

The Dov Center, Niger's preeminent Horticultural Training Center, opening Spring 2022 in Liboré

The Dov Center will train horticultural technicians to support agricultural cooperatives across Niger, increasing food and economic security for 50,000 farmers, their families and communities over 5 years

***Join us to help furnish the Center's classrooms, cafeteria,
and dorms***

By Tom & Patsy Lightbown, Niger 1965-67

Niger in 1965

When we served as Peace Corps volunteers in 1965-1967, Niger's population was just short of 4 million. We worked in the village of Magaria, south of Zinder, just north of the Nigerian border, where virtually everyone lived off the land by agricultural subsistence, half the children did not make it to their 5th birthday (due often to measles epidemics), and many women died in childbirth. During our years of service and afterward, the UNCC (*Union Nigérienne de Crédit et de Coopération*) made efforts to encourage more productive agricultural practices and to make credit available to implement those more productive practices. (*Men farmers only, of course!*)

2021: Rapid population growth, same agricultural economy

Fast forward to 2021, 56 years later: Niger's population is over 25 million with the world's highest birth rate, Magaria's population is fast approaching 20,000, the measles vaccines have virtually conquered the childhood scourge, most children celebrate their 5th birthdays with hope of a long life, and the availability of improved basic infrastructure and medical care have reduced the chances of a mother's death in childbirth.

And what of Niger's economy? Although urbanization has diversified the country's engines of growth to some extent, very little about how Nigériens make a living has changed since 1965. About 80% are dependent on agriculture and livestock for their livelihood, with these sectors accounting for about 40% of the country's GDP. And the population has increased so rapidly that it has outstripped economic growth, with GDP per capita essentially moving sideways.

But there's Good News!

This is a sobering picture. But there is good news too! In recent decades many individuals and agencies have set out to find solutions to Niger's agricultural challenges. These include unreliable rainfall (and risk of floods!), ingrained traditional farming techniques, lack of capital for superior crop seeds, limited irrigation systems, variable soil conditions, as well as desertification. With the majority of the population involved in small-scale, low productivity agriculture producing small incomes, the challenges are daunting.

At international, regional, national, and local levels, agricultural scientists, government officials, NGOs, and the private sector have rolled up their sleeves to find solutions that can be **successful** and **sustainable** at the local level, then **scalable** to larger populations across the Sahel.

These include decades of work by, among others, [ICRISAT](#) (International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics), [CILSS](#) (*Comité Permanent Inter-États de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel*) including its research and training arm AGRHYMET (*le Centre Régional d'Agro-Hydro-Météorologie*), the Niger government's own 3N Initiative ("*Les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens*"), and the Food & Agriculture Organization's IPPM (Integrated Production and Pest Management) program. All of these support the development of *resilience* and *food security*, with funding provided in many cases by the World Bank, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and others.

Add to these the tireless work of non-governmental organizations, working at the local level to help smallholder farmers increase yields, irrigate more land, and diversify production systems.

Farmers of the Future and The Dov Center: A Scalable Solution

Farmers of the Future—A model of food and economic security

One of the projects that has succeeded in developing an improved, sustainable smallholder farming model is Farmers of the Future. Farmers of the Future is the brainchild of Dov Pasternak.



Dov (who [died in 2018](#)) was an Israeli agronomist and was Principal Scientist at ICRISAT where he began his work in the Sahel in 2001. His passion about finding solutions to the challenges of drylands and his great love for Nigériens were the driving forces behind Farmers of the Future, which he brought to life in partnership with LIBO (a Nigérien NGO based in Liboré, southeast of Niamey) and two North American NGOs—[Eliminate Poverty NOW](#) (United States) and [Pencils For Kids](#) (Canada).

The Farmers of the Future model maximizes farmer income by organizing local cooperatives that are owned and operated by women farmers and teaches them intensive, market-based farming techniques. The model has been tested and perfected in a number of villages in the communes of Liboré and Balleyara over the past 10 years, with women earning up to 500,000 cfa annually, double the average income in Niger. The women farm the land 12 months a year, growing high value fruits and vegetables and applying the

lessons learned from their detailed training in precision farming by horticultural technicians. These techniques including the use of quality seeds, irrigation (including drip feed systems), sustainable fertilizer, weed and pest control methods, and market timing to ensure maximum prices and incomes. It has been shown to be both successful and sustainable.

The key to success is training!

A decade of experience with the Farmers of the Future model has shown that the key to success for the women farmers and their cooperatives is training—rigorous training in farming methods that ensure the effective and lasting transfer of information that becomes knowledge and then ingrained habits for sustained success, higher yields and incomes. With increased incomes, the women farmers can afford better food for their families, school fees for their children and grandchildren, home improvements, and the other benefits of economic success.

Now that the Farmers of the Future model has been shown to be **successful** and **sustainable**, it is the time to show that it is **scalable** across Niger.

The Dov Horticultural Training Center is under construction

The Dov Training Center has been designed by the LIBO/Eliminate Poverty NOW/Pencils For Kids partnership in honor of Dov Pasternak's passionate commitment to improving the lives of Nigériens. The cornerstone of the Center was laid on November 24, 2020, and construction is planned to be completed by fall of 2021. (Click [here](#) to see photos of construction progress.)

\$1.5 million is being raised by the partnership to complete the building of classrooms, science labs, a computer room, a cafeteria, a 24-room dormitory, a training garden, an infirmary, and other related spaces.



Niger's Minister of Higher Education lays the cornerstone for the Dov Center on November 24, 2020.

Now, furniture is needed to fit out the facility.

John Craig, the president of Eliminate Poverty NOW, recently distributed the following appeal:



Architect's rendering of Dov Center Campus

"Eliminate Poverty NOW will soon be opening Niger's first horticultural training center named in memory of Professor Dov Pasternak. It will train a generation of field technicians to teach farmers—mostly women—to move beyond subsistence farming and become successful entrepreneurs, raising their income ten-fold to \$1,000 or more annually.



The Dov Center will "train the trainers" who will teach farmers to dramatically increase their incomes

In 5 years, we will graduate enough technicians to train 50,000 farmers and upgrade living standards for 300,000 of Niger's rural poor. This will be transformational!

Construction of the main campus is moving full speed ahead. The academic hall, cafeteria, and dormitory should be completed this Fall. Now, our attention turns to furnishing classrooms, dormitories, labs and more!



Would you consider helping us to help our students?

We need desks, chairs, dining and laboratory tables. Donation opportunities include:

- Cafeteria Table and Chairs: \$500
- Laboratory Tables: \$250
- Library Tables: \$100
- Desks: \$75
- Chairs: \$40
- Furnish an entire classroom: \$2,500

Pick a category, or simply make a gift in any amount. You'll be part of bringing Dov's dream to fruition! For gifts of \$40 or more, you will receive a certificate of thanks and be included on our donor honor roll. Contributions can be made in honor or memory of another if you wish. Your donation is tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

To donate in the US go to: <https://www.eliminatepovertynow.org/donate> or send your check to Eliminate Poverty NOW, PO Box 67, Mendham NJ 07945

To donate in Canada through Pencils4Kids go to: <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/11336>

And thank you for your generous support."

As members of Friends of Niger, we are pleased to support FON in its mission to benefit the people of Niger. Although the Dov Center is not appealing for a grant from FON, it is strategic in its approach to addressing the challenges of improving both food and economic security and will deliver immediate benefits to many Nigériens.

We hope you will join us in offering your support.

Tom & Patsy Lightbown
Niger 1965-67