

Bappa Dari and Faji Hamid are nomadic Wodaabe girls in Niger with one thing in common: they are both pursuing their dream of an education at our learning center and dormitory in Agadez. RAIN staff Brian Nowak and Halima Aboubacar recently spent some time talking with them about their lives.

Bappa Dari



Bappa Dari is 16 years old and has completed the 10th grade. She's one of four children. Her mother takes care of the household her father is a cow herder -- the main activity of the Wodaabe Fulani, one of the most nomadic societies in the world. Bappa is from Foudouk in the Ingal region of Niger, famous for the *cure salee* (salt cure), an ancient meeting of herding communities with large festivities.

Bappa and her classmates at the learning center are the first from their region to attend middle school, with their parents blessing and support. Rural students in Niger must relocate to the city to continue studies beyond elementary school; for girls this is almost impossible without a safe place to stay. Bappa appreciates the programs and the company of other girls from the countryside and enjoys working on embroidery and carving calabashes – activities Wodaabe women take very seriously, carving the calabashes with secret designs that are known only to them.

The break is during the rainy season - her favorite time of year. “There are many things to do. There is grass and water everywhere. Everything is green. It is good to enjoy nature. There are multi-colored birds that come and sing. There is oxygen and of course, milk!” While at home she helps her mother with household chores including caring for her two younger brothers and sister and constructing a shelter each time they relocate. She spends her free-time making jewelry and embroidering cloth to prepare for the traditional dances in September.

The most difficult thing she remembers was a drought that forced families to relocate far away to find water and a place for their animals to at least survive the difficult time. Traveling was very hard. Families lost several animals, their only source of income. Bappa also lost her grandfather. Bappa will never forget the many problems her family faced. She reminded us that even when there is not a drought there is always the problem of insufficient water. At any given time during the dry season women may spend a whole day at the well waiting for the water to fill.

Bappa has an aspiration to be the Minister of Education. “I would like to help Nigerien schools.” Barring that, she would like to be an accountant. She hopes to go on with her education and holds the same wish for other girls.

Faji Hamid

Faji Hamid is 16 years old and has just completed 8th grade. She grew up in the village of Tamazalak where her father is the chief. He tends a garden and herds goats, and her mother weaves mats to sell in addition to caring for the household.



Tamazalak, like other villages in the region, has suffered great losses from recent droughts, and herding as a primary livelihood is no longer possible. When asked about the most difficult issues facing her village, Faji cited the drought and the loss of animals, famine, and the second rebellion, when families had to leave their village to hide.

During school breaks, Faji helps her mother at home and visits family and friends. Daily household chores include the long trip to the well, searching for cooking firewood in the bush, pounding millet twice daily and bringing their animals out to pasture in the mornings.

When at home she enjoys taking walks, chatting with her friends, knitting and visiting family in dispersed nomadic camps. The rainy season is also her favorite. "Nature is beautiful. The trees are green and there is water that gathers in ponds that we can swim in. There are berries that ripen. It is not too hot or too cold. It is magnificent!" With the rains both people and animals are happy as the daily routines become easier with accessible water and pastureland for the herds.

Faji is grateful for the opportunity to continue studying. She is the first girl in her family to reach middle school and she hopes she can continue to high school and beyond. She enjoys the after-school support classes, the center's facilities (dorm rooms, bathrooms, and shade hangar) and the friends that she has made during her first year at the learning center.

Faji hopes to visit Niamey, France and the U.S. Her favorite subject in school is English. When asked what she would like to be when she grows up, she replied, "I would like to be Prime Minister or work for an NGO. I want to help the people in my village and my family and fight against terrible diseases."



Niger Program Director Brian Nowak talking with students.



Girls in their dorm.



Tamamounte, Faji, and Dafada (L to R) enjoying responding to questions about their life and aspirations.



DafadaMaidaji Ibrahim

Fatima Abdou



Naiwa Diyowa



Teneflit Abdou





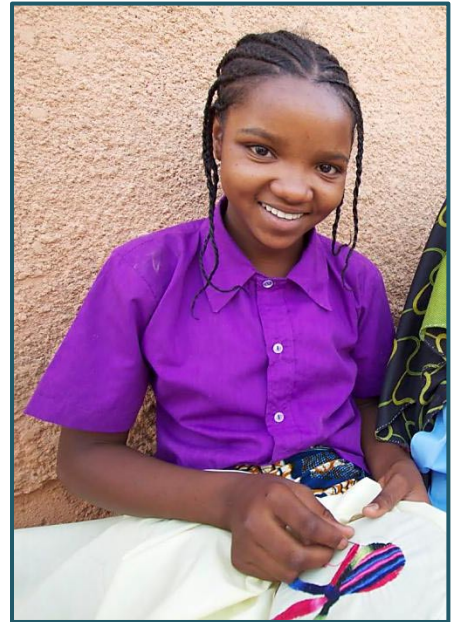
Naiwa's design for the center of her cloth.



Bappa's design for the center of her cloth.



(At L) Teneflit working on a knit hat to protect a baby from the desert cold season temperatures that can leave frost on the ground in the early mornings.



Fatima, proud of her work. (close up below).



Naiwa and Bappa design and create traditional Wodaabe symbols.



Dafada's central design.



Dafada working on her embroidery.

