

What Our Graduates Are Doing:

Mariama Gouro received a coveted scholarship to study tourism for her bachelor's in Morocco.

Salamatou continues with her medical school studies.

Nafissa will finish her master's in nutrition this year.

Roumanatou, Rakia, and Aissa will likewise finish their masters' in agronomy, sociology, and accounting respectively.

Mariatou is beginning her master's program in public planning.

Chamsya, Djamilia, Nana Mariama, Ramatou, and Marwa are all in public health fields studying for nutrition, midwifery, or health laboratory work.

Rahilatou, Assamaou, and Roukaya will work with environmental issues once they graduate in agronomy, natural resources, and environmental engineering respectively.

Mariama Sahabi is in computers, and **Aichatou** is studying marketing.

Hassira is working on her bachelor's in economics.

Rahila is an English teacher in a rural area while she waits for acceptance into an English master's program in the capital.

Marlia who teaches in a primary school has been assigned to teach 6th grade and the exam class, a vote of confidence from her director.



*"We really knew what we were doing, and the community appreciated it. They made us take more girls than we had planned on, and we had girls from all the rural areas as well as the town. We taught them well; everyone did their part. At the end of the conference, all of the important people were there from the community. The room was so full of parents, too. The governor had us stand up one by one, and tell everyone where we had come from, and what we were now doing with our lives. He said we were the kind of girls that everyone should strive to have. We are the kind of daughters to help our parents and our community. After that, all of the parents came to us with their daughters and asked us how we did it. They told their daughters to look at us and to become like us. **I told you we wouldn't let you down.**"*

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EXPANDING LIVES

In This Issue

The Power of Many



Building a Coalition of Girl Leaders



Where is Benin?



What Our Graduates Are Doing



Your donation gives these girls a voice in places not traditionally open to them.

Your donation allows them to be active participants in their communities.

The Power of Many

This year I am writing my end of year letter with both pride and concern.

I am very proud of the work you have helped us to do the past 7 years.

I am concerned that as we grow, Expanding Lives will have to make difficult decisions on which projects to fund.

Twenty-seven young women have participated in our leadership workshops in Chicago, and their results are nothing short of fantastic.

In turn, they have done workshops for 56 younger girls in Niger and Benin, teaching about menstruation because nobody else will, acting as role models, and giving them courage to get past the typical dropout year of eighth grade. These conferences have also given our past participants experience in public speaking, teamwork, and organization. The organizers, our graduates, get buy-in from parents, community leaders, and political leaders, sending a powerful message to the younger girls and their supporters. Conferences cost about \$100 per girl for a better chance at a future with choices. **Can you send one girl?**

As the most educated people in their families, several of Expanding Lives' young women are responsible for the education of their siblings and cousins. Two of them, having lost their fathers after attending our program, navigate

their families through financial and legal systems. Their parents count on them for the type of support only an educated person can give. Your donation gave them a voice in places not traditionally open to them.

The same is true in their communities. The young women often use Expanding Lives' training and materials, especially reproductive and sexual health materials, with their peers. They have helped friends to write résumés, and worked alongside teachers in computer training. Your donation has allowed these girls to be active participants in their communities.

As more and more of our young women pursue bachelor's and master's degrees, our costs rise. Our organization spends about \$400 for each year of a girl's 3-year bachelor's degree. In a country where some 2 percent attend university, we know their success can eventually affect the entire country. **Can you fund a university education for one of our world changers?**

I believe our conference in Chicago, the young girls' conferences in Niger and Benin, and the follow-up education of our participants are all vitally important to making significant gains in building strong leaders. **Please consider donating to Expanding Lives to extend this chance to more capable young women in 2016.**

Leslie Natzke, Executive Director

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Learn more or donate online:

www.expandinglives.org

Expanding Lives is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. All donations are tax deductible.



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

French Lesson Travel Edition

A large part of what makes Expanding Lives so life-changing is its ability to broaden perspectives and help girls experience new cities, countries, and even continents.

Whether they are selected to fly to Chicago for our summer program or a group of EL leaders is taking a bus to a nearby village to run a workshop for local girls, traveling is an important part in how we spread our message and how we empower and connect girls all over the world with each other.

Traveling to West Africa? Here are some terms to help you navigate your travels in Francophone countries:

To Travel: **Voyager**
Car: **Une Voiture**
Airplane: **Un Avion**
Walk: **Marcher**
Meet: **Rencontrer**
Suitcase: **Une Valise**

Building a Coalition of Girl Leaders

The 2015 Leadership Conference welcomed four young women from Benin: Ninia, Arafat, Pierrette, Rosine, and their mentor chaperone Aimée, the Executive Director of Femme et Développement.

Why Benin?

Simple answer? Solidarity.

Several members of our Board of Directors have worked in Niger, Benin and Togo, but we don't see these places as three separate countries. The young women we work with in West Africa are all sisters. They're our sisters. After living there for years, they have truly become our family members. Host families, volunteers and supporters of Expanding Lives no doubt feel the same way. This is solidarity.

But Expanding Lives is not about us. It's about giving motivated and empowered young women the opportunity to live up to their potential. Whether it's lack of resources, tuition money, or access to healthcare, Expanding Lives' scholars experience challenges that many of us never had to overcome. Yet they persevere and become role models for other girls and women in their communities and throughout the world.

When we originally *expanded* into Benin in the summer of 2014, the Nigerian scholars were given a chance to teach the new Beninese scholars what Expanding Lives is truly all about: solidarity. Not only had the Nigerians educated dozens of girls in their home communities, now they had formed a sisterhood with their neighboring Beninese counterparts. Imagine the power of connecting these young women to others in their region so that they can empower and learn from each other. This is why we do what we do. Solidarity with Expanding Lives' mission causes a ripple effect and continues to empower young women worldwide.



Over the past 7 years of conferences we have developed a strong curriculum with volunteer instructors conducting sessions on leadership, health, yoga, computers, theater, social entrepreneurship, and much more. Each session introduces the participants to new skills and different ways of solving problems to support them as leaders and provide the tools they will need to serve their communities and support their peers.

Involving American Youth

Expanding Lives supports American youth by providing guided opportunities for American students to enhance global and local problem-solving capacities.

This year, a group of American students participated in classes alongside the participants from Benin. Rida Yousef, a student in Leslie Natzke's French class, supported the conference almost every day assisting with the sessions and using her French skills as often as possible.

Rida credits this experience with helping her refocus her goals and start new projects. For example, she started the Niles West feminism club with her friend Lejla to support gender equality. After hearing the Beninese girls' stories about the struggles women face in order to attend school, Rida wanted to start a club to raise money for Expanding Lives and also spread the word about the movement. She now wants to take on a leadership role with EL. "I realized then I really like working with Expanding Lives and that's why I applied for the internship. I hope one day to be on the junior board too. The 6 weeks with the girls, there was not one day where I didn't learn something new."



Where is Bénin?

Formerly the Kingdom of Dahomey, and later a French colony, the Republic of Benin is as rich in culture as it is diverse.

Having gained independence only 55 years ago, this narrow slice of land the size of Ohio is situated on the Atlantic coast between Nigeria and Togo and on shores formerly referred to as the Slave Coast. Resting between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer, Benin's 10 million inhabitants endure a hot and humid climate year round, with coastal temperatures in the 80s. As you move north through the country and away from the coast, the vegetation and humidity are replaced by arid land and increased heat.

A reminder of colonization, French is the official language of the country, however there are more than 50 languages spoken in Benin, with Fon and Yourba the most

common. Like its linguistics, religion in Benin is also very diverse with Roman Catholicism and Islam accounting for nearly a quarter of the population each, followed by traditional West African Voodoo and other religions. Unlike some countries where different religions compete against one another, the Constitution of Benin provides freedom of religion and it is not uncommon in Benin to have multiple religions practiced in the same household.

While Benin continues to rank among the poorest countries in the world, it has seen economic growth over recent years driven by the agricultural sector and the export of cotton. Still, subsistence farming is the way of life for many Beninese, with maize and yams being the most commonly farmed crops in the south and the north, respectively. Tourism in Benin is a small and captivating part of Benin's economy, built around not only the national wildlife parks in the northern parts of the country, but also the cultural traditions and history that can be found in places like Abomey and Ouidah. Visiting architecture from pre-colonial times, wrapping pythons around yourself while learning about the local voodoo culture, and walking along the ancient slave routes are just some of the ways to learn about and experience the culture that Benin has to offer.

#62MillionGirls

The Obama Administration announced this year that it is expanding its efforts to help adolescent girls worldwide attend and complete school through an initiative called Let Girls Learn.

At Expanding Lives, it is our goal to help girls realize their full potential and become more than a statistic.

Use your annual donation to **#LetGirlsLearn** with us!

The state of girls in the world:

- There are 62 MILLION GIRLS in the world who are currently not in school and denied their right to an education.
- In the developing world, 1 IN 7 GIRLS is married before her 15th birthday.
- Girls with secondary schooling are up to SIX TIMES LESS LIKELY to marry as children compared to girls who have little or no education.
- Almost 60% FEWER GIRLS would become pregnant under 17 years in sub-Saharan Africa if they all had a secondary education.
- An EXTRA YEAR of secondary school for girls can increase their future earning by 10-20%.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

