Dear Friends of the Sahel,

The OASIS Initiative (Organizing to Advance Solutions in the Sahel) is excited to share the stories of a few of our amazing Sahel Leadership Program (SLP) alumni in West Africa and tell you more about how OASIS is challenging complacency related to population growth.

How SLP Alumni Are Changing the Sahel

![Image of SLP Alumni](image)

SLP Alumns Ms. Warr (far right) in a village in the Gorgol region of Mauritania

Ms. Aichetou Amadou Warr has always been passionate about the development of Mauritania. The SLP sparked in her new energy and ideas for how she can forge a real impact on development. Since completing the SLP intensive training in Ouagadougou, Aichetou has been actively engaged in advocacy, catalyzing change on a national level.

She says that before the SLP training, “I wasn’t very knowledgeable about how to do advocacy work. But, because of the practice exercises we did in Burkina Faso and the mentoring that followed, I found myself being consulted on how to develop advocacy plans. I still remember the role plays we did [in the intensive training] advocating against gender-based violence. Since then, I have been able improve my skills.”

In the last year, Aichetou has helped to develop an advocacy plan used to testify before the Ministers of Agriculture and Finance, holding them accountable to the Maputo Protocol that Mauritania ratified in 2005. On International Women’s Day 2017, she spoke before parliamentary members from several Sahelian countries on the importance of women’s access to land. She is a powerful advocate for women’s development in the region.
Ms. Pascale Pârè is proposing a new way that she can support women's empowerment in Burkina Faso. Encouraged by what she learned at the SLP intensive training, she has signed on to help her friend establish an association designed to combine women's economic empowerment with family planning.

“If there is a woman receiving family planning services, you can support her in becoming financially independent...The SLP showed us that the integration of all of these points is essential so that the country can move forward. It is something important that I took from the SLP, and it is very important for our association.”

Pascale and her friend are currently acquiring the legal documentation to make this program a reality. And this isn't even her full-time job. Pascale works for Marie Stopes International to help women plan their families, and is currently taking care of her new baby boy.

Senegalese fellow Dr. Mame Yauto Faye joined the 2016 SLP with a strong background in management and marketing. Upon completing the SLP, Mame discovered her passion for improving health care. Though she had no formal training or education in the health sector, she was determined to apply her skills to the field.

“When we talked about nutrition during the training, when we talked about reproductive health, all of that spoke to me. Afterwards I said to myself, how can I contribute to this work?”
On her professional development road map she created with her SLP mentor, Mame set her sights on becoming the Regional Director of Management Development Institute’s (MDI) Francophone Africa branch. Not only did she get the job, but she successfully advocated for Senegal to be the seat of this newly established branch. Mame is now tapping into the SLP network to find health workers across the region to participate in MDI’s program. Mame’s impact is rippling through health institutions across the Sahel as she supports selected candidates to implement community health improvement projects.

As in 2016, this year’s SLP intensive training in January 2017 has helped spur some extraordinary shifts in the thinking of a new cohort of leaders, like this one: “I leave this training having undergone a major transformation. Before, I was against family planning. After having seen the correlation between demography and development, especially in the education, health and agriculture sectors, I now support birth spacing.”

Watch our 3-minute French video for highlights from the week here.

(English subtitles coming soon)

Waking Up the World to Population Growth’s Impact on the Sahel

*Graph: The year in which Niger reaches replacement-level fertility has a major impact on its ultimate population size. See projections below.*

"On the Edge: What Future for the African Sahel?" was the name of last month’s conference at University of Florida, where OASIS Initiative founders Dr. Malcolm Potts and Alesha Graves presented their new working paper with the goal of "waking up the world" to the looming humanitarian crisis in the Sahel. Their paper, “The Imperative for Slowing Population Growth in the Sahel – and recommendations for achieving it” suggests that recent gains in health in the region may not be sustained in the face of today’s unprecedented population growth. Abdou Moumouni Nouhou, OASIS’ Country Director for Niger, co-authored the paper, which will be published by Oxford University Press in the forthcoming Handbook of the African Sahel. Their paper makes the case for major international investment in family planning and in the education and empowerment of adolescent girls, which can have a tremendous impact on improving conditions in the region.