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Leader Spotlight

Expanding Lives supports the education of West African young women who are among the first in their families to attend high school.



*“People think girls like me can’t do anything. Expanding Lives shows that isn’t true.”*

—Marlia

## The Power of One

Expanding Lives is founded on the idea that one person can do one thing that can influence positive change in the world. We instill this belief in our young women, we practice it ourselves, and we recognize that your individual financial support is what allows us to continue.

Marlia is one. Her father died when she was two years-old. Disinherited and not allowed to go to school, she could easily have been married early and lived in poverty all her life. Instead, despite starting first grade at age 11, she is now a primary school teacher, and a really good one at that. One educated woman can change an entire family’s prospects. Since her mother’s death, Marlia supports her sisters, one who is still in school and one who is cognitively impaired. Marlia said that without the \$150 that YOU donated, she would not have been able to finish teacher training school. Would you consider making this a possibility for more girls like Marlia?

This summer we saw her teaching skills firsthand at a young girls’ training in the neighboring country of Benin that was organized and taught

by our former participants and paid for by YOU. Marlia’s self-assuredness was infectious, and the younger girls obviously saw her as a role model. After the training, her critical input to other leaders was invaluable. With your continued donations, Marlia’s team hopes to work with more girls, teaching them about their bodies, their strength, and their individual responsibility in making the whole world better. The cost of a week-long training from start to finish for 20 girls is \$1500. Our leaders would like to hold three next summer. Be a part of this exciting endeavor with a donation.

Marlia and her husband, who is also a teacher, are the proud new parents of a healthy baby boy. This little boy will grow up respecting the strength of an empowered mother, benefiting from the fact that she waited to have her first child and truly understanding the importance of education. In turn, he will become a power of one.

Your end of year donation to Expanding Lives can start this cycle for another young woman, her family, and her community. Please donate today.

*Leslie Natzke, Executive Director*



## Djerma Lesson Holiday Edition

West Africa is a place where culture and language are as rich as they are diverse. While countries like Benin, Niger, and Togo share French as an official language, most West Africans' first language is based on their ethnicity. In Niger, the Djerma (pronounced similar to "Zarma") ethnicity accounts for 21% of the country's population. With Nigeriens celebrating Eid al-Adha (a Muslim festival where everyone indulges on sheep) this past October, and Americans gathering for Thanksgiving in November, here are some Djerma words for you to use around the dinner table.

Dinner: **Hawro**  
Holiday: **Jingar**  
Turkey: **Tolotolo**  
Ram: **Feygi**  
Family: **Almayali**  
Friends: **Corey**  
Homes: **Fu**  
Taste: **Taba**  
Thanks: **Ay Saabu**

## Expanding into Benin



Expanding Lives had a unique summer conference this year – we held our conference in the town of Ouidah. Eight American volunteers travelled to the West African country of Benin to meet with six Nigerien young women who have been to our conference in Chicago before, and two Nigeriens who work for our sister organization, Micro-Credit in Africa (MICA). We also had the good fortune of working with numerous residents of Ouidah who helped us put our program together. Our time was spent with classes for the Nigerien girls taught by American volunteers, plus cultural activities, and panel discussions. My favorite event was a one-day conference held for local Beninese girls.

Twelve local Beninese girls in grade seven came for a conference taught entirely by our Nigerien alumnae. Given a whole day for the conference, the Nigerien young women collectively planned what they wanted to teach and how they wanted to teach it. This conference was meant to be a trial run of

sorts. After returning from Chicago, our leaders are expected to teach other young women in their community. They already held one conference last September in Niger for middle school girls, and it appears to be a huge success. At this conference in Benin, the Americans observed and offered feedback regarding how the Nigeriens planned and executed it.

Having never seen the young women in that kind of teaching role before, I didn't know what to expect. Would they be able to engage the younger girls? Keep control of the classroom? Plan enough material?

Watching this conference unfold was the greatest experience I had in Benin. With no outside help from us, these girls executed a hugely successful day. Super-quiet Roukaya commanded the room with poise, and go-getter Rahila managed the needs of different students beautifully. I cannot put into words how proud I am of these girls. It is amazing to see how much they have grown from their first days in Chicago just a few years ago. Watching this conference, I am confident that our girls will continue to be successful, powerful forces in their communities and will continue to spread Expanding Lives' mission through many more conferences in Niger. I am so proud and grateful to be a part of this organization.

*Katherine Aulis, Junior Board Member*



*Expanding Lives in Ouidah, Benin*



## Niger is Where?

At first glance Niger might not stand out from the African continent, but there's much more to this desert country than meets the eye.

Comprised of an overwhelming Muslim population, the landlocked and arid country of Niger is home to 16 million people, most of who live along the southern border and rely on sustenance farming. Niger's agricultural sector generates half of the country's GDP; however, factors such as infrequent rainfall and poor soil composition are part of the reason for 76% of the population surviving on less than \$2 a day.

And yet even with all these obstacles, there are young women in Niger who are driven and determined to make a better life for themselves and their country. The strength that these young women have is the reason why Expanding Lives exists.

Even in places like Niger, there are smart and determined women who have so much potential, but are limited by their environment. We give these girls the opportunity to become leaders, and they have seized it.

*Brian Tinger, Board Member*

## Why Niger?

Expanding Lives works to provide education and leadership experiences to intelligent yet disadvantaged young women from Africa, but with more than 50 countries in Africa, why did we start in Niger?

For women in Niger, food security and poverty aren't the only issues they deal with. Four in ten girls are married before they are 15 years old, and many times this means they are taken out of school permanently.

This is a contributing factor to a population in Niger where only 15% of women can read or write.

## The state of girls in the world:

- Out of the world's 130 million out-of-school youth, 70% are girls.
- One sixth of the world's young people live on less than \$2 a day, including 122 million girls in Sub-Saharan Africa who live on less than \$1 a day.
- 82 million girls in developing countries who are now between the ages of 10 and 17 will be married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 25% to 50% of girls in developing countries become mothers before age 18, and girls under 15 are five times more likely to die during childbirth than women in their 20s.



### Leader Spotlight: Hassira NaMaka

She is studying Economics at the University of Niamey. Her plan is to get her Bachelor's and then continue for her Master's.

When Hassira came to Chicago in 2010, she shared her story with us. Her story begins with her mother, Zouera. At six years old, full of fantasies, with a polished face, a new school uniform, and a second-hand school bag tucked under her arm, Zouera was ready to start school. But her brother, only two years older than she, said, "No, if she goes to school then I don't". As is common in Niger, Zouera did not attend school, but channeled her frustrations into her work around the house. She spent days pounding millet into powder, straining both her body and her heart. The strength she showed even as a child inspires Hassira to do more.

As Zouera grew older, she wound up like many young Nigerien girls and was married off at the age of 15. Like many traditional marriages in Niger, Zouera's parents decided to whom and when

she would marry, without her input. Her first child came only two years later at the age of 17 – Hassira's older sister. Four more children later, and after her husband had taken on two additional wives, Zouera devotedly raised her children, striving to give them the opportunities that were taken from her.

Thankfully, Zouera's daughter has a different story to tell. Through Hassira's determination and with the opportunity from Expanding Lives, she has finished high school and is in her first year of university, studying Economics. After obtaining her Bachelor's degree, she aspires to get a Master's degree. Hassira knows she may pound millet and have a baby someday... But before that, she will fulfill all of her dreams and her mother's dreams.

### Stay In Touch

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