



A Message from Peace Corps Director Mary Abrams

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

Dear Friends of Niger; Welcome to 2007. I believe it is going to be a great year for Peace Corps Niger even given the tight budget situation. We have been through some pretty disruptive and tough times but we are still on our feet and I believe we have turned the corner. Hopefully 2007, 45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger's uninterrupted service to Niger, will prove to be the year of the rebound.

I'm writing this as I head down the road from Niamey to Zinder, glad to be out of the office doing the fun part of the job - visiting Volunteers. The last time I wrote I had been as far east as Maradi but hadn't made it to Zinder so it is great to finally be making the trip out to the far east country. We welcomed a group of stagiaires in July. I was touched by the swearing in ceremony. I particularly loved



New Peace Corps Director Mary Abrams enjoys a meal with freinds in Niamey.

seeing Tondi [Training Director] so obviously proud of the stagiaires and all the work they had done over the previous 8 weeks. And beside me for this delightful event was Henry McKoy, Regional Director for the Africa Region, and Mary Angelini, Director of the Crisis Corps. Little did we know that just a few weeks later the halls of the Bureau would suddenly be hushed by the absence of Tondi's booming

voice and great laughter. Tondi got sick in mid-November and in late December we were finally able to get him to Marseille for much needed medical treatment - carrying with him as moral support a packet of emails and cards from many of you. He is now back and regaining the weight he lost. Julien Denakpo arrived to bridge the gap from Lee's departure to the arrival of our next "permanent" Admin Officer, Pat Nuwanyakpa. Then Yves Toudonou showed up to run the winter stage while Tondi was recovering. Julien has done everything from getting the electricity up to Hamdallaye to reorganizing the Admin Section for greater efficiency. His smile and all his great ties have definitely lit up the Bureau. We are incredibly lucky to have both of these Porto Novoians until March.

There have been a number of other happenings in my first 6 months - we have formed a Volunteer Advisory Committee; we have had a record-earning fundraiser; I have learned how to ask people to speak more slowly in Hausa. And through all these various changes and stases, Peace Corps Niger is still moving along its own bumpy road and I'm still happily enjoying the ride.

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Visit with Nigerien Ambassador Touré

On March 9, Penni St. Hilaire (FON Recording Secretary) and Jude Andreasen (newsletter editor) met for the first time with Mme. Toure Maiga, Ambassador for the Republic of Niger to the United States. Also present was her Counselor, Mr. Amadou Sounna. Penni and Jude summarizing the goals and activities of Friends of Niger, and Mme. Toure indicated that she was eager to cultivate a robust communication with the organization. She said she had met the previous day with the Miami-based organization, **Educate Tomorrow**, which is sending a

delegation to Niger in April. (www.educatetomorrow.org) The organization was co-founded by Virginia Emmons, a Niger RPCV.

Mme. Ambassador noted that collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution to promote Niger was being considered, and that she had met with Niger's Tourism Minister on promoting tourism, and particularly ecotourism, in Niger. She believes two of the worst environmental problems in Niger are desertification and proliferation of the water hyacinth, which is clogging the Niger River. (See follow-up story on pages 6-7). The meeting was congenial and a great start to what promises to be an active and open collaboration.

Later, the Ambassador's secretary, Maimouna Iro, joined the discussion. Many RPCVs may remember her, as did Jude, since she served for 25 years in the Niamey Peace Corps Office.

Update on FON's Micro-Credit Project in Niger : Tin-Hinan

Your Donation Requested!

Tin-Hinan is a non-profit registered with the government of Niger. The founder and president of this organization is a Tuarag woman, Habsatou Aboubacar. Rural women in Niger encounter enormous difficulties, among others, the dearth of revenue sources due to lack of means and time to take part in activities that will generate revenue and permit them to be financially independent. Our donation has helped finance the micro-credit operation for the women of Goroubi in the Tillabery Region to enable them to provide for their needs and the needs of their children. An important focus of this project is literacy and numeracy, since the women need these skills for any income-generating project. Women spend mornings with these classes and afternoons with the craft projects. Your donations will help purchase more materials for the women to work with and for the basic costs of the project. Sue Rosenfeld, our FON liaison in Niger, reports that she recently purchased a wonderful bag from Tin-Hinan that she uses every day.

Donating through FON is now 100% tax-deductible since we have attained tax-exempt status. For more information on this project, email Gabriella Maertens at gmaertens@earthlink.net

Other Projects Supported by FON

FON continues to contribute to other worthwhile projects in Niger, including a school well project, a children's vitamins project, and a health manual project. Former volunteers have initiated other projects, such as Educate Tomorrow, and fund-raising events. We can all help with bringing our Peace Corps experience back home and maintaining support for the people of a country that changed our perspectives forever. If you know of an RPCV effort you would like to see reported here, write or e-mail and let us know.

Niger's National Guinea Worm Eradication Program Enters Critical Period

By Stephanie Palmer

Stephanie Palmer worked as a consultant with the Carter Center to Niger's National Guinea Worm Eradication Program from June - December 2006 and will be returning in May 2007. She reports on the program's progress and funding needs to eradicate the disease by 2009.

"May Allah spit upon you!" the young girl cursed at Sani as he pressed upon the reservoir of pus that had formed in her knee where the guinea worm had been removed. Awa's mother took hold of her hands as Sani continued with the treatment. Despite antibiotics and daily bandagings, the infection had slowly grown worse until the girl could no longer walk and howled in pain at every touch. Her father worried that she would never be able to walk again, meaning that she could no longer follow the herds and would not be able to find a husband. It also meant, Sani later explained, that the family would be forced to abandon her, as each member in the nomadic Bellah tribes must be able to contribute to the family in order to ensure its survival.



Removal of a guinea worm.

Guinea worm is transmitted when an infected person enters a stagnant pond and the worm releases thousands of larvae into that water source. An intermediate host, the cyclops, then eats the larvae, which are then consumed in drinking water by humans. Although the gastric juices destroy the cyclops, they do not harm the larvae, which grow and develop in the person's abdomen. Eventually, the mature females and males mate. After mating, the males die, while the females

continue to thrive in the human's body. After 9-12 months, the female is ready to release her larvae and moves to an appropriate place in the body, often in the feet or legs. A few larvae are initially released, which causes a blister to form. This blister, once it comes in contact with water, will burst, releasing the larvae into the water source starting the cycle once again.

Although the guinea worm itself is not lethal, the wounds where the worm emerges often become infected, incapacitating the afflicted person. This means that farmers cannot take care of their

fields, herders cannot guard their animals, women cannot care for their families, and children cannot attend school. This problem is especially serious in Niger, where food supplies are tenuous and any interruption to these supplies could result in a catastrophe.

Guinea worm contamination is easy to prevent and can be achieved in several ways: those afflicted must not enter water sources to contaminate them; filters can be used to strain out the cyclops; ABATE® larvicide can be used to kill the cyclops; or, where available, the population can consume pump or well water.

Since the inception of Niger's National Guinea Worm Eradication Program (GWEP), the number of those afflicted by the disease has been reduced dramatically: from over 35,000 cases in 1994 to 110 in 2006. It has also been eradicated in all areas but the Tillaberi region, where it is still endemic to 4 districts: Tillaberi, Tera, Ouallam, and Kollo. The World Health Organization, the Carter Center, and other health agencies have demanded that Niger stop all transmission of guinea worm in 2007, which will allow the country to completely eradicate the disease by 2009. This means that the GWEP needs additional funding to provide the filters, ABATE® larvicide, and education in order to meet this deadline.



Supervisor holds a newly extracted worm.

Please support Niger's effort to eradicate this horrible disease. Donations can be made online at www.cartercenter.org under the box "Donate Now." To earmark funds specifically to Niger's GWEP, indicate in the "comments" box that the donation is to go to Niger's guinea worm eradication program. Donations can also be mailed to:

Becky Brookshire
Associate Director of Development, Health Programs
The Carter Center
453 Freedom Parkway
Atlanta, GA 30307

Checks should be made out to the Carter Center and a short note should be included that indicates the donation is to be used for Niger's GWEP. For more information on Guinea worm disease, please visit www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea_worm/location.html

"Bank for the Poor" Arrives in Niger

NIAMEY - Tucked inside a nook in the capital city's bustling Grand Marché, Niger Mutual Credit (CMI) opened its doors in October to a clientele that other banks turn away: the very poor. With microcredit, a concept pioneered in Bangladesh by economist Muhammad Yunus, entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans are provided very small sums to start their own enterprises. Here in Niger CMI relies on financial backing from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation and receives additional support from the International Mutual Credit Centre (CICM). Created in 1979 with the goal of promoting banking services for people in developing countries, the CICM has more than 17 mutual credit federations operating in central and west Africa including Senegal, Mali and Cameroon. It will cost around 3,000 CFA francs (4.50 euros) to open a bank account at one of CMI's new branches, and all banking operations, such as deposits and withdrawals are free. After three months of regular deposits, a client will be

able to obtain a 12-month loan with an interest rate of less than 2.0 percent per month.

Reported by Natasha Burley to Business in Africa

Local Populations Struggle to Diffuse Longstanding Border Disputes

In January, tensions rose between Niger and Burkina Faso as they accused each other's security forces of crossing the border to rob and harass villagers. The dispute has simmered quietly for years with government officials having held talks on border issues since 2000. But only in recent weeks had local officials started making accusations against each other. "The situation is very difficult as the exact location of the border has not been agreed on," the governor of the Sahel Region of Burkina Faso, Bila Dipama, told the UN media 'IRIN.' "Therefore we think that we must peacefully manage a buffer zone until a definitive solution can be found," he said. The buffer zone should run between the Tillaberi Region in Niger and the Eastern and Sahel regions of Burkina Faso and should be controlled jointly by the two countries' security forces. The officials also agreed to call on the International Court of Justice in the Hague to arbitrate the border dispute.

Tensions at the meeting were eventually diffused, said Mr Dipama. "Since that day local officials have started talking to one another again." Previous meetings over border issues had been between government ministers and other senior officials; this one featured mayors and prefects in the border area as well as local officials from two countries' departments of customs and forestry and wildlife services. "Many on both sides of the border were born in the region and so they know the problem very well," Mr Dipama said. "It is also going to be easier for them to get support of the population to solve the problems." The officials agreed to inform each other in advance of starting any infrastructural projects and to increase cooperation to facilitate free movement as well as to control rising banditry.

Niger's Adoption Policy Under Review

In January, adoptionblogs.com reported that although Nigerien law does not technically permit adoptions by couples with biological children, a longstanding policy of granting exceptions is under review by the Direction de la Protection de l'Enfant. The report stated that in the last seven years, no Nigerien children have received U.S. immigrant visas on the basis of being orphans adopted by U.S. citizens, and that there are no U.S. agencies placing children from Niger.

Niger Abandons Energy Privatizations After Reform

Niger has abandoned plans to privatise its state electricity and fuel distribution companies,

following World Bank agreement that reforms undertaken make privatisation unnecessary, Finance and Economy Minister Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine said.

Niger has been under pressure for over a decade to privatise state industries under reform programmes overseen by foreign donors like the World Bank and its sister institution, the International Monetary Fund. "What is privatisation for? Better management, a better product for the consumer. So if you have all this, why push people to privatise?" Lamine Zeine said in a state television broadcast at the weekend. He said the World Bank had agreed to the abandoning of plans to privatise power utility NIGELEC and fuel importer SONIDEP after the government discussed the likely benefits and drawbacks of privatisation, including the possibility of exchanging a state-controlled monopoly for a privately-owned monopoly. NIGELEC imports 95% of its power consumption from neighbouring Nigeria, Africa's top oil producer. Niger has already privatised its water and telecommunications industries.

Reported in www.engineeringnews.co.za on March 12, 2007.

Trees and Crops Turn Back the Desert

The front page of February 11 *New York Sunday Times* featured a color photograph from Ague, Niger, showing young men operating a foot pump to draw water for irrigation. The following are excerpts from the article.

GUIDAN BAKOYE, Niger - In this dust-choked region, long seen as an increasingly barren wasteland decaying into desert, millions of trees are flourishing, thanks in part to poor farmers whose simple methods cost little or nothing at all. Better conservation and improved rainfall have led to at least 7.4 million newly tree-covered acres in Niger, researchers have found, achieved largely without relying on the large-scale planting of trees or other expensive methods. Recent studies of vegetation patterns, based on detailed satellite images and on-the-ground inventories of trees, have found that Niger, a place of persistent hunger and deprivation, has recently added millions of new trees and is now far greener than it was 30 years ago.

About 20 years ago, farmers like Ibrahim Danjimo realized something terrible was happening to their fields. "Suddenly, the trees were all gone." So Mr. Danjimo and other farmers in Guidan Bakoye took a small but radical step. No longer would they clear the saplings from their fields before planting, as they had for generations. Instead they would protect and nurture them, carefully plowing around them when sowing millet, sorghum, peanuts and beans.

Today, the success in growing new trees suggests that the harm to much of the Sahel may not have been permanent, but a temporary loss of fertility. The evidence, scientists say, demonstrates how relatively small changes in human behavior can transform the regional ecology. Another change was the way trees were regarded by law. From colonial times, all trees in Niger had been regarded as the property of the state, which gave farmers little incentive to protect them. But over time, farmers began to regard the trees in their fields as their property, and in recent years the government has recognized the benefits of that outlook by allowing individuals to own trees. Farmers make money from the trees by selling branches, pods, fruit and

bark. Because those sales are more lucrative over time than simply chopping down the tree for firewood, the farmers preserve them.

They also have extraordinary ecological benefits. Their roots fix the soil in place, preventing it from being carried off with the fierce Sahelian winds and preserving arable land. The roots also help hold water in the ground, rather than letting it run off across rocky, barren fields into gullies where it floods villages and destroys crops.

Ibrahim Idy, a farmer in Dahirou, a village in the Zinder region, has 20 baobab trees in his fields. Selling the leaves and fruit brings him about \$300 a year in additional income. He has used that money to buy a motorized pump to draw water from his well to irrigate his cabbage and lettuce fields. His neighbors, who have fewer baobabs, use their children to draw water and dig and direct the mud channels that send water coursing to the beds. While their children work the fields, Mr. Idy's children attend school.

"It really requires the effort of the whole community," said Dr. Larwanou. "If farmers don't take action themselves and the community doesn't support it, farmer-managed regeneration cannot work." Still, more trees mean that Niger's people are in a better position to withstand whatever changes the climate might bring. "This is something the farmers control, and something they do for themselves," said Dr. Larwanou. "It demonstrates that with a little effort and foresight, you can reduce poverty in the Sahel. It is not impossible or hopeless, and does not have to cost a lot of money. It can be done."

Letter from an RPCV to the NY Times Editor regarding this article.

As a former Niger Peace Corps volunteer, I was gratified to read your article about local progress in reforesting the country. But I disagree that these results have come about without the efforts of the government or aid organizations. During my time in the country, I worked as an agro-forestry volunteer in a rural village educating farmers on the benefits of trees for improving soil fertility, raising water tables and deterring erosion.

In fact, for almost 40 years, hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers and government agents have worked at the grass-roots level to get farmers to adopt the practices your article describes. The fact that a Peace Corps volunteer costs the American taxpayer less than 10 percent the cost of the average soldier reinforces a lesson all volunteers learn during their time in service: how you help can be far more significant than how much.

M. Masaya Seltzer, New York, Feb. 14, 2007

RPCVs Communicate with FON regarding the NY Times Article

Joel Neuberg, Jack Saunders and I visited our old Niger PC villages last year on our way to see the March 29, 2006 Total Solar Eclipse. Along the way we met Chris, a

current PCV. Between the four of us, through many e-mails, we developed a tree planting program. (Chris did and will do most all of the work.) Two types of Acacia trees will be planted, Australian Acacia for food bearing seed and the other, for Gum Arabic, a cash crop. And neither is harvested by chopping down trees. The three of us are the initial sponsors, providing the funding for this Peace Corps project. Fields have been dedicated and the first plantings are to begin shortly. Even if the trees are not a miracle, at least the project is providing direct employment to a few Nigeriens; rather, than to the Washington DC experts. In addition to funding this PC project, or others, via the PC web site, in this modern age, we can wire funds directly to people via Western Union and we can text message our old friends and houseboys etc. Even current PC Vols have e-mail. As retirement approaches we can to continue our worldly involvement, even if only from our computers.

Sandy

I recall spending the first month of my Peace Corps service in West Africa some forty years ago working on a new USAID-funded farm school south of Maradi, Niger, while waiting for the regional office of adult literacy where I was assigned to open up. Our job consisted of putting a fence around the extensive property of the farm school; and in the evening we would chat with the newly-appointed Director on the veranda of the main building about his future plans, which included planting trees on the sparsely wooded land in an attempt to reforest that corner of the Sahel. I ended staying in Niger long beyond my volunteer duty and did not happen to see the farm school director again until five years later, at a meeting in the capital. I asked him, then, what had become of his plans for reforestation. He thought a moment, then burst out laughing. "I didn't have to do anything," he said. "Your fence was enough. The seeds were already there in the ground. The problem was that all the young plants were grazed off by goats and cattle. Once the fence cut down on the grazing, the property reforested itself."

Peter Easton, Niger 1964-1967

Very interesting, how ecology works if we let it. And I am impressed with the economic angle too. The farmers "owning" their own trees makes them better stewards, puts added value on the trees in the minds of the people. I would like to know more about this story.

Robert Potter, Niger 19

From the BBC: Niger Taking Ownership of Disrupted Island

Niger is officially taking ownership of the disputed island of Lete located on the banks of the Niger River, where its flag is to be raised shortly.

Niger and Benin have disputed the island for decades but the disagreement was finally settled in the International Court of Justice in 2005. Lete is some 60km square and its floods plains are used by nomads for grazing. There are also unconfirmed reports that the island may be rich in oil and other minerals like iron. The Niger River forms a natural border between Niger and

Benin.

The BBC's Idy Baraou, who is attending the ceremony, says hundreds of soldiers, republican guards, gendarmes, and university scholars and lecturers are expected at the event. Three government ministers will conduct the ceremony, he says.

Our correspondent says the case was referred to the ICJ in 2000 after the two countries closed their borders following a raid by Niger's army, in which infrastructure built by Benin was destroyed. The ICJ based its rulings on grazing permits awarded by the French colonial authorities in 1914. Both countries became independent in 1960 but they did not agree on sovereignty over Lete and 15 smaller islands. The ICJ awarded Benin ownership of nine of the other islands.

Nigerien Film Maker Seeks Niger RPCVs for Video Documentary

A Nigerien who was a language teacher for PC Niger (1990) is currently in the U.S. on a fellowship for foreign journalists. He sends the following message:

Since 1990, I've been a journalist and a communicator, owning a communications agency called Les Echos du Sahel, and dealing rural world and development (printing, broadcasting, training, advising, etc.). I arrived in the U.S. last June on a fellowship funded by the State Department to allow mid-career professionals from the developing world a year of rewarding experiences and studies in the U.S. One of my projects is to make a video documentary about RPCVs who are still involved with Niger in one way or another. But all my attempts to reach these folks have been unsuccessful. The idea is: after 45 years of a successful presence in Niger, some RPCVs have kept contact with their host country, in the spirit of the program created by President Kennedy. Whether they work in civil society or as individuals, I want to portray them in their daily life and show how they continue to impact and improve the reality or the image of Niger. I am currently enrolled in Broadcasting and International Development studies. I will be staying in the US until next June. Please feel free to contact me for questions if you would like to participate. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sai An Jima!

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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!

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.

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

FON Responds to Peace Corps Niger's Girls' Education Scholarship 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 support of "Young Girls' Scholarship Program" (YGSP) began in 2000, allowing some talented and needy girls to attend secondary school.

Selection

With assistance from local teachers and school directors, Peace Corps Volunteers distribute 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 and school officials select the recipients, based on talent and need.

Support

The scholarship covers the cost of books, supplies, living and tutoring expenses. Peace Corps Niger also tries to hold an annual conference for all of the scholarship recipients, which helps increase their peer support network. The director of Peace Corps Niger's education sector, Assalama Sidi, a mentor to all of the girls in the program, supervises the program and the conference.

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 significantly 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 agreed to fully fund the program for 2007, but more sustainable mechanisms must be found for future funding. If you are interested in supporting this program, you may donate to FON (which now has attained tax-exempt status) and note that your donation, 100% tax-deductible, is targeted for the Girls' Scholarship Program.

Remerciements de Tondi

In December, 2006, FON received word that Aboubacar (Tondi) Mahaman, the Peace Corps Niger training director, was gravely ill, suffering from a misdiagnosed case of hepatitis. He had been in the National Hospital in Niamey for a month with a serious liver condition, and told he would die without immediate surgery -- in France. The new PCD, Mary Abrams, generously covered his plane ticket, and volunteers, PRPCVs, friends and relatives raised more than \$20,000 more to cover his surgery, medicine and care. He has now returned to his post in Niamey, and sent the following:

Hi all, bonjour or bonsoir,

I would like to inform all of you that I am back to work after a long sick leave and I am doing well. My story is a sad one and that is the reason why I do not want to get into details, but it has been really hard for me, my family and all of you. All I know is that I would not have been sending this email today if many of you have not stepped in, in order to take the lead and give the help and support needed. When I first heard from the doctor (after a long hold at the clinic and the national hospital) that I needed to be Medvaced, it sounded to me as an impossible dream because I knew at that time I simply could not afford to do so by my own, knowing that we do not have any Medevac insurance coverage.

In my mind it was just IMPOSSIBLE. But you know my story has shown that

nothing is impossible if you do have true friends who truly love you and care truly about your health. Day after day, I just realized that if your friends care about you, they will do whatever they can to help get you out of trouble. That was how the impossible became possible and here I am.

I would like to use this note as an opportunity to thank all of you who have helped in that process and thank God. I would like to extend my thanks and recognition to the PCVs, RPCVs and their friends and families for all the help and support, especially those who have taken the lead to make this happen. One of the lessons that I have learned is that not only is it good to have true friends but also it is good to be LOVED BY PEOPLE and to have the opportunity and the chance to witness it.

I hope you will understand the feeling I am expressing here because there is no way I can thank you enough for what you have done for me. May God give me the health and strength needed to help those who have helped me. Even though life is short it really feels good to be loved. Thank you all and may God bless you. I love you all and wish you all the best.

Your friend, Tondi

West Africa's Mightiest River at Risk

The Niger River's Human and Environmental Stress Factors Being Addressed

Ambassador Toure indicated to FON that a major environmental problem in Niger is that the water flow and ecosystems of the Niger River are at risk. FON researched the extent of the problem and found that World Wildlife Fund addressed the problem recently on their Web site

http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/africa/where/niger/niger_river/index.cfm

The following is an excerpt from the article:

River flows in Africa's Niger basin are decreasing at the same time as fishing pressure is increasing, leading to drastic declines in fishery yields. Deforestation and farming of fragile soils is leading to siltation of river channels. Maintaining natural flow regimes in the river, and associated sediment dynamics, could go a long way toward relieving the pressures on the Niger River's ecology without exacerbating regional tensions over food and water security.



The original Tuareg name of the river, the third largest river in Africa, was "egerou nigereou" which means "river of rivers." The river has made human survival possible even in times of desolate drought. The river harbors nearly 250 species of freshwater fish, of which 20 are found nowhere else on earth. In the floodplains and delta wetlands along the river, a specialized flora has evolved that is adapted to extreme fluctuations in water levels. These communities support a wide variety of fascinating animals, including hundreds of

thousands of trans migratory birds.

A combination of human population growth, unsustainable resource use and development, and desertification are threatening the Niger River's ability to supply crucially needed natural resources to the people of West Africa. Habitat alterations are also threatening the rich tapestry of the ecosystem. These include dams, which drastically alter the flow and sediment regimes and destroy aquatic habitats, as well as irrigated agriculture and discharge of sewage and other pollutants into the river. The combination of these changes are creating ideal conditions for the spread of the water hyacinth, an invasive species that chokes the river channels and increases evaporative losses by up to ten-fold. Future water development in the Niger basin is likely to generate political tensions as the nine basin nations compete for control of an increasingly important resource. WWF is promoting adoption of a regional strategy for the sustainable use and development of the Niger River and related resources.

Wikipedia on Water Hyacinth

According to the online dictionary, Wikipedia, there are seven species of water hyacinth, an invasive, pernicious plant that can double its population in two weeks. They reproduce primarily by way of runners or stolons, eventually forming daughter plants, but may also reproduce via seeds. Native to South America, water hyacinths have been widely introduced throughout North America, Asia, Australia and Africa. When not controlled, water hyacinth will cover lakes and ponds entirely; this dramatically impacts water flow, blocks sunlight from reaching native aquatic plants, and starves the water of oxygen. Directly blamed for starving subsistence farmers in Papua New Guinea and Australia, water hyacinth remains a major problem where effective control programs are not in place. In some areas, the plants are being harvested for cattle food. The plants also create a prime habitat for mosquitoes, the classic vectors of disease, and a species of snail known to host the worm which causes schistosomiasis.

As chemical and mechanical removal is often too expensive and ineffective, researchers have turned to biological control agents to deal with water hyacinth. The effort began in the 1970s when USDA researchers released three species of weevil known to feed on water hyacinth into the United States: *Neochetina bruchi*, *N. eichhorniae*, and the water hyacinth borer, *Sameodes albiguttalis*. Although meeting with limited success, the weevils have since been released in more than 20 other countries.

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:

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2388 Glenmawr Ave.
Columbus, OH 43202

The Camel Express is the Friends of Niger Newsletter

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Friends of Niger
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20016-9998

Call For Support From *Friends of Niger*

May 13, 2007

Dear Friends of Niger,

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger (FON) is requesting your support for a wonderful program in Niger. For the past several years, Peace Corps Niger (PCN) has sponsored scholarships and support for 18 Nigerien girls to complete their secondary education. The Board members of FON have assisted with this program in the past with donations from our members. PCN and the FON Board members consider this program an essential investment in the future of Niger because more than 60% of all poverty in Africa is found among women, less than 1/3 of girls who complete primary school in Niger are able to attend secondary school, every year of school a girl completes dramatically reduces the chances she will live in poverty, and recent studies suggest that improvements in female literacy are crucial to development in traditional societies. In the future, the girls who participate in this Peace Corps program could become leaders in the development of their communities and resources and support for other girls.

Peace Corps Niger has reported that sources of funding for this program have diminished and has requested that FON increase our funding support for the program. Because of its importance, the FON Board members have pledged to contribute \$3,600 which is equal to a year's budget for the program. The financial support for the scholarship program amounts to \$200/girl per year, and currently there are 18 girls in the program. PCN is committed to providing the on-going infrastructure and Peace Corps volunteer to support the program. We are approaching you, the Friends of Niger, to join with us in guaranteeing the future of this crucial program. We are requesting that you pledge a contribution of 10, 15, or 20 dollars a year to this program. In addition to our financial support the FON Board of Directors has committed FON to researching with Peace Corps Niger alternative and more permanent sources of funding for this program.

As I write to you on this Mother's Day, 2007, I am reflecting on the lyrics of "Daughters" a

popular song by John Mayer that speak to taking care of the girls because our girls one day become mothers... In honor of all our mothers including our Nigerien "host" mothers, I am appealing to you for your support of this program. With your assistance, we continue to make a contribution to the development of Niger and the people we love so deeply.

Sincerely,

John W. Soloninka

President, Friends of Niger

The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

Please use this pledge form:

To: John Soloninka, President

FRIENDS of NIGER
P.O. Box 5823
Washington, D.C. 20016-9998

Dear John,

___ Yes, I want to contribute to the Peace Corps Niger/FON Girls' Scholarship Program:
Please receive my contribution of _____
(checks should be made to the order of Friends of Niger)

___ Yes, I want to contribute to the Peace Corps Niger/FON Girls' Scholarship Program
and am pledging the following annual amount: _____

___ Yes, I want to help PCN/FON raise awareness of this program and
will distribute information about this program
among my Niger RPCV contacts and others.

___ Yes, I want to help PCN/FON with this program
by coordinating a fund raising event in my community.

___ Yes, I want to help PCN/FON with this program by submitting an article
(and/or photos) to the FON newsletter, Camel Express, about my experiences
with girls' education while I was in service in Niger.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please note that a list of donations and pledges will be distributed
to Peace Corps Niger and FON members.

For your donation, please indicate one or more of the following:

My donation to this program is given:

___ In memory of _____ by: _____

___ In honor of _____ by: _____

___ Anonymously

The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
Contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 22 Issue 2



July—August 2007

Young Girls' Scholarship Program Thanks FON & Finds a Home in PC Niger Gender & Development Program

I would like to thank you again for your continued support of our Young Girls Scholarship Program. I believe that by developing a fundraising partnership, not only are we helping these young girls who so greatly deserve our aid, but I hope that we are opening the door to a bright future for the Friends of Niger (FON) and the Peace Corps Niger Gender and Development (GAD) Program.

The projects of the GAD Program take into account both the differences and the inequalities between men and women in program planning, implementation, and assessment. The roles and activities of men and women affect who does what in carrying out an activity, and who benefits. Taking account of the inequalities and designing programs to reduce them contributes not only to more effective development programs but also to greater social equity. The Young Girls Scholarship Program is the largest project of our GAD program, but our small projects take many forms - youth groups, village tree nurseries, women's gardens, nutritional education, health camps, women's fairs, art clubs, and income generating activities such as soap making, sewing, fabric dyeing, and weaving skills trainings are just a few examples.

However, we are limited in the number and scope of projects that we are able to do since we are only able to raise so much money in a country as poor as Niger. It is our hope that we could strengthen the collaboration between Peace Corps Niger and FON and greatly benefit the people of Niger by simply setting up a section of the FON website dedicated to the Peace Corps Niger GAD Program. Those interested in Niger and the obstacles it faces, and how we here in Peace Corps Niger seek to address those obstacles through sustainable development practices would have unprecedented access to what life is like here on the ground and offer a unique opportunity to make a difference by donating to the Peace Corps Niger GAD Program. I truly hope you share this vision and I look forward to working with you all in the future.

Sincerely, Travis Massar, Peace Corps Niger Gender and Development Program Coordinator

PC Country Director Mary Abrams supplied the following background on the Young Girls Scholarship Program funding and why FON support is so crucial.

The current funds from FON to PC Niger that are destined for the Young Girls Scholarship Fund came as a grant to me as Country Director and the most needy project at the time was the Young Girl's Scholarship Fund. It had been funded since its inception by the Peace Corps Partnership Program, which allows Volunteers to post proposals for specific projects for tax deductible funding by individuals in the US. The Partnership program went through



some growing pains last year and one of the results was a discontinuation of funding for projects that last longer than the cycle of one Volunteer, including the multi-year Young Girl's Scholarship Fund. The reality on the ground and need for funding the girls already in our program and others who could benefit in future years has not changed with the change in the Partnership program. So when FON offered to send some money to me as a Country Director, we opted to put it towards this very deserving and needy program. Future monies would go from FON to the GAD board to the PCVs to the girls. The PC Niger scholarship program does not fund schools or school authorities, but directly supports the students. The new GAD coordinator is Travis Massar.

Young Girls Scholarship Program
Participants at an Annual Conference.

45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger



Dear Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Niger,

The first group of Volunteers arrived in Niger on September 7, 1962. 45 years later, Peace Corps/Niger is proud to announce its 45th anniversary of collaboration and mutual friendship with Niger. To commemorate this landmark, we are putting together a series of activities that will culminate with a (a) *porte ouverte* at the Peace Corps bureau, (b) television show, and (c) special Swearing-In ceremony the week of 24-28 September, 2007. We are hopeful that Peace Corps Director Ronald Tschetter and a delegation from Washington will attend these events along with many dignitaries from both public and private sectors within Niger.

Ultimately, this celebration is about recognizing the work and impact that each current and returned Volunteer has accomplished during his/her time in Niger, and the partnerships and friendships fostered and endured over the years. In making this possible, we request your assistance. First of all, we are working on preparing a television program to air on ORTN (Office de Radiodiffusion Television du Niger -- <http://www.ortn-niger.com/>) on September 26, 2007. The program will be one hour long and include PC/Niger activities through the decades, panel discussion with locals who have been affected by Volunteers, and slideshows and video clips of Volunteers in action.

In addition to the television program, Peace Corps will have a *porte ouverte* the day of the show, to serve as a birthday celebration, with posters, media coverage and presentations. If there are returned Volunteers interested in coming back to Niger for this event, we would welcome this whole-heartedly. We are also considering other commemorative activities including a 45th anniversary *pagne*; hardbound 'photo books' that would include a selection of the best photos from RPCV submissions, arranged by decade; and t-shirts.

As a Goal 3 component to this celebration, we are interested in having an American media outlet document your work in Niger over the years. We would work through our Office of Communications and the Press Office in Washington, DC, but we also request assistance from you. If you have contacts with media outlets and would like to assist in setting this up, please let us know. Please send comments and thoughts to Christopher Burns (cburns@ne.peacecorps.gov). We look forward to hearing from you.

All the best,
Mary Abrams, Country Director, Peace Corps Niger

Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership for the year 2007 or join us for the first time. You'll find the **FON 2007 Membership & Order Form** on page 7.

Board of Directors Friends of Niger

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

FON can be contacted via the post at
P.O. Box 5823

Washington, D. C. 20016-9998

Or by e-mail at

j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net

and you will find **FON** on the web at the following Internet address

www.friendsofniger.org.

Editor: Jude Andreasen

Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at the address above.



Save the US Postal Service International Surface Mail Service (M-Bag) for Humanitarian Projects

Friends of Niger Board of Directors has joined with other groups and individuals to support an electronic petition signing to request the reinstatement of the US Postal Service M-Bag mailing overseas option that was recently discontinued. Individual members may also e-sign this petition. If you would be interested in learning more about this e-petition and signing the e-petition please see the message and internet link below.

On May 14 the US Postal Service eliminated International Surface Mail (M-Bag). This is the method many non-profits and individuals used to ship books, educational materials and other humanitarian items internationally. This method was used extensively by NPCA Affiliate Groups, RPCVs and friends/family of current PCVs in supporting grassroots efforts in many rural schools and communities in our countries of service.

USPS now offers Airmail service only, which in most cases has tripled (or even quadrupled) the cost of shipping items overseas. This has shut down many projects not only with RPCVs but other non-profits, church groups and school groups.

Several groups (Friends of Malawi, African Library Project, One World Children's Fund, among others) are working at compiling a list of non-profits and other groups who are protesting the elimination of International Surface Mail. This list will be sent to the Board of Governors of USPS as well as to Henry Waxman, the Chairman of the Oversight and Govt. Reform Committee which oversees USPS.

<http://www.petitiononline.com/zikomo/petition.html>

Women wait to be seen at the UNICEF-supported health centre in Madarounfa in Maradi, south Niger. Giuseppe Aquili/2007



Bilharzia: Waterborne Disease Blights Millions of Lives in Niger

Almost a quarter of Nigeriens suffer from bilharzia, an infection spread by swimming or bathing in water contaminated with urine and feces, according to new research by Niger's Ministry of Health.

Some three million of Niger's 13.4 million people have been diagnosed as suffering from the parasitic skin infection, also known as schistosomiasis. It causes rashes and flu-like symptoms, can create urinary problems and damage the bladder, liver, lungs, bowel and nervous system.

Parasitic diseases thrive in areas with poor water supply, sanitation and housing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). And Niger, a vast and landlocked country on the southern fringe of the Sahara Desert, has the lowest number of wells and toilets per capita in the world.

Niger's government, in conjunction with the nongovernmental organization Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI), has said it is responding to the data by constructing a new laboratory devoted to the disease in Niamey, and distributing drugs for treatment.

UNICEF REPORT FROM MARADI—April 2007

The health centre in the village of Madarounfa opened a month ago and serves 23 villages covering 39,000 people. There are no doctors in the centre, only two nurses and four medical staff. The health centre provides prenatal care, prevention of mother-to-child-transmission of HIV services, consultation for newborn babies, family planning and immunization. Around 70 per cent of all consultations are for children under the age of five. The centre is currently funded through patient fees. Adults are charged 900 CFA (equivalent to £1) and the consultation for children is half of this at 400 CFA. This explains why 1/3 of the population does not use this centre.

"In the health centre they tell us we should only breast-feed our babies because this will protect them from being ill" said Halima. Whilst most mothers breastfeed their babies, they believe that breast milk is not enough and so the custom is to give water too. Often the water offered is contaminated leading to diarrhea and dehydration. As I leave the health centre, I am convinced that education is crucial and that more women like Halima need to receive basic health information to prevent so many needless deaths.

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

Niger's Ambassador to the United States graciously met with FON Board Member Penni St. Hilaire and Newsletter Editor Jude Andreasen. She provided this biography and looks forward to continued collaboration with Friends of Niger.

BIOGRAPHY OF MRS. AMINATA DJIBRILLA MAÏGA TOURÉ

Mrs. Aminata Djibrilla Maïga Touré was appointed to be the new Ambassador of Niger to the United States of America in 2005.

From 2003 until her appointment, she served as General Secretary of the National Franco-phony Commission at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2002 to 2003, she held the position of Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Apart from four years spent as appointed Mayor of Niamey Commune II under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior from 1996 to 2002, Mrs. Touré has served her entire career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1991 to 1995, she was Counselor at the Embassy of Embassy in Bonn, Germany.

Mrs. Touré began her career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1979, after receiving a Bachelor's degree in Public Law from the University of Togo. She first served in the Legal and Consular Affairs Department until 1991. During this same period, she was able to continue her studies at the graduate level, from 1981-1984 in Paris, and from 1987-1988 in Cameroon.

Mrs. Aminata Djibrilla Maïga Touré was born in Niamey on November 4, 1955.

Update on Tin-Hinan

This report by Boston University students Mangu and Goro, a.k.a. Magali Carette and Sarah Garton, who visited, director of Tin-Hinan, a non-governmental organization supported in part by Friends of Niger.

For a week in March, we had the fantastic opportunity to live and learn with a Nigerien family in Niamey through a study abroad program with Boston University. Habsou Aboubacar, wife, mother and head of the family, is an incredible personality active in the Tuareg community working with social consciousness issues facing marginalized communities today in Niger. Habsou also runs the non-governmental organization Tin-Hinan Atelier, a women's working cooperative in the neighbourhood of Koura Kano. Two years ago on this lot, Tin-Hinan began working with a group of 21 women. The name, according to folktale, is that of the strong matriarch from which all Tuareg peoples originate. At this workshop, the women make all sorts of crafts for sale and by request: tie-dye, embroidery and sewing. The organization also provides the women an opportunity to learn how to read and write through daily lessons led by the group's managers. This means a lot in Niger where 84.7 percent of the women have never attended school, according to the 2005 World Bank report. While they work, the women are allowed to bring in and care for their small children. Habsou is an activist working with the United Nations with Indigenous Peoples' Rights, so Tin-Hinan serves women from all of Niger's various ethnic populations.

The atelier is in a building with one large workroom, where all the women work around a large table. It's a social atmosphere, where the women exchange ideas and work together on the same projects and also helping one another tend to the children around them. Along one wall is a large chalkboard for lessons. Tin-Hinan's founding members were eleven concerned Nigerien citizens: Habsou, doctors, judges and others. Their latest project is a women's micro-credit association in the village of Goroubi in the Tillabery Region, which has outside sources of funding. They are currently working with forty women and hope to double that number.

Tin-Hinan is one of a number of women's rights groups organizing in Niger, and there is still a lot of work to be done. It teaches skills, both business and academic, which women can use to start their own projects and enterprises. Tin-Hinan, a young organization, is full of ambitious projects that lack funding. Hopefully, with increased recognition, they will be able to find the funding necessary to continue to grow. To learn more about Tin-Hinan, contact Habsou at tinhinanniger@yahoo.fr or locally 96-88-42-04.



Galmi Hospital

Dear Family & Friends,

Nine months ago, Madame Souley was brought to Galmi Hospital. It took two people to carry her as she was too weak to walk. She had been having diarrhea for several weeks. It hurt to swallow because of the thrush in her mouth. We admitted her to the hospital and gave her the needed IV fluids and antibiotics. Our clinical suspicion of immunocompromise was confirmed with a positive HIV test.

She left the hospital a little stronger. During subsequent follow-up visits to our HIV clinic, we learned that her husband had left her because of her poor health and the loss of her beauty. He refused to contribute any money towards her medications or transportation to the hospital. She turned to her parents who took her in and cared for her. Following additional lab tests showing a severely weakened immune system, we started her on antiretroviral medications.

When I saw her in clinic today, I would not have recognized her as the woman we admitted to the hospital nine months ago. Her diarrhea has stopped and she has regained her appetite. When she stepped on the scale, she showed a healthy 12 kilogram increase in her weight. She looked beautiful as the feminine fat had returned to her face and torso. She had a look of hope that had replaced the despair. She continues to live with her parents, though she is now strong enough to take care of herself. Her husband has visited and asked if she would return to him now that she looks so good again. She said she is unwilling to go back to him until he comes for testing and treatment. Her 15 month old daughter was with her today. Together, we gave thanks for the restoration of health and that her daughter continues to show no sign of congenital transmission of the virus. With good management, Madame Souley can hope to live to see this daughter's children.

Thank you for supporting our efforts.

Christopher & Helene Zoolkoski, Galmi Hospital
NIGER, West Africa, May 2007



Tuareg Exhibition & Book

“Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World,” with its accompanying catalogue, is the first major exhibition in the U.S. to examine the art and culture of the Tuareg, a semi-nomadic people of North Africa. Featuring the distinctive jewelry, clothing, leatherwork, and other highly decorated items for which the Tuareg are famous, the exhibition considers the complexities of history, desert living, and the ever-changing global market. This exhibition includes more than 200 Tuareg works from collections world-wide, documentary photographs, video footage, and music. The exhibition premiered at the UCLA Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, fall 2006. After Stanford, the exhibition goes on view at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African Art, October 10, 2007–January 27, 2008. The soft cover catalogue of the same title, “Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World,” is available at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art for \$45, and both soft and hard cover editions are available on Amazon.com.



TUAREG TALES IN TIMBUKTU - Volunteers Sought:

We would like to bring to your attention a new non-profit, 'Living Cultural Storybases' which will be working with Tuareg communities later this year. This community-empowerment work is a part of a global venture against the accelerating disappearance of cultural diversity being incubated in California, supported by the Christensen Fund. The retelling of traditional and personal stories is vital for cultural transmission, group solidarity, ethnic identity and evaluation of change. We would like your support to create living networks of stories and songs for minority communities to share, celebrate and re-interpret their cultural knowledge, i.e. self-empowering narratives. This can strengthen Tuareg dialogue across the generations, between scattered nomadic groups and with their urban diaspora in their own language, Tamasheq. We are looking for skilled volunteers who would like to get involved and sponsors for our 501c(3) organization. Do contact us! Email of our local CA contact: coordinator@storybases.org
Our website: <http://storybases.org>

Mercy Corps Nominated for 2007 Nobel Peace Prize RPCV Christie Collins is Director of Mercy Corps Niger

Excerpts from an interview with Director Christie Collins on Mercy Corps Web Site

Christy Collins first came to Niger in 1975 as a Peace Corps volunteer and began working on infant health programs in small rural clinics. After her Peace Corps service ended, she remained in Niger for an additional two years working for various organizations on projects that included agriculture, forestry and water. She returned to Niger in 1993 to work on a USAID food security program and stayed until 2000, before coming back for a third time in 2005 to spearhead Mercy Corps' health and therapeutic feeding program.

What are the biggest challenges facing Niger's people - specifically its poorest families - today?

Since some of Mercy Corps' health programs are in the capital city, Niamey, I'd like to evoke the migrant families from rural areas staying in Niamey as among the poorest and most vulnerable populations we work with (since they also come from the poorest families in the rural communities). These migrants likely feel little link to the urban community, and thus do not easily seek access to public services. I don't think that many of the kids of these families go to school. Nor do family members seek medical attention unless they are very ill, as services are not free and often cost well beyond what the poorest can pay. The plight of the migrant urban poor is the most dire.

What's the one best thing you think that Mercy Corps has done since arriving in Niger?

We have supported the integration of nutrition rehabilitation programs into the operations of 92 rural public health centers, and supported community volunteers to assist the government's health staff in undertaking this work. This has led to the admission of more than 40,000 at-risk and malnourished children since the program's inception in September 2005.

How can Americans best help the people of Niger?

Keep the populations of Niger in your minds and hearts, and be proactive in finding an area to support. Be aware of the position of your representatives and senators on issues related to Africa, the Sahel, and Niger in particular. Keep abreast of news of Niger and support fundraisers for Niger activities. Many American and international [organizations] are doing excellent work in Niger. There are also important program costs for which it is difficult to find donors: for example, the cost of [effective] treatment of malaria for children is very high. I would like to make an appeal directly for a supply of these malaria treatments for children, as malaria is one of the main threats to the life of a malnourished child. It is also one of the main causes of reaching a stage of malnutrition where the child's growth and life are compromised.

What's one thing that the world might not know about Niger that you'd like to share?

I would like the public to know that there are sharp, lean, agile and animated primary-schoolers skipping to class, holding hands; persistent mothers who walk 40 kilometers round-trip for a weekly dose of treatment rations for their children; dedicated mayors who meet their constituents at the market and hold open air briefings on the community's latest news; young men and women bursting to contribute and establish themselves.

To donate, see <http://www.mercycorps.org/silentdisasters/nigerhunger/1692>

Niger Is Getting Greener!

On July 2, National Public Radio (NPR) aired a good news story about Niger and trees. You can view it at the link below, under Wild Chronicles: Trees Return to Arid Niger. Researchers have found that in areas where there were no trees, farmers are now planting and protecting them. Aid groups from Europe and the United States planted trees extensively starting in the 1980s. The government of Niger also changed its policies and let local people take ownership of the trees. And that has encouraged farmers to let the trees grow. These days, they prune them for wood rather than chopping them down altogether. "They know the importance of trees," Larwanou says. "If there are no trees here, they are in trouble. That's end of their lives." The stories vary from one village to the next, but Tappan says the result is the same: Large swaths of Niger are getting greener.

<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/climate/video/>

FRIENDS OF NIGER 2007 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

Name(s) _____

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.
**The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3).
Membership and contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.**

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 FON Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)
- I am a current Niger PCV, entitled to Free Membership
- I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

New and renewing members are entitled to one FREE copy of *Brother from Niger*

Format Choice: DVD ____ VHS ____ No Thanks ____

- 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
Format Choice: DVD ____ VHS ____
at \$20 (2 for \$35) (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 with this form to:
P. O. Box 5823, Washington, D. C. 20016-9998



FON Participation Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on Page 11.

- Will help set up local FON group
- Would participate in local FON group
- Will be local FON contact person
- Would be FON contact person for potential PCVs to Niger (contact us at the address on page 7 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

Inside THE CAMEL...

- Page 1 - Girls' Scholarship Program
- Page 2 - PCD's 45th Anniversary Plans
- Page 3 - News Bytes
- Page 4 - Nigerien Ambassador's Bio
- Page 4 - Tin-Hinan Update
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- Page 7 - Membership Form

An electronic version of this newsletter and previous editions can be accessed at <http://www.friendsofniger.org>



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



Address Correction Requested

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 22 Issue 3



November—December 2007

45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger

Peace Corps Director Tschetter Visits Niger & Joins the Celebration

Peace Corps Niger Director Mary Abrams sent the following account of the fete and the Director's visit:

Peace Corps Niger rather naively took on the task of hosting the Peace Corps Director to help honor their 45th Anniversary of uninterrupted service and the swearing in of 40 new Volunteers. It just sounded like such a good idea – who would have guessed it would have been such an adventure.

Director Tschetter came to Niger with his Chief of Staff, David Liner; his Confidential Assistant, David Miller; the Press Director, Amanda Beck; and the Director of the Office of Private Sector Initiatives (OPSI), Michelle Cangelosi. None of these people had been to Niger before and most of them struggled to imagine the life of a Peace Corps Niger Volunteer in the bush might be like. We were determined to show them all. In addition to the Director's entourage, I drove and translated for them and one of our talented Volunteers, Brittany Gallagher, was the official videographer. We were almost always accompanied by a member of Peace Corps Niger's senior staff as they are the ones that make it all happen so we wanted them to show off their work. (Continued on page 4)



Peace Corps Director Ronald Tschetter with Peace Corps Niger Staff

45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger



Letter from the President

Dear Friends of Niger,

It has been a great joy to celebrate with Peace Corps this year, 45 years of continuous developmental service with the people of Niger, building positive relationships in Niger, and weaving the threads of a global family. Let's toast together to the past 45 years and hope for at least another 45 years of collaborative service, friendship, and peace.

Friends of Niger hasn't yet a history of 45 years as an organization. Our history has had some starts and stops, some set backs and some successes. To help us continue into the future, one idea the FON Board of Directors had was to raise awareness of and support for FON by better articulating our advocacy goals, especially our commitment to the development efforts that uplift and celebrate Nigerien women. Our advocacy work and discussions led us to a fuller and richer understanding and articulation of who we are as an organization. Now in its final draft, the Board of Directors looks forward to sharing with you our FON mission, vision and advocacy goals in the next issue of the Camel Express.

A commitment to Niger and her people will continue to be the focus of our FON mission and vision. One way to support Niger and as a part of the 45th anniversary celebration, the FON Board of Directors launched an appeal earlier this year to raise funds for the Peace Corps Niger Young Girls' Scholarship Program. I'm happy to report that we met our goal and exceeded it by raising over \$4,000! Wow! I want to sincerely thank all of you who donated and to remind everyone else that next year's fund drive has already begun –so please consider a donation to this very important program.

All the best wishes for Happy and Peace Filled New Year, 2008!

John

Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership for the year 2007 or join us for the first time. You'll find the **FON 2007 Membership & Order Form** on page 11.

Board of Directors Friends of Niger

John W. Soloninka, PRESIDENT

*

Gabriella Maertens, VICE-PRESIDENT

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Penni St. Hilaire, RECORDING SECRETARY

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Larry Koff, TREASURER

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Vacant, MEMBERSHIP

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www.friendsofniger.org

Editor: Jude Andreasen

Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at the address above.



Chris Burns, APCD for Natural Resources Management at PC/Niger, sent the following summary of the festivities.

Peace Corps/Niger Celebrates its 45th anniversary

The balloons arrived at the 11th hour, 2 days prior to the event – the last hold-out preparatory detail after months of planning. 500 red, white and blue balloons with Peace Corps' logo silk-screened onto them. They arrived just days after the new American and Peace Corps flags. Not a detail was overlooked in preparing for our 45th anniversary, a celebration of 45 years of uninterrupted service and partnership with the people of Niger.

The event, on Tuesday, September 25, coincided with the visit from Peace Corps Director Ronald A. Tschetter and his team from Washington (see CD's letter on p. 1) – the first visit to Niger by a Director since 1994. The night before, 20 Volunteers hyperventilated in the bureau's conference room, inflating every single one of the balloons. The day of the event, Volunteers were out in hordes tying the balloons to anything they could – trees, railings, window bars, CD Mary Abrams' arms, etc.)

The air was frenetic on Tuesday morning; the weather stifling. Volunteers and their APCDs were busy putting the final touches on their project display stands. The 5-foot tall paper maché giraffe was moved to a nearby baobab tree so she could be feeding during the event. 10-meter long banners highlighting the event were hung for passers-by to see. Couches were pulled outside, out of the hallways, for the VIPs. The office had been freshly repainted and adorned with new wall hangings. We were ready to showcase our work.

When the doors opened at 09.00h, guests arrived to hear Volunteers and Nigeriens playing their respective instruments in harmony. Volunteers Kurt Garretson, Josh Anderson and Colin (Seabass) Massey provided a pomp and circumstance welcome, with drums, traditional violin, guitar, mandolin and banjo.

The "official" speeches began at 09.30h, with Training Manager Tondi Mahaman MC'ing the event. Volunteer Danielle Sewell started off the words of thanks, providing a heartfelt perspective on what 45 years of service means to the current Volunteer corps. CD Mary Abrams followed up and took a moment, mid-speech, to recognize all past and present staff on-hand, as well as returned Volunteers from Niger-past. RPCVs in attendance included Dr. and Mrs. Kirker from Maine-Soraa, Diffa Region, in the late 60's, and Kelly Bishop who finished his service in 2006. Five neighboring country P.C. staff members were in attendance, each of whom had a connection with PC/Niger, either as a Volunteer or staff member. They included: CDs of Benin (Sheryl Cowan), Togo (Brownie Lee), Burkina Faso (Marilyn Knieremann), and Mali (Kateri Clement), and Administrative Officer for Benin (Anne Martin). (continued on page 8)

A view from above.



Ag PCV Natalie Beck spotting giraffes at the NRM stand.





The team arrived late on a Friday night and left the following Tuesday and in those four short days they packed in a lot of experience. They managed to travel about 500 kilometers and visit 28 Volunteers, met the President of the Republic, the US Ambassador, and the FAO's representative to Niger. Director Tschetter also got sick (undoubtedly Burkina bugs, that's our story and we're sticking to it), gave out staff awards to the hardest working staff in Peace Corps, cut PC Niger's birthday cake, and wore a grand boubou made of 45th Anniversary pagne material to the swearing in. So here is the short story.

Cutting the ceremonial anniversary cake.

After arriving late, the Director was anxious to be off the next morning early for Birni N'Gaoure in the Dosso Region. There he met local dignitaries and was interviewed by a couple of Volunteers on the Birni radio station. The Volunteers translated the interview into Zarma much to the delight of everyone we saw for the following two days. The Director also visited a Volunteer working at a feeding center for malnourished children and then was hosted by her village for lunch.

We headed down the infamous Falmey laterite road, stopping to see a well-pulley project funded by Rotary International and a women's cooperative grain and fertilizer bank funded by the Peace Corps Partnership (run out of the Office of Private Sector Initiatives and a place people can find PC projects to help fund). Unfortunately the Ramadan fasting (oh did I forget to mention it was Ramadan) and heat (oh yes, it was also the mini-hot season) made the communities quieter than normal but Nigeriens still turned out to warmly welcome Director Tschetter.

We spent the night in Deytegui Moussa, with three Volunteers, a Zarma community of about 100, some drummers and singers, and a zillion West African stars scattered across the sky. The Director seemed completely at ease with the pit latrine and bucket shower amenities and joined the women in pounding millet, the men in dancing to the drums, and the kids in giggling. He also ate all the fabulous Nigerien meals the village prepared – dinner of stewed sheep, rice, and tuwo and breakfast of millet beignets and tuwo with sauce from the night before. He was an amazing trooper sleeping right through the 3h30 pan-drumming to wake all fasters for the pre-sunrise breakfast.

On our way back to Niamey, we stopped to visit a Volunteer working on giraffe conservation just south of Niamey. With the local wildlife guides, we were able to find a small herd of giraffes in just a few minutes. The group was completely taken with the tall, graceful creatures who are protected enough now that you can approach quite close. Many a photo was taken to show that small glimpse of Niger's wildlife.

The afternoon was unfortunately when the nasty Burkina Bug caught up with the Director so we left him in the good hands of one of our PC Medical Officers and finished the days events. In the afternoon we visited the National Museum with a couple of Volunteers who are helping artisan cooperatives in Niamey and Tahoua improve their marketing strategies. That evening we all (except the poor Director) ate BBQ prepared by the Niamey Region Volunteers with all the Volunteers and staff at the Peace Corps Office. Special guests at the BBQ and throughout the remainder of the 45th celebrations were the CDs of Benin (Sheryl Cowan), Togo (Brownie Lee), Burkina Faso (Marily Kniermann), and Mali (Kateri Clement) all of whom have Niger connections as well as Dr. and Mrs. Kirker (Maine Soroa in the late 60s) who are back in Maine helping with a medical clinic. Needless to say it was a wonderful night of laughter and conversation.



Wodaabe dancers at the anniversary celebration.



PCV John Anderson with master drummer Oumarou.

Monday morning found Director Tschetter well enough to meet with Ambassador Bernadette Allen, a great Peace Corps supporter, but not quite well enough to make the trek out in 115 °F heat to sign an agreement with the FAO's representative. So we left some of the group at the hotel and David Liner, Michelle, and I headed out to Winditan, just this side of Balleyara. We toured the young farmers' training center (an improvement on the style popular in the 1980s) with two Volunteers who work there demonstrating sustainable development methods such as rain harvesting, solar energy, and composting toilets. The visit was capped by signing the agreement between Peace Corps Niger and the FAO to continue such collaboration. The trip was followed by a quick stop and tour of the Hamdallaye training center where the staff had really spiffed up the grounds and the Trainees had actually waited for us to have their afternoon cookie and coffee break.

The next day was the Big Day and fortunately the miracle drugs had worked their wonders on Director Tschetter. In the morning we celebrated the 45th Anniversary, complete with balloons, banners, cake cutting, speeches, and displays. In the afternoon we enjoyed a visit to President Tandja who had many memories of Volunteers from his days as *Prefet* of Tahoua and kind things to say about President Kennedy. We then met with all the staff at Peace Corps Niger which featured the appropriate Nigerien exchange of "gifts" - true gifts of Nigerien handiwork for the Director and his staff followed by awards from the Director to certain staff for their extraordinary efforts. It was the staff who presented Director Tschetter with his *grand boubou* that later became his evening attire. The Director then met with the Volunteer Advisory Committee to hear the concerns and ideas of current Volunteers. And suddenly it was time to head to the Ambassador's residence for the swearing in of the 40 new Volunteers - 14 Education, 13 Health, and 13 Municipal and Community Development. But first - Director Tschetter suddenly decided, he had to put on his *grand boubou*. He turned out to be a pretty quick change artist, so before you knew it he was looking fabulously El Hadj-like. He definitely turned heads at the ceremony.

And just as quickly, we were back at the VIP lounge at Hamani Diori International airport. As we walked in, the local newscast was playing scenes of the Director speaking at the swearing in, David congratulating the FAO representative and all of us cutting the 45th Anniversary cake. The team was tired but very happy with the experience. Peace Corps Niger was honored to have hosted the team and we were also tired and happy to have the plane lift off. Like all the best adventures, it had been a grand but intense experience.



Volunteers with Director Tschetter

Friends of Niger and the Young Girls' Scholarship Program Form a Fruitful Partnership

**Donations from PCVs, RPCVs, and Friends of Niger
Ensure the Continued Education of Bright Nigerian Girls**

Thank-You!

A sincere thank-you from Friends of Niger and Peace Corps Niger goes out to all who contributed to the Peace Corps Young Girls' Scholarship Program campaign. A combined total of over \$4,000 has been received to date (November 15, 2007) from the following donors:
Anonymous

Frances Abrams, in memory of Robert Abrams

Jude Andreasen (81'-83')

Mary Jo (79'-81') and Peter (77'-81') Cashel-Cordo, in honor of their 25th Wedding Anniversary

Jean and Chuck Cecil (96'-99'), in memory of Jeremiah Mack

Mary Lou Cronin (76'-79')

Shari Exo (87')

Major Elisha Gray (66'-68')

H and J Fund of the Pittsburgh Foundation

Terri Hallenbeck (83'-85')

Harriet Isom (65'-67')

Matthew R. Kenney (87'-90')

Marily Knieriemen

Larry Koff (64'-66')

Paul Lorenz (72'-74')

Gabriella Maertens (64'-72')

Jane Huser Maxwell (67'-69')

Alaine Nijenhuis (87'-89')

Frances Raycroft (86'-87')

Mimi Haelsenbeck Rich (65'-67'), in honor of Niger IV PCVs

John Soloninka (90'-96'), in memory of Leocadie Agloboe Songbe

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Janet Wilgus (87'-89')



Friends of Niger and the Young Girls' Scholarship Program Form a Fruitful Partnership

**Donations from PCVs, RPCVs, and Friends of Niger
Ensure the Continued Education of Bright Nigerien Girls**



**Annual Conference Helps Girls
Connect with Peers and Mentors**



**Generous Contributions
from FON Ensures
Continuity for Higher Education
and the
Future of Niger**

How You Can Help

Contributions to our ongoing support for the Young Girls' Scholarship Program of Niger should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **YGSP c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the **Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form** (see page 11).



Chris Burns on The Festivities— continued from page 3

Director Tschetter was next in line, offering his thanks to Niger for hosting the Peace Corps for all these decades, and to the staff and Volunteers for their unbending dedication. U.S. Ambassador Allen followed-up with thanks from the American people and then passed the microphone to President Tandja's special *conseiller*.

The formalities behind us, the three Volunteer musicians played for the crowd, again along with their Nigerien counterparts. Then eight Wodaabe dancers got the crowd chanting just before the ceremonial cake was cut by Director Tschetter.

The rest of the event, people had the opportunity to walk around to each display stand and take note of Volunteer work in the following sectors: Agriculture, Natural Resources Management, Education, Health, and Municipal Community Development. Displays also included cross-sector work like Gender and Development, HIV/AIDS education, and Information & Communication Technology and radio work. There was even a display stand for the Training team, highlighting photos of Volunteers and training staff going back twenty years. Speaking of photos, a slideshow ran of photos from Volunteers who served in the 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's and today (a special thanks to everyone who contributed these gems).

By the end of the afternoon, in true Nigerien fashion, every balloon had popped from the intense heat of the sun. The event received a lot of local press; hopefully we can find a way to get some of the footage on the FON website. All in all, it was a wonderful event to celebrate a remarkable milestone.



Director Tschetter with Health PCVs Noah Mann & Kelly Devine.

Protection of the River Basins & Rural Economy—Niger & Nigeria

8 July 2007, by By Ousseini Issa in Niamey - IPS. Nigeria and Niger have more than a border in common; they also share a number of river basins that are under threat, and the responsibility for conserving them. "The degradation of land in the trans-frontier river basins of Niger and Nigeria has advanced to the point that it is undermining local and regional economies, and increasing the vulnerability of rural communities," Souley Aboubacar, Nigerien co-ordinator of the joint programme, told IPS.

Now, an initiative is underway to conserve four river basins -- Komadougou Yobé, Tagwaï-El Fadama, Gada-Goulbi, and Maggia-Lamido -- the 'Ecosystems Integrated Management Project' (Projet de gestion intégrée des ecosystems, PGIE). The PGIE is intended to restore the ecosystems of the four basins and slow desertification, rehabilitating 48,000 hectares of degraded land and reducing rates of sedimentation by about 35 percent -- notes documentation for the project.

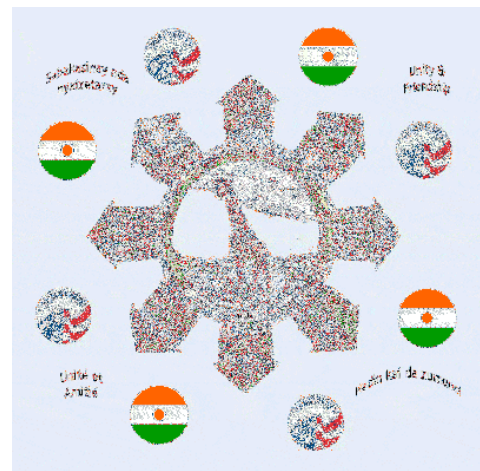
"These regions overflowed with a mosaic of ecosystems of great biodiversity, (and) plants...about 400 species adapted to the Sahelian environment," says Emmanuel Oladipo, PGIE regional co-ordinator. With the shortage of arable land and grazing areas in trans-frontier regions, the project also aims to help communities make sustainable use of natural resources and share these equitably.

The border situation has led to a worsening of poverty amongst people in the river basins, leading to tensions over use of the few remaining natural resources, says Seidou Amadou, principal technical counselor of the PGIE. Communities will be directly involved in implementing the project through attending to degraded land, and helping to conserve biodiversity, according to Oladipo: "From now until the end of the project, in 2013, we also expect at least 50 percent of communities to master good practices for management of natural resources."

The project is being carried out in 24 pilot villages in the two countries, and will affect over 12 million people, mainly crop and stock farmers. The basins cover a surface area of approximately 100,000 square kilometres and traverse the states of Borno, Yobé, Gigawa, Katsina and Sokoto in Nigeria -- and the regions of Tahoua, Diffa, Zinder and Maradi, in Niger. Aboubacar puts the cost of the project at 29 million dollars. It is jointly financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and Niger and Nigeria.

Like the Colorful Anniversary Cloth You See on the Front Page?

Pagnes are still available for \$4.50 each (2 yards) plus shipping. See basic commemorative anniversary cloth design at right. Contact Chris Burns directly at CBurns@ne.peacecorps.gov and he'll let you know the cost of shipping and where to send the check. Go to the online newsletter at www.friendsofniger.org to see it in color.





Ag PCV Alex Towns showcasing her women's cooperative's sesame oil.

More Photos of the 45th Anniversary Celebration



Program & training Assistant Haoua Noma showing off the Natural Resource Management (NRM) display stand.



Safety & Security Coordinator Kabirou Amusa with his three children.



The new flags near the VIP couches for the dignitaries under the tent..

Photographs of the 45th Anniversary provided by Suzannah Johnston, Christopher Burns and Jennifer Burns.

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- Will help set up local FON group
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Other _____

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Editor: Jude Andreasen

An electronic full-color version of this newsletter and previous editions can be accessed @ <http://www.friendsofniger.org>



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