

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

June 2005

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Letter from the Past President: Jim Schneider Announces Retirement

For anyone who visits this website on an occasional basis, and especially for members and supporters of **Friends of Niger**, it has been for some time apparent that **FON** has been much, much less active than had been true for many years.

This has to a very large extent been directly related to very severe restrictions on my time and energy - scarce personal resources which I have felt obliged and compelled to redirect toward the needs of a family in crisis, the family of my daughter and her four young children. As so often happens in these matters, I long postponed making certain decisions regarding various involvements - in the hope that matters would improve to the point where I could resume past levels of activity.

FON has suffered from this delay, much to my regret. Recently, I informed our Board of Directors of my decision to step down as President of **Friends of Niger**, a post that I have been honored to hold since the spring of 1998. With my strong endorsement, the Board chose John Soloninka to serve as President until the next scheduled Board elections in the spring of 2006.

I know that you will all give John the same support that I have been fortunate to receive over these past seven plus years, support for which I will always be truly grateful. I particularly want to publicly thank my fellow Board members - Gabriella, John, Larry and Penni - and other **FON** super vols - Irma, Sue and Judd - for their efforts over the years and for their generous personal support throughout my continuing personal crisis. I will be trying to assist the **FON** Board by doing a better job of keeping this website up to date and by continuing to serve as an At Large member of the Board.

I will also continue my activities with the Nigerien embassy in Ottawa, where I am assistant coordinator of a committee of Canadians and Nigeriens resident in Canada which is engaged in a range of activities designed to raise Niger's profile in Canada - for general purposes as well as in the context of Niger's role as host country for the 5th Francophone Games (Niamey - December 7-17, 2005).

It would be more than a little remiss on my part to not apologize to many of you for my horrific communications failings this past year and more - I think particularly of Kimba and Pam and Dudley, but they are not alone.

Pentultimately, my understanding is that **FON** plans to renew its activities in support of microcredit, children's vitamins, youth education and appropriate technology. Supplies of the **FON** t-shirt and of the DVD production *Brother from Niger* continue to be available and can be ordered as indicated below.

Finally, you will find a link to a letter from Jim Bullington, current PC Country Director Niger, which speaks to the food shortage and famine in parts of Niger and which provides some thoughtful guidance on how people can best respond.

All the best and thank you.

Jim Schneider
Niger PCV 1964-66
President, Friends of Niger, 1998-2005

Letter from Jim Bullington: Food Crisis in Niger

The developing food crisis in Niger has gotten increasing attention in European and American media in recent days, and many Niger RPCVs, current PCVs, and their families and friends have been asking for more information and looking for ways in which they might help. Therefore, I thought it would be useful to provide this summary of the situation and address the question of Peace Corps involvement.

Last year's harvest was very poor in the agro-pastoral zone, i.e. more or less along the 14th parallel: Tillaberi-Ouallam-Filingue-Tahoua-Dakoro-Tanout. Forage for the animals is also scarce. This zone includes about a fourth of the population, some 3 million people. In the rest of the country, the harvest was normal or better.

Thus, while the food crisis is not country-wide in scope, it is very serious for those in the affected zone. The usual coping mechanisms (temporary emigration, animal sales, "famine food," etc.) have been employed sooner and more extensively than in normal years, and various relief operations by the government (sale of reserve food stocks at subsidized prices) and donors (food for work, grain banks, etc.) have already begun. However, there are reports that some people (estimates of the number vary widely) are not just hungry but starving.

A major problem in addressing this crisis is that food grains are in short supply throughout West Africa, and prices are very high; so simply providing money, while needed, is not a sufficient response to meet the overall requirements for more food. The government and donors are seeking to import additional supplies.

The rains began in late May, and crops are planted in most areas. However, the harvest won't come in the agro-pastoral zone until about September. Moreover, as always, there is no assurance that the rains will continue in a sufficient amount or timely manner.

This situation poses challenges for PC/Niger and our PCVs, about a fourth of whom are located in the agro-pastoral zone where the problem is centered.

For many good reasons, it is not appropriate for PCVs to simply pass out free food to their villagers:

- * PC focuses on development, not relief; and therefore we are not trained and equipped for such operations, which require special expertise and professionalism. Well-meaning amateurs can do more harm than good, while getting themselves into trouble.
- * Since PC as an organization has no resources for food aid, there is no way that an individual PCV could be able to feed everyone in the village. Thus the question inevitably arises of who gets food and who doesn't, with the PCV caught in the middle. This could endanger the PCV's security as well as undermine his/her effectiveness as a development agent.
- * If one PCV hands out food in his/her village, this creates expectations for successor PCVs and PCVs in other villages, expectations that cannot be met (and should not be met if our primary objective remains long term, sustainable development).

On the other hand, PC is also a people-to-people organization, and we are acutely aware of the humanitarian imperative to do something when friends and neighbors are starving. This is not only a moral issue but also a practical problem: Development work is not possible when people can't eat, and the PCVs' own safety and health (physical and mental) may become problematic in such conditions.

Thus, while we can't and shouldn't get involved in direct food relief by PCVs, neither can we turn our backs and do nothing, particularly in those places where PCVs may be living among starving people.

Here are some things we are doing:

- * CRS has received a grant from USAID for an emergency food relief project. They would like to have a few PCVs to help administer it. PC staff is currently assessing the situation of PCVs in seriously affected villages to see if it would be appropriate for some of them to work temporarily in this project.
- * We are looking at the possibility of collaboration with other NGOs, including Africare and World Vision, that have access to food aid and the expertise and means to deliver it effectively.

* PCVs have organized 13 village food banks, and the government has agreed to our request to provide an initial stock of 10 tons of grain for each (although they have not been able to give us a date when this will be done).

As the food crisis develops, we will continue to monitor the situation and look for ways in which PC could effectively respond.

RPCVs and family members who would like to make a personal contribution to food relief in Niger might wish to consider donations to the UN's World Food Program, the lead agency in addressing the crisis. You can go to: www.wfp.org, click on the "donate" box at the left of the page, click on "WFP operations in" and scroll down to Niger.

J. R. Bullington
Country Director
Peace Corps/Niger

In his June 10, 1963 speech at American University, President Kennedy said:

"What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children -- not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women -- not merely peace in our time but peace for all time."

Brother from Niger Goes DVD

Brother from Niger, the 42-minute video which focuses on FON's microcredit initiatives and which was produced by Whalesong Productions of Halifax, Nova Scotia, will soon be released in DVD format. **Friends of Niger** plans to make the DVD version [available for purchase](#) at the same price and on the same basis as the VHS version.

Micro Niger - How You Can Help -

Contributions to our ongoing support for microcredit in Niger should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **Micro Niger c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the [Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form](#)

Vitamin Campaign - How You Can Help -

Donations to FON's ongoing vitamin campaign should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to **Vitamins, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the [Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form](#)

Video Production that Features FON Available for Purchase in DVD & VHS



The 42 minute documentary on Niger, originally produced for Canadian TV and shot in Niger in January 2002, is now available for purchase from **Friends of Niger** in both DVD and VHS formats.

From the blurb of the video's jacket - "In a *Brother from Niger*', award winning journalist Andrew Younger brings a story of courage, hope, and struggle from one of the world's poorest countries. *Brother from Niger*' follows **Friends of Niger** president Jim Schneider as he returns to a country he once called home, a country that's still as poor as when he left it.

The video was shot on location in Niamey, Maradi, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Kantche and Zinder and includes interviews with Haoua Diatta of the Oxcart Project as well as with Schneider, representatives of FON's Nigerien partner organizations and others.

Copies of the videotape may be purchased for \$20 each (2 for \$35). Use the [FON 2004 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check or money order, made payable to **Friends of Niger** , to **Video, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164.**

“Serve, serve, serve. That's the challenge. For in the end it will be the servants that save us all.” - Sargent Shriver .

Friends of Niger

You're Gonna Love This T-Shirt

**Available in 4 Sizes
- S, M, L, XL**



Makes a Great Gift!!

It'll Look Good on You as Well!!

Introducing - Friends of Niger T-Shirts...

You're gonna love this T-Shirt!!

Based on a design originally created by our neighbors at Friends of Burkina Faso, **FON** had produced its first and very own T-shirt. The short-sleeved shirts are 100% cotton, pre-shrunk beefy-T, natural muslin-colored fabric. The design (above) is four color: brown, black and the orange and green of the flag of Niger. You'll notice a nifty proximity map of Niger within the map of Africa which appears in the branches of the baobab tree. The shirts are available in Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes and sell for \$18 each, shipping included. Use the [FON 2004 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check made out to **Friends of Niger** (indicating the number of shirts by size), along with your name and address to: **Shirts. c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**

Credits and Other Information

The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**.

FON can be contacted via the post at **P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164;**
by email at lorenz3@ca.inter.net; and you will find **FON** on the web at the following Internet address - www.friendsofniger.org.

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed by Jim Schneider. Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses above.

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"hello!" in Hausa, Zarma/Fulfulde, Tarmachek and Beri Beri, the languages of Niger.

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The Camel Express

 Newsletter of the Friends of Niger
July 2005

Niger Confronted by Famine: A Call for Help

In Niger four million people (one third of the population) face a catastrophic famine. An early end of the rains and then the locust invasion have led to this serious food crisis. Officials in Niger say that millions in Niger are relying on food aid to survive because the country suffered a shortfall of 223,000 tons of millet, maize and sorghum in the 2004-2005 harvest.

The next two months are important so that subsistence farmers and their families in the southern area of Niger can make it through to October when hopefully harvesting starts again.

The U.N. Food Program has requested \$11 million to finance emergency operations in Niger and Mali. Check out www.IRINnews.org, from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The people of this country that we love so much need our help. Because of the urgency of the situation, sending donations for this project through Friends of Niger (FON) would not be timely. FON is aware of three organizations already in place in Niger: [World Vision](#), [Catholic Relief Services](#), and [Médecins Sans Frontières](#). Donations can be made online. World Vision and Médecins Sans Frontières have articles on their websites about the famine in Niger.

As an organization FON is preparing a letter to the administrator of AID to encourage the agency to increase aid to the food security and nutrition programs already in place in Niger and to step up humanitarian assistance during the current crisis. We will send copies to Condoleeza Rice and the Niger desk officer at the State

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Department and to the White House. To aid Niger in this food shortage it is important also that you contact your own Senators and Representatives to encourage their support on this issue. Other very important persons to contact are the [Senate Foreign Relations Committee](#) and its [Subcommittee on African Affairs](#).

- by Gabriella Maertens, 12 July 2005

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- [Niger children starving to death \(includes video\)](#) (BBC 19 July 2005)
- [200 tonnes of food aid for airlift to Niger](#) (PANA 18 July 2005)
- [WFP aims to feed one million in hungry Niger](#) (AFP 12 July 2005)
- [Too poor to live: poverty kills Niger's hungry](#) (Reuters 2 July 2005)
- [Letter from Jim Bullington \(Peace Corps Niger Country Director\): Food Crisis in Niger](#)
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Newsletter of the Friends of Niger
August 2005

Friends of Niger Respond to Niger's Famine

The food crisis in Niger has finally come to the world's attention over the last month. Posted below are links to [websites accepting donations](#) and some [excellent media resources](#).

Many Friends of Niger have sprung into action; here is just a sampling of the activities that we have been alerted to. Please send any additional news to [Bill Stein](#) for posting in the next edition of the Camel Express.

- Gabriella Maertens' article in the [July Camel Express](#) inspired many to make donations to aid agencies and/or write letters to newspapers and government officials about the need to address Niger's famine. Portions of the article were reprinted in the Buenos Aires Herald. It also led to [Asia Relief's](#) offer to ship a container of food, vitamins, and medical supplies to Niger.
- Friends of Niger donated group funds to CARE and World Vision. The board also wrote a [letter to USAID](#) urging an increase in food aid and received a [response from USAID](#) describing their efforts in Niger.
- Randy Brown organized a fundraiser in central Vermont that sent \$5500 directly to affected populations in Gueladio, Niger. He has also added depth to coverage of the famine in the [Barre Montpelier Times Argus](#).
- Several Portland-area RPCVs are organizing a benefit event for [Mercy Corps'](#) famine relief efforts in Niger. It will be held Tues, Sept 20 from 6:00 to 8:30 pm at Ciao Vito, 2203 NE Alberta Street in Portland, Oregon. Contact [Shari Exo](#) for more information.

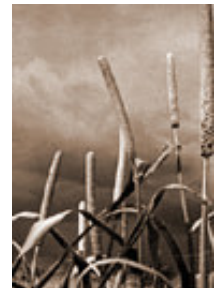
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- On Aug 8, John Risley devoted his monthly folk music show on Portland's KBOO community radio to the Niger food crisis. Between African songs he encouraged listeners to make donations on aid agency websites.

Visitor 

Please Donate What You Can

Friends of Niger encourages all to visit one or more of these websites to donate much-needed funds toward aid agencies working directly in Niger. Be sure to designate your donations for famine relief in Niger.

- [Action Against Hunger](#) (programs in Maradi, Dakoro, and Tahoua)
- [Africare](#) (35-year involvement in programs throughout Niger)
- [CARE](#) (programs in six of Niger's eight regions)
- [Catholic Relief Services](#) (programs in Dogon Doutchi, Ouallam, Tanout, and Tillabéri)
- [Islamic Relief](#) (programs in Ouallam and Tillabéri)
- [Concern Worldwide](#) (programs in and around Tahoua)
- [Lutheran World Relief](#) (programs in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)
- [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) (programs in Aguié, Dakoro, Keita, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder; but no longer soliciting donations for Niger)
- [Oxfam](#) (assisting nomadic people in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)
- [Save the Children](#) (providing food and supplies to thousands of families in the most acutely affected areas of southern Niger)
- [United Nations World Food Programme](#) (coordinating all bulk food distributions in southern Niger)
- [World Vision](#) (programs in and around Zinder)

Coverage of Niger's 2005 Famine

- [Global Aid System Stalled as Niger's Crisis Deepened](#) (Washington Post 17 August 2005)
- [Good harvests for hungry West Africa](#) (BBC 17 August 2005)
- [Niger way of life 'under threat'](#) (BBC 16 August 2005)
- [Niger's leader - haunted by hunger](#) (BBC 15 August 2005)
- [Meanwhile, People Starve](#) (NYTimes Editorial 14 August 2005)
- [Bringing relief to Niger's hungry](#) (BBC 13 August 2005)
- [Don't blame the locusts](#) (Guardian 12 August 2005)
- [The Rise of a Market Mentality Means Many Go Hungry in Niger](#) (Washington Post 11 August 2005)

- [How many dying babies make a famine?](#) (BBC 10 August 2005)
- [Women's groups in Niger help stave off the worst of the food crisis](#) (CARE 10 August 2005)
- [Niger leader denies hunger claims](#) (BBC 9 August 2005)
- [Famine in Niger: A Look Behind the Headlines](#) (American Diplomacy 8 August 2005, by Jim Bullington, Peace Corps Niger Country Director)
- [A taste of salvation for Niger children deemed not ill enough for a hospital](#) (Guardian 8 August 2005)
- [This is not just another act of God - this is ingrained poverty](#) (Observer 7 August 2005)
- [Niger livestock face food crisis](#) (BBC 4 August 2005)
- [Meagre food for babies first and elderly last, as villages empty of life](#) (Guardian 4 August 2005)
- [Lucky few get food in starving Niger](#) (Reuters 4 August 2005)
- [Plenty of food - yet the poor are starving](#) (Guardian 1 August 2005)
- [Niger Faces Major Food Emergency](#) (Democracy Now 1 August 2005)
- [Food Aid Arrives in Niger, Belatedly](#) (NPR 31 July 2005)
- [A New Face of Hunger, Without the Old Excuses](#) (NYTimes 31 July 2005)
- [Niger's people living on the edge](#) (BBC 30 July 2005)
- [Behind the Famine Footage](#) (NYTimes Editorial 30 July 2005)
- [Feeling of helplessness in Niger camp](#) (CNN 29 July 2005)
- [The Problems of Preventing Famine](#) (NPR Talk of the Nation 26 July 2005)
- [USAID Announces Additional American Aid To Combat Hunger, Promote Food Security In Niger](#) (USAID 26 July 2005)
- [Learn more about the devastating famine in Niger](#) (ABC 26 July 2005)
- [Niger's 'silent hunger' \(includes video\)](#) (BBC 20 July 2005)
- [Niger children starving to death \(includes video\)](#) (BBC 19 July 2005)
- [200 tonnes of food aid for airlift to Niger](#) (PANA 18 July 2005)
- [WFP aims to feed one million in hungry Niger](#) (AFP 12 July 2005)
- [Too poor to live: poverty kills Niger's hungry](#) (Reuters 2 July 2005)
- [Letter from Jim Bullington](#) (Peace Corps Niger Country Director, June 2005)
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Newsletter of the Friends of Niger
September 2005

Friends of Niger Famine Relief Fundraisers

The food crisis in Niger continues, though it's been pushed from the headlines by our domestic crisis, [Hurricane Katrina](#). Posted below are links to [websites accepting donations](#) for famine relief and some [excellent journalism](#) describing current conditions in Niger.

Friends of Niger around the U.S. have already raised tens of thousands of dollars for famine relief efforts. Here are the upcoming events that we know about. If you would like your activities listed, please e-mail [Bill Stein](#).

- **West Chester, PA (Sat 10 Sept, 7:30 pm):** A Night for Niger at the Unitarian Fellowship, [501 S High St.](#) Professor Paul Stoller of West Chester University, who has written books about Niger and has lived in Niger, will be giving a slide presentation. There is no admission fee, but there's a suggested donation of \$10, with all proceeds donated to the [World Food Programme](#) for its famine relief activities in Niger. View the [event's flyer](#).
- **Seattle, WA (Sun 18 Sept, 6:00 pm until?):** Niger Famine Relief Party at The Rendezvous, [2322 2nd Ave](#) (near Bell St). Bands start at 6pm, DJs spin all night. Silent auction of Niger arts and crafts. \$10 cover charge, with all proceeds donated to the [World Food Programme](#) for its famine relief activities in Niger. Contact [Keri Cavanaugh](#) with any questions.
- **Portland, OR (Tues 20 Sept, 6:00-8:30 pm):** Fundraiser for Famine Relief in Niger at Ciao Vito, [2203 NE Alberta St.](#) Featuring hors d'œuvres and wines from some of the finest restaurants and wineries in the Portland region. There will also be a short presentation on the current situation in Niger,

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stories and music from West Africa, and an auction of donated goods and services. \$20 minimum donation, with all proceeds donated to [Mercy Corps](#) for its famine relief activities in Niger. Check out the [cool poster!](#)

- **Corvallis, OR:** [Ruth Sitton DeMaio](#) (RPCV Niger 1970-1973) is soliciting donations for a focused aid project in the Birni N'Konni area. Funds she has raised, sent directly to trusted individuals in Niger, have already allowed the purchase of over five tons of food and its distribution to 2500 people. She is currently wiring additional funds on a weekly basis. Donations can be mailed to Ruth Sitton DeMaio, 2435 NW Arthur Ave, Corvallis OR 97330.

Please Donate What You Can

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- [Africare](#) (35-year involvement in programs throughout Niger)
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- [Médecins Sans Frontières](#) (programs in Aguié, Dakoro, Keita, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder; but no longer soliciting donations for Niger)
- [Mercy Corps](#) (programs in northern Filingué)
- [Oxfam](#) (assisting nomadic people in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)
- [Save the Children](#) (providing food and supplies to thousands of families in the most acutely affected areas of southern Niger)
- [United Nations World Food Programme](#) (coordinating all bulk food distributions in southern Niger)
- [World Vision](#) (programs in and around Zinder)

Coverage of Niger's 2005 Famine

- [The Niger we should know](#) (Boston Globe 23 August 2005)
- [Annan visits crisis-stricken Niger](#) (CNN 23 August 2005)
- [Global Aid System Stalled as Niger's Crisis Deepened](#)

Web Site Design
 Jai A. Evans RPCV '91-'94

Web Site Content
 Jim Schneider RPCV '64-'66
 Bill Stein RPCV '90-'93

(Washington Post 17 August 2005)

- [Good harvests for hungry West Africa](#) (BBC 17 August 2005)
- [Niger way of life 'under threat'](#) (BBC 16 August 2005)
- [Niger's leader - haunted by hunger](#) (BBC 15 August 2005)
- [Meanwhile, People Starve](#) (NYTimes Editorial 14 August 2005)
- [Bringing relief to Niger's hungry](#) (BBC 13 August 2005)
- [Don't blame the locusts](#) (Guardian 12 August 2005)
- [The Rise of a Market Mentality Means Many Go Hungry in Niger](#) (Washington Post 11 August 2005)
- [How many dying babies make a famine?](#) (BBC 10 August 2005)
- [Women's groups in Niger help stave off the worst of the food crisis](#) (CARE 10 August 2005)
- [Niger leader denies hunger claims](#) (BBC 9 August 2005)
- [Famine in Niger: A Look Behind the Headlines](#) (American Diplomacy 8 August 2005, by Jim Bullington, Peace Corps Niger Country Director)
- [A taste of salvation for Niger children deemed not ill enough for a hospital](#) (Guardian 8 August 2005)
- [This is not just another act of God - this is ingrained poverty](#) (Observer 7 August 2005)
- [Niger livestock face food crisis](#) (BBC 4 August 2005)
- [Meagre food for babies first and elderly last, as villages empty of life](#) (Guardian 4 August 2005)
- [Lucky few get food in starving Niger](#) (Reuters 4 August 2005)
- [Plenty of food - yet the poor are starving](#) (Guardian 1 August 2005)
- [Niger Faces Major Food Emergency](#) (Democracy Now 1 August 2005)
- [Food Aid Arrives in Niger, Belatedly](#) (NPR 31 July 2005)
- [A New Face of Hunger, Without the Old Excuses](#) (NYTimes 31 July 2005)
- [Niger's people living on the edge](#) (BBC 30 July 2005)
- [Behind the Famine Footage](#) (NYTimes Editorial 30 July 2005)
- [Markets respond to good season prospects](#) (FEWS 29 July 2005)
- [Feeling of helplessness in Niger camp](#) (CNN 29 July 2005)
- [The Problems of Preventing Famine](#) (NPR Talk of the Nation 26 July 2005)
- [USAID Announces Additional American Aid To Combat Hunger, Promote Food Security In Niger](#) (USAID 26 July 2005)
- [Learn more about the devastating famine in Niger](#) (ABC 26 July 2005)
- [Niger's 'silent hunger' \(includes video\)](#) (BBC 20 July 2005)
- [Niger children starving to death \(includes video\)](#) (BBC 19

July 2005)

- [200 tonnes of food aid for airlift to Niger](#) (PANA 18 July 2005)
 - [WFP aims to feed one million in hungry Niger](#) (AFP 12 July 2005)
 - [Too poor to live: poverty kills Niger's hungry](#) (Reuters 2 July 2005)
 - [Letter from Jim Bullington](#) (Peace Corps Niger Country Director, June 2005)
 - [Google search on "Niger Famine"](#)
-

<http://www.friendsofniger.org>



Friends of Niger fon

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Sannu! Fofu! Owyeeem! Wushiwushi!

"hello!" in Hausa, Zarma/Fulfulde, Tarmachek and Beri Beri, the languages of Niger.

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger
October 2005

'Pieces from Niger'
by [Anna Aguilar \(RPCV Niger 1986-89\)](#)

[Editor's note: This essay describes the roots of Niger's current food crisis. See our [Media Page](#) for more recent news from Niger, and please consider donating to one or more of the [organizations providing aid to Niger](#).]

One day in November a cry went up in the village. A young boy, Midou came running into my yard, yelling that the locusts were coming back. It was the hottest part of the day and as I walked into the sun I saw them. The locusts fly incredibly high in layer after layer as deep as the eye can see. I watch as they fly over the village. There are so many of them. "This is nothing," Midou says. "When they came the first time they blocked out the sun." Most of the village men and women run to their fields to try to protect the few crops that hadn't been eaten when the locusts came through the first time. One farmer stopped near me to watch the locusts fly overhead. Mournfully he said to me before leaving for his field: "You should go home, there will be no food here."

I was first here in the village of Mondolo as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1986 and now I am back in 2004 for another visit. I notice a man on the plane carrying a map labeled FEWS - the Famine Early Warning System. My first impression of the village is surprise that people have got even thinner. Most of the men and even the older teenage boys have left the village to find work in neighboring countries. The women as usual are overburdened with work. The young children are doing more work than ever before. They are all muscle and too small for their ages.

You would never know that anything was wrong just by looking from the road. From the back of the bush taxi the millet fields look normal. The millet stalks are tall and plentiful. It is only when the villagers take me to their fields that I can see the damage done. They show me that, although all the stalks are standing and the long leaves

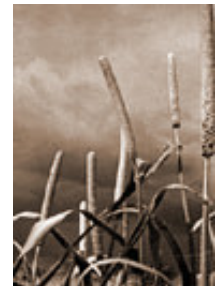
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are untouched, every single bit of the grain has been removed. They show me and they still seem to be bewildered by how such a catastrophe could have happened. How could you not be surprised by watching months of work destroyed by millions of locusts in a matter of minutes?

Almost immediately the price of millet sacks start to rise. It goes quickly out of reach of many of the villagers. I remark to the Chief that there is greater interest in starting the vegetable gardening earlier than usual. He replies: "Where there is hunger there is gardening." I join them in the gardening but they do all the hard work: putting up fencing, pulling water from the well, and chopping plots in the rock hard ground. Somehow many of the plants survive.

Mondolo is lucky that it is on the road and only a few kilometers from where the government has a grain distribution center in Tondikiwindi. Outside the warehouse wait various groups representing the numerous villages from the surrounding areas. We will wait most of the day for the grain distribution to begin. On the first day Mondolo purchases ten sacks of grain for the entire village. For many days afterwards, the villagers will rise before the morning prayers and head to the warehouse; sometimes they get some grain, sometimes they don't. Always they are using up energy and time trying to secure food.

It is unimaginably difficult to see people starving. It is even worse when you know their names and their stories. The village gets eerily quiet when someone dies. My friends in Niger are amazingly generous to me. They live by the rule that if you have lots of what another person needs then you share with them. I know they will not be surprised if they learn that we are gathered here to help them get the food that they need. It would be more surprising if we didn't give assistance when we could.

Visitor 

Please Donate What You Can

Friends of Niger encourages all to visit one or more of these websites to donate much-needed funds toward aid agencies working directly in Niger. Be sure to designate your donations for famine relief in Niger.

[Action Against Hunger](#) (programs in Maradi, Dakoro, and Tahoua)

[Africare](#) (35-year involvement in programs throughout Niger)

[CARE](#) (programs in six of Niger's eight regions)

[Catholic Relief Services](#) (programs in Dogon Doutchi, Ouallam, Tanout, and Tillabéri)

[Islamic Relief](#) (programs in Ouallam and Tillabéri)

[Concern Worldwide](#) (programs in and around Tahoua)

[Lutheran World Relief](#) (programs in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)

[Médecins Sans Frontières](#) (programs in Aguié, Dakoro, Keita, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder; but no longer soliciting donations for Niger)

[Mercy Corps](#) (programs in northern Filingué)

[Oxfam](#) (assisting nomadic people in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)

[Save the Children](#) (providing food and supplies to thousands of families in the most acutely affected areas of southern Niger)

[United Nations World Food Programme](#) (coordinating all bulk food distributions in southern Niger)

[World Vision](#) (programs in and around Zinder)

FON Needs Your Help Too

Recent visitors to our website may have noticed that Friends of Niger have been re-energized by the need to respond to Niger's food crisis. In the last few months, tens of thousands of dollars have been raised for other organizations through our collective efforts. We are eager to promote additional fundraisers on this page; please e-mail your information to [Bill Stein](#).

As the current crisis fades into the world's memory, our organization would like to continue our work with small sustainable development projects in Niger. We encourage all visitors to this site to consider supporting Friends of Niger through [membership dues and/or donations](#). We're also looking for a new webmaster. Please contact [John Soloninka](#) with any questions. *Mun godi!*

<http://www.friendsofniger.org>



The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Focus on Slavery in Niger

by [Bill Stein](#) (RPCV Niger 1990-93 and FON's webmaster)

[The views expressed below are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of Friends of Niger.]

For those of us who care deeply about the people of Niger, one thing that pains us to share with a wider public is the continued existence of slavery in Niger. It is estimated that almost 8% of the population of Niger is enslaved in 2005. The chattel slavery engaged in by some cultural groups entraps whole families (women, children, men) in involuntary servitude for generations.

Amid all the news about Niger's food crisis and connection to world uranium markets, it might have been easy to overlook some excellent journalism on slavery in Niger that has emerged in the last year. Light is being cast on a dark subject that wasn't much talked about by the non-slave-holding populations that most Peace Corps Volunteers lived among. I encourage all to read the Smithsonian article, and if you are so moved check out the other resources on this page.

- [Born Into Bondage](#) (Smithsonian, September 2005)
- [The Shackles of Slavery in Niger](#) (ABC Nightline, 3 June 2005)
- [Niger: Slavery - an unbroken chain](#) (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 21 March 2005)
- [Born to be a slave in Niger](#) (BBC, 11 February 2005)
- [Slavery in Niger](#) (Anti-Slavery International, 2004)

The articles referenced above describe the harsh treatment of Niger's slaves, the Niger government's assertion that slavery hasn't existed since unenforced laws against it were passed a century ago, and the official intimidation of Niger's abolitionists.

Where to go from here? I've already written Niger's embassy in Washington (June 2005), and they responded with a rigorous defense of the actions and views of their government. I am interested in launching a letter-writing campaign to the U.S. Secretary of State, members of the Congressional Black Caucus, influential columnists, and others who may be able to affect change. [Please e-mail me](#) if you would like to get involved with this effort.

Other Ways to Help

Friends of Niger continues to invite all to visit our [Media Coverage](#) page for up-to-date information on Niger's food crisis. We highly encourage [On-Line Donations](#) to organizations working directly in Niger.

Though we are not soliticing funds for the food crisis, Friends of Niger would like to continue our work with small sustainable development projects in Niger. We encourage all who find value in this website to consider [joining Friends of Niger](#).

November/December 2005

FON Supports the Reopening of the USAID Mission and Office in Niamey

FON has begun an advocacy campaign in support of the reopening of the USAID mission/office in Niamey. FON's letter to **Andrew Natsios**, the USAID administrator in Washington DC, outlining our position can be viewed in its entirety on our website www.friendsofniger.org. A brief summary of the letter follows.

[FON] ... strongly urges the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to re-open its mission office in Niamey, Niger in 2006. Since the USAID mission office in Niger closed, the agricultural, health, and economic sectors in Niger have not faired well. This year, the United Nations ranked the Republic of Niger as one of the poorest country in the world. Most of its citizens continue to face difficult obstacles in obtaining a steady supply of food and water, and access to health care; even maintaining a subsistence standard of living has become out of the reach of many Nigeriens over the past two years. The people of Niger need and merit the constant presence and assistance of a USAID country office and staff...

USAID's own public reports on the latest food crisis in Niger appear to have concluded that poverty and entrenched cultural practices are the root problems of food security and require a committed long-term development strategy to resolve. Without a national, on-site presence, USAID will not be appropriately positioned to respond rapidly, to accurately assess the issues and problems in the early stages, or to put in place measures to prevent these chronic problems from persisting.

The absence of a national USAID mission office in Niger also limits the ability of the US to assist the government and people of Niger in their establishment of a long term program of sustainable economic growth...

[FON] urges you to expedite the return to Niger of a nationally based USAID mission.

Please join us by writing, emailing, or calling the USAID office in Washington and your state representatives in Congress urging them to consider reopening the USAID mission/office in Niamey.

Message from the President

Dear Friends of Niger:

If you listen to the news, you've no doubt heard Niger mentioned this past summer and fall: from the yellowcake uranium memo to the food crisis. The UN again has listed Niger as one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world - this year Niger ranks last on the 2005 Human Development Index. Nigeriens have suffered much this past year, and so they remain in our hearts and prayers.

Last winter and spring, we received news from Niger detailing the poor 2004 harvest due to drought and locusts, and then in July we received the BBC news articles and chilling video footage detailing the effects of the food crisis on families and especially children in and around Maradi. Because of your past support to FON, the FON Board of Directors was able to take action and make three \$500 contributions on your behalf to three relief organizations working in Niger: World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and CARE. We also launched an advocacy campaign of letter writing, emailing, and calling congress men and women asking that the US government increase its humanitarian assistance to Niger through USAID. Thank you to many of you who joined us in this advocacy campaign. Other FON members took action by raising funds for Niger in their local areas (read about some of these activities on pages 6 and 7).

The recent reports coming from Niger suggest that this past growing season produced a bountiful crop, but because of heavy borrowing that many families did to purchase food last year, this year's harvest went toward paying off their indebtedness. Herders were also affected by last year's drought and many lost their animals or sold them to buy millet. The herders in some areas are now at the end of their resources and face an uncertain future this year (see the link to Tagaset's video on page 6).

FON will continue to monitor the precarious food situation in Niger and make updates to our website regarding any related news for Niger that we receive.

We would like to make a special thank-you to Jim Bullington, Peace Corps Director in Niger, for his many contribution to this newsletter and support of FON.

The FON Board of Directors would like to continue supporting the development projects that we have listed on page 11. Especially, we will be exploring our involvement with Peace Corps Niger's Girls Education program. We will be sending you more information about this activity in our next newsletter.

Enjoy the newsletter and consider contributing the news you have from Niger to the next

Camel Express. Peace.

John W. Soloninka (Niamey, LWR, 90'-96')

Remembering Rita Herkal

Tuy-Cam and I have come to deeply admire the Peace Corps Volunteers we've led and supported during the past five years in Niger. While there are vast differences among them, they all tend to share a deep commitment to service and a strong taste for adventure. Also, all of them are willing to give up American affluence for two years of poverty, hardship, and sometimes danger in the African bush. It hasn't been possible to develop close personal relations with each of the more than 400 who have served here under my direction, but many have become almost like family, and we follow their post-Peace Corps lives with much interest.



One of our favorites was Rita Herkal, a member of the first group of new Volunteers to arrive after we did. She was an outstanding Volunteer, not only surviving in the harsh environment of a small Nigerien village but actually thriving in it. She extended her normal two years of service for an additional six months, and then stayed on in Niger for several more months to travel in the Sahara with a group of nomad herders.

After leaving Niger and spending some time with her family in the U.S., Rita got a job with Save the Children, a major international humanitarian organization. (Many Volunteers go on to careers with international organizations of this sort.) She was with a Save the Children affiliate called Building with Books, and her job was to help rural communities in Malawi build schools. She wrote a series of emails to us and many other Peace Corps friends describing her adventures and the progress she was making on the schools. In the most recent one, on August 24, she said, "I am happy and healthy and so satisfied with my life and what I am doing. It truly is an incredible feeling to have each minute permeated with contentment and gratification."

Two days later, on August 26, Rita was killed in a bush taxi accident. (Bush taxis are the aged, crowded, unregulated, uncomfortable, dangerous vehicles that serve as the primary, often only, form of public transportation in much of rural Africa.) She was 28. We should remember her as a hero who lost her life in service to humanity. She represented the best of Peace Corps, and the best of America. Submitted by J.R. Bullington Country Director of the Peace Corps program in Niger. (Originally published in American Diplomacy.)

UN's Human Development Report

The United Nations' annual report of "Human Development-2005" lists Niger last, 177th out of 177 member countries, on the Human Development Index; last on the list for Commitment to health resources, access, and services; last on the list for water, sanitation and nutritional status; last on the list for literacy, economic performance, etc. See the full report:

http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_HDI.pdf



NPCA 45th Anniversary Gathering

The National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) is sponsoring a National Gathering September 15-16, 2006 in Washington, DC to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Peace Corps. Stay tuned for more information.



Happy 90th Birthday Sarge!

The Peace Corps community extends its very best wishes to Sargent Shriver, the founder of the Peace Corps, on his 90th birthday. (November 9).

**There is no way to peace.
Peace is the way.**

Les Jeux de la Francophonie au Niger

The Games of La Francophonie are an international cultural and sporting event in which athletes and artists from States and Governments members of La Francophonie participate. The Games distinguish themselves from other similar events in many ways. They are the only major international Games where sports and cultural activities are presented in a comparable competitive context. This uniqueness showcases the originality of Francophone culture and the excellence of athletes from all the Francophonie states. The next Games of La Francophonie will be held in Niamey, Niger, from December 7 to 17, 2005.

Sporting competitions

- Athletics (men and women)
- Basketball (women)
- Boxing (men)
- Judo (men and women)
- Soccer (men)
- Table tennis (men and women)
- Traditional wrestling (animation)

Cultural competitions

- Song
- Storytelling
- Traditionally inspired dance
- Literature (short story)
- Painting
- Photography
- Sculpture



From Radio France Internationale:

http://www.rfi.fr/actufr/articles/069/article_38303.asp

Deux ministres français se rendent au Niger, pays frappé par une crise alimentaire aiguë et qui se prépare à accueillir les cinquièmes jeux de la francophonie, prévus du 7 au 17 décembre 2005. Alors que certaines rumeurs annoncent le transfert des jeux au Burkina Faso voisin, d'autres trouvent en cette visite de Brigitte Girardin, ministre déléguée à la Coopération, au développement et à la francophonie et de Jean-François Lamour, ministre de la Jeunesse et des sports et de la vie associative, la confirmation de la tenue des jeux au Niger.

Le ministre français Jean-François Lamour a visité les installations sportives et hôtelières censées accueillir les 15 000 participants aux jeux de la francophonie. ... A Niamey, le ministère des Sports et le Comité national d'organisation des jeux (CNOJF) ont concocté un programme de visite des différents sites pour que la délégation française apprécie l'état d'avancement des travaux. La moitié des 365 villas qui accueilleront les participants serait déjà construite. Centre de conférences et restaurants seraient en «phase de finition». Le ministre Jean-François Lamour a aussi visité l'Académie des arts martiaux en travaux, d'une capacité de 1,222 places, financée par la France. D'autres complexes sportifs financés par la coopération chinoise sont en rénovation. Le budget total des jeux de la francophonie à la charge de la France et du Canada est estimé à environ 7 milliards de francs CFA (plus de 10 millions d'euros). Le président Mamadou Tandja a déjà annoncé «son ferme engagement dans la réussite des jeux».



Technical Advisors Needed

<http://www.cartercenter.org/healthprograms/program1.htm>

The **Carter Center** is updating a database of interested candidates for short-term consultancy positions in Guinea Worm endemic countries. Duties: assist host governments to implement national eradication program, increase capacity to identify, contain, manage, and report cases, conduct health education and social mobilization activities, and support ongoing supervision of eradication efforts. Qualifications: BA/BS, MPH (preferred); local language skills from any of the following countries (Mali, **Niger**, Nigeria, Sudan, Togo); French highly desired; overseas experience implementing health programs,



In Togo, a young girl (above) endures the removal of a Guinea worm from her

preferably in Africa. Honorarium provided. Send CV and availability via email to: [Aryc Mosher, awmoshe@emory.edu](mailto:aryc.mosher@emory.edu).

foot.
Photo Credit: The Carter Center / Emily Howard

Traditional treatment of Guinea worm disease consists of wrapping the two to three-foot-long worm around a small stick and extracting it: a slow, painful process that often takes weeks.

Webmaster Needed for FON

Friends of Niger (FON) is seeking a webmaster to maintain the FON website. Currently, Bill Stein is doing an excellent job as our webmaster. Bill will help orient the new webmaster. Responsibilities of the webmaster include adding content to the FON webpages at least once a month, and archiving materials on the website's multiple webpages. The FON webmaster works with the FON Board members on content for and constant improvement of the website. This is a voluntary position. If you've had webpage maintenance experience and would be available, please contact John Soloninka, FON President at: j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net



Éclipse Solaire Totale

Le 29 Mars 2006 au NIGER

Une éclipse solaire totale aura lieu au Niger le 29 Mars 2006 à 10 heures 33 Minutes.

A total solar eclipse will occur in Niger March 29, 2006 at 10:33 a.m.

FON Members Respond to the Food Crisis 2005

Fundraisers

Several Niger RPCVs and FON members organized fundraisers to help support famine relief efforts in Niger this past summer and fall. A few that we were made aware of are listed below. If you know of additional events, please let us know. On behalf of all FON members we want to acknowledge these efforts and to thank these people for responding in a time of great need:

- **Laura and Jason Hahn** organized a Niger benefit happy hour at the Ghana Café in Washington DC on August 30th. Funds were donated to CARE.
- **Randy Brown** organized a fundraiser in Montpelier, VT. Funds were sent to Gueladio, Niger.
- **Melanie Wasserman** organized a fundraiser at Brown University Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research the end of August. Melanie gave each participant a sticker that she made featuring the Camel Express graphic and read, "Sannu ba ta hanna zuwa" - Slowness does not prevent arrival! Funds were sent to Mercy Corps.
- **Deborah Popowski** and other Niger RPCVs organized two Happy Hours in New York City at Pioneer Bar, the second event was held August 31st. Funds were sent to RPCVs Julianna White and Dave McNally, both working in Niger.
- **Kerri Cavanaugh** and other Niger RPCVs in Seattle, WA organized a benefit fundraiser including a silent auction of Niger arts and crafts at The Rendezvous on September 18th. Funds were sent to the World Food Programme.
- Niger RPCVs in Portland, OR including **Bill Stein** and **Shari Exo**, organized a fundraising event including hors d'oeuvres, wine tasting, and auction of donated goods and services at Ciao Vito, an Italian restaurant run by Niger RPCV Vito DiLullo on September 20th. Funds were donated to Mercy Corps.
- **Diane Choplin** organized a fundraiser in San Francisco, CA.
- **Paul Stoller**, organized a fundraiser that included a slide presentation: "Night for Niger" in West Chester, PA on September 10th. Funds were donated to the World Food Programme.



A local health aide mixes a nutritious supplement for underweight children in Tanchiley, Niger. Photo: Christy Collins/Mercy Corps



A village woman in Tillaberi receives a seed voucher. Photo Credit/CRS Staff



Ingrid Patetta, a French documentary filmmaker, portrays the nomads of the Azawak Valley (north of Tahoua) and documents their plight after the 2004 drought in a 10 minute documentary video filmed in September 2005. See the video at:

<http://homepage.mac.com/ingridpatetta/tagaste/Menu81.html>

Relief for Birni N'Konni

Ruth 'Rakia' Sitton Demaio, RN, served in Konni '70-'73 as a mother and child health educator. Trying to figure out how she could target aid to the people she lived with in Niger, thought of Harouna Amani, one of the dusty little boys who used to hang out around her compound. After Ruth had left Konni, Harouna had gone on to get a degree in English at the university in Niamey. He is presently an international journalist for IINA based in Jeddah. Ruth contacted Harouna and together they made plans to direct aid to Konni. Harouna told Ruth that there was relief aid in Konni but that it was inadequate. The subsidized food available was only about one tiya, not more than 4 kgs per person, and that people had to wait for many hours from early morning to late in the afternoon to receive this assistance. Harouna suggested that funds be sent by Western Union to a relative living in Niamey and that he would take the funds to Konni. Ruth also enlisted the help of her former house keeper, now the Sarkin Yan Tauri in Konni (he had inherited his father's job as head of the traditional chief's body guard of the invulnerables). These two men worked through the traditional governing system in determining those most in need of food, including those in outlying hamlets and nomads. Women, young children and elders were especially targeted.

At her home church in Corvallis, OR, Ruth enlisted the support of her Catholic parishioners and even obtained an interview about the famine in Niger that was published in the local newspaper. Through these efforts, Ruth initially raised over \$3,000 and later an additional \$1,500 was donated.



Once the money arrived in Niger, "Team Niger" went to the border market in Illela, Nigeria and purchased over 5 tons of millet, dried cassava and kuli-kuli which was then distributed to over 2,500 people in and around Konni.

Ruth writes that in addition to people in Corvallis, Niger RPCVs now living and working in Afghanistan and Singapore wired money to her for this project. "The chain of people involved in our project are inspired by the good will being exchanged between our countries, cultures and religions as much as by the concrete aid."

Allah shi ba ku lahiya,

Ruth 'Rakia' Sitton DeMaio, RN:

Ed. Note: See more photos at <http://www.cmug.com/~demaio/>

Galmi Hospital

Dr. Christopher and Helene Zoolkoski serve at the Galmi Hospital in Niger. In August, they

wrote to update us about the situation around Galmi:

Thank you for the prayers and concern many of you have expressed during this famine in Niger. The problem is very apparent here in the areas surrounding the hospital where we live. This time of year is the most difficult because it is almost a year since the last harvest and the grain stores from last season are depleted while there still remains a couple of months until this year's grain can be harvested. Those of us serving at Galmi Hospital have responded to the need by starting a famine relief project to distribute grain to those in the surrounding communities. We will be distributing 30,000 kilograms of grain over the next several weeks. We also have our ongoing CREN project, which is our center for the rehabilitation of malnourished children. The CREN is presently exceeding its capacity during this time of need, but we are doing our best to meet the needs of each child who comes. While they are living here at the center, they are fed and their mothers are taught how to provide a balanced meal using local products. One good way to help the Nigerien people during this time of famine is to contribute to the Galmi Hospital Benevolent Fund through SIM. Contributions made to this fund will be used to help those who need medical care during this time of food shortage and to feed and rehabilitate the malnourished children and their mothers.

<http://www.sim.org/country.asp?fun=12&fun2=1&cid=37&mid=&pgid=&prid=100>

SIM NIGER / B.P. 44 / Hopital de Galmi / Madaoua / Niger

SIM USA / P.O. Box 7900 / Charlotte, NC 28241

E-Mail: postmaster@sim.org or zoolkoski@medscape.com

How Else You Can Help

There are many governmental and non-governmental agencies working to combat hunger in Niger. A few of these organizations that we are familiar with are listed below. This past summer, on behalf of FON members, the FON Board of Directors contributed \$500 each to three of these organizations: World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and CARE. Friends of Niger encourages you to visit one or more of these organizations' websites to donate much-needed funds toward their work in Niger. You may choose to designate your donations for humanitarian relief in Niger. How Else You Can Help

- Action Against Hunger (programs in Maradi, Dakoro, and Tahoua)
- Africare (35-year involvement in programs throughout Niger)
- CARE (programs in six of Niger's eight regions)
- Catholic Relief Services (programs in Dogon Doutchi, Ouallam, Tanout, and Tillabéri)
- Islamic Relief (programs in Ouallam and Tillabéri)
- Concern Worldwide (programs in and around Tahoua)

- Lutheran World Relief (programs in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)
- Meedecins Sans Frontières (programs in Aguié, Dakoro, Keita, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder)
- Mercy Corps (programs in northern Filingué)
- Oxfam (assisting nomadic people in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)
- Plan International (programs in Tillabéri)
- Save the Children (providing food and supplies to thousands of families in the most acutely affected areas of southern Niger)
- United Nations World Food Programme (coordinating all bulk food distributions in southern Niger)
- World Vision (programs in and around Zinder)

Katie Leach-Kemon

Submitted by J.R. Bullington Country Director of the Peace Corps program in Niger.

Originally published in *American Diplomacy*.

Katie's Twins... One of our Peace Corps Volunteers, Katie Leach-Kemon, illustrated some of the complexity and frustration of trying to alleviate this deep-rooted poverty with a concrete, human example in a story for her hometown newspaper:

Part of my job includes working with mothers to rehabilitate severely malnourished children. Since January, I have been working with a pair of twins and their mother in a neighboring village. The twins, Amara and Boubacar, weighed only nine pounds each when they reached their first birthday.

My friend Indi, a nurse at the local clinic, and I have been visiting the twins' house over the past eight months. During each visit, Indi and I discuss nutrition and hygiene with the twins' mother. Our instruction has been partially productive: the mother has been diligently preparing a protein-enriched porridge for her children, but she has yet to improve hygiene in her household. Despite Indi's and my constant reiterations about the importance of sanitation, nothing seems to change. Bowls of food left open and covered with flies, chickens eating out of cooking pots, and waste scattered throughout the yard where the children play is the scene that often greets us when we visit the twins' house.

For the past several months, the twins have been showing signs of amelioration, like steady weight gain. Just the other day, however, I saw the twins and their mother at the clinic. Both twins were sick with vomiting and diarrhea, and their frail bodies had lost all evidence of the last eight months' progress. I am hoping that antibiotics the twins received will restore their health. I am wary, however, knowing that the unsanitary conditions in which these children live may attack their defenseless bodies with a fatal infection any day now. While I have tried to help rehabilitate the twins as best I can, I am convinced that the only way to reduce malnutrition among young children in Niger is to encourage primary school education for girls.



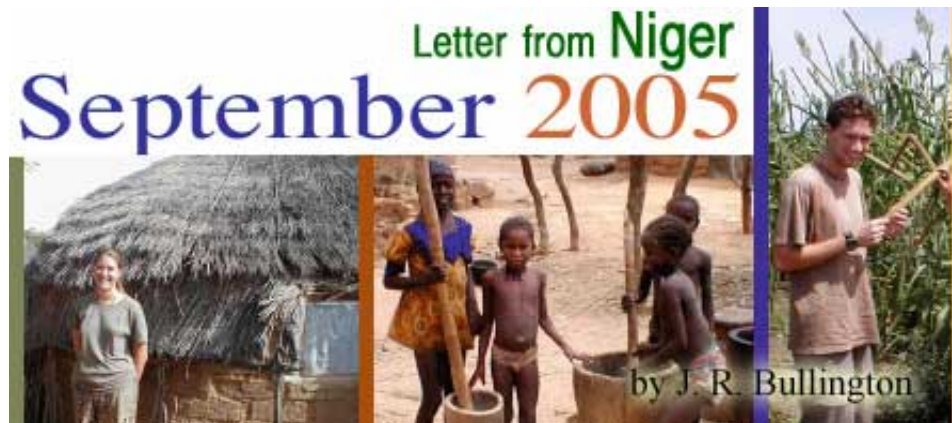
Children pounding grain

Research has shown that girls' education has a direct impact on infant mortality rates. In Niger, only 16 percent of the population is literate, and a mere 24 percent of girls attend modern school. Increasing school attendance among young girls seems to be the most viable approach in reducing malnutrition and infant mortality in Niger. If the twins' mother had attended school, it is likely that her hygiene and feeding habits would be dramatically different. If nothing else, she would better understand the connection between dirt and sickness, and perhaps be more responsive to my counseling.

While the news headlines scream "CHILDREN ARE STARVING IN NIGER," the solution seems so simple. If they are starving, bring them food. End of story? Not quite. There is no "quick-fix" that will help Niger out of the hole in which it finds itself. The best way to help Niger is to work with its people and its government toward long-term goals, like increasing primary education for all children, reducing population growth, slowing desertification, and improving access to healthcare for all Nigeriens.

Submitted by J.R. Bullington Country Director of the Peace Corps program in Niger.
(Originally published in *American Diplomacy*.)

INSIDE PEACE CORPS NIGER



Dear Friends:

The rains have continued to fall normally throughout the summer, and what promises to be a good harvest is getting underway. This is bringing an end to Niger's unusually long and severe hungry season that garnered so much attention in the international media. Massive amounts of food aid, though too late to prevent widespread hunger and even starvation in some areas, began arriving in July and continue to pour into the country. Additional humanitarian aid organizations have set up operations, and existing ones have added hundreds of expatriate and local employees to their staffs.

This outpouring of international generosity is both needed and welcome. However, as with most emotional, media-driven responses to complex problems, it has weaknesses.

Especially with famines, it seems, the media's focus and the international aid it generates always arrive late. Food shortages are fairly easy to predict, and this one was in fact predicted last November, soon after it became apparent that the harvest was poor. But agricultural statistics and economic indicators can never be as telegenic and compelling as images of skeletal children with distended bellies.

Such pictures and the accompanying commentary claiming that millions of people are facing starvation have the unintended consequence of driving already high food prices even higher because of panic, profiteering and hoarding. Then, weeks or months later, when the food shipments begin arriving from abroad, prices drop dramatically. If, as is often the case, this coincides with an average or better harvest, farmers (three quarters of the population in Niger) have to sell their production at lower than normal prices and are driven even deeper into poverty. Thus, food aid can do harm as well as good. Experts have long recognized the potentially perverse consequences of food aid, and organizations such as USAID and the UN's World Food Program are trying to limit them as they respond to Niger's immediate needs. Some well meaning but less sophisticated donors, however, are not so careful.

Another danger in this media-hype-and-emotional-response syndrome is that it tends to give the impression of a temporary problem (in Niger's case, drought and locusts) that can be solved with short term measures such as emergency food aid. In fact, Niger's food insecurity is structural and long term, with multiple causes, and it can effectively be addressed only with development aid that promotes sustainable economic growth.



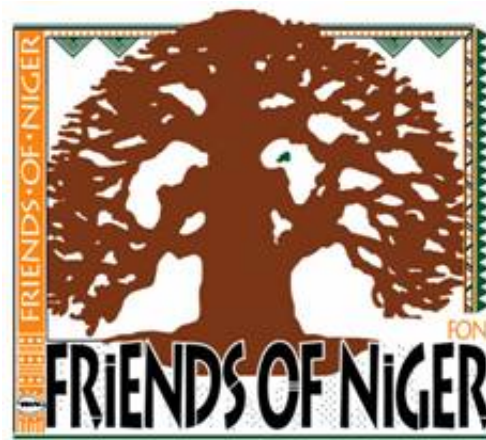
Jim Bullington, Peace Corps Country Director Niger
(Originally published in *American Diplomacy*)

Friends of Niger T-Shirts

You're gonna love this T-Shirt!

Based on a design originally created by our neighbors at Friends of Burkina Faso, FON had produced its first and very own T-shirt. The short-sleeved shirts are 100% cotton, pre-shrunk beefy-T, natural muslin-colored fabric.

The design (right) is four color: brown, black and the orange and green of the flag of Niger. You'll notice a nifty proximity map of Niger within the map of Africa which appears in the branches of the baobab tree. The shirts are available in Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes, and sell for \$18 each, shipping included.



Use the **FON Membership & Order Form** on the last page or send a check made payable to **Friends of Niger** (indicating the number of shirts by size), along with your name and address to:

Shirts, c/o FON, PO Box 5823, Washington, DC, 20016-9998

The *Brother from Niger* DVD

Filmed in Niger in January 2002



In a *Brother from Niger*, award winning journalist Andrew Younger brings a story of courage, hope, and struggle from one of the world's poorest countries.

A Brother from Niger follows Friends of Niger president Jim Schneider as he returns to a country he once called home, a country that's still as poor as when he left it. The video/DVD was shot on location in Niamey, Maradi, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Kantche and

Zinder and includes interviews with Haoua Diatta of the Oxcart Project as well as with Schneider, representatives of FON's Nigerien partner organizations and others.

Use the **FON Membership & Order Form** on the last page or send a check or money order for \$20 US (2 for \$35 US) made payable to **Friends of Niger**, along with your name and address to:

Video, c/o FON, PO Box 5823, Washington, DC, 20016-9998

2006 Peace Corps Calendar

Sales to Benefit Niger

In past years, Friends of Niger sold the wonderful International Calendar produced by the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison, Wisconsin. This year we've chosen to steer people toward purchasing calendars from the Columbia River Peace Corps Association (Portland, OR), as a significant portion of the proceeds from their sale will benefit Mercy Corps' famine relief efforts in Niger.

Calendars are \$10 each, plus \$4 for shipping 1-5 calendars to U.S. addresses.

To order send your request and check (made out to CRPCA) to **Cate Wilcox, 4609 SE Mitchell St, Portland, OR 97206**. More information at <http://www.crPCA.org>.





Friends of Niger Membership and Order Form

Name(s) _____ Date: _____

Address _____

City/ State _____ Phone (h) _____

Zip _____ Phone (w) _____

E- Mail Address _____

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____

Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____

Program or Involvement in Niger _____

Membership Dues & Contributions help fund FON Activities - including
The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON Archives,
and Projects such as Those Listed Below.

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON

\$55 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA

Enclosed is \$35 for a Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)

\$77.50 to cover Family Membership in both FON & NPCA

I am a current Niger PCV, entitled to Free Membership

I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed
a General Contribution of _____

Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed
a General Contribution of _____

I want to support FON's Microcredit in Niger activities with
a Contribution of _____

I want to support FON's Appropriate Technology activities
with a Contribution of _____

I want to support FON's Youth Education activities
with a Contribution of _____

I want to support the FON Chewable Vitamin Campaign
with a Contribution of _____

Please send _____ copies of Brother from Niger/DVD
at \$20 (2 for \$35) (Shipping Included) _____

Please send one copy of Brother from Niger/DVD
(Free to members) (Shipping Included) _____

Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts
at \$18 each (Shipping Included) _____

T-Shirt Sizes: S _____ M _____ L _____ XL _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Make Check or Money Order Payable to Friends of Niger and mail to:
P. O. Box 5823, Washington, D. C. 20016-9998
(Please Enclose Membership Form)