

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

[Friends of Niger Home Page](#) / [Archives](#) / Volume 21, Issue 1 - July/August Camel Express

Mary Abrams: Peace Corps Director

Peace Corps Niger Receives a New Director

Mary Abrams was appointed the Niger Peace Corps Director this past June. She sent us this greeting and message:

Dear Friends of Niger; I'm very excited about getting back to the Sahel and to Niger in particular. Although I haven't been back since a short consulting trip in 1992, I've kept in touch as a member of the Friends of Niger and helping as much as possible with the fundraiser for drought and famine relief that the RPCVs put on last September with Mercy Corps in Portland.

I'm originally from Heppner, Oregon. I earned my B.S. in Agronomy at the University of Arizona, and after a couple of years of odd jobs, served as a volunteer with Keith Collier (my husband at the time) in Maradi from 1979-1981 and then again from 1982-1984 on the Niamey Department Development Project, both in the agricultural extension arena. After Niger, I went back to school at the University of California, Davis and earned an M.S. and a Ph.D. in Soil Science. Being a doctor of dirt propelled me into academia where I studied natural resource management issues at the Oregon Graduate Institute - it was fun and provided me with the opportunity to work in interesting places like New Mexico, southern France, and Namibia.

For the past five years, I have been a member of the executive management team for the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality as the Laboratory Division Administrator. It was a great job but when my father passed away last year, I decided it was time to return to overseas work. And since making a job transition and moving half-way around the world wasn't enough, I got remarried to a guy I've known for over 30 years, Gary Cramer (some things just take time).

Gary and I are excited to be living in Niamey. Peace Corps provided me (and 8 other incoming country directors) with some fabulous training. I was fortunate enough that a part of the training was an evening with several women who are returned country directors including Jane Bon in who served in Niger. Not surprisingly, the projects currently in Niger look different from those I experienced over 25 years ago, but they are still addressing some of the fundamental issues that face Niger - food security, sustainable natural resource use and protection, health

(HIV/AIDS) and education. I'll keep in touch while I'm in-country and let you all know what is happening and how we can all help.

Bernadette M. Allen: US Ambassador, Niger



From www.state.gov: Bernadette M. Allen is a career foreign service officer at the US Department of State. She was nominated by President Bush in October 2005 to serve as the US Ambassador to the Republic of Niger, was confirmed by the US Senate in February 2006, and was sworn in as ambassador on March 29, 2006. Ambassador Allen was raised in Seat Pleasant, Maryland. She earned a BA in French Civilization and Linguistics in 1978 at Central College in Pella, Iowa and a Certificate in French Civilization from the Sorbonne in Paris. She completed an MA in Human Resources Management at George Washington University in 1990. She speaks French and Mandarin Chinese.

"Niger is making great strides in investing in its people, with particular focus on improving literacy and health," Allen told the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations at her confirmation hearing. Allen's plans for her new post include combating hunger and malnutrition, particularly among children; supporting economic development and diversification, with a focus on empowering women; building on the US partnership with Niger to fight terrorism; tackling development and educational gaps; improving literacy and health; and strengthening democratic institutions.

Message from the FON President

Dear Friends of Niger,

Many thanks to the members who came forward this year to serve on the FON Board of Directors. New to the board this year are Judd Lyon, Steve Bushell and Sue Rosenfeld. Judd is our Advocacy chairperson, Steve serves as our Webmaster and Sue is our Niger Liaison. Please welcome our new board members. A special thank-you to Jim Schneider who served as our FON president since 1997.

Last year we asked you to join in an advocacy campaign of letters, emails, and phone call to reopen the USAID mission in Niger (which was closed in 1998). This summer, Mark Wentling was sent to Niger as USAID's permanent program manager. Mark is joining a new leadership team in Niger; Bernadette Allen is our new US ambassador to Niger, and Mary Abrams is our

new Peace Corps country Director. All of our best wishes go to Ambassador Allen, Mary, and Mark. We hope to hear from them in future Camel Express issues.

Friends of Niger continues to promote grassroots development efforts and Peace Corps projects in Niger. Through your generous financial donations, the FON Board recently sent funds to sponsor micro-credit activities which favor women through Tin-Hinan a Nigerien development organization; the publication of a Peace Corps Volunteer health manual for children; and two scholarships for the Peace Corps education program for young girls.

We've also heard from many of you who remain active in promoting development activities in Niger, raising funds for different NGOs working in Niger, and traveling to Niger. Please let us hear from you.

Enjoy the newsletter and, please, stay in touch. Peace.

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



2006-2008 Friends of Niger Board of Directors

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Friends of Niger Supports Micro-Credit Projects in Niger

Tin-Hinan Receives Two \$500 Grants From FON

Tin-Hinan Association, a non-profit development organization in western Niger, supports women's activities in the Tillabery Region. The founder and president of the association is Mme. Wouro, nee Habsatou Aboubacar. Programs supported by this group of women include several food security projects, health education, literacy projects, sewing workshops and a micro-credit project.

Tin-Hinan's micro-credit project began in 2005 with a grant from the Paguoin Foundation. Women in Goroubi were the first beneficiaries of the micro-credit project; after successfully completing one cycle of the micro-credit activities, Tin-Hinan sought to expand the number of beneficiaries of the project by requesting additional funds from FON. The women proposed using the funds to buy goats and cattle which they would fatten and then re-sell after a period of four months. They would then repeat this process over a twelve month period, at which time they would reimburse their original loan to the group to be used as credit for other women.

FON has given two \$500 grants to Tin-Hinan to promote these types of micro-credit activities among other members of their organization. FON members can continue to contribute to this activity by indicating the micro-credit project on the membership and order form.

Tin-Hinan is named after this ancestral figure in Tuareg history and folklore. According to Sonia Bleeker in her book, *The Tuareg: Nomads and Warriors of the Sahara*, archeologists confirmed that Tin Hinan was buried in a tomb in the stone fortress of Abalessa, Algeria. "As with all legends, it is hard to separate fact from fiction, but the Kel Ahaggar [Tuaregs] say that Tin Hinan lived at Abalessa in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. Some authors, however, believe the Tuareg entered the Sahara at a later time. In the tomb of Tin Hinan were rich burial materials, gold jewelry, beads, bits of glass, Roman lamps, iron arm rings, and Roman coins. The coins bore the impression of Constantine the Great, [circa 288 to 337 AD.]... The Imochar say that this noble lady, Tin Hinan, came from the north, where they all came from and died in the Ahaggar. The Imrad, the vassal tribes, claim that Tin Hinan's companion, a woman named Takamat, whose burial place was found a few hundred yards from Tin Hinan's, was a vassal and is their ancestress, their ancient Mother. Descent through the mother has continued among the Tuareg since ancient times. Children, both boys and girls, belong to the clan of their mother."

Funds Needed for Kirtachi School Hostel

When Peace Corps left the Kirtachi Region, the Peace Corps and the Nigerien government agreed to transform the former Peace Corps hostel/transit house and land in Kirtachi to a school hostel site. Now, funds are needed to convert and operate the former facility to a hostel for middle aged school students from the region who live far from the village school and who will be

staying in the hostel during the school year enabling them to attend school regularly. Students from Kabey Fo, a village about 25 kilometers from Kirtachi, will be the first beneficiaries of the project. Virginia Emmons, a Niger RPCV, and co-founder and director of Educate tomorrow, an international non-profit organization, is helping to organize fundraisers in San Francisco and Washington DC for the project. More information about the project can be found on the Educate Tomorrow website or by contacting Virginia:

www.educatetomorrow.org -or- info@educatetomorrow.org

Mark Wentling appointed USAID Program Manager in Niger

After an intensive year of advocacy on the part of the FON Board of Directors and many FON members, this summer USAID appointed Mark Wentling as the USAID program manager in Niger. Mark left for Niamey in August. Mark has had an extensive career in development and humanitarian work. Born and raised in Kansas, Mark began his career as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras (1967-1969); he continued his volunteer work with Peace Corps Togo from 1970-1973 as a construction and agricultural education volunteer. In 1974, he became APCD for rural development programs in Togo; in 1975, he was assigned to Gabon as Peace Corps Director; and in 1976 he took up the same position in Niger. In 1977, Mark accepted an appointment as a Foreign Service Officer with USAID, Niamey Department Project. For his work in Niger, he received a Superior Honor Award from USAID and a commendation from the Government of Niger. Mark has also served with USAID in Guinea, Benin, Togo, Somalia, Tanzania, and Washington, DC. After his retirement from USAID, Mark served as program director with CARE in Niger and Mozambique (1999-2003) and World Vision in a Maputo-based regional position focused on helping national offices in Africa obtain increased funding especially in the area of HIV/AIDS. Mark is the first USAID program manager permanently assigned to Niger since USAID closed its Niger mission in 1998.

FON Funds School Well Project

Friends of Niger contributed \$465 from its general fund to the Peace Corps Partnership Program to support the construction of a well in Sigurado, sponsored by PCV, E. Ross of Washington. The Sigurado's community school has over 70 children who participate in a school garden project each year. Students raise tomatoes, eggplants, corn, and other vegetables. The school director identified the need for a school well so students could have access to a clean drinking water source and for the garden project. Assistance aided in the purchase of materials needed to build the concrete well and well-apron.

Zarma & Hausa on the Web

By doing a quick search on the Internet for "Zarma Dictionary" and "Hausa Dictionary", you can find several resources. The Peace Corps Zarma Dictionary is now "officially" on the web at:

<http://www.bisharat.net/Zarma/> Many sites for "Hausa Dictionary" exist. One helpful site supported by UCLA is:

http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/hausarbaka/Download_vocabulary.html

Calling all Zarmaphones and Hausaphones to take notice!

FON Member Mary Nasibi

Medical Mission to Niger

Mary O. Nasibi, along with Stella Jeffries and Dr. Patricia Ayuk recently participated in a medical mission trip to the Tera Region. They were accompanied by members of the Bethel World Outreach Church.

FON Makes Contribution to Fraternite Notre Dame Orphanage

Sister Brigitte-Marie recently wrote to FON to thank us for our small contribution to the Fraternite Notre Dame Orphanage outside of Niamey. Sister Brigitte-Marie wrote, "I want to express our gratitude for your donation... We now have 27 children in our orphanage aged from 3 months to 10 years old... The older children enjoy going to school and playing with their friends. We want them to have a life as any other kid in the world... We also assist 30 other orphan children who live with family members like their grandmother or an aunt. We give them formula, infant cereals, vitamins, soap, clothes and other items... We have a small clinic for the children suffering from malnourishment, malaria, and other illnesses... We also help the leper village near to us... In addition to the children's daily needs, we hope to be able to get the funds necessary to build another house for the older children. God bless you."

Sister Brigitte-Marie: damien14@caramail.com

Peace Match

Are you a returned Peace Corps Volunteer eager to share your experiences with others? Or are you a classroom teacher looking for first-hand information on the culture and way of life of the people in countries served by the Peace Corps? If you or someone you know would answer yes to either of these questions, register as a speaker or as a host at: <http://www.peacematch.org>

The Peace Match Program is sponsored and administered by the National Peace Corps Association under a cooperative agreement with the Peace Corps. The goal is to increase the number of classroom presentations made by RPCVs and help teachers find speakers to visit their classrooms.

Rain for the Sahel and Sahara

Rain for the Sahel and Sahara is a private humanitarian and development organization that sponsors several projects and programs in northern Niger (Agadez). RAIN has worked with women's cooperatives and parent groups to establish businesses, grinding mills, a general store, and a women's artisan cooperative, to generate profits for schools. Recently, RAIN sponsored school gardens and school supply programs in the Air Massif and Talak Valley. To find out more about RAIN's activities write to

Rain for the Sahel and Sahara
PO Box 545
Newmarket, NH 03857

Or visit their web site at: <http://www.rain4sahara.org/>

Bonjour les amis(es) from Ibbo Daddy Abdoulaye

I was a formateur at Peace Corps Niger during the 1990s. Now, I live in the US. I was at Santa Cruz University in California and then I transferred to the University of Maryland. I would like to get in touch with my Peace Corps friends. Please contact me by e-mail and send me your news!

*Best regards,
Ibbo
ibbo_daddy@yahoo.com*

Children's Chewable Vitamins

FON continues to receive funds for the Children's Vitamin Project/Campaign. Children's chewable vitamins are purchased in bulk in the US and then sent with people traveling to Niger willing to take them in their luggage. Recently as baggage weight limits have been enforced on travelers to Niger, carrying heavy children's chewable vitamins has been a sacrifice for travelers. FON would like to thank the many Boston University students who have recently taken several large containers of vitamins with them in their luggage as they traveled to Niger for their semester abroad. Sue Rosenfeld continues to assist with the distribution of the children's vitamins in Niger. Most recently, children's vitamins were donated to the National Hospital in Niamey. Thanks to all the FON members for your continued support to the Vitamin Project/Campaign.

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

Children's Health Manual

Peace Corps Niger Health



Friends of Niger donated \$500 from the general fund to support the publication of the Children's Health Manual edited by Niger PCVs and Health Care staff for middle school children in Niger. Amanda Ree-Toubali, PCV Niger, 2002-2006, recently sent us this report on the project.

amandatoubali@gmail.com

Bill Gates once said that a community must first be healthy before any other philanthropic effort can take hold. In a country like Niger, I believe this statement to be absolutely true. The rural population of Niger accounts for eighty-five percent of its 11 million citizens - Niger claims one doctor for every 75,000 inhabitants and of these doctors, eighty-five percent of them live and work in Niger's cities. Since Peace Corps Volunteers are overwhelmingly placed in rural villages, we have a unique reach into the rural areas of the country and its most critically in need populations. One of the greatest strengths volunteers have is the ability to serve as a critical link for information and education.

With this in mind, and the love of my community and this country at heart, I designed a Health Manual for Children. The health manual contains 12 lesson plans aimed at rural or city-based literate and illiterate boys and girls from ages 8 - 16. Each lesson takes into account local beliefs, value systems, myths and fears that determine the approach communities and individuals take to managing their health. These lessons aim to excite youth with songs, games, and activities while educating them in basic health care issues. The lessons focus on weaning foods, baby immunizations, diarrhea, conjunctivitis, malaria, and individual/family health responsibilities with a special and detailed focus on HIV/ AIDS education and prevention. Each lesson is complete with the following items:

- *Discussion dialogue and questions written especially for Nigerien children of diverse backgrounds;*
- *Games and activities providing an opportunity for abstract thought while drilling the messages home with fun messages;*
- *Stories and pagivoltes directed toward both literate and illiterate children. Stories have been written and designed by the Ministry of Health, the Peace*

Corps Volunteers, Nigerien Peace Corps health sector staff and regional health workers.

- *Songs have been written to accompany each of the twelve lessons and were written specifically to enable children to have fun with the subject matter but also to further enable children to pass on what they have learned as the songs provide a valuable conversation piece.*

The songs and stories have the power to become part of a community's unique vernacular. Lessons are designed to enable students to easily recall them and to tell them to their own families and villages thereby stimulating conversation among their fiends and family about the health issues involved.

Following two years in the village working with women and children, I designed this manual with the help of two Konni regional health care workers; they provided invaluable resources. These women led "sensibilizations" for my girl's group and served as "animatrices" for a health camp I organized for 43 village children.

This project supplied 130 PCVs working in every sector in Niger, in addition to headmasters of schools and PCV counterparts working in the health sector, with a training resource on which to build youth groups in their respective regions. The manuals are available in Hausa and Zarma. Manuals were also burned onto CDs and distributed to regional Peace Corps transit houses and the Peace Corps Information Resource Center in Niamey.

Sheri Kennedy Raises Funds Through Art



Sheri Kennedy, Niger RPCV, is currently a professional artist in the Boston area. After reading about the food crisis last year in Niger, Sheri created a painting, *Tilling the Soil, Dossey, Niger*, shown here.

High-quality giclee reproductions of the painting are available for \$40 (plus shipping). Approximately \$10 for the proceeds from each print will be forwarded to Oxfam's Niger program.

Prints can be ordered at Sheri's Art-Think web site: <http://www.art-think.com>

Peace Corps Niger's Girls' Education Initiative: Young Girls' Scholarship

Program

Program:

Girls' education is a problem throughout Africa, particularly in Niger. In Niger, only one in ten women can read and write; and one in three girls attends secondary school. Most villages in Niger do not have secondary schools. If girls do finish primary school in or near their village, most do not continue their studies. Secondary schools are located far from remote villages in towns and cities where families cannot afford to send their daughters. Girls tend to stay near their villages and marry young. In 2000 Peace Corps Niger decided to do its part in ending this cycle. The Peace Corps Niger's "Young Girls' Scholarship Program" (YGSP) began in 2000, allows some talented and needy girls to attend secondary school.

Selection:

With assistance from local teachers and school directors, Peace Corps Volunteers hand out YGSP applications to schools in the areas where they serve. To qualify for the scholarship, girls must pass the comprehensive nationwide test. After reviewing the results of the test and applications, PCVs select the recipients, based on talent and need.

Support:

The scholarship covers the cost of books, supplies, living and tutoring expenses. Since girls leave their life-long homes for secondary schools in far-off towns and cities, they must live with a host family. Some of the money from the scholarship pays for these living expenses. Every month volunteers visit the recipients, hand out the monthly stipend, check on the girls' progress with the host families and teachers, and address any problems. The girls receive the scholarship for four years as long as they maintain good grades and do not become pregnant.

In addition to financial support, Peace Corps Niger organizes a yearly YGSP conference for all of the scholarship recipients. The director of Peace Corps Niger's education sector, Assalama Sidi, a mentor to all of the girls in the program, supervises the conference. The girls have the opportunity during the conference to meet their peers and to discuss pertinent and universal issues; they shadow professional women - doctors, engineers, and lawyers; and they explore the markets and sites of the Niamey, a city many have never visited. In addition to the YGSP conference, PCVs put together regional conferences to reinforce the skills learned at the national conference and acquaint the girls with their new host communities.

Laura Bacon, YGSP Coordinator, remarked after attending the national conference, "Something struck me personally and poignantly during this conference: These participants have the spirit, character, and instincts of young girls - fun, bubbly, creative, energetic, social, innocent - and yet face the expectations, like, and work of mature women. They must leave their village and family behind to attend a secondary school, a school that generally has a much higher standard than the primary school they are used to. They must navigate a new city, make new friends, and speak and write in a new language. We all understand how hard this is. And they often attempt to maintain their schoolwork while forced to pound [millet], pull water, or cook for their host family. This dichotomy between carefree child and responsible young woman is the balance, a line they all straddle."

Success:

Going to school secures a better life for each girl. It has been shown that for each year of school that a girl completes, she is less likely to raise a family in poverty. Even if she does not become Niger's first female president, she might be the only literate woman in her village. Her peers will respect her and listen to her. Most of all, her children will have no choice but to go to school.

How to Support the Program:

A donation of \$200 supports one girl's scholarship for one year. Friends of Niger has donated \$400 to this project from funds collected from its members. The FON Board of Directors would like to continue our participation at this level (or greater depending on interest) for the coming years. If you are interested in supporting this program, you may donate either to FON (see the form on page 7) or directly to Peace Corps. (Go to the Peace Corps website and click on "Donate Now." The program's code is 683-085. Or write a check to "Peace Corps Partnership Program," include the program's code on the memo line of the check and send it to:

Peace Corps
Partnership Program
1111 20th St. NW
8th floor
Washington, DC 20526

Our Next Camel Express

You can have a by-line in the next edition of Camel Express:

Tell us something interesting about yourself since you left Niger.

Tell us something about your favorite person, place, and occasion in Niger.

Tell us about an event or gathering your "stage" or group of Nigerien friends is planning.

Tell us about any current event in Niger.

Send your information/story to:

John Soloninka
2388 Glenmawr Ave.
Columbus, OH 43202

The Camel Express is the Friends of Niger Newsletter

Visit us at: www.friendsofniger.org

Or Write to us at:

Friends of Niger
P.O. Box 5823
Washington, D.C.
20016-9998

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)