

# Bene Koytara Goyterey

Those who work for God's Kingdom (translated from Zarma)



## Dear friends,



About 6½ years ago we, the members and employees of Youth with a Mission Niger, but also many others in and outside of Niger, were in shock when we received the news that Jeff Woodke, who was our country director at the time, had been kidnapped from his home in Abalak. During all those years we continued to think of him and his family, we continued to pray for him and we continued to believe that one day he would be free again. But still, much to our surprise, and at first unbelief, we received the news on Monday 20 March that Jeff had been released together with a French journalist who had been kidnapped almost 2 years ago. Finally! What a joy and what a relief! Thanks be to God! We are so glad for his family, his wife and sons, that they are reunited with Jeff. And for us in Niger too it is a relief to know that he is free again. Because throughout those 6½ years Jeff's captivity and all that that implies continued to be on our minds one way or the other. To know now that he is back with his family gives us joy and peace of mind, and we feel that we can turn the page.

In this newsletter we share about how many people in Niger do not get registered at birth and many grow up without a being registered. This is also the reality for the girls and women who come to be trained at Training Centre Caleb. We write about the importance of actually being registered and having a birth certificate and how it was possible to help the girls and women in this sense. We also explain how important being well-dressed is in Niger and we write about three dynamic young women who are aspiring business women.

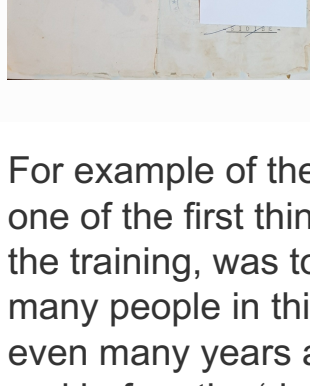
We hope you enjoy reading our newsletter again and that you will find it helpful to understand more about the work we're involved in and the context we live in. As always we value your questions or feedback.

## Birth certificates



I'm sitting at the annual softball tournament in Niamey. It's a major event within the missionary community in Niamey. But a variety of teams participates and it is fun to see how people from the local communities are also picking up the sport, integrating existing teams or starting teams themselves.

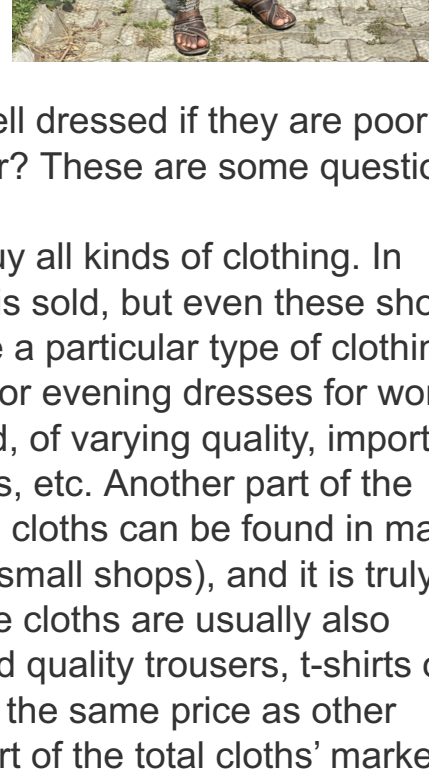
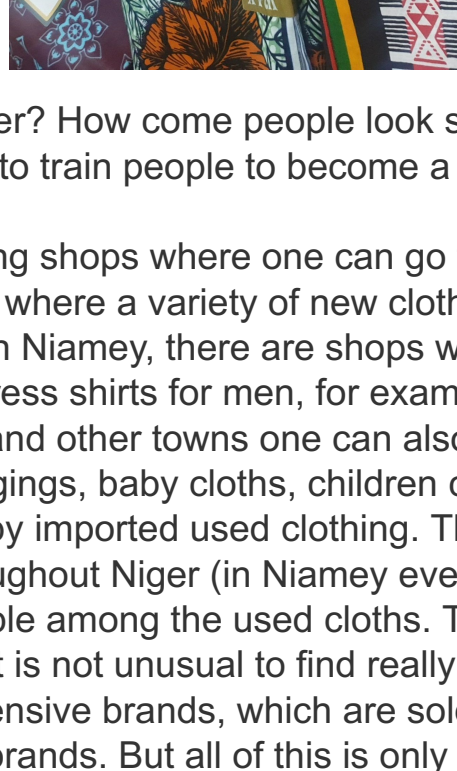
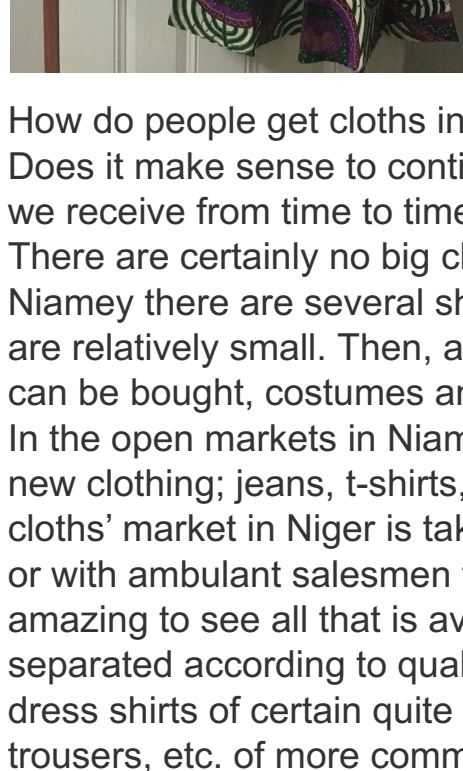
While I'm sitting at the side of the field, I'm looking around at the crowd. It's quite a mixture of people coming from various places in the world. They are mostly families with children of all ages, there are several special needs children, several children also that have been adopted, several young adults that grew up in an orphanage, but that are now standing on their own two feet and still others in their own quite unique situations. One thing stands out though, for all those (young) people care is taken that they have and can take their place in the wider society.



And then my thoughts go to a rather different setting, the girls and women that come for training at Caleb Training Centre. They are very much part of their local communities, but these communities are often not really integrated in the wider society in an official sense. As a result many children born in these communities never get officially registered. We see this at Caleb Training Centre where the majority of the girls and women centre do not have a birth certificate. Beside other considerations with relation to this situation, what sense does it make to give people certificates to proof that they have successfully finished their training, if they have no official status?

For example of the present group of 150 girls and women, about 15 had a birth certificate. So, one of the first things that Blaise and Sunday started working on with them when they started the training, was to help them get a birth certificate. The good thing is that, because there are so many people in this situation, there is a system in place to help people to get a birth certificate even many years after they were born. Obviously, the exact date of birth is not known anymore and before the 'date' that would be put on the birth certificate would read: 'née vers' (born around) followed by the year estimated from events remembered around the birth of the person in question. 'Née vers' however doesn't work when you need to fill out today's forms. Therefore, years a good number of years ago now, 'née vers' was replaced by 1 January, followed by the estimated year. And so, even if it's not exact, at least these girls and women now have the paperwork which allows them to be recognized, which allows them to get a certificate and take their place in the wider society.

## Fashion in Niger



How do people get cloths in Niger? How come people look so well dressed if they are poor? Does it make sense to train people to become a tailor? These are some questions we receive from time to time.

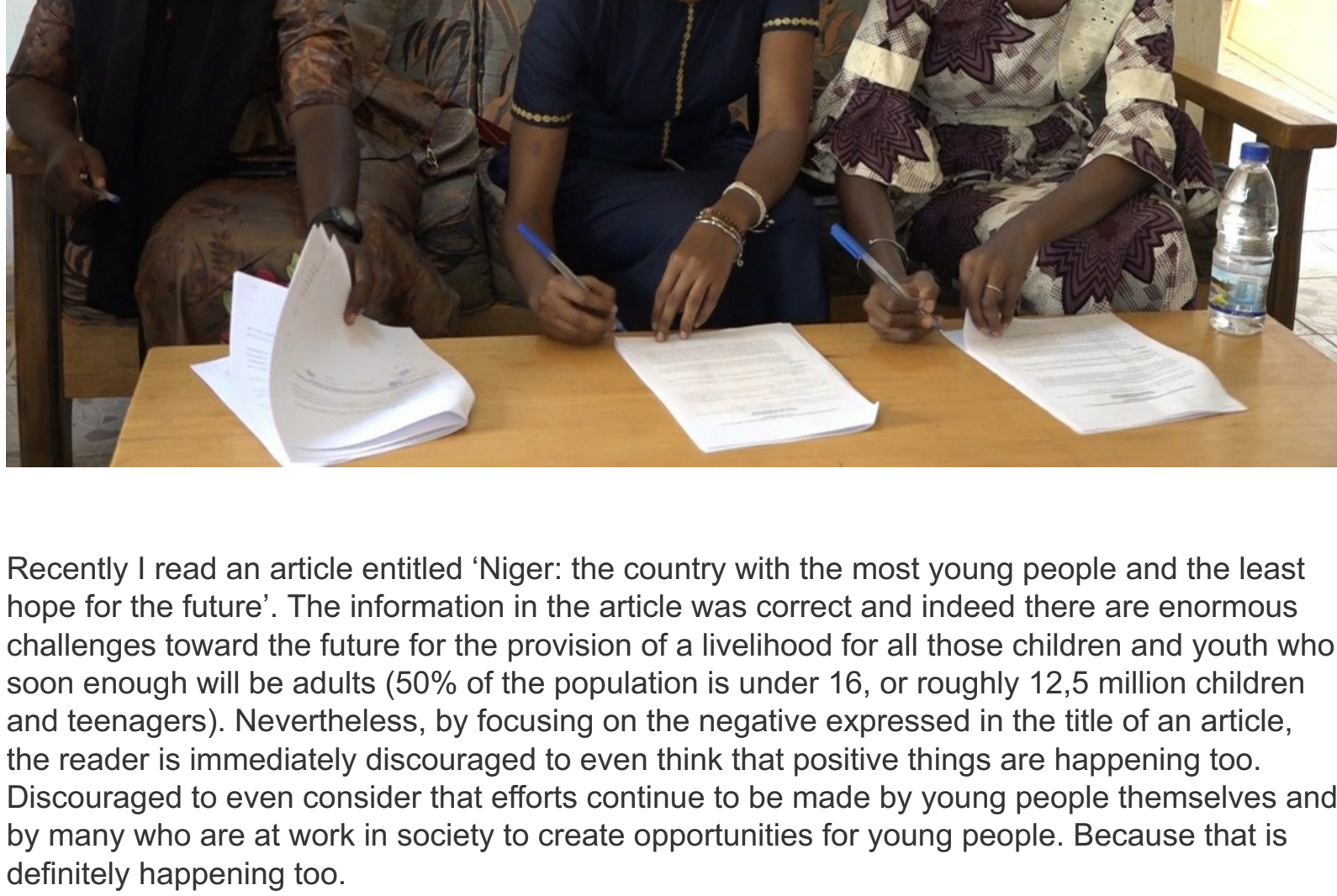
There are certainly no big clothing shops where one can go to buy all kinds of clothing. In Niamey there are several shops where a variety of new clothing is sold, but even these shops are relatively small. Then, also in Niamey, there are shops where a particular type of clothing can be bought, costumes and dress shirts for men, for example, or evening dresses for women. In the open markets in Niamey and other towns one can also find, of varying quality, imported new clothing: jeans, t-shirts, leggings, baby cloths, children cloths, etc. Another part of the cloths' market in Niger is taken by imported used clothing. These cloths can be found in markets or with ambulant salesmen throughout Niger (in Niamey even in small shops), and it is truly amazing to see all that is available among the used cloths. These cloths are usually also separated according to quality. It is not unusual to find really good quality trousers, t-shirts of dress shirts of certain quite expensive brands, which are sold for the same price as other trousers, etc. of more common brands. But all of this is only a part of the total cloths' market in Niger.

A big part of the cloths we, and everyone else, wear in Niger are tailor-made. Fabric of a range of quality, with or without print, in all kinds of colors, and from quite cheap to very expensive, can be bought in markets or in specialized shops. Most fabric comes in the standard size of "3 pagnes". One pagne is the size of a piece of cloth women typically use to wrap around their waist to make a long skirt, which is also the meaning of the french word 'pagne'. The 3 pagnes measure 6 yards, or 5,486 meters. People who really don't have the means, can also buy just one or two pagnes in the market. Or they buy the really cheap material for less than € 4,- for 3 pagnes. On the other extreme there is also material that is sold at about € 450,- for 3 pagnes.

Once you've bought your material you take it to the tailor or seamstress. Here too, prices for making the cloths vary with different market sections in accordance with the different groups in society (often also reflected in the quality of the work done). This makes it possible for almost everyone to have at least one or two sets of clothing to look well dressed for going out into town, or to a baby naming ceremony, or for other occasions.

Being well dressed is also very important in the Nigerien culture. It is not uncommon to hear that westerners do not know how to dress. And it is not about the monetary value of the clothing. It's simply about being well dressed in accordance with what are considered acceptable types and ways of clothing. By dressing well one shows respect for oneself and toward others. By dressing well one receives the respect and consideration of others. And also, if one is not well dressed, it brings a sense of shame to the person and those he or she is with. As a result people are willing to prioritize clothing over for example food under certain circumstances, in order to respond to (unspoken but experienced) pressure from the community to dress in accordance with expectations.

## Hope for the youth



Recently I read an article entitled 'Niger: the country with the most young people and the least hope for the future'. The information in the article was correct and indeed there are enormous challenges toward the future for the provision of a livelihood for all those children and youth who soon enough will be adults (50% of the population is under 16, or roughly 12,5 million children and teenagers). Nevertheless, by focusing on the negative expressed in the title of an article, the reader is immediately discouraged to even think that positive things are happening too. Discouraged to even consider that efforts continue to be made by young people themselves and by many who are at work in society to create opportunities for young people. Because that is definitely happening too.

Esther Moussa, Sarah Salifou and Marie Nouhou, three dynamic young women in their early twenties, are an example of this. Last year, in the collaboration with Tearfund UK, we (meaning Jeunesse en Mission Entraide et Développement, JEMED) got involved in a project to offer support to young people who wanted to start up a business. Focusing on the urban environments in Niger, youth from the churches were encouraged to submit a project plan describing their motivation, their skills and the business they wanted to develop. The businesses they were proposing also somehow had to respond to an environmental issue. Out of a larger total, 44 project plans were selected and those 44 aspiring business men and women were invited to take part in a short but intensive business training either in Maradi or in Niamey. After the training, the 44 participants were invited to write a business plan. After submission, all business plans were evaluated professionally. At the end of the process the three best plans were maintained for further coaching and financing. The young people behind those three business plans were, you guessed it, Esther, Sarah and Marie.

Their businesses concern the production of natural cosmetic products for hair (including also natural hair styling instead of making use of extensions, wigs, etc.), transformation of plastic waste into household products (like long lasting bags, baskets, etc.), and a training centre for transformation of plastic waste. With the enormous amount of plastic waste in Niger, this activity certainly presents a large potential for job creation and income generation.

At the beginning of March we organised a small ceremony at the JEMED office where the three young women explained their vision for their businesses to us, who had not been part of the training and selection process. Subsequently the contracts, determining the conditions for receiving the subsidy, were signed. Each of the three beneficiaries received around 3.800 Euros to invest in their business.

It was very encouraging to see and hear these three young women share about their passion. It was also encouraging to see young educated people who are exploring possibilities for earning a living apart from government or NGO jobs or going abroad but instead are seeking to contribute to the society they are part of. Moreover, their businesses all have the potential to create jobs for other young people. Esther, Sarah and Marie show us that they consider that there is hope for them as young people in Niger and in the process they are showing others that same hope. We on our part will continue to support young people in finding their place in society and earn a living as well.

## To thank for:

- Jeff Woodke's release;
- All the girls and women who continue their training at Training Centre Caleb;
- The three young women with a good business plan and desire to start their own business and who now have the possibility to invest and have a good start.

## To pray for:

- We (YWAM) are exploring the possibility to start work with and alongside young people in the Tillabéri, a town at 115km north-west of Niamey – pray for wisdom and insight;
- This is the hot season – pray with us for continued health and endurance;
- Sufficient resources to be able to do the follow-up with the three young women who received a subsidy to invest in their business.

With our love,

Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé

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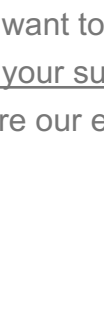
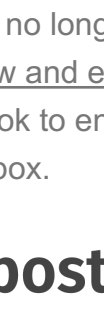
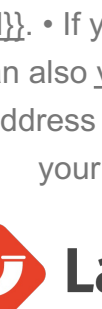
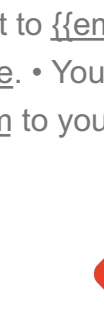
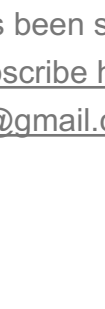
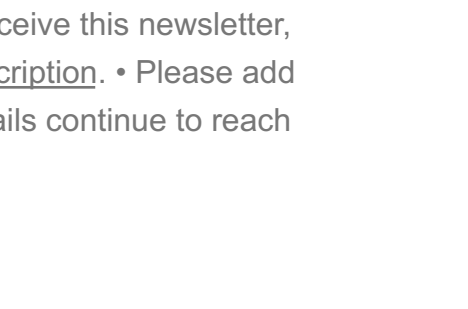
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