

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



Niger

Amina, a journey to healing

Burkina Faso

Pauline and Adjima's life journey

Madagascar

A faithful nurse bears witness

Editorial

Once a Sentinelles...

Michèle Froidevaux, a former employee, retraced her steps to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the programme for Burkinabe women suffering from obstetric fistulas. She spoke with her characteristic sensitivity and humanity to some of the women who underwent surgery nearly two decades ago, when she was stationed in the east of the country. These poignant reunions revealed the difficulties of their medical and social journeys in an unstable security context and attested to the lasting impact of our commitment.

In Madagascar, patients' families are responsible for looking after them during their stay in hospital, and buying medicines, food and personal hygiene products. Needless to say, this is an enormous investment in terms of time and money. Practical solutions have gradually been put in place by our team, such as using resource persons when families do not have the means or live too far away to provide support to a relative in hospital. In this issue, one of them, who has been with us since 2006, talks about her experience.


In Colombia, we are increasingly opening our doors to the community, through a wide range of activities developed in partnership with other private and public organizations. These initiatives, which are often intergenerational, help to strengthen the social fabric in a high-crime region, and reinforce the protection of children and young people.

Whilst not being exhaustive, these stories illustrate Sentinelles' broad scope of action and its community-based approach to vulnerable populations. They also reflect our determination to make mutual aid and participation a vector of individual and collective development.

In conclusion, we would like to inform you of an important change within our organization. After ten years as President of our Foundation, Christiane Badel is handing over the reins. We would like to express our deep gratitude for her dedication, and welcome her successor, Christian Moulin, with our best wishes for success.

Thank you for your unfailing support.




Marlyse Morard
Director

IN BRIEF

SENEGAL

A play to raise awareness



Sentinelles recently organized a play with the talibé children of a daara* we've been following since 2020 in M'bour.

The play, performed by the children themselves, focused on the importance of adopting good hygiene practices within the daara. The aim was to get the talibés directly involved in this crucial issue. It brought together not only the children, but also the Koranic teachers and the local community, to raise awareness about hygiene issues.

In many daaras, talibés are left to their own devices, forced to beg for their survival, and live in extremely difficult conditions where hygiene is virtually non-existent. Poor access to drinking water, substandard sanitation, lack of latrines and hand-washing facilities are major obstacles to the adoption of good hygiene practices. This play provided a fun activity for the children, while at the same time raising their awareness!

*Traditional Koranic school, students at which are known as *talibé*.

A New President

At their meeting on June 25, 2024, the members of the Sentinelles Board of Trustees appointed their new president, who took up his post on 1 July 2024.

After 10 years' unwavering commitment at the helm of the Foundation, Christiane Badel, has taken the decision to step down. Her successor is Mr. Christian Moulin, a former employee of Sentinelles.

Between 2002 and 2007, Mr Moulin took on the role of itinerant delegate in India and subsequently Nepal, then Head of programme in Madagascar. He currently runs a private foundation for people with physical disabilities and/or brain injuries in the canton of Valais.



Symphony for hope Musical doctors help children

The Swiss Doctors' Orchestra has once again demonstrated that passion and solidarity can be combined for a noble cause. These talented doctors, united by their love of classical music, have chosen to support children suffering from noma, in their medical and social journey.

At their recent concert at the Victoria Hall, they enchanted the audience

with famous pieces and a moving presentation of a work by Alberto Ginastera, a composer who left his native Argentina during the dictatorship to settle in Geneva. Conducted by a radiant Anthony Fournier, the orchestra conveyed a vibrant message of hope, proving that music can be a powerful vector of support.

In autumn 2023, Dr Patricia Zanger, with her sparkling personality and profound humanity, approached us with a firm resolve to bring this magnificent project to fruition and her efforts

definitely paid off! Thanks to her; the members of the concert's organizing committee, and the association Les amis de Sentinelles, the day-to-day lives and prospects for children in the Sahel region affected by the disease will improve.

COLOMBIA New community activities

The Tierra de Vida children's home in Colombia: a place of exploration to improve skills and recreate social ties within a protective space.

To foster the creation of protective spaces for children from the Minas mining region who are facing new challenges and social difficulties, we encourage community action by opening the home to various meetings bringing together children, young people, parents and elders. We currently offer a computer course, as well as workshops in



making radio programmes, sports and nature conservation. These courses are open to all and enable the local community to interact with the home's children, while discovering new trades or alternative activities to the mine, as well as topical issues. The home's openness to the community also ensures that children are safer when outside the home.

Over the past forty years, Sentinelles has placed increasing emphasis on the protection and well-being of children in the particularly vulnerable Minas region.

Opération tartines in Fribourg

On Saturday September 7, our friends from Sentinelles Fribourg are organizing another «Opération Tartines» in aid of Sentinelles on the Place du Temple in the Fribourg capital. The sale of sandwiches - CHF 1.- each - will raise awareness of our commitment to helping children in deep distress. We hope to see you there to share discussions and delicacies.



NIGER Amina's arrival

On May 7, 2024, 12-year-old Amina arrived at Geneva airport after a long journey by bus and then plane, to undergo surgery for total jaw constriction. When Amina walks through the arrivals gate, it's a relief for all those who helped prepare her journey. After all, her visa had only been obtained on the day of her departure. However, it takes several months to put together a file, and nothing is left to chance.

The stories of children who come to Switzerland for surgery are often told in this newsletter. With the help of our long-standing partners such as the HUG and the Maison de Terre des hommes in Masongex VS, the children are cared for in Switzerland in a seamless, meticulously coordinated fashion. Arranging children's travel from their country of origin, on the other hand, is much more unpredictable and can be a real obstacle course. Here's an overview.

An invitation from the HUG – University Hospital of Geneva

Amina suffers from total jaw constriction following a fall in front of her house when she was younger. As a result, her jaw clamped shut, making eating particularly difficult for her. Although she has gradually developed a strategy, it takes her an inordinate amount of time to eat.

Our referral doctor in maxillofacial surgery at the HUG studies her medical file and validates the possibility of her being transferred from Niger to Switzerland. Once the invitation from the HUG has been obtained, all the necessary documents must be completed in Niger before she can travel, i.e. a passport, a visa and a safe-conduct attesting that her parents are entrusting their child to Sentinelles for medical care.

Parental consent and passport

Sentinelles' support for Amina and her family began long before she leaves for her operation in Switzerland. Everything was discussed, explained and meticulously translated by our social workers, sometimes in front of witnesses, to her father, mother and the entire village community.

It is during these visits that the parental authorization documents are filled out. By signing these papers, the parents entrust us with their child, and the trust they sys-



tematically place in us demonstrates the importance of the local social work carried out by our teams.

The children we accompany don't always have birth registration or identity papers. Amina didn't have any, so her parents had to travel to her native village to obtain her birth certificate from the village authorities. Once all the documents had been collected, they were sent by bus to Niamey, the capital and handed in at the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire. It took our courier several visits to the DST offices, and several weeks of waiting, before Amina's passport finally emerged from this office.

Visa and Safe Conduct

Once the passport had been obtained, we were able to book a plane ticket for Amina and apply for her visa on medical grounds. The various documents are sent with the visa application to the Swiss consulate in Niamey, which forwards the file to Nigeria. There is no embassy in Niamey, and all applications for Schengen visas on medical grounds have to go through the Swiss embassy in Abuja, Nigeria. The passport then takes two to three weeks to return from Nigeria with the visa.

Preparations for Amina's trip began three months before her departure and everything seemed to be under

control, but it wasn't until the very day of her trip that her passport could be collected from the Swiss consulate in Niamey. In the meantime, our team arranged for her father to travel to the capital so that he could sign the safe-conduct form at the police station certifying that she could leave the country without her parents.

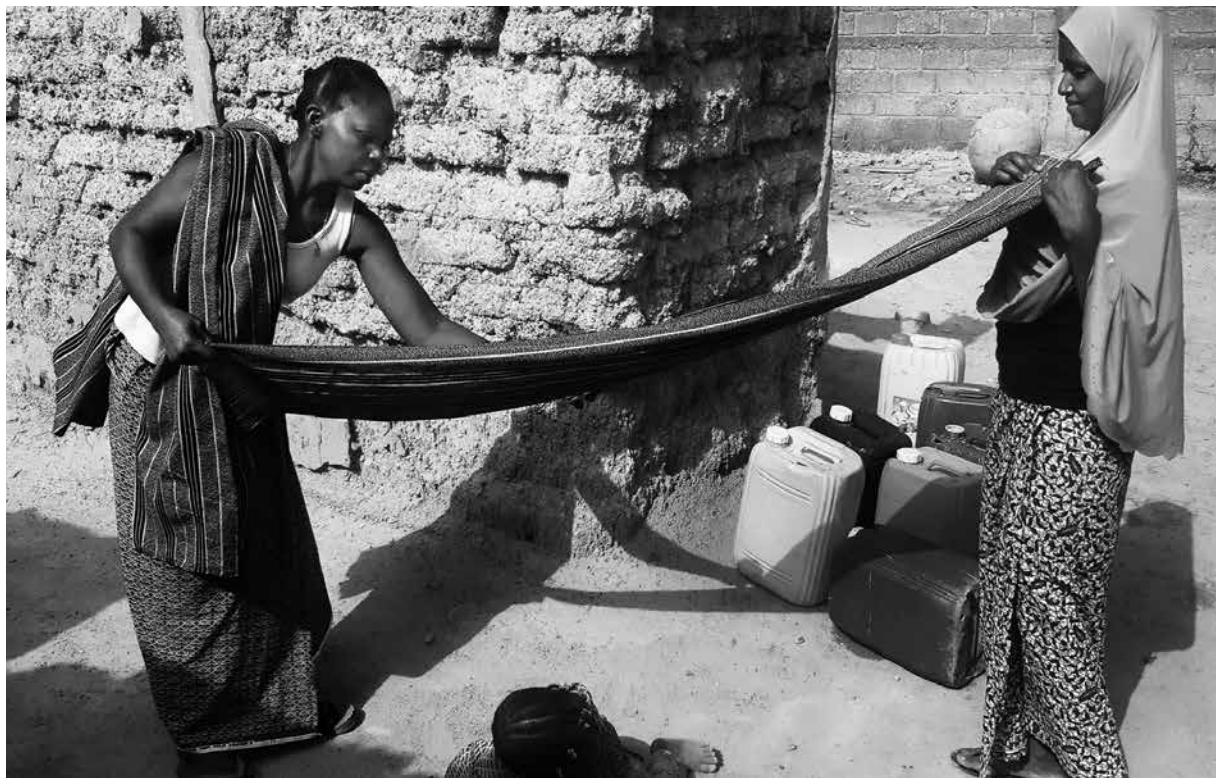
How do children travel?

In Niger, a new problem has arisen because the airline Air France is no longer authorized to operate flights to this country since the political changes of 2023. However, the association Aviation Sans Frontières, that we work with to accompany children on flights, does not authorize its volunteers to go to countries where this airline is banned. We therefore have no choice but to arrange the children's trips to coincide with our follow-up trips in the country, or those of our partners, adding an extra parameter of coordination. In fact, Amina arrived at Geneva airport accompanied by her programme manager, who had just completed a follow-up mission to our centre for children with noma in Zinder.

How difficult all these procedures depend very much on the children's country of origin. Niger is particularly difficult because Switzerland doesn't embassy there. The country is vast and administrative services are very centralised,

everything has to go through Niamey, even though our reception centre is 1,000 kilometres from the capital.

Fortunately, the Nigerien children who come to Switzerland are only a tiny fraction of those who benefit from surgery. Most of them are cared for in Niger. But for those who do come, it's a real obstacle course, with a few cold sweats before they are warmly welcomed at Geneva airport.



BURKINA FASO

Pauline and Adjima's journey

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Sentinelles programme dedicated to women suffering from obstetric fistula. Since 2004, nearly 700 women have been helped on their journey to recovery and social reintegration.

During a trip to Burkina Faso, Michèle, former head of the programme, was able to meet some of these courageous women, who shared their stories with her. Here are two of their stories.

Pauline, operated on in 2005 at the age of 30

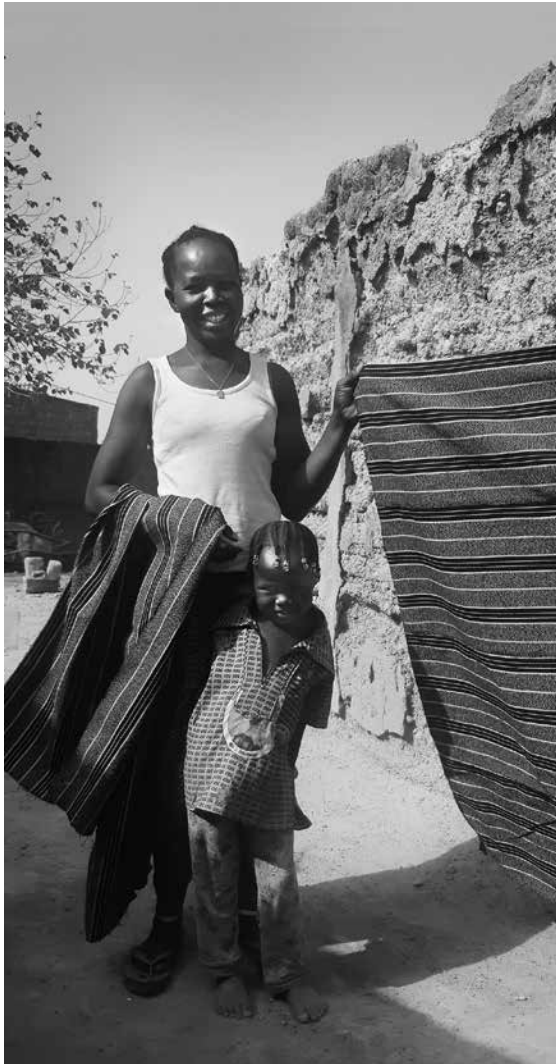
Pauline came to us when the fistula relief programme was just starting up in the Fada N'Gourma region and was desperate to find a solution to her health problems. After several attempts, in 1997 Pauline finally gave birth to a child under difficult conditions. This was followed by long years of wandering in search of a cure. At the time, she suffered from severe, permanent incontinence that was difficult to live with on a daily basis. No fewer than 4 operations were needed to overcome this problem. The last operation, a urinary bypass performed by our specialist urological surgeon, Professor Rochat from Geneva, finally brought relief from her suffering.

Sentinelles also spared no effort in helping her develop a small income-generating activity so that she could become financially independent. She came to our centre in Fada N'Gourma to learn, among other things, how to make soap. For a long time, she managed to make a small profit which enabled her to meet basic needs. Pauline is contacted annually by our nurses for a full medical check-up at a hospital to make sure she's doing well. Pauline underwent

a shunt“, meaning that her urine is evacuated through the anal sphincter, so she must stick rigorously to a potash-based diet (ash resulting from the burning of cooking wood) taken daily. The potash helps “basify” or make the urine in the intestine alkaline, thus avoiding kidney complications. Pauline's most recent medical examination, carried out in Ouagadougou in February 2024, shows that she has no bypass-related disorders. Her social and family situation is also reviewed annually. Unfortunately, she had to stop her small soap production because she could no longer sell it. What's more, with inflation, the raw materials she used to make her soap became so expensive that she could no longer make a reasonable profit. Today, at almost 50, she grows millet on her family's plot and lives quietly alongside her 19-year-old son and her husband, who take good care of her. Her facial expression is serene and conveys good moral and physical health.

Adjima's courage and resilience in the face of life's challenges

Adjima had her fistula operated on in September 2020 by Dr Guiro in Ouagadougou. After just one operation, she is now perfectly healed and continent. Back in her village in eastern Burkina, she led a peaceful life with her husband and children. In 2022, she was forced to flee from jihadists who took their house and all their possessions. Her husband enlisted as a volunteer to defend the population, so Adjima took her 2 daughters under her arm and found herself in the capital. One tragedy led to another, and her 8-year-old daughter fell ill and passed away owing to a lack of adequate health care. Initially taken in by her brother and sister-in-law, Adjima had to resign herself to leaving them a short time later, owing to a lack of space and resources, and moved into a small, shared flat with an acquaintance, who had also been displaced. Sentinelles supported her with emergency food aid when she arrived. Undaunted by her fate, she soon found a small job in a traditional weaving workshop, where



she was able to train as a weaver. At the same time, she works every evening in a restaurant, grilling fish. In addition to a small salary, she is given meals there and can take home enough food to support her small family.

Following an interview with Adjima at our shelter in Ouagadougou, we visited her home to admire her work. We discovered some beautiful traditionally woven loincloths, known as Dafani weaving. Her face was full of pride. We offered her a loom so that she could develop her own production in her backyard. Living modestly, Adjima has found stability and a little security, even though she misses her husband and rarely hears from him. For the time being, the security situation does not allow them to travel, and therefore to meet up. She accepts this situation with great courage and has taken her destiny into her own hands.

Obstetric fistula is an abnormal communication between the bladder or rectum and the vagina occurring after a difficult or prolonged delivery.

Obstetric fistula occurs in 1 to 2 ‰ deliveries, or around 3,000,000 women worldwide living with fistula, most of them in Africa and South Asia.

In Burkina Faso estimates give a 2019 prevalence of 16,080 and an average annual incidence of 901 cases.

In addition to the medical consequences, which can lead to kidney failure or even early death, social exclusion, marginalization and stigmatization mark the women who suffer from it.



MADAGASCAR Valuable collaboration

Hospital staff do not bring food for patients, help them wash and go to the bathroom, or in other ways during their stay in hospital. It's up to the patient's family to take on this role 24 hours a day. When this isn't possible, Sentinelles enlists the help of trusted former beneficiaries, who are modestly compensated for this.

„Toutou“ is our most loyal caregiver. She has known us since 2006, following the imprisonment of her sister-in-law (a beneficiary of our foundation, who was in prison with a child), and then that of her brother, during which time she looked after her nephews. We often call on her services. Most recently, she took care of Melissia, a 1-year-old girl who was living with her mother in prison and had to be hospitalized due to respiratory problems.

Testimonial from „Toutou“

Sentinelles puts all its trust in me by letting me do what I can for these children. It's very important to me, our relationship is good and I really enjoy taking care of them, especially as I have a special attachment to them that they also feel. Melissia is one of nine children I cared for in this hospital. They all came out safe and sound, and I feel the same way about little Melissia.

I'm not new to the medical staff, who also trust me. This reassures me regarding my responsibilities and my ability to care for these little patients. These experiences inspire me to dream of working in a centre that takes in young children abandoned by their families.

I must admit, however, that the financial contribution I receive from Sentinelles to help me carry out my humble duty helps me to strengthen my chalk-making business. Sentinelles itself had helped me build up this income-generating activity when my sister-in-law was in prison, so that I could provide for her children and my own.

Melissia has now been discharged from hospital.

The role I've taken on with the Sentinelles team is a blessing and an opportunity to fulfil my duty to my compatriots, especially the children who are the future of our country. My participation in the Foundation's work is very important in human terms.

From time to time, it's also a double-edged sword, because parting with the children once they've recovered and thinking about what will become of them worries me, but I trust in the support of the social workers for that.“

Sentinelles

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