

Bene Koytara Goyterey

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



Dear Friends



Like last time when I was writing the introduction and prayer points for our newsletter, I am in Maradi once again. I enjoy being in Maradi. It's just nice to be away from the big city and to be able to physically be in the place where the work I'm managing is being undertaken. Even if I still spend most of my time in the office while I'm here. At least I get to meet with my team and exchange with them. On the Wednesday of the week that I am in Maradi we always organize a team meeting. We also include the two men who used to be part of the team but are now independent farmers in their respective villages and all together we are 10 people. The men from the Maza Tsaye farm share about their ongoing work (at present it's harvest time), things that are going well and the challenges too. The two men from the villages also share about what they are working on, not just their own fields but also at village level. And then there is the ongoing community health teaching. We do Bible study together and there are the weekly accounts to take care of. It's an intense long (sometimes very long) morning, but also very good and enjoyable.

Oh, and another reason why I like being in Maradi is that the weather is nicer at this time of the year – not so hot and sweaty as Niamey.

In the meantime, on October 4th, schools in Niger have started the new school year. This means that at Training Centre Caleb a new group has started the three year training programme. A small group has also started with the Discipleship Training School. And at the Académie Evangélique Cornerstone de Maradi the new school year has taken off as well. We will be giving you news about all of that in future newsletters. In the rest of this newsletter however, there are stories from a village and about soccer. Read on, and learn more about what we're involved with.

Village stories



Maybe you remember, although it has been quite a while back (about 4,5 years ago), that I wrote about the two men who had been working with SSCS and who decided to move back to their respective family's villages to live and work there as farmers. Well, last year during the rainy season, in and around the village where Sam lives there was a huge rainstorm which caused a flash flood through part of the village. As a result Sam's house (and parts of others) collapsed. For several months he and his family lived in their storage room. I'm glad though that we were able to help him.

SSCS is part of SIM and within SIM there are many and very diverse other types of work. One other project concerns a fund through which people with an urgent need can be helped. Thanks to this fund we were able to help Sam rebuild his house. And as so often, one thing led to another. To not put Sam in a privileged situation, the person managing the fund indicated that we could see how we might also give some support to other pressing needs in the village more in general. So together with Sam we decided to help those whose houses had been damaged in the flood with several bags of cement. Sam also shared that a number of people (mostly women) in the village were seriously struggling to feed their families. Together with Sam we decided to support them with millet and corn.

Last time I was in Maradi I took some time to discuss with Sam how people responded to the support they received and how things were going in general. Since he has been living in the village now for about 4,5 years he has gained a good understanding of what's going on. One of the issues is that this village actually is quite near to Maradi. Near enough for the rich tradesmen from Maradi to speculate on the increase of value of the land and start buying it from the villagers. As a result hardly anybody in the village has land any more – or at least sufficient to be able to feed their family. Reasons why people regularly seek to sell land are many, but that is not what I want to talk about here. I would like to share what Sam shared with me. He said: "Really, it's the women that suffer most. Because the men don't have land any more, they leave to go and look for work elsewhere. The women and children are left behind and have to see how they get by. During the cropping season women often go and look for work on other people's fields. Outside the cropping season they maybe collect a bit of firewood or something to sell. They gather edible leaves from shrubs and small trees to cook at home. It's a very difficult life. And then," Sam continued, "many fathers from the village don't allow their daughters to go to school.

And even those that are allowed to go to school will not get any further than the 3rd year in secondary school (collège). At that time they will be taken out of school so that they can get married. There are only two girls in the whole village (2.500 – 3.000 people) thus far that are continuing their secondary school beyond the 3rd year. And that is because they are in my family and I have insisted that they continue," Sam said. "And because I help pay for their schooling." After all this, Sam continued "and now families have started sending their young sons abroad. When they fail their exam at the end of their 4th year in secondary school (collège), they are taken out of school. The family (i.e. the larger family) puts money together so that the boy can be sent to Libya or Algeria to look for work and earn money for the family."

We discussed a bit more and then Sam returned home to continue to live his daily life, work as a farmer and take care of the local church as its pastor and through it all invite others to look at his life and see the difference. And we, the team from SSCS, do our best to continue to support him in that and together look for ways to walk alongside the people in the village and help them to seek constructive ways to bring change in their situation.

Soccer



In the year 1992 the neighbourhood soccer clubs in Yantala, Niamey, didn't know that they were about to launch an initiative that would spread not only to other neighbourhoods in Niamey but even to other towns in Niger. At the time I (Blaise) was a fervent soccer player with 'Ardent FC' and I remember well the excitement. That year the various soccer clubs in Yantala decided to not simply play matches, but to organize an official tournament. We called it TGV - 'Tournoi des Grandes Vacances' and we really made it into an official event. With Ardent FC we won the cup several times.

Several years later, I don't remember exactly when it was, I stopped playing and became the trainer of Ardent FC for two years. One of those years we even won the TGV again and I still have the cup in my office. After those two years I became more of a spectator. And when Jeannette and I got married, they organized a match for the occasion on the day after our wedding. During our years in Maradi I never got involved with soccer there. But when we moved back to Niamey last year, I started going to the matches again when I have time.

In the mean time TGV has become quite big. When other neighbourhood soccer clubs heard about what the soccer clubs in Yantala had started, they liked the idea and decided to start the TGV in their neighbourhood too. And so it spread throughout Niamey. Then, with all those neighbourhood TGV's being organized each year, the idea to extend it and organize a TGV between the winners of the neighbourhood TGV's, the super TGV, was launched a few years ago. Obviously the organization of these TGV's cannot be done without organizing committees and I was asked to join the Yantala committee as advisor and treasurer. Because I am a Christian, they expect that I won't misuse the money from the contributions of the participating teams. And advisor was mostly because I am older than the others and as an 'older' person my opinion really counts (remember, half the population of Niger is 15 years and younger, and only 2,6% is older than 65). So, having accepted that position I discovered that I could really help in conflict resolution and keeping the peace. Regularly there were people involved with the clubs who tried to bend the rules in their club's advantage. When this was discovered it would typically result in others being angry. Sometimes too, people wanted to pay bribes for others to close their eyes to the bending of the rules. All of this did not really help resolve the issues, nor is it correct, of course, to want to bend the rules. My experience in people management and also by simply being honest and taking people back to look at the rules and regulations in place, showing them to take those as the measuring stick, helped me to help the others to work through these situations of conflict. And I hope that by doing so, they also learned something in the process.



With our love,
Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phobé

To thank for:

- The various activities that we are involved in and all the different people we work together with.
- Health and strength to continue the work.
- For the fact that we are indeed able to continue to support the work in Maradi while living in Niamey.

To pray for:

- The search for funders in particular for Training Centre Caleb.
- The new group of girls and women just starting their training -that they will adapt quickly.
- Wisdom in all that we do.

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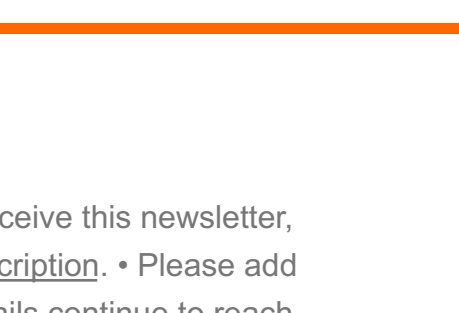
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