

Sewing, Knitting, and Weaving – a Chance for Young Girls to Make a Name for Themselves



Begorou Tondo is a rural community located at about ten minutes' drive from Tera and three hours' drive northeast of Niamey, near the Burkina and Mali borders. Tera is one of the poorest Departments in Niger. The village has about 25,000 inhabitants, most involved in agriculture, herding and small commercial activities. While the village has a school, girls' enrollment is very low and many girls drop out of school early to help their families make a living. There are not many opportunities for them to do anything other than help with household chores and eventually get married and start their own families.

One association in charge of school drop-outs wanted to change that and offer opportunities. The Association for promoting young school drop-outs (the APJD or Association pour la Promotion des Jeunes Déscolarisés) contacted the American Embassy to submit a project that would empower young girls to learn a socially-acceptable trade: sewing, embroidery, knitting, or weaving. This project would enable the beneficiaries to learn a reputable job and sell their products through various fairs and exhibitions at the national level, engaging them in their own business.



This project fit perfectly within the Ambassador's Special Self Help program (SSH) that helps communities to build economic strength while supporting women's education and empowerment. With a total of \$7,778.90, APJD was able to build a 269.10 square-foot learning center equipped with ten sewing machines, two embroidery machines and lots of other sewing equipment and furniture. This learning center would be open for young women who did not complete schooling, and would finally give them means of self-support. This entire project was received with a tremendous anticipation by both the young women and the entire village community. One mother of a young girl said: "I am so happy that this center will now occupy my daughter's day. I want her to do something with her life, not just stay at home."

On May 8, 2013, Ambassador Bisa Williams and an Embassy delegation attended the opening ceremony of the learning center. The girls were beaming with excitement at seeing the new equipment and the opportunity to start learning something new. The Ambassador wished the first beneficiaries good luck and said "I hope you follow the training rigorously and are conscious that you are role models for your entire village community."

While this project is limited to a single community and is focusing on young girls, other similar projects have sprung up in other parts of Niger and been financed with SSH or DHR (Democracy and Human Rights) funds. Another recent beneficiary of the DHR funds is ONG SARED (Structure d'Aide et de Reinsertion des Détenus et Enfants en Difficulté), a juvenile rehabilitation center located in Maradi. The

center was created in 2004 through DHR funding and has recently benefited from additional funding to reinforce its capacity in sewing, knitting and weaving machines, as well as carpentry equipment. Participants in this project are young girls and boys who have been victims of sexual or physical abuse. The girls will learn sewing and knitting, while the boys learn carpentry, and both will receive training in basic literacy and mathematics. Some 207 girls and 81 boys will be trained during this project.

Niger already has one famous fashion designer, Alphadi. Who knows, perhaps the next is being trained in one of these projects!

For more information on the SSH or DHR program, please contact Mireille Gbetholancy-Kun at Gbetholancy-KunME@state.gov or 99 49 90 70.