

Learning by Ear 2009
Children's Rights 6
Children's Health

Topic: Access to healthcare

Author: Mahamadou Koné (Mali)

Editor: Yann Durand

Translator: Anne Thomas

	Women	Men	Age	
IN/OUTRO		X	Unimportant	
Narrator	X		Ca. 25	
Mamadou Niafo		X	Ca. 25	
Ali Niafo		X	Ca. 45	
Alkalifa Touré		X	Ca. 40	

LbE Soundtrack

Intro

Hello everybody and welcome to this, the sixth episode of our Deutsche Welle Learning by Ear series on children's rights and working for peace.

Today we're going to Mali where healthcare, like in most developing countries, is a major concern. The richest patients go to Europe or to other countries with better equipment and more qualified staff. But the poorest have to rely on help from charities or non-governmental organizations. Mamadou Niafo was helped by the French NGO "Au fil de la vie" – "As Life Goes By" in English:

Report

1. OTON: Mdou Niafo 2 (bambara) 12''

"I was ashamed of walking around in my area because people would look at me in a disturbing way. Sometimes, I got into fights with people who were staring at me."

Narrator:

Mamadou Niafo, who is now 25, got noma as a baby. This is an acute and ravaging gangrenous infection that affects children's mouths and faces. He had a very difficult childhood. And his only crime was to be from a poor family. Mamadou's father, Ali Niafo, welcomes us to his concession in a popular district on the outskirts of Bamako, the capital of Mali.

2. ATMO (In the Niafo concession, there is a small group of men on one side, while women are cooking on the other side, making lunch): 21”

Narrator:

Ali explains to us how he tried to treat his son, who was not even one year old when the illness broke out:

3. OTON: Ali Niafo (Bambara): 30”

"It was a mysterious illness for us. I didn't know what to do. So I decided to get him treated at the Koutiala health center (400 km south of Bamako). This center was 15 km away from my home. Mamadou was so small that I would put him in a box to move him. I went back and forth for two weeks. But I had to stop in the end because I ran out of money."

Narrator:

Although he no longer had any money, Ali Niafo could not just give up and do nothing for his son. The cheapest and most accessible option was traditional medicine:

4. OTON: Ali Niafo (Bambara): 22”

"We sent Mamadou to the village of Samanyana, not far from Bamako, for traditional treatment. A woman was able to neutralize the germs. He was no longer in pain but it was already too late – he didn't have a nose anymore."

Narrator:

The traditional medicine was able to stop the illness from spreading. It is good that traditional medicine exists since many Africans do not have access to modern medicine, partly because of the high cost of drugs made in developed countries. This is especially a problem for people in rural regions. They often turn to traditional medicine that is based on the use of medicinal plants. It is the main source of treatment for 80 percent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although traditional remedies are seen to be effective for treating common afflictions, their therapeutic effect is limited. Especially when it comes to noma and its effects.

4. Atmo city sounds

Narrator:

A few years later, the Niafo family moved to Bamako. It was difficult for Mamadou, who didn't have a nose, to integrate with the local children. Some of them would run away from him; others refused to share their food or drinks with him. He and his family turned to God until they found out about an NGO, which helps people who have noma. It was 2006. Mamadou looks back:

5. OTON: Mdou Niafo (Bambara): 22”

"We found out about "Au fil de la vie" thanks to a family friend who is a nurse at the Gabriel Touré Hospital in Bamako. He told my father there were surgeons in Mali who specialized in noma. My dad took me and a few days later we went to the hospital to meet Alkalifa Touré who put me on the list immediately."

Narrator:

Alkalifa Touré manages the Malian branch of "Au fil de la vie," which works with Swiss and French partners. The French do the surgery whereas the Swiss nurses provide care. They all know the disease noma very well, including Alkalifa Touré:

6. OTON: Alkalifa 5 (French): 17”

"Children under six are the most vulnerable to noma. Generally, a child will catch the disease because of malnutrition or an infectious disease that has not been treated properly. Noma can then set in."

Narrator:

The members of "Au fil de la vie" make regular trips into the heartland of Mali. They organize awareness campaigns and raise people's sensitivity about the disease. They also try to compile statistics on how many children actually have noma. When the European specialists arrive, the patients are brought to a health center in Bamako and prepared for the operation. Here's Alkalifa Touré:

7. OTON : Alkalifa (French): 25''

"We treat them if they have infected lesions. They can be better within three weeks. We give spirulina to those who are anemic. Practically to all of them. Then they have a high enough hemoglobin level to survive the operation. Generally, they put on some weight before the operation because of the spirulina."

Narrator:

Mamadou's group was treated in 2007. The operation took place at the Gabriel Touré Hospital in Bamako. He tells us what happened:

8. OTON : Mdou Niafo (Bambara): 23''

"First of all, I was put under general anesthetic. Then the surgeons took some bone and skin from my own body to make a new nose for me."

9. ATMO (in the Niafo concession, a hen tries to escape and almost falls into the pot on the fire) **Length: 8''**

Narrator:

Mamadou is one of dozens of children who have regained their smiles thanks to a simple operation. And every year there are more children being treated, says Alkalifa Touré:

10. OTON : Alkalifa (French): 28”

"In 2007, we operated 35 people, in 2009, 55 and in 2009, 83. The number was higher this year because we have a new group of Western partners who wanted to support us. These include representatives from the American NGO "Global Smile""

Narrator:

The Western specialists play a very important role not only by providing training but by providing funding. They fill a gap, says Alkalifa Touré:

11. OTON: Alkalifa (French): 18”

"You know there is no operating block for plastic surgery in Mali. So we never have enough material. Our partners bring everything we need, everything we don't have. They leave us some of the material and go back with the rest."

Narrator:

The NGO is also helping Mali to honor a commitment it has made, along with 192 others around the world, to children. Mali has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was drawn up by the United Nations in 1989. Article 24 stipulates: *"States recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. They shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services."*

Narrator:

The highest attainable standard of health does not only concern a child's physical health but also his or her psychological balance. And this is not a negligible fact considering how ravaging noma can be. This is why "Au fil de la vie" and its partners stay in touch with their former patients to accompany them through their daily life. Alkalifa Touré:

12. OTON: Alkalifa (French): 17"

"Our aim is not to operate on the children and abandon them. We follow them for years, if not decades, after the operation. Some of the children that we have treated are then looked after by other organizations, which send them to school".

Narrator:

Mamadou does not have to reregister for school. He never stopped learning although he did get behind because of his illness. He is now in year nine and is courageous:

13. OTON: Mdou Niafo (Bambara): 22''

"I have not gone to school since I came back from hospital because it's a bit far from my home and I don't have a means of transport. My health is still fragile so the school principal said I could just take the exam at the end of the year without going to class."

Narrator:

Today, Mamadou is very happy and does not want other children to suffer like him because of an illness that can be avoided. He knows what he is talking about.

14. OTON: Mdou Niafo (Bambara): 34''

"You have to know that noma is caused by malnutrition, lack of vitamins. So I would ask all parents to look after their children. The illness starts with black stains inside the mouth. Then germs eat up the lips and the nose. I would advise parents to clean their children's mouths regularly and to vary their food and make sure they eat nutritious meals."

15. ATMO: Niafo 2 talking (in the concession, one woman with a baby is smashing onions in a small mortar. 3-4 meters away two young men are listening to sports news on a local radio. At the end, the baby cries and a man tells him to calm down until his mother is finished.) **Durée : 55''**

Narrator:

After his school exams, Mamadou wants to start doing sport again which he hasn't done for some years. He used to play football and practise martial arts.

Music

Narrator:

Mamadou's story offers an example of how access to good healthcare can make a positive change in a child's life. But it is an isolated case in Sub-Saharan Africa. 10 percent of the world's population lives in the region but 50 percent of under-five mortality is registered here. Children in this age group are particularly vulnerable to noma. Only gradually are the infrastructures and capacities being improved and qualified staff being trained. According to the World Health Organization in 2009 only five of the 46 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are on their way to meeting the Millennium Development Goal of reducing under-five mortality by two-thirds before 2015.

End of reportage

OUTRO

This report from Mali was written by Mahamadou Koné. Learning by Ear is over for today, but you can listen to the programs already broadcast by Deutsche Welle by visiting our website: www.dw-world.de/lbe

Thanks for listening and don't forget to tune in next time!