

River of Death

TRAILER

In central Mali, the river Niger splits into a big delta of wetlands and tributaries that have been channelled since colonial times to provide year-round irrigation for rice farmers. But the water that brings life to the region also carries diseases.

RUNTIME: 04:38

COUNTRY: MALI

FILMING LOCATION: NIONO

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH, BAMBARA, FRENCH

SOURCE: A24 MEDIA/REUTERS

SCRIPT

COMMENTARY

The town of Niono sits at the centre of Mali's biggest system of irrigation channels, built in the 1920s to help farmers here maximise the waters of the river Niger and cultivate all year round.

50,000 people live and farm in and around Niono, but the water that sustains life here is also its biggest health hazard.

ITV, DJENIBA DIARRA (Bambara)

"I came here to do my dishes. We wash dishes, clothes and even bathe here often because we don't have enough water at home. But we know that the water is very dirty with all sorts of germs in it. There are some who relieve themselves in it; others just dispose of their waste in the water. This water is not good for consumption".

COMMENTARY

At the Niono Hospital, attending physician Dr. Oumar Sango examines a patient with malaria; not a waterborne disease as such, but prevalent here because there's so much breeding ground for mosquitoes.

She also has typhoid. Sango says that the two diseases both of which are in some way caused by the water that surrounds the town, are the biggest killers here.

SOT R/T: 0.16 (Male/French)

Dr. OUMAR SANGO

Niono Hospital

“People here are in constant contact with water because they're rice farmers, they do their house work with the water from the canal, they fish and they go into swamp areas – so all that means they're more likely to catch diseases from the water.”

COMMENTARY

Mali's Ministry of Health has spent some money on an awareness campaign to try and stop people at least from using the canal water for drinking.

But what's needed, are wells that tap water 40 to 50 meters below the surface where it hasn't come into contact with human or animal waste and is safe to drink.

So far, it's been left to local charities to provide these, and although there are now 7 pumps in Niono, they cannot cater for the 50,000 residents.

ITV, MAKOROBA TRAORE (Bambara)

“I come to fetch water here because it is not polluted, and when stored, it stays clean. It does not have any dirt in it”.

COMMENTARY

In Niede village, also part of Niono district, efforts to provide clean drinking water and a sanitary environment are paying off.

Oumou Traore, here in the red dress, is the president of Diakabara, a women's association that now manage some of the deep wells in the area.

By selling clean water to residents, the association is also helping members make a living. The funds they make help to maintain the pumps, pay the water sellers and the rest is saved in a common account.

ITV, OUMOU TRAORE, Diakabara Women's Association (French)

"Before we didn't charge for the water and the women came here to wash clothes and dishes and they wasted water and the entire place was messed up. This stopped after we charged for the water and the place is now clean."

COMMENTARY

They have also built environmentally friendly toilets known as Ecosan, which stands for Ecological Sanitation, and is being promoted in parts of the developing world because it doesn't drain waste into the water. Instead it separates urine from excrement and dries out the solid waste, so that both can be recycled as fertilizer.

Building one toilet costs \$ 600, but the women's association and other charities have helped the 3000 Niono residents construct 68 Ecosan toilets.

Applicants bear about 20% of the cost by supplying labour and building materials.

ITV, OUMOU TRAORE (French)

"Here in Niono we have direct contact with water but Ecosan toilets prevents water contamination because faeces get dried out completely and the urine is collected separately. After six months both the urine and faeces can be used in the fields and are completely odourless."

COMMENTARY

Even if the government could be doing more to help protect the people of Niono against waterborne illnesses and diseases like Malaria, the women here show that there are local solutions too. They meet regularly to discuss how they can get more

people to wash hands and disinfect food, and make home visits to educate their neighbours. In this way, they might just inspire more of Niono's residents to take matters into their own hands and reap the benefit of the region's abundant water resource – without their health suffering as a result.

SHOTLIST

(AJ) MALI, NIONO (RECENT) (REUTERS - ACCESS ALL)

1. VARIOUS OF PEOPLE AND DONKEYS CROSSING A BRIDGE OVER A WATER CANAL

2. VARIOUS OF WOMEN WASHING CLOTHES ON THE BANKS OF A WATER CANAL

3. DEAD DONKEY DISPOSED OFF BY THE WATER CANAL

4. (SOUNDBITE) (Bambara) NIONO RESIDENT DJENIBA DIARRA SAYING:

“I came here to do my dishes. We wash dishes, clothes and even bathe here often because we don't have enough water at home. But we know that the water is very dirty with all sorts of germs in it. There are some who relieve themselves in it; others just dispose of their waste in the water. This water is not good for consumption”.

5. DOCTOR OUMAR SANGO EXAMINING A PATIENT AT THE NIONO HOSPITAL

6. (SOUNDBITE) (French) LOCAL PHYSICIAN DR. OUMAR SANGO SAYING:

“People here are in constant contact with water because they're rice farmers, they do their house work with the water from the canal, they fish and they go into swamp areas – so all that means they're more likely to catch diseases from the water”.

7. VARIOUS POSTERS AIMED AT CREATING AWARENESS ON WATER SANITATION

8. VARIOUS OF PEOPLE PUMPING AND FETCHING WATER FROM A WATER PUMP

9. RESIDENT MAKOROBA TRAORE PUMPING WATER

10. (SOUNDBITE) (Bambara) NIONO RESIDENT MAKOROBA TRAORE SAYING:

“I come to fetch water here because it is not polluted, and when stored, it stays clean. It does not have any dirt in it”.

11. MAN WALKING AWAY CARRYING FETCHED WATER ON A BIKE
12. VARIOUS OF CHILDREN FETCHING WATER
13. PRESIDENT OF DIAKABARA WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OUMOU TRAORE TALKING TO A WOMAN WHO MANAGES A WATER PUMP
14. VARIOUS OF BOY LOADING WATER ONTO A DONKEY CART
15. (SOUNDBITE) (French) DIAKABARA WOMEN ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT OUMOU TRAORE SAYING:

“Before we didn't charge for the water and the women came here to wash clothes and dishes and they wasted water and the entire place was messed up. This stopped after we charged for the water and the place is now clean.”

16. VARIOUS OF ECOSAN TOILETS AND THEIR SEPARATING SYSTEM UNDERNEATH
17. VARIOUS OF WOMEN OF THE DIAKABARA ASSOCIATION SHOWING AN ECOSAN TOILET
18. (SOUNDBITE) (French) DIAKABARA WOMEN ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT OUMOU TRAORE SAYING

“Here in Niono we have direct contact with water but Ecosan toilets prevent water contamination because faeces get dried out completely and the urine is collected separately. After six months both the urine and faeces can be used in the fields and are completely odourless”.

19. WOMAN FETCHING CLEAN WATER FROM A WELL
20. VARIOUS OF WOMEN OF DIAKABARA WASHING THEIR HANDS AND WASHING SALAD

END