they did not once make the trip to find out about the living conditions in the daara. It is therefore natural for Samba to consider his talibé friends and marabout as his family.

In October 2020, the marabout of that daara requested Sentinelles' assistance to take over the welfare of this young boy, then aged 12, suffering from kidney stones. His parents, made aware of the

problem by the marabout, do not have the means for the operation. Thus, in the midst of the sanitary crisis, the Sentinelles social worker struggles for Samba, who is in great pain, to be treated rapidly. But hospitals are overwhelmed. The operation scheduled in a public hospital in Dakar is postponed. Given the emergency, an opening for surgical intervention is secured in a private hospital. The operation is successful. Samba progressively regains health and appetite.





The story of Samba is revealing deeper problems. Talibés are obliged to beg every day, for money or food, from house to house in the hopes of receiving anything edible. Back at the daara they deposit the gathered food into a big bucket which will be shared among all.

The lack of hygiene and that food, sometimes cooked or spoilt, is the cause of many afflictions for the children: diarrhoea, belly aches, skin rashes and other illnesses.

Sentinelles decides to integrate this daara into its talibé programme and a free health check-up is quickly organised there. A voluntary medical doctor first inspects the premises to better know the living conditions of the children. Abandoned cats are squatting the dormitories to which the daara's sheep also have access and whose excrements found there are breeding grounds for parasitic infections.

**Sentinelles' strategy for this programme is to involve right from the start all of the communal actors gravitating around the daara: the neighbourhood Delegate, the Bajenu Gokh as well as some talibé mothers.**

A talibé mother is the mother of a family who gives some of her time to a talibé child and allows him to come to her place to have a shower, a breakfast and

some small care when necessary. Unfortunately, not all talibés are lucky enough to have one.

The role of these actors is essential to guarantee a better observance of good practices within the daara. They have taken part in the consultation that has allowed to detect health problems of several children and during which hygiene protocols were discussed. The project aims to significantly improve the general living conditions of the children.

Since January 2020, literacy lessons are given by lady teachers employed by Sentinelles for 10 hours weekly. To benefit from it, the first condition is that the daara has been tidied and cleaned. This rule is taken very seriously by the ladies who also play a role in the wellbeing of the children. Today Samba is again smiling among his mates in the literacy class. He proves to be brilliant and catches up on his lag.

To end child begging and gain self-sustainment, a money-making activity could be started in the daara, to which the children could participate according to their ages, such as gardening, poultry or sheep herding, under the supervision of the neighbourhood delegate. The daara must be integrated into the neighbourhood, of which the talibé children are a part, and which must take responsibility for the problems created by it.

We hope that the presence and support of Sentinelles will improve the living

conditions of the children and allow us to withdraw and hand over to the social web so that the gains are maintained and progress. ■



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## I SWITZERLAND

# Exhibition at the Vaud Cantonal Archives

### The Marie-Louise Association presents the course of the life of child victims of noma

In 2020, the Sentinelles Foundation entrusts its historical archives to the Vaud Cantonal Archives and upon receipt, its vivacious director, Delphine Friedman, is already bubbling with ideas to make the public aware of its riches. But how to show the life of a child disfigured by the illness, of women raped or imprisoned, without affecting their dignity, without hurting anyone or divulging information subject to the law on the treatment of archives? Acacio Calisto, an archivist, has the answer. He suggests to the Marie-Louise Association plunging into the Sentinelles documentation and extracting from it a variety of artworks. The Association's designers, after a meeting with Martin Bovay, author of a master's thesis linked to the illness, decide to concentrate their work on noma.

The artworks exhibited today at the Cantonal Archives illustrate faces or scenes of daily life, there, in the arid region of the Sahel, either in an explosion of colours or with a fine and delicate stroke. Occasionally, short sentences extracted from a file make the visitor aware of medical and sociological stakes. Sabine Bertschi, member of the Association, decided to concen-

trate on a single file, that of a small girl. She tells of her impression of entering into her intimacy, the feeling of guessing her life by reading between the lines of follow-up reports. She also describes how that child is part of her life. Giancarlo Mino uses an original collage technique. He has an offbeat and sensitive outlook on the plastic and aesthetic aspects. Thousands of miles from noma? Not so sure...

The whole collection of drawings exhibited at the Cantonal Archives lies well protected in an imposing wooden structure, both hidden and accessible. As did the members of the Association who entered the realm of Sentinelles archives and noma for creation purposes, the visitor will have to look for the artworks to discover and appreciate them.

**Come without delay to see this hitherto unseen exhibition in the **Hall of the Archives of Canton Vaud**, in Chavannes-près-Renens.**

For more information, visit our website:  
[www.sentinelles.org/actualites](http://www.sentinelles.org/actualites)



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