

N° 288 - June 2023

Sentinelles



Field mission

Senegal

Moussa's
obstacle course

Burkina Faso

Help Aissatou
stay healthy

Editorial

Between insecurity and skyrocketing prices

The programmes developed by Sentinelles contribute to the improvement of living conditions for particularly vulnerable women and children. Our actions are designed in accordance with individual needs and, thanks to important awareness raising work, tend to limit the dangers threatening them. They include access to quality health care, education, a thorough psychosocial follow-up, administrative assistance and where necessary the development of income-generating activities. Even though operational contexts vary, the global approach remains the same: individualised and faithful support with a view to reaching autonomy.

For many months, multifaceted crises have affected already fragile populations. When they are prolonged, the underlying weaknesses are exacerbated, particularly those of the health care systems. Prices are skyrocketing and poverty is rising. Our teams are increasing their efforts to respond to the needs of children who require sometimes vital care, to prevent them from dropping out of school and to offer food aid to people suffering from malnutrition. Reaching families to gauge their living conditions is a real challenge and spreading prevention messages to villagers is becoming more and more difficult. Insecurity, non-existent or poorly maintained roads, are all obstacles that have been valiantly overcome, with the continuous willpower to provide support and pursue the health prevention activities.

David Ilboudo, a Sentinelles co-worker in Burkina Faso, who is leaving after 20 years of service, writes in a thank you letter: *“In my country, you have helped and continue to help my brothers and sisters smile, have a radiant face and new feelings. Thank you for taking care of these wounded innocents.”*. Through his beautiful message he is the spokesperson for those who, in his own words, have come and will come out of the shadows and who are committed to increasing the impact of Sentinelles’ actions and hence your solidarity. Thank you for your support.



Marlyse Morard
Director

Hope generating activities

Close to 2 million people are displaced within Burkina Faso because of attacks by armed groups of radicals and violence which reigns in a large part of the land. Sentinelles continues to help women whose families have had to flee to Ouagadougou or Fada N’Gourma, in particular, through the establishment of income generating activities. Their choice as women, adapted to their individual situations, is often to establish small businesses, such as, the production and sale of cakes, soaps and other basic necessities in the outskirts of the cities where the families have settled. Even though these businesses are small, these activities bring in a source of income to help their families support themselves, a source of energy and hope for these brave women.

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Fadilla returns home

In our February issue we told you about Fadilla, a 9 year old child from Niger suffering from severe Noma sequelae. Her treatment has finished and she can now return home to her country. Fadilla underwent four operations at the Geneva University Teaching Hospital to rebuild her lower jaw and improve her face. We express our gratitude to the medical team. Welcomed at the Maison de Terre des hommes in Valais between periods of hospitalisation, she was very well cared for and followed up by a team of professionals, whom we also thank whole heartedly.

Fadilla returns to her country with a new face both functionally and aesthetically. She is both happy to go home and sad to leave our country and all the contacts she made here; it is with emotion that we say goodbye to her at the airport. Once she was back home, we were told about the joy the local team and her family had about welcoming her back, a communicative joy!

Back home, Fadilla will have to continue exercising the mobility of her face and our local team will ensure she does. Steps will also be taken to enable her to go back to school. We wish her all the best for the future and are happy to have met such an endearing little girl.



A happy ending to a hard fight

Narovana, a 4 year old boy was taken into care when he was 2 months old because he had a cleft lip and palate, and he was underweight. His very young mother, abandoned by the child's father, had difficulties feeding him because of this malformation and her standard of living did not allow her to purchase powder milk.

After 4 years of appropriate feeding and medical care, Narovana's health improved a lot and the cleft was sealed up by an operation; he started school in the 2022-2023 cohort.

To enable the mother to look after them both, she was granted a micro-credit to start a sales activity and she managed it well, diversifying her products according to the demand (snacks for school children, clothes, etc.). She was even able to build a small lodging to which we only partially contributed. Since then, the family dynamic has changed, the mother has remarried, and our help is coming to an end because the family is now able to move on without our support.

Sentinelles

To the rescue of wounded innocence



A smiling future as a legacy

With a bequest, you continue your **commitment** to children who have suffered and people in great need.

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www.sentinelles.org/nous-soutenir



Diary (extracts)

As Colombia Programme Manager, I go on a mission to Minas, in the Medellín region, every ten months or so, in order to evaluate the development of the activities of Tierra de Vida (Sentinelles' name in Colombia).

The journey

From Lausanne to Minas, it takes more than 48 hours to reach the destination. First, a 14-hour flight to Bogota, then the next day, from Bogota to Medellín. From there a bus takes me to Amagá in about 2 hours. Then another bus to Minas. I walk the last kilometre with my luggage to finally arrive at the Tierra de Vida Centre.

All visitors are given a warm, joyful and emotional welcome by the children who organise a welcome party. This year, 27 children greeted me on my arrival. Of these, 11 are staying in the home and 16 are participating in our daily school support programme.

From the very first moment, I notice significant changes in the children we have now been working with for over a year. For example, Carlos, who joined the home two years ago, could not read or write and hated presenting himself in front of an audience. Now, at the party, Carlos confidently sings trovas (typical songs of the region).

Martha, one of the teenagers, gives me a poem she wrote. When she first came to the home, Martha found it difficult to express herself, to get her emotions out.

Individual meetings with children

Spaces for listening and support are necessary and can radically change the trajectories of these children. Some need shelter, security and food, others need support to heal their wounds, and others need to express them.

Raising awareness

Sexual abuse by someone close to them is a underlying risk for children. Thanks to our awareness raising initiatives, they are now able to identify the different types of abuse and know how to claim their

rights. Unfortunately, due to the lack of effective legal protection, few sentences are handed down. Investigations take so long that the child is very often forced to continue sharing the family space with the potential abuser. The damage caused by the abuse then continues and results in a lack of confidence and self-esteem. It is therefore essential that Tierra de Vida continues its prevention and awareness-raising activities with children and their families.

Visits and new encounters

The days go by between home visits and administrative meetings. I walk 10 km a day on dusty roads. The visit to the rural area of Amagá allows me to understand two realities within the same municipality. The mining production area is better developed and has more accessible roads, while the rural areas are deprived of structures to access health and education services due to the lack of investment from the local administration, which means that young people are leaving the countryside.



The families we help usually live in places that are far from access roads. This is the case of 13-year-old Fredy, who wants to study, but there is no school in his hamlet. Fredy was the only child there, all the others were taken in by a family member to study in the urban part of Amagá, 1,5 hours from their home. To get to Fredy's house, we took the bus, then a motorbike taxi, and again walked on hilly paths. A good surprise awaited us on the way back: a neighbour lent us his mules to join our motorbike taxi!

Fredy lives alone with his father, Jaime, his mother having abandoned him for reasons we do not know. His family comes from a region of the country threatened by illegal armed groups. His father is a farmer and grows coffee. He wants his son to be able to study, but cannot afford the 8 francs a day needed for transport, in addition to school fees and food. Tierra de Vida offers Fredy the chance to join the home to finish his schooling so that he can, in his own

words, offer his father a better life in the countryside. Jaime agrees to pay the school fees after the coffee harvest.

Departure and farewell

The time has come to say goodbye. After 5 years of living at the home, Camila leaves us to become a teacher. In order to train for this profession, she is moving to a boarding school close to the school located in the urban centre of Amagá but her mother cannot afford this. Tierra de Vida will finance her schooling and continue to accompany her to ensure that she adapts to her new life as a young adult.

Camila's departure coincides with my return to Switzerland after 3 weeks here and a moving farewell party. The letters, drawings and poems handed in by the children all contain the same message: "Thank you for giving us a place where we can smile, learn and share".

Accounts of the

From 01 January to 31 December 2022 (in Swiss francs, with comparative figures for 2021)

REVENUE	2022	2021
Burkina Faso	53 054	69 485
Colombia	5 567	35 613
Congo	21 847	42 717
Madagascar	49 904	57 152
Niger	7 492	27 171
Senegal	4 343	232
Other Supports	290	
Donations for children with noma	309 599	464 436
Winds of Hope Foundation	50 000	80 000
Association Noma-Hilfe	92 400	45 000
Les amis de Sentinelles (LADS)	10 000	
LADS / Republic and Canton of Geneva	150 000	75 000
LADS / City of Geneva	19 000	19 000
BCV Solidarité	120 000	
Subtotal	893 496	915 806
General donations	701 044	915 127
Successions	14 958	5 000
Markets	4 517	335
Events	4 752	434
Sales of Edmond Kaiser's books	4 216	4 025
Contributions to medical care	14 622	10 895
Interests on stock and c/c	15	15
Subtotal	744 124	935 831
TOTAL REVENUE	1 637 620	1 851 637
EXPENSES		
Burkina Faso	337 533	270 578
Colombia	140 152	134 125
Congo	320 418	178 816
Madagascar	423 436	441 628
Niger	491 401	493 069
Senegal	317 201	294 887
Care for children operated in Switzerland	77 239	66 287
Other supporting expenses	12 466	2 944
Subtotal	2 119 846	1 882 334
COSTS IN SWITZERLAND		
Salaries and expenses	122 565	191 092
Sentinelles Newspaper	62 060	64 790
Communication media	193 666	154 370
Administrative costs	22 869	24 332
Other charges	4 271	5 070
Subtotal	405 431	367 654
TOTAL EXPENSES	2 525 277	2 249 988
Changes in restricted funds	17 389	-22 532
Result before change in free funds	-870 267	-420 883
Dissolution of the free reserves	-870 267	0
Net result for the year	0	-420 883



Sentinelles does everything possible to ensure efficient, high-quality and cost-effective operations. The services obtained free of charge or at a preferential rate, as well as the collaboration of numerous volunteers, represent an annual saving almost one million (CHF 983,857.- in 2022). If the amount of these free services is included in the expenses, the Sentinelles' budget would amount to CHF 3,509,119.-.

Expenses distributed in 2022 between the different countries, administration and fundraising.



Moussa's journey, feeling helpless in front of the health system

Sentinelles run a care programme in this country, mainly for children (and exceptionally for adults) suffering from various diseases and in situations of extreme economic and social insecurity. Within this framework, we welcome patients who often, after having started a medical treatment in hospital, find it impossible to continue their treatment due to a lack of means and access to quality care.

Moussa is a young 22 year old man, living in the region of Mbour, from a very modest family. Since the end of 2020, he has been frequently falling ill and regularly goes to the Grand Mbour hospital for consultations. After a few months, when his condition did not improve, the ENT department referred him to a public hospital in Dakar. From then on, Moussa had to travel twice a month to the Senegalese capital for consultations and examinations. He was diagnosed with oropharyngeal tuberculosis. He then underwent an operation to have a cannula placed in his throat to enable him to breathe better, as well as a gastric tube to enable him to eat. Moussa was fed for a month whilst his throat healed. He was then sent home without any follow-up consultation. He was told that he would have to keep the cannula and the tube for life.

Since the beginning of his medical treatment, Moussa has had enormous difficulties obtaining clear information about his condition, the recommended treatment and a post-operative follow-up. His numerous meetings with medical professionals have shown an absolute lack of respect and consideration towards him. On several occasions, he has had to pay a "bribe"

to the medical staff to have his case processed or to simply obtain information on his condition. Moussa soon found himself without the means to continue his care. He remained with his cannula and tube, without any follow-up, for months in the precarious hygienic conditions of his living quarters when an infection broke out at the tube site.

It was at this point that Sentinelles met Moussa and became aware of his situation. Our team in Mbour tried to organise emergency medical care for him, fearing that the infection would get worse. This was the beginning of an obstacle course that he would never have been able to complete alone. The hospitals in Dakar had been on strike for weeks and the medical structures facing numerous malfunctions. We learnt that Moussa's medical file was lost and the doctor who treated him had left the hospital. Sentinelles even had to pay for the expensive tests and analysis to be redone. Despite the urgency of the situation, it was impossible to get an appointment for him to undergo surgery quickly.

We finally found a private clinic so that the cannula could be removed as soon as possible and the long useless stomach tube could be removed, since he could eat normally.

Both operations have now been completed, but it took seven months of follow-up by the Sentinelles team before Moussa could receive the care that he needed.

Moussa has now recovered well from his operations and has returned to a normal life.



Aissatou, a fighter in search of health

“I’m fine”, Aissatou shyly answers the inevitable question I ask her after her last nephrology check-up. A cautious and modest “I’m fine” does not really reflect the long struggle this young Burkinabè woman has already had to go through in her first 18 years of life.

The eldest of her siblings, Aissatou spent her early childhood with her grandmother, as is the tradition in her Tamashek community living in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso. She fell victim to noma at the age of three. Treated late and only by traditional healers, she survived, but the disease left significant after-effects.

Aissatou was not referred to Sentinelles until she was 8 years old. Her nomadic lifestyle does not allow her to attend school. In 2016, she came to Switzerland for the first time to have her face reconstructed and her jaws opened thanks to several operations carried out at the University Hospitals of Geneva (HUG). A heart problem was detected and Aissatou also underwent a successful operation to dilate the aorta.

A few years after her return to Burkina Faso, she again suffered from serious health problems. This time, a pathology attacking her kidneys which required hospitalisation and long stays in our Welcome Centre in Ouagadougou, far away from her village and family. After multiple unsuccessful treatments, Aissatou returned to Switzerland in 2022 to have a kidney biopsy to clarify the diagnosis, as this examination cannot be performed in Burkina Faso. She is treated efficiently and attentively by Dr. Hügli, head of the nephrology department at the HUG. Unfortunately, her renal syndrome was confirmed as incurable, and she would require life-long treatment with immunosuppressants.

Back in Burkina Faso in February 2023, a new ordeal awaits her. For several months, we have had no news from her family, who live in a region particularly affected by attacks from radical armed groups. No telephone link is possible, as communications are cut off, and it is too dangerous to go there. Aissatou will have to stay in Ouagadougou for some time before she can be reunited with her family. Fortunately, she can stay at the Hymne aux Enfants Foundation home and receive sewing training at a centre near the boarding school.

A heavy and expensive treatment for life

Aissatou has to take about ten medicines a day, which are essential to avoid kidney failure.

Some of her treatment is not available in Burkina Faso and has to be ordered from Switzerland.

The cost of her medication amounts to about CHF 4,000 francs per year, including a generous discount from the Pharmacie de Grandson SA, which we thank.

You can also help us to accompany Aissatou in her quest for health and a better future.

Sentinelles



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