



The Project

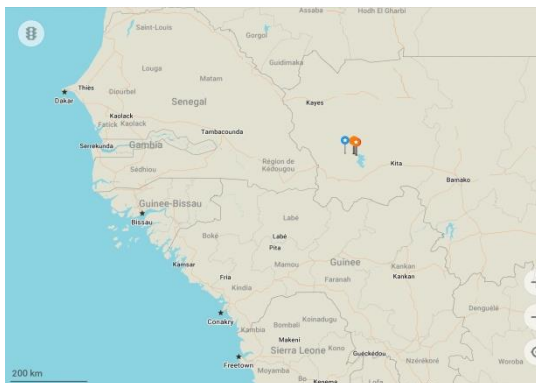
I have been living in Mali since 2012. I settled here, on a beautiful piece of land right on the river side. This all before the trouble started in Mali. I was planning to set up a campsite for tourists, with organised tours on the lake next to me, safari's, river canoe trips, restaurant and so on.

The start of the war in the north of Mali (far from here, luckily) messed up these plans. Instead of fleeing I changed my plans and am now into banana and fish farming. It keeps me alive, but only just. Then again, life is good simple and cheap here, I have 300+ days of sunshine.

I have done a few projects in this area. I have built schools, I have built a fenced of



garden with water supply for the women of a village (there is no rain here for 8 months!), latrines at schools, bought a boat for a village so the women can go to the market every day to sell their produce, just to name a few.



In 2013-2014 I noticed the dire need for clean drinking water in the villages around me. Clean water is of course life's necessity number one. Many villages did not have any, or had too little clean water, resulting in them drinking water from the river or from often polluted hand dug wells. This again resulting in disease, premature deaths of specially older people and small children. I could not live with myself, knowing these problems exist, and are relatively easily to fix. So I started fixing existing water pumps, and have been doing this ever since.

Every Saturday I go out to one or two villages to fix a pump. It is a lot of work and not easy in the sometimes 45 degrees sun. I do this with my own hands and material, I have bought the tools from my own money and the spare parts are being financed by the Maliproject in the Netherlands. They are a small Christian organisation and they raise funds in Church and among friends and family. Without them I could not finance this, I am not a rich man.



History

To understand the water pump problems we need to go back in time a bit.

During the early 80's Mali, in cooperation with Europe, decided to build a dam in this region. There is a big river, called the Baffing, that comes down from Guinea, and specially in rainy season there is a lot of water coming down this river. It flows all the way to the border between Senegal and Mauretania where it flows into the ocean.

After the initial surveys the place for the dam was chosen, Manantali. With a natural mountain on both sides of the river, it was the easiest place to build the dam. The building took place from the early to the late 1980's. Build by the Germans the dam is big. The project was undertaken by three countries, Mali, Senegal and Mauretania, because they all have the river in common. The electricity produced is transported by high power lines to Bamako, Dakar and Nouakchott, the three capitals.

At the time before the realisation, Manantali was a small village of about 100 people. (now it is a bussing town of maybe 8000 to 10.000 people.

The population was (and is) poor and live mainly from cultivation during the short 3 month rainy season.

When this region was 'in the picture' the world bank decided to fund a project to help the scattered small villages with clean drinking water. In 1985 they started drilling and during two years they placed 628 pumps in 215 villages. They then started a system of maintenance and spare parts. They appointed a manufacturer to produce spare parts, appointed regional distribution offices for these and trained local people in repairing and maintaining the pumps. Well, you would say, seems to be a great project. It was.

But this is Africa.....

A few years later the Malian government decided to increase import duties on steel drastically. The spare part manufacturer could not produce for the agreed price and gave up. Spare parts became scarce. The local repair man also started asking a lot of money to the villages for repairing a pump, the villages could not pay this. The whole system collapsed. The pumps in the villages did not get any maintenance and started to break down. Many villages had to go back to drinking from the river or from dirty wells.

When I took inventory of the situation in 2013, I found that 75% of the pumps where broken, and the 25% that where still working where in a dire need of maintenance or part replacement.

The Malian government and the NGO's in Mali, all concentrate their attention in the north, where the war is creating even more havoc, they are forgetting the rest of Mali and leave the population without clean drinking water, one of the most important basic necessities.



So when I started to take note of the bad water situation and started visiting villages, I noted many pumps broken, some even dismantled. Some big villages had 7 or more pumps. A few of the pumps had usually been dismantled for spare parts to repair the other. Many pumps had broken bearings, broken axis, worn out seals or other more serious problems. When asking the village chief why they had not repaired the pump, the usual answer would be.... We did. We paid a huge sum a few years ago to repair a pump, and it broke again after 1 month.

On inspection from me I noticed the repair man had asked way to much money for a small repair and not done it properly. For example, in one village they had payed 150.000 francs (200 euro) to change a bolt of the chain. This is money from people who have much **less** then a dollar a day, most do not have a dollar a week. So you can imagine I got furious. I had to do something.

The repair work

I have been repairing pumps for a few years now, I would like to explain how this works.

Every Saturday morning I go to a village. Either the village has contacted me, or I know the village has broken pumps.

With me I take all material needed, including the repaired head that I took from the last village. With me goes Mary Keita, a local plumber, also my translator if needed, organiser and work horse, he can repair anything with a plastic bag, a piece of wire and an elastic band. Of course with the pumps we don't work like that. The road to many villages are bad, often forcing me to strap all material on my motorbike since access by car is impossible.

The first thing to do on arrival is to go and greet the village chief, otherwise I would be impolite. This is usually an very old man who speaks no English or French, so the greeting doesn't take long.



I then go to inspect the pump in question. Usually I find very old, worn down and broken contraptions that bring tears to your eyes.

It is not always clear as to what the problem is so we start to dismantle the pump. Above ground we first take off the pump head and handle, which we will later replace with the freshly painted repaired one. The chain is removed, the usually rusty bolts removed and off comes the head.

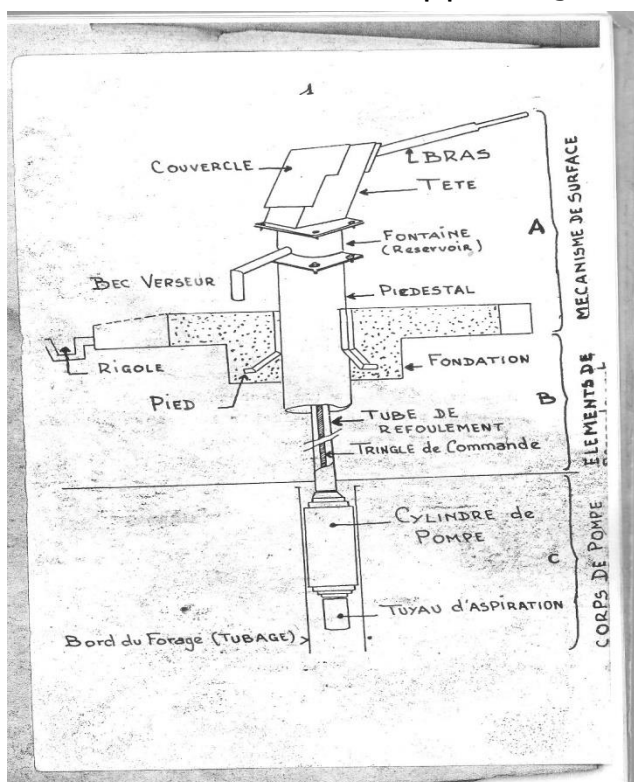
Having done that, we start removing the so called tank, that is the part with the sprout. Again usually rusty and stuck bolts, but with some oil, patience and force we can remove these as well.

The tank is fixed to the pipes that go into

the ground. There is an outer pipe, in which the water is pumped up, and an inner rod, that is connected to the handle on top and the piston down below. This rod makes that, through pumping, the water comes up.

The two pipes go down the borehole which can be anywhere between 20 and 60 meters deep. Since you cannot have a pipe of 60 meters, the pipe and rod are divided into sections of 6 meters. The outer pipes screw onto each other, the inner rods are also connected by a system of bolts.

So we now start heaving the first pipe, with the tank on top, until we see the first





connection. This is heavy work and usually the villagers are happy to help.

We

secure the pipe with special tools and unscrew first the outer pipe and then the inner rod, put them aside and start lifting again until the next connection. And so on, it can be anywhere

from 4 to 8 pies that we have to lift out of the borehole. Also here, connections are often rusted and worn down, so its sometimes painfully slow. But in the end, we can lift the last pipe with the attached pumping cylinder or motor.

If you do something wrong, the whole mess could fall into the borehole, sealing the borehole and depriving the village of water, so, we have to work carefully and slowly.

9 out of 10 times we find the problem inside the cylinder or motor. The seals are worn down, the valves are broken, sometimes its just some dirt that blocks the movement. A few times its was the balls from the bearing of the pump head that had fallen all the way down and was blocking the proper working. I even found a peanut shell blocking the valve one time. The kids tend to throw things into the pump.

The pump cylinder is always old, rusty and very hard to open. Remember, most have been down the borehole for 25 years. So, usually it takes a good 20 minutes just to open the cylinder. Inside is the piston with it seals and two valves.

I always replace the piston seals, even if they are not to bad. And when needed the valve seals. After checking that all works well, we close the cylinder and start lowering it in the borehole. Then slowly each pipe and rod is attached on top of the other until we are back at the tank. I then place the newly repaired pump head with, if needed, a new chain, new bolts and voila, the pump should work.





By this time it's usually around midday. Sometimes I repair two pumps, especially in villages that are far away. Then, if we are lucky, the village has prepared some food. The usual Malian dish, rice with some sort of sauce. But this is an exception, usually I return home hungry.

After a 1000 thanks you's from the village and the village chief, lots of 'God will reward you' and so on, I go back home, only to stop at the welder to drop off the broken pump head, including new bearings and axle. He then has time to fix it so I can pick it up on Monday or Tuesday to start the painting.



The actual situation in Mali

It is not going well with Mali. Before 2012 it was one of the more stable countries in Africa. A colonel in the Army staged a coup d'etat, since then the country has been sliding down the slippery slope. At first fast, very fast. Every Jihadist and outlaw in the region took advantage of there not being any working government and no army. It got so bad that these rebels got to about 60 km from the capital Bamako. And that's when the French intervened. Strangely enough, they did not finish the job (politics?) and Mali has been sliding down ever since. Slowly, but surely.

There is a government, even an elected President. That in itself does not mean much, since elections here are not about policies, plans, ideas or ideologies. It's about which candidate has the most friends and hands out the most gifts. It has nothing to do with democracy.

This president, a real statesman and politician, has not really achieved much during his term. Sure, big words, meetings and trips abroad. That is Malian politics.

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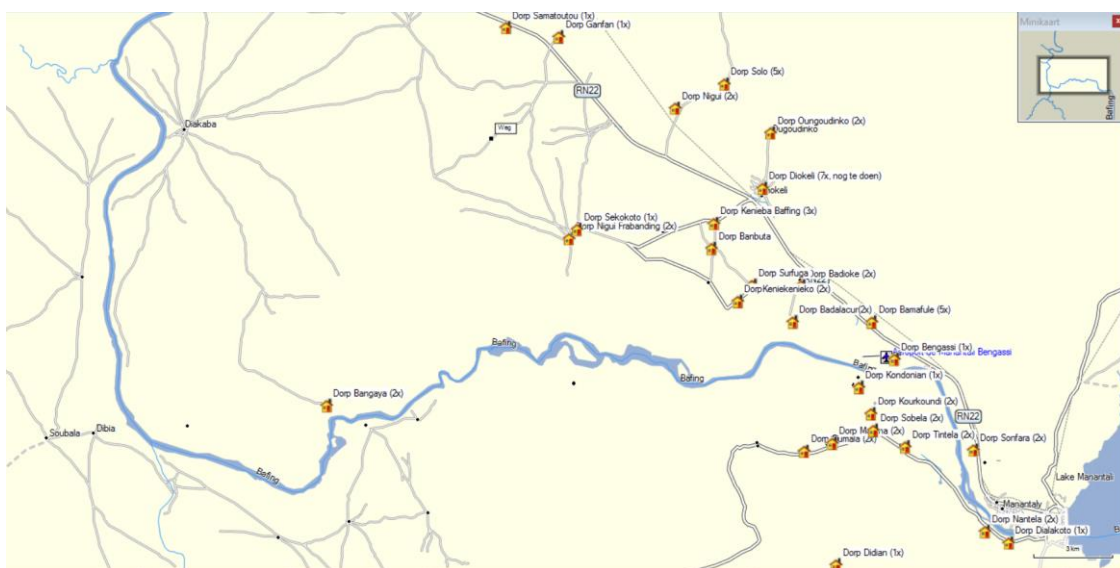
The political elite fare well with all the attention and aid Mali is getting, believe me, a lot of money does not arrive its intended destination. The presence of 12.000 foreign military brings so many jobs and so much money into the country that you would suspect the political elite do not want them to leave. And this means there is no strive for a solution to the problem, because that would be killing the goose with the golden eggs.

On the other side is the conflict so complicated, with so many different groups and interest, that a solution would only be possible with a good dictator who will do what is needed, slam his fist on the table and shout words like 'and now the bloody party is over, so get in line or piss off'. Wishful thinking.

Taking all this in mind, I see no solution for Mali in the short or medium term. I suspect the situation will get worse. The country is almost too big and desolate to control, with bad infrastructure and a non-working government. The Jihadist, the bandits and criminals have all the advantages.

The people of course are the ones that suffer, as in any conflict. Bad infrastructure (bad roads), irregular electric (if any), bad water supply, bad telecommunications, bad health care, horrible education etc. Corrupt government whose employees are only out to suck money from the already poor population.

I try to have as little to do with the Government and any Government official, keeping a low profile, although not easy as the only white living in this area. And I have come to love Mali and the Malian people. The Malian people are friendly, life is hard and simple. And I recognised the need to help these people. Not like the big NGO's do. They have quite a different objective. Remember, a NGO is a western organisation, perhaps initially created to help people but most have grown to big expensive corporations with huge overheads. Although their objectives might be good, way too much money is spent on advertising, personnel and overhead. People working in NGO's are earning money. And many have no idea what the poor African really needs. (photo, some of the villages where I have repaired pumps)



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My problem, my request

I need more help. The repairing of the pumps is taking to long, the repaired pumps, which are 25 years old, often break down again. I need to either find another solution or

I NEED TO REPLACE THE PUMPS INSTEAD OF REPAIRING!

And that's where I need your help. For 175 euro I can replace a pump. Not really a huge amount of money, but with 250 pumps in the region it adds up. My original Sponsor, the Maliproject from the Netherlands (www.maliproject.nl) is slowly winding down. I need another donor

Please donate me some money. Its easy, its painless, its tax deductible, and you are helping the villages, especially the children, the women and the old, with clean water.

Also please , share my request on Facebook among your friends, with a little publicity we can go a long way. Its easy, you can do it via my Heroes & Friends crowd funding page at

www.heroesandfriends.com/projects/drinking-water-for-mali

facebook: coolcamp Mali

And of course, if you have any questions, any ideas, input, or just want to drop me a line, my email

camp@coolcampmali.com

THANKS