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President's Report January 2021

The impact of the Coronavirus

Africa generally was less hard hit by Covid 19 than much of the rest of the world. It's been speculated that the reasons are that Africans spend more time outdoors, that the average age of the populations is younger, but it might also be, in part, that the number of cases is under-reported because there is less testing. In any case, the Burkina Government said at the end of January 2021 that slightly over 10,000 cases were reported, with just 117 deaths. Still, we are eager to get our girls vaccinated as soon as possible, but Dr. Etienne Traore, Director of our Health Fund, says that vaccines are not yet available in Burkina Faso.

At the outbreak of the virus, the Government was quick to shut down flights into the country and limit border crossings. Schools, including this one below, and businesses closed, forcing many out of work. Food shortages in the cities are frequent because of the closed markets.





Clarissa, a third year nursing student, studying at home in her yard when her school was closed.

The Soap Program

We launched an emergency appeal to our donors and the response was quick and generous. We started in April with a distribution of soap and masks to our 28 beneficiaries.



Dressmaking student Zénabou with her soap and mask.

As the food shortages worsened, we expanded in June to food distribution—a sack of maize or rice, a container of cooking oil and more soap. A third distribution happened in November.



Marketing major Anayiss and her Mom with cereal and cooking oil.

Our distribution covered three cities, Ouagadougou, Koudougou and Bobo Dioulasso and was expanded to cover former beneficiaries as well as we learned that they too were in distress.



Primary school teacher Brigitte, a new baby on her back, temporarily lost her job when her school was attacked by terrorists.

An orientation program for newcomers

For the first time we organized an orientation program for our new students. It lasted a day and started at the French Institute in downtown Ouagadougou. We bussed girls in from Bobo and Koudougou. Our program manager, Christiane Toé, explained the benefits of our program and what their obligations were. All the girls were masked and socially distanced.

Later that day we took them to the Yerelon+ clinic, run by a new member of our Health Fund, Djénéba Ouedraogo. Her clinic is financed by several governments, including USAID, and she can provide medication and services at reasonable prices. In any case, our Health Fund will reimburse all expenditure. Djénéba specializes in sexually transmitted diseases and talked to the girls about sexual health. They appreciated it.



Computers

The Rennes school district (*Rectorat de Rennes*) again gave us used computers in the spring, which were then cleaned and repaired as necessary by volunteer David Gouhier, a technician

with the school district. In the end, he felt there were only seven worthy of sending to Burkina Faso. The humanitarian association that we use to ship the computers by container was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the shipment that should have left France in April did not actually depart until July. Consequently, the computers arrived late and there were not enough for all the girls. David is working on a new batch now that we might have to send by DHL.

Computer literacy

In 2019, we organized a course on computer literacy offered on a volunteer basis by a start-up in Ouagadougou, Fasodia. 18 girls participated; we bussed in those from Koudougou and Bobo Dioulasso. But the Coronavirus hit Fasodia hard, and director Hamado Kindo, who had presided over the 2019 class, had to lay off staff. They said they couldn't do another course for us in 2020. Through the *Institut Français*, we were introduced to another company that can help, but it will cost money.

BWEF (Geneva) has taken up the challenge of seeking funding for courses in 2021. Assistant Treasurer Suzanne Mesli Petalas took the lead in developing a proposal and Vice President Isabel Garcia Gill is circulating it in Geneva. Fingers crossed.

The class of 2020-21

We had agreed to support 29 girls for the school year 2020-21, but at the last minute we received an appeal from *Solidarité Goëlo-Burkina* in Burkina Faso to accept three more. These were girls who had failed the baccalaureate exam twice and were therefore not qualified to receive more aid from *Solidarité*. But Catherine Yameogo, the President of the Burkina branch of *Solidarité*, made an impassioned appeal. I had interviewed all three of them twice and there was one whom I felt was really not motivated. We agreed to support the other two for one more year of secondary school, bringing the **total number of our beneficiaries for this year to 31**. (See Annex 1.)

No visit to Burkina Faso in January 2021

In 2020, it was the security situation in Burkina Faso that almost forced me to cancel my travel plans for Burkina Faso. In the end, I decided to go but to not travel outside of Ouagadougou. Dr. Odile Pagezy, a Board Member of BWEF (France), does humanitarian work in Bobo Dioulasso, and while she was there, she interviewed our beneficiaries for us. In Koudougou, we asked a member of Noëlie Zongo's family, Lambert Djigemde, to profile all the girls, which he did assiduously.

This year, the coronavirus made it virtually impossible for me to go. So we asked Christine Gnoumou, our one salaried employee, to travel to Koudougou and to Bobo to touch base with as many of our girls as possible. She flew to Bobo, which is a six-hour car ride from Ouaga—the

road isn't safe. In these two cities, as well as in Ouaga, she also distributed cereal, cooking oil and hand soap. (See Soap Program, above.)

You can read Christine's **blog** about her visits on the BWEF site. Because there is no need to meet with all the girls in the month of January, Christine will continue this process in the months ahead, focusing now on our beneficiaries in Ouagadougou.

Fundraising

Our fundraising efforts were totally disrupted by the coronavirus and yet we did well.



In total, the three associations collected the equivalent of about 50.000€, thanks to some 250 individual donors.

Nane Annan, Honorary President of the Geneva Association (pictured above left), originally said she would accept this post if she didn't have to fundraise or attend meetings. On the contrary, she

attended our annual board meeting, gave a speech about us in 2019 to the women's organization, *Féminin Pluriel*, which then made a contribution of 3,000 CHF and in 2020 she recruited a major donor who made a contribution of 5,000 CHF.

Our annual lunch at **Pylos Restaurant** in Manhattan was cancelled, but we made an appeal to the previous year's participants and got a positive response. One Board Member gave us \$7,500, the amount we normally raise at the event. We ended up doing better than previous years (\$11,025).

The gathering at **my sister's house in Connecticut** could not take place but we did it by Zoom and collected over \$2,800.

In France, we stopped organizing the **old car rally** several years ago but continued to collect donations from local merchants who used to sponsor the cars. In 2020, we were afraid that they would be hurting from the virus. But in fact they had a strong season because many people who own second homes were free to stay in them longer in lockdown, and the extra clientele in the spring and fall gave the merchants a bonus. Collectively, they donated over 1.000€.

The Good Friday fast by **Stella Maris High School** could not take place, but they're planning for it in 2021. A major **bridge tournament** was cancelled because of the virus. A **classical music concert**, planned for the first time, had to be put on hold.

Fundraising in Geneva picked up steam in 2020, in large part to the special appeal for our soap, cereal and cooking oil campaign.

The Reserve Fund

At the beginning in 2010, we raised money to cover the expenses of the current year. After a few years, at the insistence of our Treasurer in France, André Orhan, we tried to raise at least one-third of the expenses for the following year. During a visit to the Elle Foundation in Paris seeking funding, the foundation President, Karine Guldemann, strongly advocated having in the bank all the funds necessary to pay our beneficiaries' expenses to the end of their studies.

I discussed this problem with Michael Möller, then UN Director General in Geneva. I estimated we would need a reserve of 30,000€. He arranged for me to meet with Ambassador Raymond Loretan, President of the *Club Diplomatique de Genève*. The following year, Ambassador Loretan gave us a check for 10,000 CHF. That same year, the Austrian Government development office in Ouagadougou gave us 10,000€. I asked my son, Jan Eckhard, Treasurer of our US affiliate Chance for Change, to invest \$20,000 conservatively. He chose the investment firm of Edward Jones. Chance for Change's fundraising that year permitted us to add another \$10,000 to the fund in April 2020. At the end of the calendar year 2020, **its value was \$32,892**. Target met.

The Health Fund

We encouraged our girls to get vaccinated against typhoid, yellow fever, meningitis and hepatitis. Many did and we reimbursed them. We also paid for the treatment of various illnesses. Total dispensed in 2020: 652€.

Student exchanges

For a number of years, we have carried out student letter exchanges between a high school in Ouagadougou and Stella Maris High School in Saint-Quay-Portrieux. When we lost our contact in Ouagadougou due to the retirement of our friend the Director, we continued with the primary school students of a friend of Christian Toé, Armata Ouedraogo.

We found a partner in a primary school in nearby Plourhan. But as exchanges at the primary level are not totally consistent with our mandate, I will no longer pursue this activity in 2021.

CEMEF and the 1% Fund

I have known Noëlie Zongo since 2009, when I first visited Burkina Faso. She was at that time Treasurer of our sister association, *Solidarité Goëlo-Burkina*. While in Geneva in 2018, I met with a representative of the UN 1% Fund seeking funding for our associations. (UN employees may voluntarily contribute 1% of their salaries to development projects.) I was told that we didn't meet their guidelines but during our exchange I mentioned Noëlie's dressmaking school for high school dropouts, CEMEF. The representative said that helping Noëlie improve her infrastructure was within their guidelines and suggested installing solar panels.



Some of Noëlie's students.

Noëlie was thrilled with this idea and said it would save her a lot of money in electricity bills. Over the next two years, Nicole Hochschild of BWEF (Geneva) worked with me refining the idea and processing the paperwork.



Eight solar panels on the roof

We got the grant. The 1% Fund found it awkward communicating with Koudougou and asked BWEF (France) if we would manage the funds. We agreed. I personally took responsibility. The project included, in addition to solar panels, new sewing machines, ceiling fans, general repairs and re-painting of the interior. The work was completed on schedule by March 2021.

Girls' soccer

In 2020, while visiting Brigitte, one of our graduates, we were introduced to her brother-in-law, Boubié, who was a policeman and the coach of the policeman's soccer team. He had started an association to offer soccer lessons to boys if they stayed in school. He said they could use some soccer balls. André Orhan, Treasurer of BWEF (France) and a former gendarme, found a donor of balls and jackets here in France and we sent them by container.

I mentioned to Boubié that our association couldn't help his boys' team but if he starts a girls'

team, let us know. He did just that. The same conditions apply; they have to stay in school. You'll notice that the girls have neither shoes nor uniforms. I made a personal gift to Boubié to buy both for them.



Abdoulaye

Abdoulaye was Mme Toé's driver; when I visited, he would drive me around Ouagadougou and Koudougou in her car. I needed help with taking photos and I noticed that he had a good eye. I gave him my camera and last year we paid for him to take a photography course.



He's pictured above with his certificate. He dreams of opening a photography studio but he's not yet ready for that. We use him on a freelance basis; he took the photos during Christine's visit to Koudougou.

Smartphones

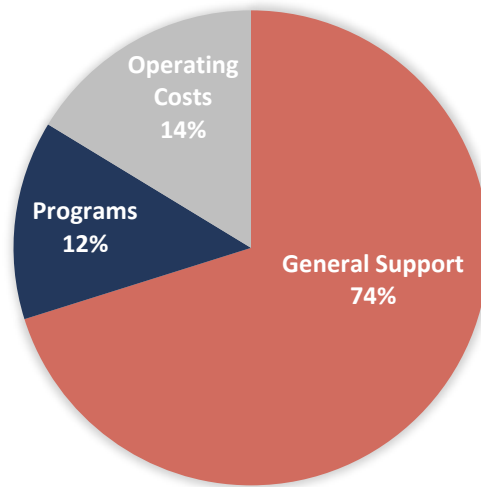
As the security situation in Burkina Faso continued to deteriorate, we thought that it would be good if our beneficiaries could stay in touch by smartphone. Of course, as students they could also find one useful. Ursula, with a Master's degree student in communications, organized a WhatsApp group of all our girls. Christine canvassed them to find out how many didn't have one. Thanks to Clément, the brother of our beneficiary Marie who worked his way through law school selling used smartphones, we were able to purchase used smartphones at a good price.



Clément and Ursula conferring during my last visit to Burkina

I occasionally ask Ursula to send out a message to all our beneficiaries in the WhatsApp group but after one year it's not yet clear that this investment was worth it. For now, we will not give out smartphones to the newcomers in 2020-21.

HOW WE SPEND YOUR MONEY



General support: tuition, inscription fees, graduation fees, supplies, housing (if necessary), transport, lunch money, specialized equipment (stethoscopes, blood pressure monitors, thermometers for nursing students, for example) and hygiene (soap, sanitary napkins). Also, preparatory courses for the government service exam, rural internships for nursing students, admissions test fees, et cetera. Our Health Fund pays for vaccinations, medications, doctor's visits and, if necessary, operations. **Total 39,655€.**

Programs: Orientation program for new students, a computer literacy course, a course in polishing French (in the planning stage), supplementary English courses. We provide reconditioned computers donated by the Rennes School District and reconditioned smartphones. In 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic, we launched an emergency food program, giving maize or rice and cooking oil as well as enough hand soap for the whole family. Also, we give modest help to a dressmaking school catering to young women who drop out of secondary school. **Total 6.420€.**

Operating Costs: In Ouagadougou, our office space was provided free by a managing consultant, Christiane Toé, who also on a voluntary basis writes our checks, keeps our books and manages our affairs. We pay a salary and benefits to her assistant, Christine Gnoumou and certain operating costs to Mme Toé. Once a year, we pay the cost of my travel to Burkina Faso to meet with our beneficiaries and to interview new candidates for aid, but I reimburse the association the full cost of my trip. There are legal fees, bank fees, office supplies and petty cash costs. **(Sub-total 6.042€)**

In Saint-Quay-Portrieux, France, we had miscellaneous operating costs, bank fees and support for the overhaul of our website. There is no office. **(Sub-total 1.207€)**

In New York, we had office expenses, website maintenance and bank fees. Again, no office.
(Sub-total 374€)

In Geneva, bank fees and no office. **(Sub-total 100€)**

Total: 7.723€

Grand total expenditure: 53.798€

Contributions received in 2020:

BWEF (France)	12.845€	=	12.845€
Chance for Change (New York)	\$31,464	=	25.995€
BWEF (Geneva)	10,874 CHF	=	<u>10.061€</u>

Total contributions 48.901€

The future

I have already relinquished the Presidency of Chance for Change to Nora Updegrove, while retaining the title of Honorary President with responsibility for fundraising. I would now like to do something similar with BWEF (France) by nominating Vice President Béatrix Bazin Rushton as the new President. In her place as Vice-President, I would like to nominate Safia Morvannou, the current assistant Secretary. Safia is born in Burkina Faso and is eager to organize the professional women of Bobo Dioulasso, her home town, to aid under-privileged girls. I have proposed to her that she do this as a program of BWEF (France). She is discussing it with Christian Toé. I will put these changes forward to the General Assembly of 2021.

Frederic Eckhard
President