



Interim Progress Report: May 2015 - October 2015

## **Learning and Earning Program for Women and Girls in Five Agadez Communities**

**Amount:** \$36,066 over two years

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## **Dining for Women**

Dr. Veena Khandke, DFW Program Director  
**Via Email:** [veena@diningforwomen.org](mailto:veena@diningforwomen.org)

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Dear Dr. Khandke and the Dining For Women Trustees,

I am honored to present this report on behalf of Rain for the Sahel and Sahara (RAIN), which details the work we were able to do through the RAIN LEGS program, thanks to the funding support of \$18,033 from Dining For Women.

## **Summary Information**

Niger is the poorest country in the world, with over 40% of its inhabitants struggling to survive on less than \$1.25 a day. The majority of these are rural and nomadic desert people living in extremely remote locations, who have been marginalized for decades. They face severe challenges including food and water shortages brought on by desertification and climate change, few income generating opportunities, a 90% adult illiteracy rate, and few educational opportunities for their children. Only 10-15% of

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children attend school and for those who do, girls complete, on average, only three years. Boys average just four years.

RAIN's LEGS program creates educational opportunities for at-risk girls and empowers nomadic women through learning new livelihoods and income-generating savings and loan groups. S&L groups also play a critical role in enabling the program to become self-sustaining by replacing the \$10 monthly stipends currently paid by RAIN. Funding over 2014-2016 will support 235 women and girls as direct beneficiaries, and approximately 1490 indirect beneficiaries, from remote Agadez communities including Iferouane, Tchinfiniten, Soulefiet, Tadek, and Tchintelouste.

### **Expense Breakdown**

This past year we spent \$4,445 launching the mentor program in all five communities. Funding also supported the S&L program in Iferouane, for a total of \$1,000.

Admin fees totaled \$550 during that period.

Monitoring and evaluation totaled \$1,500.

The outstanding funds (\$10,538) will be combined with this year's disbursement to:

- Launch herding groups in the five original communities (delayed from prev. year)
- Start S&L groups in four new communities (pending DFW approval)
- Support the mentor program
- Monitor and evaluate

Total: \$28,571

Our funding has not changed over the year. Halima Aboubacar, our coordinator for the promotion of women, has since left the organization. Alhassane Aboubacar joined us last spring as education specialist for the Agadez region. We anticipate that a woman will join us in December as our Coordinator for Education. Alhassane and Djibrilla Mahamane, field agent, will be direct trainers and monitors for the DFW program. Our new education coordinator will be the supervisor and will also spend time onsite.

### **Challenges**

A second year of drought conditions required us to delay our 2014-2015 goat herding program, following directives issued by the Niger government. This is because goat herds are reliant upon grass feeding and animals are subject to malnutrition and death if rains have failed to give rise to adequate grasslands. Thankfully, this year we received plentiful rains, and preparations are underway to launch the herding program.

A new gold rush east of the Air Mountain region is causing concern over the potential success of the S&L program in the initially chosen communities. The gold rush is disrupting communities. The success of some miners is distracting families away from education and small enterprise to joining the gold rush. We have postponed the S&Ls there until this fever passes, and propose identifying new communities unaffected by the gold rush to be able to take the DFW project forward in the meantime.

## **Program Outcomes**

Original proposed outcomes remain unchanged and include:

**1. A. Rural and nomadic girls will attend state-run schools more regularly and succeed at higher rates than their peers.**

- Insert unlettered women as part of the school structure where they support girls and gain knowledge of education and its value for all;
- Develop mentoring as a replicable and self-sustaining program;
- Impact attitudes and understanding of girls' education, as well as gender roles, health, hygiene and artisanal skills.

**B. Support nomadic women in saving and developing new livelihoods.**

- Foster confidence, skills and learning so that women can improve their livelihoods;
- Increase family economic stability, primarily measured by food security;
- Train women to initiate new S&L groups for small enterprise in their communities.

Thanks to the support from Dining for Women members, 150 girls in five communities were encouraged to pursue their dreams of education. 35 Mentors received training and stipends to effectively teach their students practical skills, as well as the importance of health, hygiene, and nutrition. Mentors support students, but they also interact with their families to ensure that they also appreciate the value of education over marriage. This is

no small task for these communities, where a 90% illiteracy rate amongst adults is the norm. Teaching students traditional artisanal skills links education to something that provides tangible results and the parents can understand. Students often teach their parents these skills, which the parents then use to earn income. Mentors are extremely proud of their new, valued role in society and we see the program spreading on a grassroots basis, from one hamlet to the next. Mentors are equipped for their critical role by learning to become:

- School advocates
- Life skills experts
- Cultivators of good morals
- Child life counselors
- A source of encouragement
- A community-family intervention contact

Our activities follow the school year calendar (October to June) because the summer is the rainy season, a time when nomadic people move to higher ground and travel is restricted due to flash floods. During the start and end of the cycle we measure success using the following criteria:

- Attendance of mentored students at school and mentor meetings
- Academic progress of mentored students: grades will be made available in October/November, and will then be evaluated by RAIN staff
- Regular interviews with mentors and students
- S&L group: intensive monitoring of savings and loan transactions

Mentors know their work is important: with 76% of girls married before they turn 18, Niger has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, and one of the lowest school enrolment rates. Every extra year a girl is able to stay in school makes a huge difference to her future. Mentors worked hard to serve as effective teachers to their students, establish positive and productive lines of communication with parents, and become regular features at school. Many proudly reported that none of their students

got married under their care, and described ways that they successfully intervened on behalf of their students.

Participants of the S&L group in Iferouane are delighted with the results of the program, and appreciate being part of a strong support network. Loans were invested in embroidered sheets (totaling a third of loan activities and repayment), new small business endeavors, mostly involving buying products in town for resale in Iferouane, such as: headscarves, plastic buckets, washing basins, artisan products, animal hides for leather craft workers, water containers, and sugar – a vital element of daily tea.

Other enterprises included raising a goat or ram for resale, yogurt production and key-chain and jewelry fabrication. The ten group members who are not already mentors have also expressed interest in becoming mentors, which would contribute to the sustainability of the program.

## **Timeline Going Forward**

High rainfall this year has delayed the start of the school year, which normally begins in early to mid-October, as this is the ideal opportunity for herders to graze animals. By November, the mentor program will be in full swing in its second year, with mentors selecting new students to replace those who graduated last year, if any, and resuming weekly meetings with students.

### **Goat-herding Program:**

Many wells ran dry last year for the second year in a row. Families, gardens, and herds struggled to cope with decreased access to water. Our field agent Djibrilla Mahamane recommended delaying the goat herding program to this coming year, due to animal illness and general suffering after a second extremely dry year.

Happily, this past rainy season has been a great one. Pasturelands will provide fodder months after the end of the rains, providing enough food for herd animals, and ensuring

a steady supply of milk for nomadic families. After October, when mentors and students have settled into their new routines, Djibrilla will introduce the herding program to the mentors and survey local markets for prices. We will purchase and begin program training in November/early December in all five target communities. Funds for animal feed, usually cottonseed, will be expensed before year end. The feed will then be stored until the spring -- those months before the rainy season when food is scarce and prices rise. This is important because rainfall only occurs during the months of June to September -- after that, scarcely a drop will be seen until the next June. What makes things especially difficult is that the hottest months are during April and May, known locally as the "hunger season," when storage stocks are at their lowest.

**S&L Program:**

Iferouane: Second year is on track to continue as expected.

Launch in 4 new communities: TBD, based on feedback from DFW.

**RAIN message to DFW donors:**

Among the nomadic people in Niger, only 15% of children attend school, and only 2% continue to secondary education. Thanks to the support from Dining for Women members, those statistics are on the rise. In the past year alone, 150 girls were taken under the wing by 35 women, and encouraged to pursue their dreams of education. Mentors received training and stipends to effectively teach their charges practical skills, as well as the importance of health, hygiene, and nutrition -- information which the girls are happy to share with their siblings, their friends, and their parents. The vast majority of mentors were not able to stay in school, and can not read or write today. They are extremely proud of their new, valued role in society, and we see their knowledge, skills and passion for education spreading from one hamlet to the next.

For more about RAIN's work, please visit our website at [www.rain4sahara.org](http://www.rain4sahara.org).