



Newsletter - December 2022

To friends of HDI

For HDI, this year's most exciting news arrived on Thanksgiving Day. *The Lancet Global Health* accepted our paper with results from almost 1.4 million health-facility births in Niger over six (6) years. Ten years of work have brought sufficiently solid results for them to be published by one of the world's most prestigious medical journal "families". It is embargoed until the publication date, which has not yet been announced. Pre-publication production in *The Lancet* is quite extensive. We will distribute it widely as soon as it is published.

When the article is published, your help in sharing it with anyone in any organization, anywhere, who might be inspired by Niger's results to want to similarly benefit women in other countries would be very greatly appreciated. HDI can help them plan and do training, if they wish.

Foundations these days often ask that they not be approached with funding requests, preferring their own staff to find groups whose work matches their interests, after which the foundation will reach out to offer its support. It would therefore also be wonderful, when it is published, if you can share the *Lancet Global Health* article with anyone you know who cares about preserving the dignity, the lives, the health, and the economic situation of women, thus also benefitting kids whose moms survive to be with them as they grow up, whether people you think of are associated with a foundation or a corporation, or whether they are philanthropic themselves. To be clear, it is HDI's projects to benefit women that need funding, while HDI's work on Neglected Tropical Diseases in Togo is fully funded by the People of the United States through USAID.

As those of you who have followed HDI know, financially our work to preserve women's dignity and protect their lives by preventing obstetric fistula, and by preventing women from bleeding to death when they give birth, has been "hanging on by a thin thread" for several years, effective though it is. HDI does not have a fundraising budget; your generous contributions are so needed and directly support the work we are doing. We hope the credibility that publication in a *Lancet* journal provides will make more folks aware, that supporting HDI's work can be an effective way to reach their own measurable, evidence-based philanthropic goals. Your help in bringing this fact to the attention of individuals and foundations interested in protecting women's lives and dignity, would therefore be very greatly appreciated.

Obstetric Fistula Prevention

In a part of Niger 2.5 times bigger than Denmark with a population on the order of 4 million people, we are entering the last year of very generous Izumi Foundation support, now through its three-year exit-strategy support for HDI's new obstetric fistula prevention project. Impressively, Izumi Foundation has been a strong supporter of HDI's obstetric fistula prevention work since 2010. HDI's

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recent annual program review in Niger indicates a third-quarter 2022 flattening of previously marked reductions of how many die of obstructed labor, and of new obstetric fistula cases in this area from 2018 onward. Based on a more detailed analysis of the latest data, Dr. Zeidou and I have therefore begun discussing what we can change to get us closer to zero obstructed labor deaths and to zero new fistulas, ideas we will present to the Izumi Foundation for their consideration within a few weeks.

Again this year, thanks to generous funding from **The Protect Your Sister Project** which is also providing support to obstetric fistula prevention in the project Izumi Foundation supports, and donations from individuals, Auxiliary Midwives are continuing their fantastic 24/7 on-call availability at health centers in our initial obstetric fistula prevention project area. They continue their work, each in her local community health center, in spite of security-issues spilling over from nearby Mali and Burkina Faso where the situation is sadly chaotic. These health centers were previously staffed by only one (male) nurse, who is not always there. The presence of an Auxiliary Midwife ensures a woman trained in obstetrics, who also knows how to organize medical evacuations in obstetric emergencies, is always available to care for women in labor who come to these very rural locations.

Neglected Tropical Diseases in Togo

Last spring, WHO verified TOGO as having eliminated **trachoma**, a blinding bacterial disease, as a public health problem. Trachoma causes blindness because the eyelashes turn inward over time and scrape repeatedly, painfully, across the eyes. While we had nothing to do with the Ministry of Health's work to combat trachoma, HDI with USAID funding did help document that Togo in fact already met the trachoma elimination criteria, by helping them plan and conduct surveys in particular parts of the country. And we worked with Togo on the "dossier" of materials needed for WHO's rigorous documentation process before it provides "verification".

That brings the number of "Neglected Tropical Diseases" (NTDs) Togo has eliminated to four, apparently making them the first in the world to have eliminated that many. In addition, in 2019 without any HDI participation at all, Togo became the first country anywhere to eliminate "**sleeping sickness**" (Human African Trypanosomiasis or HAT), a previously universally deadly disease transmitted by tsetse flies when they bite. Previously, Togo had completely eliminated transmission of Guinea worm disease (2006), and eliminated lymphatic filariasis (LF, or "**elephantiasis**"; Mass Drug Administration stopped in 2009), both of them with HDI's help. And Togo appears close to achieving elimination of **river blindness** (onchocerciasis) as a public health problem with support from USAID through HDI. Mass Drug Administrations (MDA) against River Blindness has already been stopped in most of one region. "Pre-Stop" surveys having been passed, samples from full, more extensive Stop-MDA surveys from the other regions are now in the lab awaiting analysis.

Warmest thanks for your support and encouragement which make these achievements possible !!!

Anders Seim, MD, MPH
Executive Director, HDI

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