

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

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Friends of Niger PO Box 452 Haverford, PA 19041

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From the Editor

Dear readers,

Most of us are preoccupied, trying to navigate the unprecedented reality we are experiencing. In addition to thinking about the health of our communities, households and families, as RPCVs and friends of Peace Corps we are reeling from the unprecedented evacuation of all Peace Corps volunteers world-wide. I can only imagine the grueling decision-making that resulted in that conclusion and the unbelievable, herculean task by Peace Corps staff to get everyone home. There's a FaceBook group to support evacuees if you are interested [Returned Peace Corps COVID-19 Evacuation Support]. It is hard to think about other things, but thinking of the future can help us to get through the present. To that end, we are asking once again for your input in a survey. Please share your thoughts freely. We are stronger with your input and participation. Stay home! Save Lives!

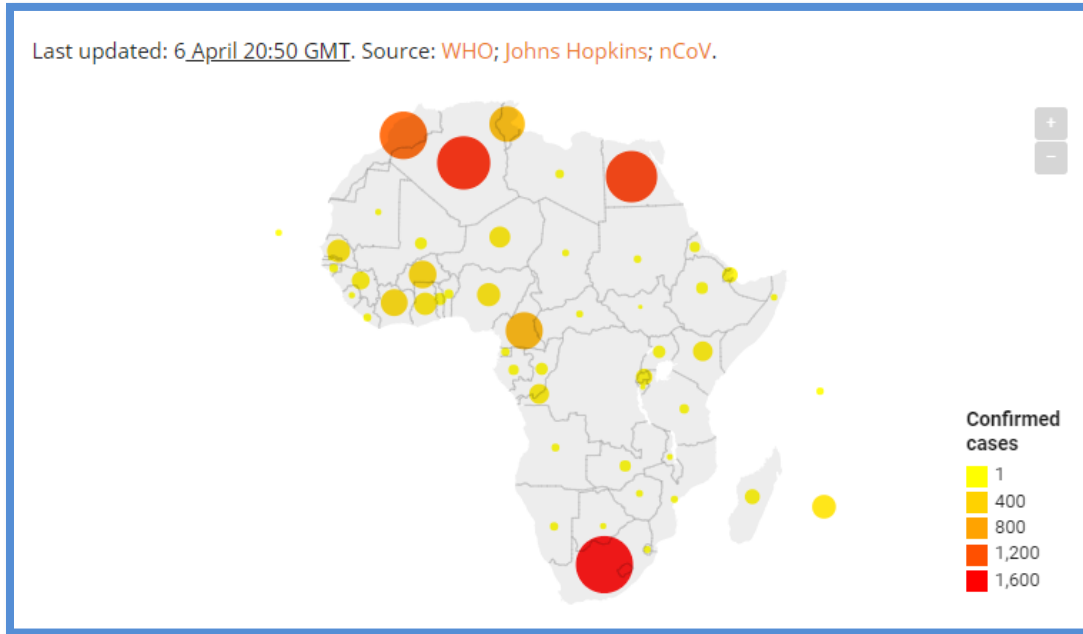
Amy Wilson, dit Amibula

1) COVID-19

By the time this newsletter hits your in-box anything I write will be outdated. I've been hearing from my friend Morou that Niger is taking the pandemic seriously, issuing stay at home orders—hard to imagine how most households will be able to cope with this. The government is putting out daily statistics. As of April 5 there were 161 patients being treated and 10 deaths attributed to COVID 19. There is a tremendous amount of misinformation flying around via social media.

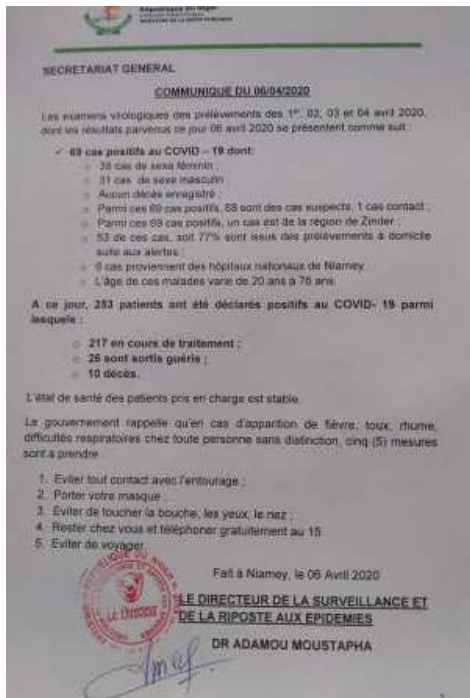


VIRUS SPREAD IN AFRICA



Total cases 9,867;
deaths 482

Here are some links to stories looking at various impacts and implications.



The other COVID-19 pandemic: Fake news

The global COVID-19 pandemic is happening at a time when sorting facts from fiction is increasingly difficult. In Nigeria, a tsunami of misinformation and disinformation has accompanied the virus' spread, provoking fear and exploiting vulnerabilities. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/03/26/the-other-covid-19-pandemic-fake-news/>

What Might Africa Teach the World? Covid-19 and Ebola Virus Disease Compared

<https://africanarguments.org/2020/03/17/what-might-africa-teach-the-world-covid-19-and-ebola-virus-disease-compared/>

Africa's corona response rests on two things: markets and money transfers: African countries can't just copy rich countries' responses to COVID-19. Here's what they can do instead. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/04/02/africa-coronavirus-response-rests-on-two-things-markets-money-transfers/>

Africa has a COVID-19 time bomb to defuse

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/africa-covid-19-time-bomb-defuse/>

The threat of coronavirus in Africa flags a deeper crisis of global solidarity

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-south-africa-developing-countries>

2) Micro loans fostered through FON connections

Our project partner Potentiel Terre eagerly engaged with TCP Global after FON made preliminary introductions. Potentiel Terre contacted TCP Global and together they ran with it. In February after getting seed money from TCP Global, Potentiel Terre issued 34 loans of \$44 each. By late March, by making 2 monthly payments each, they had sufficient repayments to support 6 more loans. These loans built on their program they call Solidarity, Alliance and Work to help vulnerable populations in Dosso, Tillaberi, Maradi, Tahoua, Zinder, Agadez and Niamey in Niger.

Snapshot of one loan recipient:



Zeinabou Mahamadou, dite Habou Salma est une veuve du lutteur de renomme Salma Danrani de Dosso. Apres le décès de son époux, elle a installé la préparation et la vente de galette du petit mil et/ou du maïs fermenté appelé localement MASSA. Elle se bat pour subvenir aux besoins de ses enfants encore jeunes. Elle a bénéficié d'un petit prêt de 25,000FCFA TCP GLOBAL à travers Potentiel Terre. «Grace à cet important crédit, j'achète le sac entier qui me permet de faire des économies sur le transport et gagner beaucoup plus sur la quantité. Chaque deux semaine je renouvelle mon stock.

Dieu merci, nous commençons à avoir une alimentation régulière à la maison, » raconte Zeinabou. Zeinabou souhaite aménager son espace et avoir un fond de roulement pour acheter les épices et l'huile en quantité suffisante.

For more information about TCP Global go to: <https://tcpglobal.peacecorpsconnect.org/cpages/home>

3) Update on the campaign to seek justice for hit and run victim- \$5,000 raised!

Volunteers who served in Niger are particularly tenacious and have deep attachment to Nigeriens. A great example of this is Pamela Britton White going the extra mile to solve a mystery and seek out some justice for her friends. We included the request to donate in our last issue and the result was heartwarming. Pam raised her goal of \$5,000 and sent the money to be hand delivered by Sue Rosenfeld. Please read the full story at: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/seeking-justice-for-Oumarous-family>

*Thanks you again for your generosity to one Nigerien family.
Please keep Niger and her people -- all of them -- in your thoughts. Don't allow their suffering to be invisible to the outside world.*

*Love to you all
Pam (Britton White)*

THANK YOU Pam- you do us proud!



Sue Rosenfeld with Mounkaila, Oumarous son

4) Friends of Niger survey & Board update

The Board has worked hard throughout the last year and has several achievements to their credit: updated bylaws, new board members & committee members, updated policies, updated accounting system and improved working relationships. Much progress was made at our retreat, with greatly enhanced communication and understanding resulting from the time we spent together. The board is hoping to hold a virtual retreat this year around August. With a virtual meeting, we could possibly get an interesting speaker and you could join us—are you interested? Got ideas? Would you like to participate in planning? Please contact the President or Camel Express editor: president@friendsofniger.org or camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com.

It will soon be time to elect board members. A few **new board members** would be warmly welcomed. New members will be asked to sign on for a two-year term. Interested? Please reply to this email or contact the president or any other board member to learn more.

A new survey is also asking for your ideas and input. We are hoping to hear how you would like to be involved. As a small group of volunteers we depend on your participation and involvement—your donations are awesome!!! of course, but we want to make sure that interested people have a place at the table and that good ideas can be supported and promoted.

Please take the **SURVEY**: [https://sou.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6A3uZTPUAIzDT6t]

Please do the survey even if only to update and verify your contact info—we are also asking your permission to share your info with other members—we hope you will opt in!

5) News

France's Challenge in Africa

The Libyan revolution of 2011 brought lasting terrorist mayhem across a broad reach of Africa's former French colonies. Now France needs its allies to help pacify the region — if that can be done.

French, U.N. and European troops are confronted with a morphing conflict: Groups like the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara feed on local and ethnic divisions, which they exploit to recruit in areas where state structures have disappeared.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/17/opinion/france-africa.html>, Submitted by Meredith McGehee

How can the US help address Africa's youth bulge and turn it into a positive force on the continent?

Africa's youth population is growing rapidly and within 30 years the continent will be home to about one-quarter of the world's youth. At a recent congressional hearing, experts discussed how the U.S. government can help create opportunities for youth and turn the "youth bulge" into a positive force on the continent.

<https://www.devex.com/news/how-can-the-us-help-address-africa-s-youth-bulge-96575>

Letter from Africa: 'Why I'm glad I left the UK to go home'

In common with a lot of Africans who have lived outside the continent, as I neared 60 I started to plan a return home, after spending far too long living in the West.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51428943>

Journalist Kaka Touda Mamane Goni arrested in Niger over COVID-19 report. March 24, 2020

On March 5, police arrested Kaka Touda, an independent journalist who publishes news reports on his Facebook and Twitter pages, at his home in Niamey, Niger's capital, according to the journalist's lawyer, Boudal Effred Mouloul, who spoke to CPJ via messaging app, and news reports.

<https://cpj.org/2020/03/journalist-kaka-touda-mamane-goni-arrested-in-nige.php>, Posted on FaceBook by Joel Mayer

6) Music & Culture News

From FON member Lindsay Rust:

Music from Niger is being taught in American schools! My husband and I adapted "Takamba" for publication and now music teachers across the country are sharing it with their students.

#ThirdGoal slam dunk!

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QolsH5r9-
xc&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1qzhnmeczSE37n4xn77bolq9MWfjKw0UUVGTCq3a0qZ4LyPAe
HIBa4NqA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QolsH5r9-
xc&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1qzhnmeczSE37n4xn77bolq9MWfjKw0UUVGTCq3a0qZ4LyPAe
HIBa4NqA)

Drumming Up World Music (DUWM) is an innovative, integrated arts program combining ensemble music for drums and xylophones with learning extensions in a variety of subjects, including visual art, dance, geography, social studies, and history. Created by Niger RPCV Lindsay Rust, DUWM aims to inspire a spirit of adventure in students through international discovery, providing a well-rounded experience of the fascinating multicultural diversity of the world.

Check it out at: <https://dancingdrum.com/pages/drumming-up-world-music>



MDOU MOCTAR had a tour planned in the US this spring and has rescheduled to the fall—inshalla he may be able to complete the tour and come to a town near you. For tour dates and ticket info: <https://bnds.us/9bubce>

Niger '66 A Peace Corps Diary –now on YouTube, check it out!!!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfPfvSlme1U> from Judy Irola.
When I went to YouTube just to check the link, I ended up watching the whole thing! A very well made film!

Angelique Kidjo just won Best World Music Album for 'Celia' at the 62nd Grammy Awards, marking her fourth win in the category and fourth Grammy overall. She's also part of the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa which is aimed at bridging the \$42 billion financing gap facing women in Africa.



Check out this short interview:

<https://cheddar.com/media/how-angelique-kidjo-is-working-to-empower-women-in-africa>

(editor's note --I do know she is not from Niger, but she is such an awesome ambassador for the whole continent I wanted to share. Seeing her in concert is fabulous!)

Here she is rocking the Nobel Peace Prize <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iXVnQkrCk0>

Book recommendation from Mary Ann Matheson

A Labyrinth of Kingdoms: 10,000 miles through Islamic Africa, by Steve Kemper

Available Online: At Good Reads <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13707567-a-labyrinth-of-kingdoms>; or try Powells Books Portland OR (shamelessly supporting my favorite store) <https://www.powells.com/>

From Barney Smith Since we're all stuck inside, you can go ahead and read my **Peace Corps Graphic novel** for free!

"2 Years" is a graphic novel that satirizes the Peace Corps experience in a way that Peace Corps volunteers and others can relate. Follow John, a Truce Corps volunteer who has been posted in Telafi, the poorest territory on mars with about a dozen other volunteers.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKjlqgNiwbQ>

7) Passing of Geoffrey Geurts 1966 – 2020



Zacharie and Benjamin Geurts, his children Lori Geurts and Mike Geurts, his sister and brother Robert Geurts, his father Pardiese, his wife are sad to share the news of the passing of Geoff Geurts on Sunday, January 12, 2020, after a long and valiant battle with cancer. Last goodbyes were held at the Crematorium of Père Lachaise, January 2020, and celebrations in the US (Wisconsin and Washington DC area) will be planned this summer.

Geoff was in Niger from 92 to 95 working in the African Food Systems Initiative program in Torodi. Most recently Geoff worked for UNESCO in Paris.

Comments can be left at: <https://www.inmemori.com/ggeurts-e41bg>

8) Enduring Connections

Mary Ann Matheson, Niger RPCV 1966-68, was invited in 2017 to NYC to see Niger President Issoufou Mahamadou at the United Nations. He sent her airline tickets and made hotel arrangements for her. She was his teacher in Madaoua when he was 12 years old and he wanted to thank her for the inspiration she provided that led him to the presidency. Quite a positive reunion!

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

You may make a donation at any time. To donate now, you can either go to www.friendsofniger.org to use PayPal, or write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to: Friends of Niger PO Box 452 Haverford, PA 19041. Thank you very much.

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website (volunteers needed to help with the website): <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfNiger/>
- Submit news topics and articles: camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com
- Contact President John Baird, president@friendsofniger.org

“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”

Last Word

Seyni Kountche preface to a 1978 French 'coffee-table' book about Niger

Ceux qui ont eu l'occasion – j'allais dire la chance—de visiter le Niger ont tous été frappés par une seule et même réalité : celle de sa très grande diversité. Diversité des régions, diversité des ethnies, diversité des mœurs et des traditions. Toutes valeurs mêlées dans une sorte de syncrétisme millénaire, et qui ont lentement structuré et différencié la personnalité nigérienne. Les images de cet album illustrent, dans une certaine mesure, l'ampleur et la richesse de cette diversité. Mais elles montrent également la décontraction particulière qui caractérise notre peuple, ainsi que certaines scènes et occupations dont la plupart reflètent assez bien les réalités quotidiennes du Niger d'aujourd'hui.

Tout au long de ces pages, le Niger apparaît donc comme un pays sobre mais prenant, austère mais digne, démuné mais riche de sa jeunesse, de la fierté et de la sérénité de son peuple, des promesses de ses ressources naturelles à peine entamées.

Certains lecteurs auraient peut-être préféré un album plus «alléchant», cédant plus aux subtilités de l'art, qu'à la prestation des faits. Le mérite de celui-ci est d'être «naturel», c'est-à-dire de ne faire aucune place aux montages, d'écarter toute suggestivité agressive, pour s'en remettre à la seule sensibilité du photographe, et de l'art indiscutable de celui-ci de conférer aux images une certaine limpidité qui leur fait leur mérite, et une parfaite netteté qui fait leur force.

Je ne doute pas qu'après avoir parcouru cet ouvrage, tout lecteur pour lequel le Niger n'était qu'un nom, aura découvert non seulement un peuple noble et attachant, mais un pays à la fois jeune et fascinant.



*Lieutenant-Colonel SEYNI KOUNTCHE,
Président du Conseil Militaire Suprême
Chef de l'Etat de la République du Niger.*

