

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



Burkina Faso

Overcoming challenges through courage and solidarity

Niger

Mariama, such a beautiful face soon to resurrect

IGA

Income-generating activities create a significant impact

Editorial

Burkina Faso: solidarity in the midst of a crisis

Burkina Faso is facing a long-term crisis, with an alarming number of people displaced within the country. Supplying medium-sized towns is almost impossible due to jihadist stranglehold; many villages are being emptied. Entire families are forced to run away from their homes due to attacks of unprecedented violence, losing at the same time their means of subsistence. These often find shelter among hosts who display admirable generosity by sharing the little they have. This solidarity encourages newcomers to rebuild their lives and preserve their dignity. It is key to support this momentum, at risk of running out of steam, given the strong pressure on host communities.

Neither Niger, nor the eastern DRC, nor Colombia, where we also run our programs, have been spared violence and insecurity. Yet we continue our work with the same commitment and enthusiasm. We work tirelessly to provide every child with a supportive environment for quality care and learning. At the same time, we carry on promoting prevention and raising awareness. You can help make a difference to many families, by donating, volunteering, or simply sharing our message with friends and family. As the year draws to a close, we'd like to invite everyone to join our cause, and especially to pass on a message of gratitude, warmth and hope to our loyal readers and donors.

We wish you happy Holidays and a new Year filled with peace and solidarity.

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Morard'.

Marlyse Morard
Director

IN BRIEF

COLOMBIA Reaching out

During two years, we have supported two sisters, Paula, aged 11, and Lina, 8. They are now more independent, more confident and happier. These 2 girls have been abused then rejected by their mother. At the Tierra de Vida home (the name given to Sentinelles in Colombia), they get school tutoring and personalised psycho-social support. Thanks to a psychological follow-up and personal development projects, Paula has gained in confidence and feels ready to talk about her mother's abandonment. And her little sister Lina now realises that she has the right to express herself and to be heard, thanks to the drama, music and radio workshops. Their father Pablo, who at first refused our assistance, has eventually rebuilt a loving and protective relationship with his two daughters. He thanks Tierra de Vida for reaching out to them. A testimonial to a true-life success through our commitment. Paula now feels confident about going back to live with her father, who plans to rearrange his working hours to look after her. Lina is not ready yet but knows that her father and sister will continue to be by her side.

Thanks to your support, Tierra de Vida has been working on protecting children in Colombia for 40 years.



MADAGASCAR A beautiful life course

Roberto, supported by Sentinelles since 2012, has come a long way. He was the eldest child in a poor family with no mother, and his father never really looked after him. As a teenager, he spent more than 2 years in a rehabilitation centre, where his father placed him as a child in moral danger¹. We met him there when he was in his 4th grade in primary school. With our support, Roberto hung in there and is now doing his 1st year of building engineering at the Institut Supérieur Polytechnique de Madagascar (Antananarivo), aiming for an engineering degree.

Well done and good luck to him!

1. This type of placement may be requested either by the family or by the competent authorities. These are children whose family or social environment, or even their behaviour, is likely to put them in danger. They are subject to the same conditions and environment as those detained for conflicts with the law.

EVENTS



Upcoming : Concert at the Victoria Hall

The Swiss Doctors' Orchestra (SMOMS) gathers physicians from all over the country who share a great passion for classical music. An exceptional concert will be given in favour of the association Les amis de Sentinelles at Geneva's Victoria Hall on **8 June 2024 at 6.30pm**.

Pieces by Haydn and Mendelssohn will be conducted by Anthony Fournier, with soloist Christoph Croisé on cello. The concert is sponsored by Dr Bertrand Piccard.

We do hope you will attend this musical event, in favour of all our beneficiaries.

Sentinelles at the Prilly and Lausanne Christmas Markets

The City of Prilly's *Integration and Culture Department* is organising a local Christmas market in the courtyard of the Château, near the Route du Chasseur, on Tuesday **5 December from 4pm to 9pm**. Sentinelles will be there to sell handicrafts from our programmes. We hope you will come and support us.

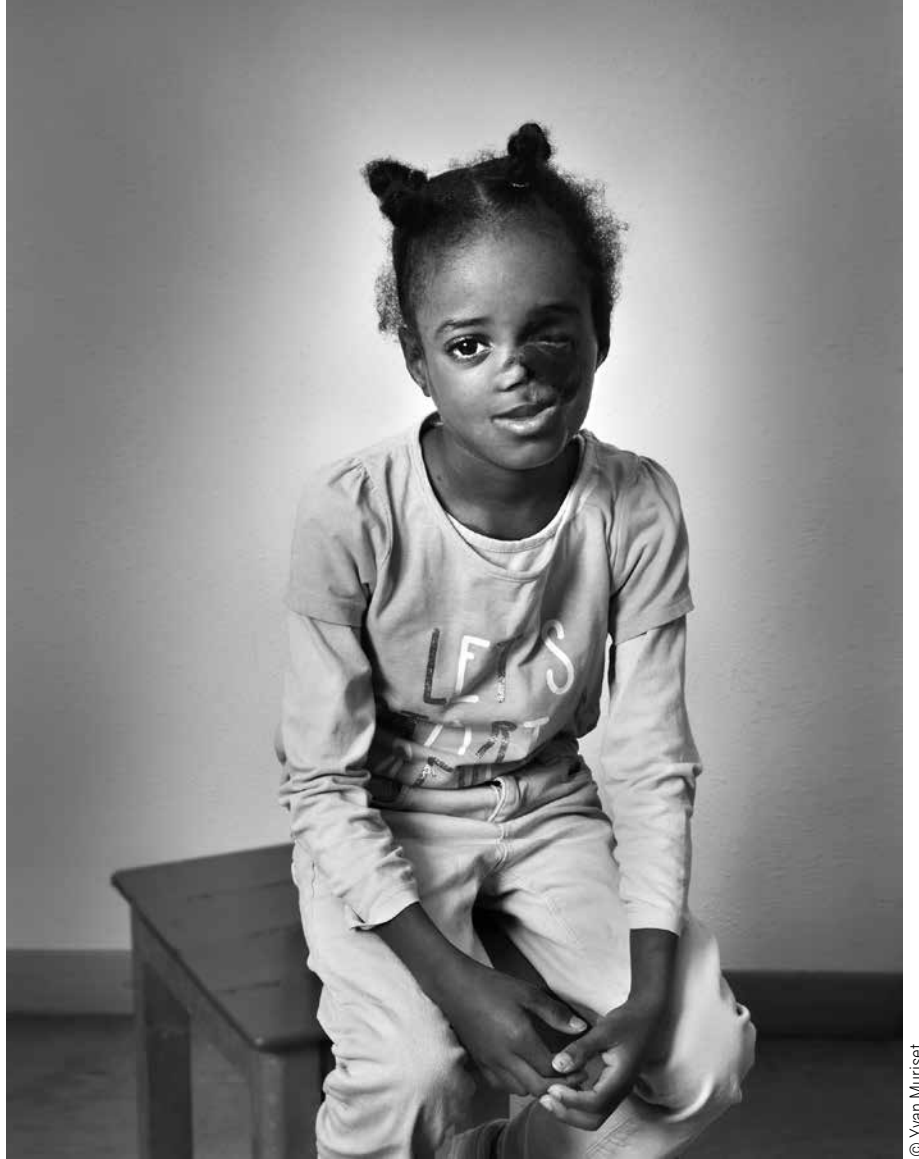
The evening will also feature a number of events, including an exhibition on migration and the Mediterranean crossing, the School Choir, organic market stalls, free pea soup and wine, and a visit from St Nicholas and his donkeys.

Sentinelles will also be at Rue Haldimand in Lausanne on **Saturday 9 December from 8.30am**. We will also be selling handicrafts from Madagascar, Senegal and Burkina Faso. We look forward to seeing you there.



It happened : “Operation Tartines”

On 9 September in Fribourg and 30 September in Lausanne, we welcomed gourmets and people who care about children to our stands. A big thank you to our volunteers and to all those who supported children in need.



© Yvan Muriel

NIGER Draw me, Mariama

“Sometimes it seems that noma targets the most beautiful children, children with the most delicate faces”. This is how Mariama, a Sentinelles nurse, words the unthinkable.

It's October 2020, and a little girl suffering from the disease has just arrived at Sentinelles' Noma Centre in Niger.

This little girl is also called Mariama, like our nurse. She is 5 years old. She is small and extremely thin. The moderate malnutrition from which she suffers is partly responsible for this skinny appearance, but it's also a question of morphology. Mariama is a Nigerian girl as many others, except that she comes to the Sentinelles nurses with a large necrosis on her face, which will fall

off in the following days, together with her eye. This will leave a gaping hole in her left cheek. Her little nose is also affected, and only half of it will remain.

Fortunately, not all children arrive at our Centre in Zinder with the same symptoms, but for some of them, the disease is taking its toll. Not all children with the after-effects of noma have the same reaction to the disease. Often, once they have recovered from the acute phase, toddlers regain their zest for life because they are unaware of their face and their difference. But Mariama is one of the children most affected by noma, both physically and psychologically. It's hard to get a smile out of her, and she remains sad and lethargic for most of her time at the Centre. We don't really know what she's feeling, and our team witness some heart-breaking moments in her village when she keeps her hand over her face in an attempt to hide the after-effects.

When she is at the Centre, we watch her progress in the activities on offer and discover that Mariama has a fantastic talent for drawing! Armed with chalk or coloured pencils, she quickly takes to the game of illustration, and her presence at the Centre's little school every morning allows us to see her blossom. Sometimes, when she's playing, she even laughs out loud, and it's such a relief to hear her spontaneous little screams. It makes you realise that part of her is still a child, with no worries or lingering misfortunes.

For 2 years, Mariama was monitored by our Nigerian team to see how the healing was progressing and to prepare her for her transfer to Switzerland. In August 2022, once all the administrative and logistical hurdles had been cleared, she arrived at Geneva airport. Everything followed on from there. Mariama first went to La Maison de Terre des Hommes Valais in Masongex, where she met many children from all over the world, and especially Fadilla,



another little Nigerian girl who had arrived a few months before her.

Consultations were held at Geneva University Hospitals, where Mariama was seen by a team of specialists who defined the procedure to reshape the left side of her face.

Many consultations followed, as well as four facial reconstruction operations. Mariama always seemed a bit sulky, probably due to her strong character, but doesn't that help to get through all these ordeals? In the consultation room at the hospital, and at La Maison, Mariama drew as much as she could, and more and more smiles beamed on her face... especially when she played in the snow that fell in Massongex during her stay.

Mariama returned to Niger in June 2023, bright-eyed and with a suitcase full of

crayons. She will return to Switzerland in a few years' time for the reconstruction of her nose, which can only be redone when she is older. Before returning to her family, she went to our Centre in Zinder, where our nurse, the other Mariama, welcomed her like all the children who get a new face: with a smile on her face and great joy to be part of the action that helps children benefit from excellent care, between Niger and Switzerland.



BURKINA FASO

The determination and courage of displaced families

Last year, we shared with you on the difficult context in Burkina Faso. Armed groups attacks have forced almost 10% of the population to migrate within the country. Most of these people are extremely vulnerable, and Sentinelles has chosen to provide assistance to some of them.

With over 40% of its population already living below poverty line, an additional 1.5 million people will have fallen into poverty in 2022. The cumulative effects of radical armed groups, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and climatic shocks have only worsened the economic situation of the poorest, who can no longer cultivate their fields and are hardly hit by rising food prices. What's more, supplies to outlying areas are particularly difficult. Growing insecurity is leading to forced displacement (almost 2 million people), generating an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the country. The vast majority of people fleeing the violence are flocking to communities that are themselves struggling to meet their needs. Health and education facilities have also been affected in all regions.

Beyond these frightening figures, we would like to share with you some of the individual situations we have encoun-

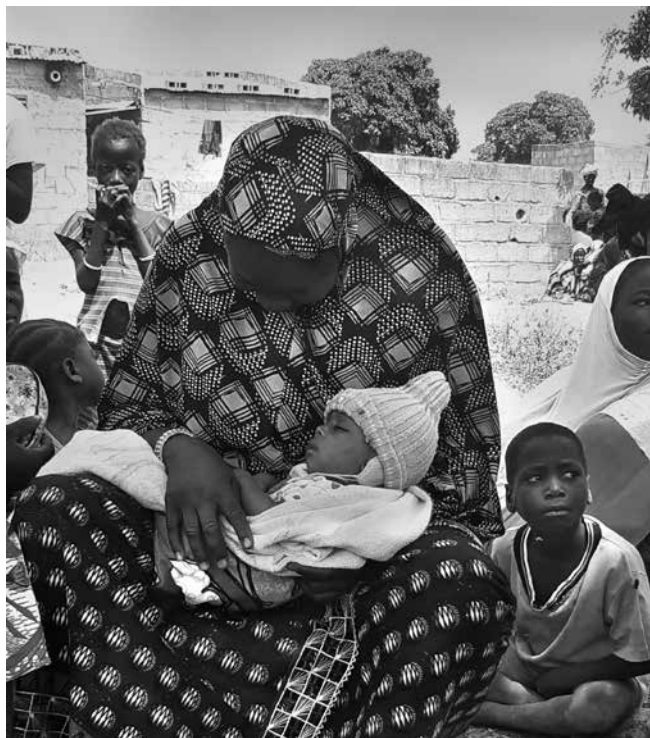
tered as part of our noma and obstetric fistula programmes, as well as the special project set up to help internally displaced families.

It is the courage of these families and the solidarity of the people that we wish to highlight.

After many months during which we had no news from him, **Aissatou's** father was finally able to visit his daughter, who returned at the beginning of the year from her stay in Switzerland for treatment of her renal syndrome (see Journal 288, June 2023). The journey from the village to Ouagadougou, which usually only takes a few hours, turned into a long and difficult journey. Faced with a group of jihadists, he had to turn back and take a different route, but the buses got stuck in another town. Far from home, with no money,

he finally managed to contact us and we sent him the funds needed to continue his journey to the capital. But his troubles were not over. Speaking only a dialect not widely spoken in Burkina Faso, he cannot understand the demands made of him at the security checks along the way. Despite his anxieties and misunderstandings, he finally arrived in Ouagadougou, very tired. Seeing his daughter again was priceless. They spent a month together at the care centre and then returned together to the village, this time without a hitch, well equipped with documents to facilitate his return and a telephone to keep in touch with us.

Tindampo crossed the bush on foot to join his family. After a cure for the obstetric fistula, she had suffered from for many years, she had gone to work for a few weeks in another town. Following attacks near her village, Tindampo found her-



self isolated from her home, with no way of getting home or communicating with her family. After several weeks of anxiety, she finally decided to reach her village by another route, first on a motorbike-taxi, then by a 3-day walk in the bush despite the insecurity. Finally safe and sound in the village, she was able to send us a voice message via an acquaintance. Tindampoa was back with her family, but lacking her livestock, which had been stolen in the meantime.

Adissa's mother had to flee her village in a hurry with her children, leaving behind all her possessions. She still has no news of her husband, who has been missing for several months, not knowing whether he is alive or dead. Her situation as an internally displaced person is worsened by the medical problems of her 7-year-old daughter, who has a rectal fistula caused by an infection contracted in early childhood. The mother sought help from the social action department, which referred the little girl to us for medical treatment. She is a courageous mother who remains dignified in the face of life's trials; she told us about her family history, little by little, discreetly. We are helping her with emergency aid

and setting up an income-generating activity. Adissa is waiting for a date for her operation.

Inoussa, who lives in Ouagadougou, did not hesitate to welcome into his courtyard and the surrounding area around forty families from his village who had had to flee their homes in a hurry without anything. He installed some of them in his courtyard, others in classrooms not far from his home, and some in unfinished houses. As these facilities cannot accommodate everyone, he has interceded with house owners to accommodate others for a rental fee. Inoussa shares the little food he has with each person on a daily basis so that they can feed themselves. Alerted by the social action, we implemented emergency aid initially before defining appropriate aid in the medium term.

These examples give an idea of the extreme difficulties that all these families are facing, but above all of the way in which they are coping with this adversity, with great courage, always with dignity and solidarity. Sentinelles' action among these families makes perfect sense.



Income-generating activities: the road to self-sufficiency

We are convinced that helping women (sometimes very young) to launch an income-generating activity (IGA) carries a double bonus: To restore their self-confidence and capacities, and to escape the vicious circle of poverty circle (illness, illiteracy, inequality, violence, abuse, etc.).

What's more, and this is the unrivalled strength of women, giving them new tasks and new responsibilities not only benefits them, but also their children, their family and their community.

In all its programs, Sentinelles has therefore decided to give priority to setting up income-generating activities for women, also taking into account their context and wishes.

In **Burkina Faso**, we are setting up IGAs - cooking, soap-making, petty trading - for displaced people who are victims of conflict, and for women suffering from obstetric fistulas. We do the same for families of children affected by noma.

In **Madagascar**, Sentinelles grants micro-credits and start-up kits covering agro-pastoral activities, small business startups, hairdressing or sewing workshops, basketry and utensils manufacturing.

In **Colombia**, we provide women with training in cooking, beauty care, organic farming and sewing, and then provide them with an IGA start-up kit.

In **Niger**, families of children affected by noma receive economic aid to help them become self-sufficient. Since noma is the consequence and face of poverty, improving the income of these families also helps to prevent new cases.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, Sentinelles finances IGAs to start small businesses or livestock farming, and provides seeds.

In **Senegal**, beneficiaries can choose to trade in vegetables or charcoal, or sell basic necessities and livestock breeding.

Merely a few dozen or a few hundred francs are needed for each situation. But the impact is significant!

Day after day we marvel at these women succeeding in grasping the opportunities offered to them.

This is the reason why we are calling on your generosity. Thank you for giving them such a Christmas present!

IGA

An IGA is an economic activity involving the production and/or marketing of goods or services. It provides women in particular with a regular income while improving their living conditions and, in the longer term, enabling them to become self-sufficient thanks to personalised support throughout the process.

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