

Bene Koytara Goyterey

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



Dear friends,

This newsletter is scheduled to go out around the time of Pentecost, when as Christians we commemorate the so called outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost, by the way, was at the time a harvest celebration for the Jewish people). The biblical account about the event is quite graphic and stirs our imagination. That makes it tempting to focus on how the outpouring of the holy spirit is described and the fact that all of a sudden those who were affected by it, were able to speak the languages of those that were visiting Jerusalem because of the Pentecost celebrations. But if we look a bit further than just the moment, it becomes clear that, because of what happened to them, Jesus' followers took courage and went out to meet with people and share with them all that they had learned from Jesus and God's Word.

Since we've started writing these newsletters back in 2005, we've given them the title 'Bene Koytara Goyterey' (those that work for God's Kingdom). That's what Pentecost is about, I think. We are called to go out (close to home or farther away) and share with people what life looks like when God is one's King: a life in which we seek to have good relationships in all aspects of our lives, with God, with ourselves, with others and with the environment we live in. And so that is what we try to do in all that we are involved in here in Niger, whether it is at Training Centre Caleb, in the activities of King's Kids/Quartier Libre, at Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel, etc. So, we encourage you to read the stories from Training Centre Caleb and Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel in that light. The story of Training Centre Caleb is a story about how people learn to grow toward a better relationship with themselves, so that they grow in understanding of how much their life is of value and because of that develop a greater desire to work on changing other aspects of their lives. And the story of Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel is one where we work on being in good relationship with the environment we live in, so that it can be a productive environment.

We hope you enjoy reading our news again!

Innovation, Irrigation



innovatie

irrigatie

duurzaam



With a rather full work load it is often difficult to take time and seriously think about implementing, or at least try out, really new, or different things that go beyond the usual. And yet, if at Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel we want to continue to be relevant in our work of bringing transformation in people's lives and livelihoods, it is important to do just that: take the time to think about what else could be done and also to look beyond the borders of our own work and see what's going on elsewhere. For this we are grateful to our colleague Ron who worked on getting material to do a small scale trial with drip irrigation. He found the possibility to buy the equipment and also the liquid fertilizer in Ghana. It certainly wasn't easy to get everything to Maradi, but in the end it all got there. As a consequence however, we were not able to plant before mid-January as planned and we ended up planting in two parts since the equipment arrived in bits and pieces. The equipment was put on a field of roughly 0,25ha. The cucumbers that were first planted on half of the field came up very well. By the time the rest of the equipment had come so that the second half of the field could also be planted, the temperature had further increased and these cucumber plants did less well than the ones planted first. Nevertheless, I have been surprised at how well the plants have been able to grow despite the heat during March and April. Because of the drip irrigation which provides the plants with sufficient moisture, they have been able to withstand the heat and produce reasonably well. That has been encouraging to see and is also promising for possibilities toward the future. Even so, to maximize the production we will be working on planting in November at the beginning of the cool season, like we do in the rest of our garden area.

Now that we have started to be interested in working with other ways of irrigation than just the traditional way of flood irrigation (i.e. planting on ridges and making the water flow through the furrows between the ridges), I have been discovering through different sources that closer to Niamey drip irrigation and other ways of irrigation have been introduced over the past few years. This means that most likely we will not need to continue to import the materials ourselves, because others have already started working on this. This is something that I need to work on now: find out where the material is available in Niamey and see if it is the same quality as we were able to buy in Ghana as well as how prices compare.

One thing that we were wondering about, and that we want to be careful about when promoting using irrigation during the dry season, is the question of sustainability. For the area where SSCS might be working to promote irrigation, I am quite sure this will not be a problem in the foreseeable future. The area concerned is a valley where a stream of water is located and every year during the rainy season the groundwater supply is restored. But even better news is that very recently an academic study was conducted to understand the groundwater situation in Niger. The study covered largely the southern part of the country where most of the agricultural activity is and the analyses showed that in this area large supplies of (deep) groundwater are available, and that these supplies are annually being renewed significantly. This offers hope. The presence of this resource means that during the years to come it will actually be feasible to increase the agricultural productivity significantly and thus work toward more food security and a much larger self-sufficiency in food for Niger. And for us at SSCS it is an encouragement to know for sure that we can promote irrigation as a good agricultural practice.

From nobody to somebody

Last year Tony Rinaudo, one of my predecessors at the Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel project, published his autobiography. His' is a remarkable story and I enjoyed reading the book learning even more about the background to the Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration technique that has had and continues to have such a big impact in re-greening millions of hectares in Niger. There are many worthwhile, moving and interesting stories in the book, but the one thing I want to share here is an exchange that happened, toward the end of their time in Niger as a family, when Tony took visitors to a village. He asked the people in the village "what was the most significant thing that the project had accomplished". (1) To his surprise, the people did not mention anything of the physical or material accomplishments, instead they replied: "Mr. Tony, before this project, we were nothing. We were nobody. Nobody knew or cared about us. But today, the forestry agents hold us up as an example for all of Niger to follow." (2)

This resonates with what the girls and women at Training Centre Caleb also often indicate about why the training is important to them. Sunday, the manager, tells us that many of the girls and women walk about 2 km from their home to get to the centre. They leave home around 6h20 to arrive well on time at the centre, where they start at 8 with a time to read and hear from the Word of God and pray. They then spend time on their studies, mostly through practice, from 8h30 to 12. After 12 they return home where their daily chores await them. But they are more than glad to do all this because the training is meaningful to them.



Afodiya tells us:

"I'm really pleased because I see how I'm improving in my learning. I was able to do the test I was given and now I'm in the second year. And I can actually do a part of the work I've been taught like:

- cloth making
- being able to write on the black board
- read and write in Hausa
- how to cook well and how to make soap

All this helps me to progress in my life. When I go home, I do the work I've learned before my parents to show them what I now know (Afodiya also participates in the Discipleship Training and comes from a village farther away. She therefore lives at the centre and goes home on the weekend). I've also made 6 bedsheets (with embroidery) and knitted 10 baby hats. I thank God and our teachers, because they help us to do our work well. I also thank our leaders for having done their best to help us have the utensils to learn."

A healthy level of self esteem is one of the necessary aspects for people to be able to cultivate a state of mind from where they wish to progress in life, as opposed to simply wanting to have more. Like the people in that one village who, through what they said to Tony, indicated: "we now know we are someone, we now know our lives have meaning", the participants at Training Centre Caleb discover that they can learn new things and make things with their hands, which creates a sense of pride and a drive for further progress. And even though this does not usually enter into the statistics of what makes a project successful, it is actually a capital part of the work, since this will make a significant contribution for people to be motivated to actually want to work on changing their situation.

To thank for:

- That we continue to be able to involved in various activities: Training Centre Caleb, Discipleship Training for girls/women, King's Kids/Quartier Libre, Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi, Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel, helping young people to start up a business;
- All the people that involved in those activities as volunteers, employees, leaders and participants;
- A good and productive meeting of African YWAM leaders that took place in Burundi (8-12 May) and in which Blaise was able to participate thanks to support from various sources.

To pray for:

- We are in the process of establishing a long term solution for the supervision of the Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi (more about this in our next newsletter) – pray with us that there will be a good understanding between the different parties and that the transition will go smoothly;
- Good rest for students, teachers and staff of Sahel Academy (holidays start June 1st) – good preparations for the new school year (start August 16), in particular for new teachers who are preparing to come;
- That we will continue to have good vision for the various activities (see above) we are involved in as well as the resources to be able to work well.

With our love,

Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé

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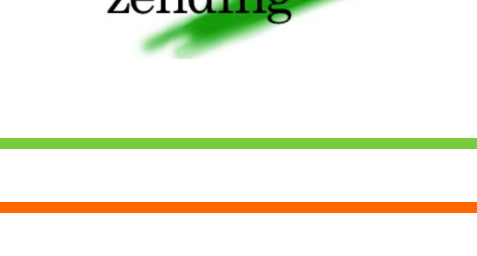
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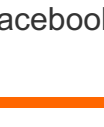
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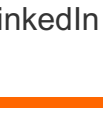
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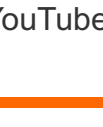
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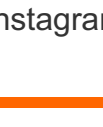
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