

# Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



## **Burkina Faso**

The unfailing  
commitment of  
Dr Moussa Guiro

## **Niger**

Work opportunities  
for young people

## **Senegal**

Alarming conditions  
of a talibé child

## Editorial

### Commitment and training, a winning duo

There are particularly pleasant collaborations to talk about and that of Dr. Guiro, a Burkinabe surgeon at the bedside of women with obstetric fistula, is one of them. A meeting in a corner of West Africa with Dr. Rochat, a specialist in urology engaged in humanitarian medicine, definitively marked his trajectory. You will read that for several years, he sees these women in consultation, operates them, ensures their follow-up with kindness and rigour and during radio broadcasts, gives them real hope by reminding them that their condition is not inevitable.

These doctors, like the many volunteers active at our side, are the artisans of a social solidarity dynamic that they create and preserve, in the shadows, in Switzerland and elsewhere. They have no other claim than to contribute to the well-being of children, women, entire families and to ensure the transfer of knowledge. Yet they leave an indelible mark on those who have crossed their path.

Youth employment is a major global challenge. According to the ILO (International Labour Organization), there have never been so many young people experiencing poverty and underemployment as there are today. The context is particularly difficult in Niger, especially for those who bear the stigmata of noma. Learning a trade and accessing decent work allows them to escape the vicious circle of poverty. Sentinelles accompanies them throughout their journey, one by one, with the conviction that the skills acquired and their beautiful energy will be vectors of change.

Thanks to alliances consolidated over time, women who believe they are incurable are getting back on with their lives, young people struggling to meet their vital needs dare to consider their future. Let us give ourselves the opportunity to offer so many others in need real social and economic integration. Let us give ourselves the opportunity for solidarity.



Marlyse Morard  
Director

## Switzerland

### Mobilisation of a volunteer

“How can you not be deeply shocked when you meet a child with a severe form of noma for the first time? This is what happened to me one Monday morning in the Sentinelles offices. When you also know that the disease starts with a lack of dental hygiene, among other things, there are ways to help and prevent! So naturally I thought of my dental hygienist, who in turn mobilised the Swiss Association of Dental Hygienists. From then on, toothbrushes, toothpastes, oral solutions and educational flyers in pictures will be sent to this cause - among many others - that Sentinelles ardently defends. The result is here! A warm thank you for their wonderful support, especially to Lucie Mazerolle, my dental hygienist, who mobilized her colleagues. Thanks also to Louise who drew a picture for the children in Africa who are not as lucky.” Corinne Junod



## Colombia

### Schooling adapted to the specificities of each child

Within the framework of educational policies and practices and educational needs, UNESCO affirms the right to schooling for all children, regardless of their particular characteristics. In Colombia, we collaborate with the state service in charge of the integration of students with special needs into the school system. Currently, this service does not have any units available for the Minas branch, so our team visits all the families in the Minas and La Clarita neighbourhoods to assess the children's level of education and identify their needs for specialised teaching. In the whole municipality 106 children have been identified, of which 68 are in the Sentinelles intervention area. This diagnosis will then allow these children to join classes with inclusive education programmes in the public school.







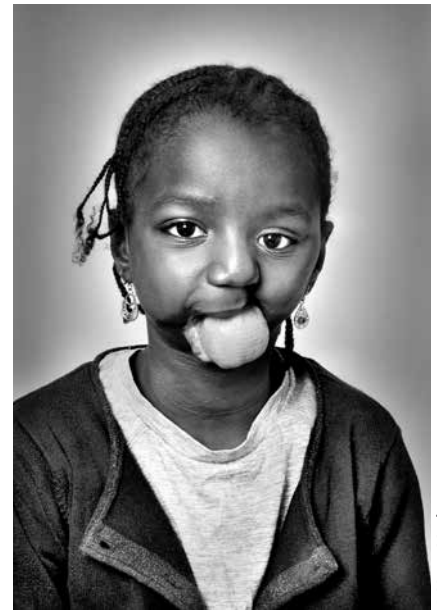
## Event Solidarity market

Sentinelles participated for the first time in the Solidarity Christmas Market from December 15 to 17 at Pôle Sud in Lausanne. A friendly welcome, a very warm atmosphere, excellent organization, solidarity was there, as well as a large and faithful public, convinced by the causes supported by the 40 associations present, all having in common the mutual aid for the most underprivileged in the world. It was cold and grey outside, but there was so much human warmth... and the proceeds of more than CHF 3,000 went to the immediate relief of children in distress.

## Medical Care Fadilla, a long-term treatment

Fadilla, an eight-and-a-half year old girl from Niger, suffers from the severe after-effects of noma, which she contracted at the age of two. Her lower jaw was completely destroyed by the disease, leaving her tongue exposed and causing difficulties in eating and speaking, as well as risks of infection. She therefore came to Switzerland for particularly complex facial reconstruction operations which are not possible in her country. After various examinations, complex operations are carried out at the

University Hospitals of Geneva to give this child a face again. In particular, her lower jaw had to be reconstructed by removing a piece of bone from the fibula - a non-essential bone in the leg - requiring the joint intervention of a plastic surgeon and a maxillo-facial surgeon. Despite the severity of the treatment, Fadilla is proving to be very brave and resilient, and her cooperation in her care is invaluable. We wish her all the best for the rest of her treatment, to keep this strength and courage that we admire.



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## The Ministrings in concert

After the triumph - dare we say it - of their concert on 15 May 2022, the Ministrings are once again offering magical musical moments in aid of children who are victims of major distress.

Come in great numbers to discover or re-discover these young and very talented students of the Lausanne Conservatory.

See you soon to live together in harmony and solidarity.

Sunday 5 March at 5 p.m.  
Centre culturel des Terreaux,  
rue de l'Alé 31 in Lausanne

Free admission - pass-the-hat  
collection in favour of Sentinelles

## Burkina Faso

# A faithful and committed collaboration at the service of women with obstetric fistula and prolapse

From the beginning of the Sentinelles programme dedicated to women victims of obstetric fistula, we met Dr. Moussa Guiro, a Burkinabe doctor. Almost 20 years later, we asked him what had been the source of his motivation and continued commitment.

“From my first assignment in 1993, as a young state-certified doctor, I met many women suffering from obstetric fistula (OF) who did not have access to surgery. Geographical inaccessibility (only the urology departments of the Ouagadougou and Bobo Dioulasso hospitals offered the possibility of surgical treatment) and financial inaccessibility meant that these women could not benefit from reconstructive surgery.

I have therefore undertaken to make my contribution to their care. After applying for a specialization in general surgery from the Ministry of Health with the support of the WHO and once back in my country, I was assigned to the Regional Hospital Centre (RHC) of Fada as a general surgeon. From my first consultations I was once more confronted with the problem of the care of women with OF. I then took responsibility for creating a surgical treatment unit for fistulas in the Fada RHC.

Not having much experience in fistula treatment, I had to look for better training. I learned that there is a mission dedicated to fistulas in Tanguiéta in northern Benin, about 220 km from Fada. The mission is led by Professor Charles-Henry Rochat. I went there hoping that he would accept me as one of the learners. I met him, explained my goals and asked for his support. He agreed and I think that was one of the happiest days of my life! Our friendship has endured for 19 years.

Since then, I have participated in many campaigns in Tanguiéta. The strengthening of my skills has allowed me to make my contribution to this fight in Burkina Faso. After Fada, I coordinated the surgical activities of the project to fight against OF in the Sahel for four years. I then directed the establishment of a fistula treatment unit at the Saint Camille University Hospital in Ouagadougou.

Through its holistic care, the contribution of Sentinelles to the fight against OF in Burkina Faso is immeasurable and ideal for the elimination of this pathology in our country.”

The collaboration with Sentinelles initiated when Dr Guiro was at the Fada RHC continues at the Saint Camille Hospital in Ouagadougou. It also extends to prevention and awareness-raising actions. We produced together a radio programme in favour of the fight against obstetric fistula at Studio Yafa in Ouagadougou, broadcast on a network of community radios covering a large part of Burkina Faso.







Surgical missions for the management of cases of obstetric fistula as well as prolapse (descent of organs protruding outside the vagina in the most advanced forms, particularly disabling for women) are regularly organised. For example, the care of a woman with prolapse costs us around CHF 500.-. During the last surgical mission, 12 women with prolapse were able to be operated<sup>1</sup>.

**Nadampo, 67, gives us her testimony. She has had 10 pregnancies, but only 5 children were born alive.**

“I had my illness twenty years ago, after my last delivery. It started with pelvic pain and after some time there was a lump in my vulva. I didn’t know what it was. At the Centre for Health and Social Promotion (CHSP), I was given an injection and the lump was pushed back into my vagina. Back home I continued to push the lump back into my vagina each time without trying to treat myself because we couldn’t afford it. It is a dirty disease that puts you out of yourself because you have difficulty having sex and if your husband does not understand you, you will have arguments all the time in your home. That same year my husband took a co-wife for I refused to satisfy him. Often, I have pelvic gir-

dle pain and sometimes an asthenia that brings me down and prevents me from working. According to the co-wife it was laziness every time I said I was tired. I couldn’t manage to farm often and my husband complained.

I did not know that my illness could be cured until that day when my brother-in-law learned that there was a structure that took care of it in Fada. I met Sentinelles and I thank God for it because I have regained my health and am very happy in my home. I wish them long life so that other women can smile again.”

<sup>1</sup>This project is carried out with the participation of the City of Geneva, through the association Les amis de Sentinelles.

Obstetric fistula is an abnormal communication between the bladder or rectum and vagina that occurs during a difficult or prolonged delivery.

There is an obstetric fistula in 1 to 2% of deliveries, or about 3,000,000 women living with fistula worldwide, most of them in Africa and South Asia.

In Burkina Faso, there is an estimated prevalence in 2019 of 16,080 cases and an incidence of about 900 new cases per year.

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



## Niger Training, a gateway to working life

**With a median age of 15 years, the Nigerien population faces many challenges, including youth employment.**

The figures are difficult to establish because informal activities are widespread and escape official statistics. But the public well understands the problem: indeed, a recent survey by Afrobarometer, a pan-African research institute, shows that more than 9 out of 10 Nigerien citizens consider youth unemployment to be a major problem in their country. The causes of underemployment are multiple and generate a lack of prospects among the younger generation that can have disastrous consequences. According to the Wathi ideas exchange group, which offers a framework for reflection on changing societal trajectories in West Africa, it is generally the economic and social marginalisation of young people living in poverty that pushes them to join violent extremist groups; information recently corroborated by the World Bank that identifies the lack of employment as a concern frequently shared by those who join terrorist groups.

Finding a job when you are young and poorly trained is not easy in Niger. But it can be even more complicated for young people with disabilities or with facial sequelae left by a disease such as noma, reinforcing the rejection they can suffer.

In Niger, Sentinelles supports young people who have been affected by noma in their childhood and works to ensure that

they are not marginalised by society. The Foundation supports them in their professional career and offers them the opportunity to train for a profession in order to earn a living. This is the case of Alzouma, which is a good example of successful professional integration.

Alzouma arrived in Niamey in 2016 at the age of 26. He is one of those miraculous people who survived noma in their childhood, but in whom the disease has unfortunately left heavy sequelae. Originally from Mali, he comes from a village plagued by insecurity and lacking basic services such as a road infrastructure, school and health centres. He travelled to Niamey to seek help, hidden under his headscarf, after selling his wheelbarrow that allowed him to transport and sell water. By dint of research, he found Sentinelles and thus benefitted from several surgical operations organised with our partners in Niger. These interventions were a source of relief for Alzouma and right from his first operation, he was satisfied with his “new” face. Moreover, the scarf that he always had with him, is now no longer part of his wardrobe. Alzouma shows himself as he is. He is a fulfilled and confident young man.

He was interested in the profession of tailor and benefitted from a small training given by a local NGO. Sentinelles then supported



him in his development by organising courses with a professional couturier. After this journey and long searches for an employer, Alzouma found a sewing workshop run by a woman who quickly identified his potential and determination. Today Alzouma works there as a couturier and leads a life that suits him, in Niamey.

Sentinelles' support is not limited to the medical dimension. Indeed, the sequelae of noma can be disabling, even after operations. It was obvious that Alzouma's support would continue as his economic situation was very fragile.

Alzouma is a hopeful example for all children who have the after-effects of noma.

Last year, Rahana completed her training as a dressmaker while Safia opened her small workshop at home. In 2023, it is the turn of Habsa and Rabilou to train. All these young people had previously arrived at the Sentinelles Centre at different stages of the disease. Although we offer training in other areas, sewing is on the rise. It is an easy activity to carry out in the villages and which has a future. Because as the young Rabilou says very well: "there will always be work in sewing because people will never stop dressing".

Carpenter, mechanic, couturier are some of the trades in which Sentinelles beneficiaries can train. In the absence of large-scale action on the root causes of underemployment, it is important to ensure that the skills and confidence of these young people who start their working lives with an additional difficulty are strengthened.



# Senegal

## The Calvary of Ablaye, a talibé child

**In Senegal, although children are given high consideration, their rights are not really a priority.**

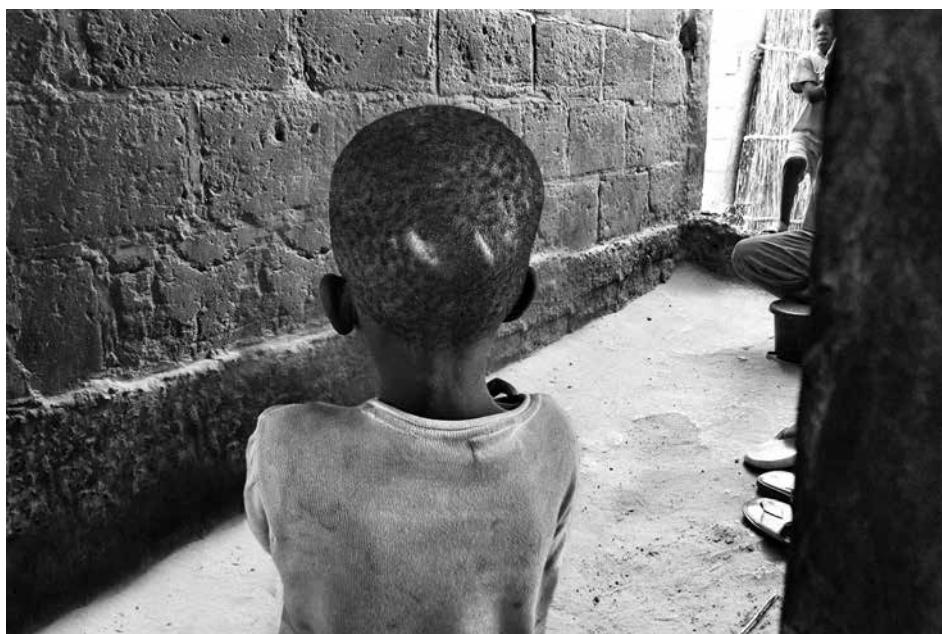
In this Muslim-majority country, talibés are children often from rural families, entrusted to Koranic teachers to learn Islam's holy book, the Koran.

In these Koranic schools commonly called "daaras" (265 in the Mbour region alone), living conditions are frequently very difficult, even revolting. Children have to go begging for food, are in rags and housed in undignified conditions, sometimes without water or latrines. Their situation is alarming for Sentinelles and institutions concerned with children's rights and protection.

Talibé children roam the streets from dawn to sunset, putting themselves in danger depending on where they go. It is common for the marabout to require children to bring in a certain amount at the end of the day, otherwise they will be ill-treated.

Sentinelles works directly with these children who experience distress that is most often ignored by the rest of the world. Some come into our office in Mbour in search of a little gentleness, listening or a gesture of tenderness.

Last March, 6-year-old Ablaye\* visited us several times. We found injuries on his body and face. His marabout mistreats him and an older talibé beat him. Our team treated him and dressed his wounds.



For several days Ablaye did not return to the office. When we saw him again, he explained to our social workers that his marabout forbids him to ask Sentinelles for help. However, a few days later, Ablaye returned in tears, his lips bleeding. To put an end to such violence and prevent the worst from happening, we alerted the head of department of the EAOE (Educational Action in an Open Environment) of this situation. This is a social services and legal aid agency under the Ministry of Justice that has a duty to act in cases of child abuse and maltreatment. Through him Ablaye was able to be placed at the "Espoir de demain" Centre. It was agreed that the EAOE would summon the marabout and the parents of the little boy before allowing his return to the family. Sentinelles will take care of the follow-up of Ablaye and his family, and will ensure social, medical and economic assistance adapted to their needs.

So everything seemed to be going in the right direction for Ablaye. However unfortunately the planned meeting with his

parents, the marabout and Sentinelles did not take place, or rather, the EAOE only summoned the marabout... who went back to the daara with the child! This is simply outrageous. The team only found out several days later and today that manager no longer works at the EAOE. This has been denounced to the right person and we are worried about little Ablaye... A case to follow.

\* Assumed name

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MAKE A DONATION



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