

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

February 2024

Please note new address:

Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503

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Dear Readers,

You are wonderful! The response to our annual request for support has been generous and heart-warming. We appreciate every donation, large and small! We all know that even the modest donations make a difference in Niger, but I'd be lying if I said that opening a handwritten check for \$10,000 is not a BIG thrill! Our hard working volunteer Board maintains our commitment to keeping our overhead as low as possible so that nearly all of the money you donate is going to support projects in Niger.

Plans for 2024 include:

- 1) election of board members- this spring
- 2) reducing to one grant cycle this year (schedule and call for proposals out soon),
- 3) conducting a survey of grantees in order to get a better picture of the opportunities and needs of the smaller non-profit organizations we target
- 4) *In discussion phase*---a general meeting in Chicago to visit the dinosaur lab (Professor Paul Sereno, fascinating research on dinosaurs in Niger) and possible Board retreat – more soon!

Merci, Fofo, Mun godey, Tanimert, Foma, Thank you --

Amy Wilson

1) A dynamic Board - consider joining us

Friends of Niger is lucky to have a dynamic Board backed up by a membership that is passionate, skilled and generous! The Board is dynamic in that we have a group of people with great ideas, energy and enthusiasm. We are also dynamic in that our busy and engaged Board members may come and go as they have busy lives and other obligations. While we hate to see people go once we've grown fond of them, we also see this as an opportunity to bring new skills and ideas to our task. Our focus over the last several years has been to develop systems that anticipate change and make it easy for people to participate at the level that they are able for as long as they can without too much disruption to FON when they move on to new adventures and other commitments.

At this juncture, we are regretfully accepting the resignations of Kimberly Dixon and Kelsey Andersen. Both of whom brought enthusiastic heart-felt passion to our work for Niger and some fantastic credentials in nonprofit grant-making. We hope their busy lives do not completely wear them out and we look forward to their continued participation in the grant review process. THANK YOU!!

With the departure of several Board members we are calling for candidates for the board. You may nominate yourself, or nominate someone you think has some time, energy and skills to bring to our mission. We have monthly meetings and ask each board member to support committee work or special projects as they are able. The nominations are put before the voting membership for approval. Officers are then elected by the Board that is seated.

Please contact us if you would like to find out more! president@friendsofniger.org

2) Partner profile: Potentiel Terre

In spite of the challenge of working remotely, FON is getting to know some of our grantees and forming productive collaborative relationships. One of those relationships is with an organization called Potentiel Terre. They have been a grant recipient over the years and lately have been a huge help by acting as a pass-through for grant funds when our banks cannot connect with the smaller Nigerien banks of our intended recipients. This service saves FON considerable cost (by wiring funds instead of using money transfer services) and gets grant funds to recipients in a timely manner.

We reached out to them recently to learn more about their organization. We spoke with Zakari Hassane the founder of the organization. *[Note the following is a translation of the original exchange]*

Camel Express: How old is the organization Potentiel Terre and how did it start?

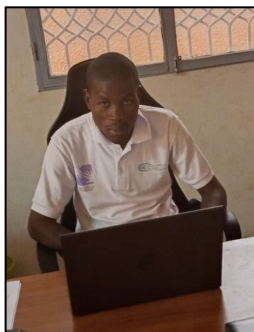
>>>Zakari: It was created on JUNE 12, 2007. We were students in accounting and business management. The general economics professor gave us a presentation theme on 'globalization, advantages and disadvantages of regional integration, case of NIGER'. That work highlighted the fragility of Niger and the enormity of its assets which are unfortunately undervalued and not exploited. Among these assets, the earth was the most important for me; as it can indeed satisfy the needs for consumption, exchange with the outside world and create sustainable jobs in this context of unemployment.

Three of us students, started the research and I finally finished the project alone. The professor was so pleased with the research results and conclusions that he invited high school and college students to the presentation.

This situation challenged me and I wanted to act, to do something to mobilize forces and knowledge around Mother Earth. Thus was born Potentiel Terre. Which was first a youth association, then an NGO with a board of directors including a representative from each beneficiary organization.

Camel Express: How many paid employees do you have?

>>>Zakari: 3 employees, recruited only 5 months ago: A National Director, Seini Issaka Harouna, an administrative assistant, Nana Mariama Santama, and an accounting assistant, Adamou Saley



Camel Express: How did you identify and recruit interns and volunteers; and how do you integrate them into your work?

>>>Zakari: Identification of interns and volunteers

The trainees contact the administration or go through someone who is in the network of actors with whom we work.

The volunteers come from several origins: some are former colleagues or comrades, others are people known from the implementation of certain activities or from meetings with actors from civil society organizations. Our first volunteers were mainly university students whom I raised awareness of the way in which academic knowledge can be at the service of development (on the other hand, we raise awareness among young people who are usually going *en exode*, about returning to the land alongside women who need supervision, support and advice). We therefore have contacts in several areas and almost everywhere. Even outside Niger, there are volunteers ready to represent Potentiel Terre in their countries because of the network operating model and the rigor in respecting the values and principles of the NGO.

This model allows them to identify the problem that Potentiel Terre can help solve. Instead we go there with this or that idea, local leadership does the first work, we then bring expertise, the regulatory framework and the motivation to mobilize commitment to see the initiative through.

This is why Potentiel Terre has no abandoned projects. Even if it goes slowly, it will continue thanks to this model because there is local leadership supporting it. For two years, we have been holding meetings with the leaders of cooperatives, associations and groups that benefit from our programs.

“You have an idea, the network helps you put it together and an administration that ensures ethics is always behind it: openness and rigor are combined. »

Camel Express: How do you identify the groups you work with?

>>>Zakari: Elsewhere the soumbala of Dosso is called "Dosso mari", but in Dosso we simply call it "mari". This is to say that Potentiel Terre is run by graduates and contributors who were born, for the majority of them, in the milieu. The need for food security, income to ensure daily life in families, to have an enumerating occupation before falling into despair....

Within Potentiel Terre we have a good understanding of the needs and possibilities of communities.

The need is everywhere, we are acting on the nature of local initiatives and possibilities in the field to increase agricultural production, create jobs and value. We have not done a characterization of the groups with which we work. Potentiel Terre relies on comparative advantages to support a community in need of inclusion (those that stakeholders call vulnerable, marginalized and others. We say that these are communities not reached or not covered by research efforts or improvement of living conditions).

The distance from large cities, the level of education, the possibilities being developed or ignored (in terms of comparative advantage), the status in the locality: maternal and/or paternal land or not, the leadership of the household: with couple active, or only one active, or with female head of household, etc.

Camel Express: How receptive are the villagers to the environmental project you have implemented?

>>>Zakari: They feel concerned not only by the involvement but, above all, see themselves in a mindset of social evolution. Those who are used to traveling (l'exode rurale) have seen things elsewhere. Our environmental projects combine sanitation, jobs and fertilization.

With the “cleaning” initiative in Dosso, young talibés, in addition to being able to feed themselves without begging, manage to make savings which allow their families to have food during the lean season, the rainy season.

Camel Express: What do you think is the most important feature of the work you do?

>>*Zakari*: We have a culture of working in local communities, relying on local leadership and initiative.

Camel Express: What do you think is different and special about your organization?

>>*Zakari*: When Potentiel Terre was created, I was completely unaware of the possibility of having financial partners. The growth of Potentiel Terre will come from the work of the beneficiaries of its advice, supervision, support and guidance.

We always start with our resources and work to get there. We want to be an organization serving populations in communities in need of inclusion through services and products that will help them achieve food and financial autonomy.

Openness and ease of having responsibilities. We work on principles and values that are inviolable to all those who want to be with us.

Commitment to achieving the goal efficiently: exemplarity, accountability, professionalism in our perspective of social change and economic take-off,

Transparent work and awareness of accountability.

Camel Express: Growing up and working, did you ever know or work with Peace Corps

>>*Zakari*: I first heard about Peace Corps while working with FON.

3) Grant Updates: results are pouring in

Grantees have been hitting the ball out of the park! Some of the grants awarded in December have already been completed. The following are excerpts from reports of recently completed projects:

Project to support the training and empowerment of women for egalitarian, united and sustainable development in the commune of Tchirozerine, Agadez Region implemented by ONG TIDENE

This project aimed to economically empower and strengthen the leadership of peasant women who are members of women's groups of Mardane and Attri. The majority of women in both groups were illiterate and encountered difficulties in monitoring and keeping their inventory management notebooks and product entries and exits. Functional literacy courses (adapted to their activity) have been initiated for better management of community assets. *Support for gardening was also provided.* >>**60 women were trained**



The biggest success of the project:

The ownership of the beneficiaries characterized by strong dynamism and the desire to achieve their goals. The empowerment of women is at the heart of current concerns, which is why the provision of seeds to accompany language training sessions for the management of their assets constitute two complementary activities which come at the right time. Currently the two gardens are operational to the great happiness of its beneficiaries.



Projet Vaches Laitieres implemented by la SCOOPS des FEMMES « FAKRU ».

Azawak breed cows, were purchased for the cooperative “FAKRU”.

>>Direct beneficiaries: 15 women members of SCOOPS; 3 employees (1 guard; 1 shepherd and 1 milker); Indirect beneficiaries: 5 resellers of milk by-products (cheese).

The biggest success of the project: The most successful aspect is the production of milk, the manufacture of cheese, the generation of monetary income. These three aspects have played a considerable role in addressing the food security of the recipients' households.



Well rehabilitation and solar water pumping system Rural commune of Tabelot/Agadez implemented by Assemblée de Formateurs et Animateurs des Associations

This project restored a well in the remote village of Almoughda by sealing cracks, installing an iron cover and providing a solar system.

The biggest success of the project: The arduous work of women and children to draw water with ropes and plastics and all the waste that flows into the well has been replaced by new useful and necessary technology. We can estimate today that a public fountain equipped with taps in an isolated village in the Air mountains is something that changes a lot in the living conditions of rural communities even if we are all aware that it is difficult to maintain but at least the partners have charted the path for awakening the consciousness of the rural masses and local development in general.



Stopper la mineuse de l'épi de mil dans la commune de Mokko: SMEP-MOKKO implemented by Potentiel Terre



The project focused on improving growers' knowledge of the millet miner caterpillar and adapting the biological control technique with the wasp through the installation of a support unit in the center of the commune.

- >>154 peers (community relays), 1 man and 1 woman per village in the commune, producers and growers are made aware of the caterpillar and initiated into its prospection in the field,
- >>10 young people, women and producers are trained in wasp multiplication and release,
- >>Construction and equipping of a *Corcyra cephalonica* breeding facility and wasp multiplication,

>>2 releases carried out in villages attacked during the 2022 and 2023 winter campaigns.

NOTE: this work was done in collaboration with INRAN and proved to be a pilot for village based production and dissemination of this biocontrol.

Restoring the Dignity of the Tagala Koye Implemented By Tagaz Espoir



The Tagala Koyes (women sand carriers) come from the Ouallam department in search of income in Niamey and their activity consists of carrying sand on their shoulders which they sell at a low price. These women wanted to have an alternative income source. The realization of this project is therefore not only a way for these women to find financial security through Income Generating Activities and to keep their young daughters in school who are also starting to practice this activity but also to be sheltered from gender-based violence of which they are victims.

>>100 women received training, assistance starting small enterprises and formed collectives to help each other.



4) Niger-related News

In lieu of recent articles, here are some sources of information to peruse and bookmark:

- ActuNiger: <https://www.actuniger.com/>
- Sahel Research Group – [sign up for email](#):
- RFI in Hausa: <https://www.rfi.fr/ha/nijar/>
- Agence Nigérienne de Presse : <http://www.anp.ne/>
- <https://www.infos-niger.com/>
- <http://news.anamey.com/>

- <https://tamtaminfo.com/>
- <https://www.lesahel.org/>

Source : Columbia University Libraries : https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/global/virtual-libraries/african_studies/countries/niger/gen.html

5) In Brief –

SHOUT OUT to loyal supporter Evelyn Siemens!! At 95 years old Evelyn was eager to chat with John Baird and recounted that she was the secretary to the US ambassador to Niger from 1960 to 1962. Evelyn witnessed the first group of 18 Peace Corps volunteers arriving in Niger!



The [United States recognized the Republic of Niger](#) on August 3, 1960, in a congratulatory message from President Dwight D. Eisenhower to Prime Minister Hamani Diori.

Passing of Mary Anne Matheson Niger RPCV 1966-68

https://www.taosnews.com/obituaries/mary-ann-matheson/article_05397cbc-c53c-11ee-8784-4bd86a785f63.html

"Mary Ann passed away peacefully at home in Arroyo Seco, New Mexico on Saturday, December 2, 2023 . . . Mary Ann was inspired by John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961 and joined the Peace Corps immediately after graduating from "Cal Berkeley" in 1966. She was posted to Niger with the Peace Corps from 1966-1968 and taught English at the secondary school level. In 1969 upon returning to the US, she married fellow Peace Corps volunteer Mathew Morrison."

A story shared by John Baird: Mary Ann was invited in 2017 to New York City 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! John Baird 68-71

Passing of Matthew Richard McCue Niger RPCV

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/abqjournal/name/matthew-mccue-obituary?id=53803821>

Matthew McCue, 41, passed away on November 16, 2023. Matthew was born December 12, 1981 in Albuquerque. He joined the Army in 2001, serving in Korea, and in Operation Iraqi Freedom where he was promoted to Sergeant and awarded The Army Commendation Medal with Valor. Matthew earned a Certificate in Ecological Horticulture at UC Santa Cruz and subsequently served in the Peace Corps in Niger, Africa. Later he completed a BS in Business Management from University of Phoenix and a MS in International Agricultural Development from UC Davis.

National Days of Advocacy in Support of the Peace Corps

2024 marks twenty years of NPCA's "National Days of Advocacy". Advocates from around the nation are invited to come to Washington D.C. on March 7th for our Capitol Hill advocacy day. No previous experience is necessary. If you are planning to attend this Capitol Hill Day on March 7th, you need to register here. <https://forms.gle/d2YDA9XjWjspMU1N6>

Closer to home, NPCA is seeking individuals willing to organize a solidarity activity – such as a congressional district office meeting, a letter writing gathering, or writing/submitting an op-ed to a local/regional newspaper – anytime during March or April. Learn more here and fill out your intentions to carry out a solidarity activity. <https://forms.gle/wsWHGL5cZoovq1TL8>

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

Friends of Niger is an organization to initiate and support activities related to Niger and its people. We pursue three main purposes:

1. Connecting and engaging people who have connections to Niger including diaspora, and those who have worked or are working in Niger,
2. Supporting development and humanitarian activities in Niger, and
3. Advocating for and educating about Niger

To donate write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to

NEW ADDRESS: **Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503,**

OR go to www.friendsofniger.org to use PayPal.

Board of Directors

Officers: Amy Wilson/President, Alix Barstow Fedoruk/Vice President, Mary Abrams/Grants Management Committee, John Baird/Past President; At Large Board members: Brandon Bragato, Paige Pihl Buckley, Alhassan Ali Mamadou Souna, Douglas Steinberg

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: [\(Friends of Niger\) FON](#)
- Submit news topics and articles: camelexpress@friendsofniger.org
- Contact President Amy Wilson, president@friendsofniger.org

"There is no way to peace; peace is the way."

