

Bene Koytara Goyterey

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



Dear Friends



Early March, the cool season is definitely over again for this year and we have started using our swamp (water) coolers again to sleep. Writing about our present season of the year reminds me of a 'funny' incident not too long ago. It showed me how easily one takes certain knowledge for granted. Caleb and Phoebé were playing a game on the X-box. They were trying to work their way through to the next level of the game and needed to solve a puzzle. They had been working on it for a bit and then came the question: "mam, what would be the present season in the US and what is the order of the seasons?" On the spot it hit me that even though they have certainly heard the names of the different seasons in temperate climates – spring, summer, autumn, winter – it remains difficult to remember when is what and in which order, because for them there is hardly a real meaning connected with those terms or their order. It was just one of those moments where I realized once again how much our comprehension of the world around us is conditioned by the environment and society we live in. And by extension, it reminded me that I should continue to be careful in my interactions with people around me in supposing that they have a similar understanding of situations as me. Such suppositions can so easily lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications and it remains challenging (and sometimes funny) to always be aware of this. Like the exchange I had recently with a European friend who lives in a small village here in Niger. She was sharing about how adults treat children and issues that she was observing as 'not helpful'. At the same time she started to wonder about the reason why adults are treating children the way they do. It is also 'not helpful' to simply say: "you should do this different". There is a reason why people do what they do. But it is hard work for an outsider to be able to grow in understanding of these 'why-s'.

| | jan | feb | mrt | apr | me | jun | juli | aug | sep | okt | no | dec |
|----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|
| Min °C | 17 | 20 | 23 | 27 | 30 | 30 | 28 | 27 | 27 | 27 | 23 | 18 |
| Max °C | 34 | 37 | 40 | 42 | 42 | 40 | 37 | 35 | 37 | 39 | 37 | 34 |
| mm regen | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 18 | 20 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 0 |

Klimaat van Niger (bron: bestereistijd.nl)

Droge seizoen: oktober t/m mei

Regenseizoen: juni t/m september

Heetste maanden: april-mei

And so returning to the issue of seasons, which are our seasons here in Niger? The main division is in dry season and rainy season. The dry season runs from October till May and the rainy season starts sometime in June (on average around mid-June; this is also when the planting season starts) and ends in September. Within the dry season there are also variations. There is a cool season from December till February when the harmattan winds prevail. And it gets really very hot (with temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius during the day and around 30 by night) during the months of April and May. We hope that once again you will enjoy reading what follows in this newsletter. Together with my cousin I wrote something about 'working in missions' and we share Ayouba's story with you.

In the spotlight: the SSCS farm manager



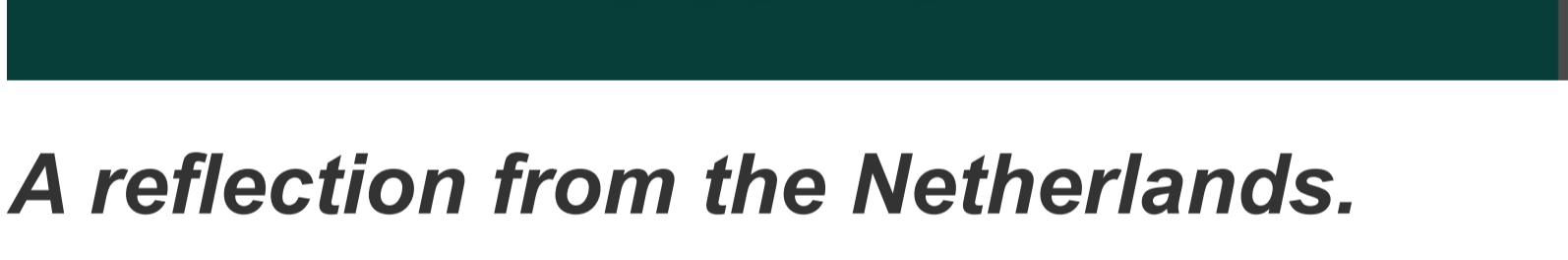
Ayouba is the farm manager at the research and demonstration farm Maza Tsaye of Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel (SSCS). Officially he started working with the project back in 1997, when it ran under the name of Maradi Integrated Development Project (MIDP). "After finishing the primary school in Tibiri (a village close to Maradi where a SIM missionary had started this school), I wanted to go to secondary school, but that did not work out. At the time I had the idea that I wanted to become a medical doctor, because I wanted to help people who were ill. Since I did not have the opportunity to continue school, I decided to start a small business selling medicines. In my mind this was at least a way in which I could help people get a cure for illnesses like malaria and diarrhea. Then I met a medical doctor who was staying at Maza Tsaye at the time and he asked me if I even had had training to know about medication. He wanted to help me and at some point he invited me to come to the Galmi hospital where he was working. While I was there I met Tony Rinaudo who was working with the MIDP. The funny thing is that we both attended the same church in Maradi and I knew he was working on rural development, but because I had medicine on my mind, I never thought of approaching him. But in Galmi we got to discuss about rural development and that is how I got to understand more about that. So that is how I got involved with MIDP. I got training about, among others, how to take care of the trees and how to improve the soil, so that the fields would become productive again. Even on our own fields that I was farming together with my father back in the village we did not get any produce at that time, or hardly. But when we started applying what I was learning, we started having a somewhat productive crop again.

In 1997 I was officially taken on to start working as an extension agent. I worked in several villages to teach people for example how to help the regeneration of the trees in their fields and how to work on restoration of depleted soil. After those first few years the project also started working a lot with several varieties of imported Australian Acacias. These Acacias grow quickly even with little rainfall and so if people plant them in their fields they can help produce fire wood. And they also produce seeds which are rich in protein. These seeds can be ground into flour, of which a small quantity can be added to for example millet flour or corn flour to increase the protein content of the food. This can help when people eat very little meat. And it can also be used to enrich the porridge for toddlers. But unfortunately not many people really adopted this as a food.

After the period where we worked a lot on the Acacias, when someone else took on the leadership of the work, we started looking much more at how it would be possible to sustainably increase the yield of the crops farmers in the Maradi region usually grow. I learned a lot again. I saw and experienced at the Maza Tsaye farm how the application of manure, a correct usage of fertilizer, increasing plant density and doing the different jobs like fertilizer application, thinning and weeding on the right time during crop development, made a big difference in yield. So I then started applying these things also on my fields back in the village. I now have much better harvests than before. And my neighbours noticed the difference too and asked me to tell them what I did to get better crops. So I explained to them and they now have better yields too. And so this is what I love about my work, I see that my work really has an impact in the lives of others. I have been able to help so many people over the years to learn how to farm better and have higher yields (which means increased food security and more income)".

I remember well when I first met Ayouba and went around the fields with him. I was greatly impressed by his knowledge of the names of many plants and trees, in Hausa, in French and their scientific name in Latin. And every year again he amazes me by his capacity to manage a crowd of 80 or sometimes even over 100 people who are working in the fields at Maza Tsaye during the busiest times of the cropping season. It's really a joy to work together with him in this project and showing people that we serve a God who does not want people to live in misery.

"Working in missions"



A reflection from the Netherlands.

Well, people my age-group might recognise it; and I mean people over 50. While I was in primary school I took something along every Monday to give for mission work; for those poor children in Africa. I had no idea what was actually done with those coins.

Later on, I sometimes read books about missionaries; and I regarded "being a missionary" as being a Christian plus. But looking back now, it was also a strange shameful feeling of superiority; like we have it better, so giving something away is your duty.

Anyway, becoming a missionary never happened. I studied in the Netherlands, worked until I retired, married a Dutchman, raised children together and am privileged to have a granddaughter.

I have no idea what the thoughts of the generations after me are about mission work; I have never asked them. Whether they also look up to the people who go to faraway countries to work in the service of their fellow man. Because I really hope that that false sense of "being better" has diminished.

I've been on the board of Nigerzending for three years now, and a few weeks ago I suddenly had this thought: Hey, I've gone into missions after all! Not physically and very comfortably from my place here in the grey Netherlands, but still.... And I realise very well now that I do want to remain here and look at the people in Niger as fellow human beings and fellow creatures of our Father. But I am also a bit proud of all the work Blaise and Jeannette are doing, and that I can contribute to that work, yes, that gives me a happy feeling: I am working a bit in missions after all.

Nel Fredrikze

A reply from Niger

So, yes, I did go to work in missions, almost 28 years ago by now. Amazing how time goes by! And yes, as a child I do remember, not so much from books but from visits in our church by missionaries on "furlough", that I thought they must be really special people. But that was not why I decided to go and work in missions. In fact, this decision eventually was a consequence of my choice of study: tropical agriculture.

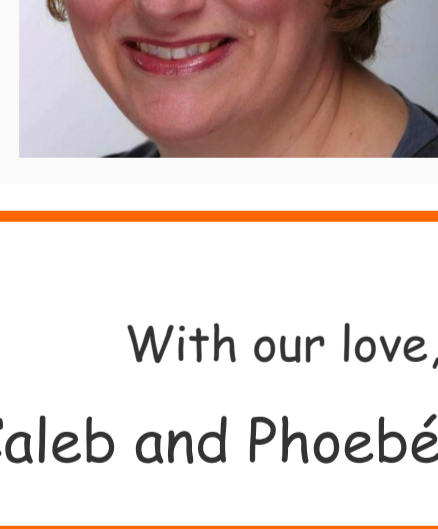
The reason why I chose studying this was that when I was figuring out what I wanted to do in life I considered that I was interested in studying and doing something a) on the more technical side, b) having to do with nature, and c) useful for society. The best match I could find at the time was the broad subject of tropical agriculture, which would take me abroad. At that time I did not consider working in missions at all. I had not even really decided I wanted to be a Christian. That all came several years later, towards the end of my studies. By that time I had decided I wanted to be a Christian and needed to find out how and where I would be able to use what I had learned. Basically the possibility to do this by working in missions presented itself to me, and so I landed in the Central African Republic (CAR) in 1994 to serve in the Development Department of one of the national churches there.

And the rest is history, as they say. I remember well after having been in Niger for a few years that my mother told me about a question she had had from someone: "when is Jeannette coming back to the Netherlands (to stay)?" My mother's reply was that she wasn't sure I was ever going to come back! She had already noticed how much I had become attached to "Africa" (which is a humongous continent; by the way, with huge varieties in all kinds of ways). Well, in the meantime, I have started to identify myself as NigeroDutch. Not just because I have dual citizenship, but also because really, while I will always be Dutch because that is where my roots are, I have also adopted from the Nigerian way of life (without pretending I am like a Nigerian; 17 years in Niger is still much too short for that!). And here in Niger, (Blaise and I work as missionaries, which to us means that we are serving in God's Kingdom (as the title of our newsletters always mentions). In other words, we are working to show in Nigerian society what we believe life should look like (in as far as we can understand now from the Bible) in accordance with God's good ideas – living in relationship with God and enjoying good relationships, enjoying justice, enjoying enough to live on, enjoying creation/nature, and many other things, and taking good care of all of that.

So, are we super-people, or super-Christians, as someone wanted to make me believe I was when I was back in the Netherlands after my first two years in the CAR? Just come and stay with us for a week and I'm sure you'll know we're just as special as everybody else! Oh, and Nel, it's true, you and the others on the board of Nigerzending are also working in missions, because you help making sure that we have what we need to live and work. And even back in primary school you were involved without realizing it. Because certainly those coins contributed to paying for the living- and work expenses of people in missions somewhere.

Jeannette

Twelve years ago Mirjam Baas-Ridderhof joined our new board as secretary. Mirjam carried out this (time-consuming) work with great enthusiasm. In addition to secretarial work, she also contributed to the website, newsletters, communication with the Gaitou family in Niger and regularly attended information days and webinars about the happenings surrounding missionary work. We would like to thank her as a board and also on behalf of the Gaitou family for all the hard work she has done with love for the mission field in Niger.



With our love,
Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé

To thank for:

- It looks like we will be able to come and visit the Netherlands this year June-July. We are very much looking forward to it.
- Sunday and the team continuing work at Training Centre Caleb in Maradi.
- The ongoing work of Quartier Libre (kids clubs) in the Maradi area.

To pray for:

- The many people in Niger who are facing food shortages this year – that effective help would be given – and on top of that those who live in regions bordering Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as certain parts bordering northern Nigeria face a lot of insecurity.
- Our government having to make decisions regarding the food insecurity and the security situation.
- The process of preparation to travel – figuring out the paperwork needed (the Dutch passports of the children are expired; COVID requirements).
- The process of application for support with an organization in the US so that we would be able to start up the Quartier Libre work in and around Niamey.

Donate now

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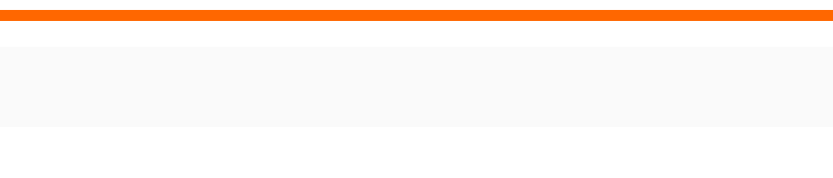
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