

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 23 Issue 1



April—May 2008

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

The idea of the Peace Corps's Gender and Development (GAD) program sprang from years of practice and observation of the unequal roles of men and women throughout the world. Though not in every Peace Corps nation, its objective is to address the great educational, health, and economic disparities between men and women in countries that suffer these inequalities the most, and has been functioning in Niger since 1997. The program's idea is to support Peace Corps volunteers working with community leaders in the field to give women more control over their personal and economic well-being and that of their families. GAD activities include health education, literacy campaigns, income generating programs, education advocacy, and others.

On Thursday, March 13, 2008, the Peace Corps and other members of the American community in Niger gathered together to celebrate the achievements of the program's projects and to raise more funds for the coming months. Silent and live auctions highlighted by an American community talent show raised over 2.9 million CFA (about \$6500). These funds will be distributed over the next six months to volunteers for projects seeking to address GAD's principles. Some examples of these projects include women's gardens, income generating activities such as sewing, crafts, and soap-making, colorful school map and nutrition murals, girls soccer tournaments, radio shows, and literacy classes.

Funding for GAD projects requires that the community contribute at least 15% of the project's budget through in-kind, labor, or financial means and that the project is strongly sustainable. The best GAD proposals involve the transfer of skill, the consideration of the family as a whole, the education of men, women, boys and girls, and the potential for community growth. Volunteers take maximum advantage of the availability of these funds for their projects, and they will need further replenishing *soon*.

The Young Girls' Scholarship Program, funded in large part by the Friends of Niger, is one of GAD's core projects. The Young Girl Scholars that are sponsored by FON and the GAD program receive monthly stipends, as well as school uniforms, materials, and books to make their formative moments in adolescence productive and fulfilling. On behalf of Peace Corps, thank you so much for your continued, much-needed, and much-appreciated support.

By Mark Seaman, Coordinator, HIV/ AIDS & Gender Development Programs, PC Niger



LEFT: YGSP Participants do a job-shadow at a Maternité.



RIGHT: Participants Rabi, Maimouna and Mourja.



Dear Friends of Niger,

2007 was a year of particular note as the 45th uninterrupted year of partnership between the Peace Corps and the people of Niger. We are very proud of the work accomplished across those 45 years and we hope to have many more AND to eventually be able to say that our partnership has reached its goal.

Unfortunately, 2007 has not been a great year for security and stability in Niger. In February, the rebellion in the North resumed and continued to disrupt assistance and daily life there throughout the year. The result is reduced activity in, information on and access to this otherwise vital part of Niger. It also suspended PC Niger's discussions on returning Volunteers to the North for work in the Agadez region. This is a sad and unfortunate drain on resources and energy for all of Niger.

2007 ended with several serious incidents involving landmines in the southern part of the country. The incidents were in urban centers – Maradi, Tahoua, Dosso, Tanout, and Niamey, and several innocent civilians were killed. We have not had any incidents since January 8 and we are determined not to let these malicious activities slow down the good work of PCVs working side by side with Nigeriens.

I'd like to highlight a sampling of the positive energy that we continue to bring to and find in Niger – and in this newsletter I'm going to focus on education.

First we have been very fortunate to receive donations from the Friends of Niger and others that we have directed to our Young Girls' Scholarship Program to support 18 young girls as they work through their secondary education. We have used that money to support the girls directly and also to prepare and produce two conferences for the girls in the program (in Niamey and Zinder). These conferences bring the girls into the regional capitals and provide life and education skills sessions while introducing the girls to successful women role models. The conferences provide a unique experience, and are often the first exposure a girl has to other female students struggling with the same difficulties in the educational system.

In addition, we have a program that helps primary students elect and support student governments. This program has been a huge success, starting in Kollo with one PCV, her counterpart, and 12 schools and now spreading as far as east of Maradi. The students elect their own student government in a process virtually identical to the one used to elect the municipal and national governments and then the elected governments actively work with the school administrations. I witnessed the election of a student body president, and the seriousness of the students and the effort their parents and teachers brought to helping them understand basic civics was truly moving. This is an excellent blend between our Education and our new Municipal and Community Development projects as it helps community members learn about their roles and responsibilities in government.

We also have a program on environmental education that was started by one PCV who extended for a third year to try out the NASA-

(Continued on page 3)

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

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and you will find FON on the web and this newsletter in FULL COLOR at:

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Editor: Jude Andreasen

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



Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership or join us for the first time. You'll find the **FON 2008 Membership & Order Form** on page 7.

Message from Peace Corps Niger Director Mary Abrams (cont'd)

sponsored GLOBE environmental education system. This system teaches students and teachers how to monitor and evaluate their physical and biological environment. The first PCV left the program in the excellent hands of a couple of PCVs who were moved to Niger when the PC program in Guinea was evacuated. These two not only expanded the program in Niamey but developed (and translated into French) a manual that they used to host a workshop to train other PCVs and counterparts. Now many of our Natural Resource Management PCVs are actively using the manual and bringing real environmental education to even small bush villages. PCVs, teachers, and students all love the program.

Please remember education is not our only work here at PC Niger – we continue to do much more. Because there is such a need for education and the exchange of information is so rewarding, PCVs incorporate some form of education into their work regardless of their primary project. In the next Camel Express we'll highlight some of our other work. In the meantime, the "cold" season is over and the days are now routinely over 105°F and we are moving into the "Hunger Season," that tough part of the year when many people don't have enough to eat. The drastic drop in the value of the dollar and the similarly steep rise in the price of petroleum have exacerbated this already difficult time of the year by causing a significant increase in the cost of staple foods.

That is all for now, as Garrison Keeler always says – Be well, do good work, and stay in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

All the best, Mary M. Abrams
Country Director, Peace Corps/Niger



PCVs help primary students elect & support student governments.

RPCVs Dedicate Retirement to the Maine-Soroa Hospital Project

Four people, including three Americans, have traveled to the village of Maine-Soroa to provide Nigeriens with much-needed medical assistance. Dr. Bill Kirker and his wife Barbara, Dr. Steve Humphrey and Dr. Orietta Barquero. Their mission is to revitalize a hospital which the Kirkers worked to establish during their Peace Corps service in the 1960s. They were forced to leave due to civil unrest, and the hospital slowly deteriorated over the years. Now, with the support of the Nigerien government and nonprofit organizations like Med-Share International, they are dedicating their retirement to expand the hospital's services. The Kirkers established KAMRA (Kirker African Medical Relief Association) to fulfill their mission. KAMRA's immediate goals are to assure a regular supply of expendable supplies from MedShare as well as equipment as the hospital expands; assure a regular supply of critically needed medicines from Medical Assistance Programs (MAP) International (www.map.org); obtain additional equipment to support the work of U.S. doctors providing short-term specialist services; and obtain funding for a new nutritional program for patients.

In June 2007, MedShare shipped a container full of much-needed medical supplies to the remote village in Eastern Niger, near Lake Chad. The shipment allowed the health-care providers at Maine-Soroa to vastly increase their patient capacity and quality of service. The shipment contained disposable items such as bandages, syringes, disinfectant and surgical instruments, as well as blood pressure meters, laryngoscopes, and a blood gas analyzer.

The hospital lacks air conditioning and adequate lighting, and record-keeping is done by hand. However, the Government of Niger is doubling the physical size of the hospital, upgrading its infrastructure and increasing the number of Nigerien personnel assigned to the hospital.

To donate to KAMRA, send a check made out to National Christian Foundation to: KAMRA, 4840 Forest Drive PMB 156, Columbia, SC 29206 and note KAMRA Fund on the memo line. Your donation will be earmarked and directed in full to KAMRA.

Friends of Niger Mission Statement

Friends of Niger (FON) supports a variety of activities for the benefit of Niger, Nigeriens, and the membership of FON. These activities seek to foster education, community development, socio-cultural activities, and the promotion of understanding and goodwill between Niger, the United States of America, and the citizens of both countries. FON's support for these activities include but are not limited to food assistance, education, health and social welfare, environmental restoration, and advocacy on behalf of Niger and Nigeriens. FON concentrates its efforts and resources on projects, programs, and advocacy activities which engage and support local initiatives, address an under-served population, have a sustainability component, and can provide periodic reports including financial reports; additionally, FON seeks to provide moral support to Peace Corps Niger and currently serving and returned Peace Corps Volunteers and financial support to those activities which have Peace Corps Niger sponsorship.

Friends of Niger Advocacy Statement (2007-2010)

Friends of Niger (FON) is committed to the future of Niger and her people. Considering UN reports that indicate that women endure more than 60% of the poverty in Africa and that Niger ranks among those countries in which women suffer disproportionately to men, along with a recent study of change in traditional societies (Harrison, The Central Liberal Truth) that states that the key to change in Africa is "improving female literacy," and responding to the personal experiences that FON members have had with programs that support women and young girls in Niger, FON while committed to supporting a variety of development and socio-cultural activities in Niger seeks to explicitly promote those programs and projects that advance the potential of Nigerien women particularly highlighting those activities devoted to economic opportunities for women (micro credit programs) and women's education (basic literacy, vocational/technical and formal education). Furthermore, FON is committed to raising awareness among its membership and others concerning the issues confronting Nigerien women and advocating on behalf of Nigerien women and the activities that seek to address their issues. During 2007-2010, FON pledges to intentionally support development activities that directly and specifically promote the well-being of Nigerien women and their families.

Children's Chewable Vitamin Project Update

Sue Rosenfeld reports from Niger that a big supply of vitamins were transported to the pediatric ward of Niamey Hospital on Mouloud (March 19) by Waikwarai (Phoebe) and Tanko (Charles). The interim administrator, Zeinabou Oumarou, received them in her office, where they built a pyramid of the 33 bottles for a photo. The 33 bottles each contained 300 vitamins for a grand total of 9,900 vitamins! In December, Dr. Lydia Englehardt, a volunteer physician at Galmi Hospital, was able to purchase and carry \$120 worth of the pediatric vitamins. FON continues to ensure that your donations for vitamins are well-spent by arranging for them to be hand carried and delivered. To donate please see the form on page 7.

A Heartfelt Thanks to the Manhattan Theatre Source (MTS) for Supporting the YGSP

FON received a \$2,000 donation from the MTS (www.theatresource.org) for the Young Girls' Scholarship Program in January. The group raised the funds as part of the 8th Annual EstroGenius Festival for the YGSP in Niger. One of the festival's former volunteers, Ginger O'Neill, is a current PCV in Niger, and has sent stories created by young Nigerien women to be performed by NYC teenagers as part of their Voices of Africa program. Mohamed Seidou, Executive Secretary of the Consulate of Niger, attended the performances. Lanie Zipoy, Co-Executive Producer of the Festival, said, "We have even bigger plans for next year."

Niger Scrub Becomes Last Sanctuary for Giraffe Herds



by Staff Writers Koure, Niger (AFP) Dec 30, 2007

The last West African giraffes have found a refuge in the acacia scrub just one hour's drive outside Niger's capital Niamey. Far from poachers and other predators, babies in tow, they extend their long necks to grab a mouthful of thorny acacia bush.

Since hunting was banned ten years ago, these giraffes have found a haven of peace in the tiger bush scrub here. At the end of the last ice age 10,000 years ago, when the Sahara was still green, giraffes could be found all the way across North and West Africa, from Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal, down to Cameroon.

Just a century ago they still could be found in Senegal, Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria but their numbers have diminished dramatically since then. Now, apart from a few animals in Mali, the only viable herds of *Giraffa camelopardalis peralta* are here in Niger.

Their record of coexistence with the local population has had its ups and downs. In 1996, after a decade of intensive poaching and the severe drought of 1984, their numbers had fallen to just 50 animals. Now there are around 170 of them, according to a recent census by the Association to Safeguard Giraffes in Niger (ASGN). If we lose these ones that means the end of the peralta sub-species," warned Jean Patrick Suraud, ASGN's scientific coordinator. "We don't kill giraffes any more. We look after them like we look after our children," said Amadou Yacouba, the chief of Kannare village in the heart of the giraffe zone. The giraffes are not afraid of humans and so they come right up to the huts in the village. "We see them crossing the school yard like top models," a village teacher said.

The giraffes are gaining notoriety in other ways. For the past few years guides and researchers have been baptizing the offspring. Armed with patience and a bit of good luck, the ever more-numerous tourists who come here can meet "Patricia" or "Siddo" in the middle of the bush. In 2003 local peasants went as far as wearing mourning dress for two giraffe calves offered by Niger's president to one of his African counterparts and who perished on their way.

But cohabiting with the giraffes is not always easy. "Sometimes the farmers get mad because the giraffes are eating their bean harvests," explained Kimba Ide, a tour guide. "To put things into perspective we explain to them that hippopotami are protected and yet they are more dangerous than giraffes and do more damage," Ousmane Zodi, another ASGN worker explained.

To encourage local people to protect giraffes ASGN and its partners, including Doue la Fontaine zoo in France, have provided bore holes, cereal banks, grain mills, seeds and fertilizer. The women get interest-free loans to help them set up small shops.

But despite the new giraffe-friendly mood in Koure, the peralta giraffes still face challenges: deforestation is destroying their habitat, while one or two have perished in road accidents.

Editor's Note: While the article doesn't mention it, Peace Corps Volunteers in the Natural Resources Program have been involved in the giraffe project, contributing their energy to the survival of these elegant mammals.



Friends of Niger: The Last Ten Years

Those attending the 35th Anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger in July 1997 were moved to revitalize the almost defunct Friends of Niger group, which had been started by Meredith McGehee; a balance of \$6,000 remained in a bank account in Washington, DC. The process took almost a year and now ten years later seems like a good time to look back and celebrate the accomplishments of Friends of Niger as Niger has just celebrated the 45th anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger.

1998 - Jim Schneider, as Acting President, formed an Interim Executive Committee and an election was held in June.

2000 - The newsletter and website are up and running. FON received an award from NPCA for its newsletter, which was produced by Jim Schneider. Membership was up to about 160 paid dues. Annual income and expenses were running round \$5,500.

2002 - The October trip to Niger for the 40th anniversary of the Peace Corps resulted in the documentary entitled Brother from Niger, which was produced for Canadian television. It was first a video and later a DVD fundraiser for FON projects in Niger. 500 pounds of children's chewable vitamins were personally distributed to the hospital in Niamey, the Notre Dame Orphanage in Niamey, and the hospitals at Galmi and Maradi. The group also visited the Mata Masu Dubara operated by CARE Niger to see first hand the benefits derived for FON's contributions of \$1680. They were also able to visit MICA's Oxcart Project in the Maradi area, which received \$2,300. That year we also developed the T-shirt fundraiser and contributed to a Peace Corps Partnership program in Niger

2004 - The FON meeting in conjunction with the NPCA National Convention was a wonderful social gathering of Niger volunteers and featured information and exchange sessions for RPCVs and Nigeriens. FON continued its contributions of chewable vitamins, the Oxcart project, and CARE Niger's program Mata Masu Dubara. FON also provided \$500 to fund a local organization providing relief for women and children, ORUCWOCA.

2005 - Famine relief efforts. FON played an important role in informing our members and the general public about the devastating effects of the famine in Niger. They were encouraged to support the efforts of NGOs operating in Niger and many private fundraisers were organized and publicized through the web site and the Camel Express.

2006 - Donation of \$1000 to the Tin Hinan micro-credit project. In order to assist 20 women in Goroubi, in the Say - Tillabery region, a fourteen-month project that ended in March 2007.

Donation to the Fraternite Notre Dame Orphanage and donations of chewable vitamins to the National Hospital in Niamey.

Donation of \$500 to insure the publication of a Peace Corps Volunteer Health Manual for children.

Donation of \$3600 to support the education of 18 Nigerien young women for the 2006 - 07 school year. Educate Tomorrow events in 2006.

FON advocacy efforts to reopen the USAID office in Niamey were rewarded when Mark Wentling was sent to Niger as USAID's permanent program manager.

2007 - Donation of \$3600 to support the education of 18 Nigerien young women for the 2007- 08 school year. FON also received a donation of \$2,000 from the Manhattan Theater project to continue funding the Young Girls Scholarship Program. The Theater Group raised the money from a production "Voices of Africa" which was written by Nigerien students under the direction of a Peace Corps volunteer.

It is evident when you look at the FON web site now or read the Camel Express that FON serves as an important connection for a number of other projects such as Art Think -- painting to feed Niger, Educate Tomorrow, Rain for the Sahel and Sahara and the Niger Guinea Worm Eradication Project, to name a few, all working to improve the lives of the Nigerien people. FON also has an important role in informing our members and the general public about issues important to the Nigerien people. FON is proud of its service over the past ten years and pledges to continue to serve the people of Niger in the years to come.

FRIENDS OF NIGER 2008 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 Young Girls' Scholarship Program activities with a Contribution of _____
- I want to support FON's Microcredit in Niger 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



Zali, YGSP participant, with her school notebook.
BELOW: Participants of the YGSP learning study skills.



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

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



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 23 Issue 2



August—September 2008

Niger RPCV Makes A Difference

Northeastern University Professor & Students Learn & Contribute to Village Development in Niger

[Excerpted from "Students' Enthusiasm Leads to a Life-Changing Journey" by Kristin Stanley: Northeastern University Arts & Sciences Chronicle, Spring 2007].

When Political Science Professor William Miles set out to teach his undergraduate Politics of Developing Nations (PDN) course for the first time at Boston's Northeastern University (NU), he never expected that the experience would physically lead him across the globe back to West Africa, a region he had come to know well since his days in the Peace Corps. As a specialist in borders, development, and decentralization, Miles had returned many times to Niger, where he had served as a Volunteer from 1977 to 1979. But his students' untraditional, yet typically NU reaction to studying development prompted a trip unlike any other he had made.



Students wanted to apply their classroom knowledge in an effort to make a real impact on the lives of the people whose world they studied in the course. But, exactly how does a student in the wealthiest, most-developed country in the world make an impact on those living in the poorest country on earth (according to the Human Development Index of the United Nations)? With money, of course! The class was spurred into

action by what they heard from Professor Miles, and set out to spend their own money on some very unusual purchases: bulls and carts to support the people of two Hausa villages, one on each side of the Niger-Nigeria border.



(Continued on centerfold pages 6—7)

Professor Miles and his students in a Niger village.

Letter from the President



Dear FON Members,

The membership of Friends of Niger continues to grow with committed and giving individuals. We are now close to 200 members and each year new members join us. Our friendship, support, and advocacy on behalf of and with Niger and Nigeriens remain strong. On a recent trip to Washington, DC, I had the pleasure to make a courtesy call on the Niger ambassador, Her Excellency Mrs. Toure A. D. Maiga, and the Niger embassy counselor Sounna Amadou. We discussed the activities of Friends of Niger, and how we continue to promote Niger and her people with our limited resources but heartfelt desire to remain a part of the Nigerien extended and global family. Ambassador Toure made some excellent suggestions for us as an organization that you will be hearing more about in future editions of the Camel Express. She encouraged us to increase the number of Nigerien organizations that we partner with especially women's organizations and the possibility of connecting with the Nigerien communities throughout the United States. Ambassador Toure was very supportive of the activities of Friends of Niger and expressed her sincere wishes for FON's continued involvement and partnership with Niger and Nigerien organizations.

One of the main activities of Friends of Niger the past two years has been the promotion and financial support of the Peace Corps Niger's Young Girls Scholarship Program. We've highlighted the work of this program in past newsletters and on the FON website. The Nigerien girls who have received these scholarships will continue their education thanks to the generosity of many FON members. Additionally some of our FON members made it possible for us to receive special grants and funds from their employers and other funding agencies. Please receive my sincere personal thanks and the thanks of the other members of the FON Board for this outpouring of financial support. FON's involvement with the Young Girls Scholarship program will continue in the coming year.

It's nothing new that FON members once they leave Niger find very personal ways to be involved with their Nigerien host families and villages, and we celebrate with you your on-going personal connections to Niger. In this issue we would like to acknowledge two individual contributions our members have made and are making in Niger. Read about Professor Bill Miles, (77'-79') connecting his class at Northeastern University with his Niger family and village, and 17 year old Bowen Kelley's well project in Saabu Dey. We want to share your experiences, too. So please write to us.

Finally, I would like to encourage your participation in the FON election of members for the Board of Directors. We have included in this issue a self-nomination form for members to consider.

Peace,

John Soloninka, (Niamey, LWR, 90'-96') FON President

Board of Directors Friends of Niger

John W. Soloninka, PRESIDENT

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Steve Bushell, MEMBER-AT-LARGE
WEBMASTER

*

Sue Rosenfeld, MEMBER-AT-LARGE
NIGER LIAISON (RETIRING)

*

Jude Andreasen, MEMBER-AT-LARGE
CAMEL EXPRESS EDITOR

*

Vacant, MEMBER-AT-LARGE

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well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at the
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Expanding Lives Brings Young Nigerien Women to the U.S. for Training

Expanding Lives is a new organization which sponsors short-term educational conferences for young women from Niger in the U.S. Two board members are RPCVs (Rachel Sonnenshein Mossi, Tillibery, and Guidan Roudmji, Tahoua, Niamey). Expanding Lives has taken stock in the learning that takes place when one is exposed to new ideas, language and culture. Their goal is to support young women so that they can use this type of learning experience to become leaders when they return home. To this end, they expose young women who are succeeding in school to as many new skills and ideas as possible that may have value on their return home.

The first group of participants learned to ride bicycles, opened e-mail accounts, and produced a short newsletter. They began peer mediation, community health and leadership training, and visited Chinatown, a bee farm, and a community garden. They are taking formal classes in Senegalese dance and yoga and will begin courses in HIV/AIDS prevention and victim advocacy, CPR and first aid, democracy, and grant writing during their 6-week stay.

The organization is seeking financial help and support for the returning participants. They would like the information to reach RPCVs this year who served in Aguié, Maradi, and Niamey and would like to connect with their "hometowns." If you would like more information, please look at their website and e-mail Leslie Natzke (1987-1990) at mail@expandinglives.org
Web site: www.expandinglives.org.

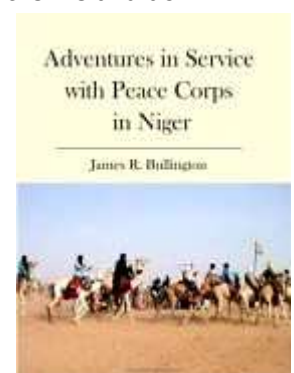
BOOK REVIEW

Adventures in Service with Peace Corps in Niger by James Bullington (BookSurge, 2007, 215 pp. \$16.99; Amazon.com) Excerpted from a review by Henry Mattox, co-founder and former editor of *American Diplomacy*. The author and current editor, Jim Bullington, had a Foreign Service career followed by service as Peace Corps Director in Niger (2000- 2006).

The author of this informative collection of well-organized and clearly written essays treats of two subjects not widely addressed or even thought about in these days of so much focus on terrorism and Middle East wars and rumors of wars. The country of Niger, peripherally linked with the war in Iraq through supposed efforts to obtain WMD materials, has been little noticed by the rest of the world since it gained its independence from France in 1960. The other story line concerns America's Peace Corps, that President Kennedy created by Executive Order back in 1961. While by no means as little known to Americans as the nation of Niger, the Peace Corps nonetheless in recent years has received relatively little publicity and attention. Nothing finer than this compendium could be found to inform the reading public about the life of Peace Corps Volunteers and their accomplishments in sub-Saharan Africa. About 2,800 Americans, mostly young people, have served there over the years with the Peace Corps. More than 400 of these Volunteers took up their duties in the country under the leadership of Ambassador Bullington during his tenure in Niamey as Peace Corps Director.

The author provides a stream of graphic descriptions of the country and accounts of the life and activities of American Volunteers in Niger, with many illustrations, covering topics ranging from a to z: from Agadez to Zinder, from agriculture to zoology.

Niger, as varied and interesting a nation as it is, poses hardships for those living there, including an 8-month dry season with incessant hot winds and temperatures reaching 120 degrees. This volume serves well to emphasize the fortitude of the PCV's under the leadership of the author, who all strove to better conditions in Niger.



German Aid Worker Photographs the Air ***Ine Stolz Works to Improve Agricultural Yield Until the Political Situation Makes the Air Off Limits to Foreigners***

Until the Tuareg rebellion resumed in February 2007 and all foreign projects left the region around Agadez in Northern Niger, Ine Stolz of the German development cooperation was helping hundreds of farmers to improve their yields in gardens in the oasis throughout the Air Mountains. Ine Stolz spent three years in the region organizing farmer field schools (FFS) with local sedentary Tuareg people living from their animals (sheep and goats) and vegetable gardens. As FFS members, the farmers have personal responsibility for all aspects of its operation from the inception. Compared to the traditional system of information transfer adopted in Sahelian countries, directed top-down from researchers to extension agents and then to farmers, FFS are a direct, decentralized and more effective and therefore sustainable development tool. The farmers are empowered to rely on their experiences and observations and make their own decisions about managing their environment.

In 2006, an intensive training was held in Agadez for 20 facilitators who were chosen during a participatory rural appraisal to later direct the FFS. The facilitators were trained in all relevant themes, including: how to set up and run agricultural cooperatives and associations, the use, safe application and role of fertilizers and pesticides, biological control and how to prepare organic manure, common pests and diseases, etc. After that training, pilot FFS in three villages in the Air Mountains, each including 30 gardeners who voluntarily joined, started operating. The original facilitators trained the new gardeners in new techniques of production and crop protection, including composting, soil preparation, fertilization, optimal plant spacing and cultural methods of pest control. Knowledge was transferred using experimental plots where different methods were compared with each other and with the traditional method. Farmers who participated in these pilot FFS then had the knowledge to become facilitators of new FFS in neighboring villages.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, increased production was noted. For example, a typical yield for a 100 square meter garden planted in potatoes had been about 83 kilograms. Using improved techniques and 2.5 kilograms of manure raised production to about 167 kilograms of potatoes.

Information on the work of the FFS was broadcast by the local and national radio, the press and, during National Farmers Day, on national television. Unfortunately the rebellion put an end to all future interventions and currently the region is closed by military.

Ine Stolz made many friends in the Air and took many beautiful photographs. She gave permission for us to include some of them in this issue. She is currently in Germany, and still hoping to return and continue working with the farmers in Niger when the region stabilizes.



Photos by Ine Stolz.



Photos by
Ive Stolz



Northeastern University Partnership with Niger Donations from Students and RPCV Professor Have a Mutually Beneficial Impact

Miles never expected this reaction to his lectures and slides but his students viewed the activity as second nature. "The practice, the experience, this is what NU is all about," they told him. Professor Miles was hesitant at first about incorporating a fundraising activity into his course. He experienced a "professional crisis of conscience." As a teacher, could he really encourage his students to take money out of their tuition-depleted pockets and support the betterment of faraway villagers? Would some students feel pressured by their peers into donating? Would the activity itself politically polarize the classroom? He had personally supported the area for the last 30 years through financial contributions as well as his scholarship but was it appropriate to encourage the students to follow his lead? In the end, the students' enthusiasm overwhelmed his qualms.

Michael Norman (African-American Studies '05) had been the first student to step forward, writing out a check for the entire class to jump-start the money transfer before the rainy season set in and delayed operations. Michael trusted that his fellow students would simply pay him back – which they did. "For me, the minimal amount of money that we were contributing to the village meant so much to them, while for us it meant not going out for a weekend or buying a less expensive pair of shoes." Students from the Fall '05 PDN class aspired to match the funds provided by Michael and their other predecessors. So began a domino effect of generosity.

The Political Science department contributed matching funds and drafted development proposals to guide dispensing of funds. The graduate students (by coincidence, all female) were particularly sensitive to the issue of widows in the villages, who occupy a marginal status in village society and receive no income. It was essential to keep in mind that the close proximity of these two villages made it necessary to support both equally, lest either one feel slighted. The contribution of the Political Science department, faculty and students, made this equitable distribution possible, and after many months of careful planning, hard work and personal sacrifice, a plan and funds were in place for implementing the project.

Professor Miles, personally well connected in the region, traveled over the spring break period to buy two bulls, two carts and 28 goats. A livestock expert from each village accompanied him to the outlying open-air market. He put in an order with the metal maven of each villager for a custom-made cart – each one bearing the NU name (in English in the Nigeria village, in French in the Niger village.) Funds were also allocated to primary schools in each village for purchasing basic school supplies such as chalk and pens.



Students & villagers with bull, cart & goats.



As similar as the process was supposed to be, when it came down to actually dispensing the goods and animals, administrative, cultural, and political differences between the villages made things more interesting. One village had a women's association that could advise Miles on the widows who would benefit the most from the distribution of the goats, but no equivalent organization with respect to the cart-and-bull. In the other village, the problem was the reverse: a pre-existing youth group could easily take charge of the bull and cart, but which women would get the goats? At one point, Miles was caught in the middle of a political dispute between rival factions aligned along party lines. Fortunately, a visiting friend, a Muslim priest from where Miles had served in the Peace Corps nearly 30 years before, saved the day by offering sage advice. He proposed that the students who had designed the plan in the first place - and who technically still own the livestock and carts - should be the ones to decide. That freed Miles to set up a "permanently provisional arrangement" by which the bull and cart would be made available for daily use by anyone who needed it. A scribe keeps track of the users and use (e.g., hauling crops from distant farms). The town crier publicized the program, and especially the eligibility of the village indigent.

Professor Miles left the region with the satisfaction that his classroom message had dramatically changed many of his students, for whom this was their first exposure to development. Graduate student Alisa Houghton stated, "After being involved with the course, I developed a great interest in development and also in Africa, an area of the world I wasn't very interested in before the course." The Chair of the Political Science Department, John Portz, recalls writing a memo to Accounts Payable to justify the expenses of goats and carts and can only imagine the reaction of staff upon reading the expense report. Miles has developed the African Borderlands Community Development (ABCD) program as a way to continue graduate student involvement, match undergraduate student involvement, and extend the program into the NU community and beyond. (Visit the PDN-ABCS web page at www.polisci.neu.edu/achievements/development_projects.)

Over the 2007 winter break, Miles led a political science Special Topics class to Niger as an "embedded" Dialogue of Civilizations course. Students from the Bouve College of Health Sciences and the College of Arts & Sciences spent their break in Niger and were introduced to the realities of village life and development agencies' efforts to help alleviate poverty in rural areas. Students participated in a pre-travel orientation course, and capped the experience with a research paper on issues facing the region.

Student Esther Chou stated, "Professor Miles has taken this relatively simple fundraising initiative and turned it into an opportunity to visit West Africa and see, with our own eyes, how western aid is used and implemented." In anticipation of their trip, NU students partnered with the Eliot School to deliver school supplies collected by the Needham elementary schoolchildren through the Pencil Box Project. And once in Niger, the students bought their own bull and cart to add to the growing stock of NU good will and development aid.

RPCV Mentors

Want to mentor Niger RPCVs? Let FON know—we will set up a partnership if members are interested. In the 2007 pilot program (in Miami , Chicago and Portland , OR), the groups hosted an orientation, communicated regularly with the mentors and mentees and involved them in their activities and programs. The RPCV Mentoring Program is now online and both potential mentors and mentees are signing up! The RPCV Mentoring program was started in 2007 with a fundamental goal in mind: to connect recently returned Peace Corps volunteers with RPCV mentors. Via phone, email and face-to-face meetings, these mentors help ease the difficult transition, provide a connection to the RPCV community at large, and say some of the most comforting words in the English language, namely, "I know what you're going through. I've been there."

How it works, in a nutshell

1. Interested mentors and mentees apply by creating their online mentoring profile in www.rpcvmentoring.org. That profile includes not only basic contact information, but also allows individuals to prioritize their particular needs and/or strengths.
2. NPCA staff review the applications and assign each individual to an NPCA member group based on their geographic location and/or country of service.
3. Group mentoring administrators review the profiles of their assigned mentors and mentees and make appropriate matches.



Young Girls Scholarship Program (YGSP) Thanks New Donors

Since we reported receiving over \$4,000 for the Peace Corps YGSP project in the December 2007 Camel Express, we have received additional contributions to the project of over \$5,000. A sincere thank-you to all those who contributed. Donors to the Young Girls Scholarship Program since November 15, 2007 though August 1, 2008 include the following members and friends of FON:

- Anonymous
- Irene Abdou (Tera, Torodi, '95 - '99)
- Marion & Frances Abrams (in honor of sister & daughter Mary Abrams)
- Linda Hager Bailey (Zinder, Tessoua, Say, '66 - '68)
- Lianne Kennedy Boudali (Konni, '00 - '02)
- Karen Brenner (Bande/Zinder, '87 - '90)
- Meg Garlinghouse ('90 - '92)
- Gary Geoghegan (Zinder, 81 - '83)
- Major Elisha Gray (Tahoua, Tessoua, '66 - '68)
- Elizabeth Hall
- Mattie Harms (Niamey, '64 - '66)
- Myra Herlihey (parent of RPCV, San Guine, '85 - '87)
- Matthew Kenny (Lili, Maradi, '87 - '90)
- Kokari Foundation
- Leah Lacivita
- Paul Lorenz (Maradi, '72 - '74)
- Gabriella Maertens (Zinder, Niamey '64 - '72)
- Mary Ann Matheson (Madaoua, '66 - '68)
- Deb Parker (Bouza, '77 - '79)
- Frances Raycroft (Loga, '86 - '87)
- Thomas Shafer (Maradi, '64 - '66)
- Roy Simpson (Ibecitin, Tahoua, '80 - '82)
- Walter Tavaska (Illela, Madaoua, '69 - '71)
- Wendy Wallin (Say, Tera, '67 - '69)



Call for Nominations

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger is pleased to announce FON Board member elections 2008. The members of the board are elected by the FON members every two years. 2008 is an election year for Friends of Niger. **See page 2 for list of current board members.**

In 2006, all the FON members who submitted their names for election were placed on the board by acclamation. This year we are seeking your participation in the election process and encourage you to submit your name for board membership. If you would like to nominate yourself for the FON Board, please complete a brief resume following the guidelines in the form below. Please submit your nomination by September 19, 2008. (If submitting electronically, submit by September 19th; if submitting by mail, please have your nomination post marked by September 19th.)

Please send your nomination to FON by post or email to:

Friends of Niger

PO Box 5823

Washington, DC 20016-9998 Email: President@FriendsOfNiger.org

NOMINATION FORM

Friends of Niger * Board of Directors * Elections 2008

I. I am a member of Friends of Niger, and I would like to stand for election to the Board of Directors:

Please Print Contact Information. Name : _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Phone: _____

II. Tell us about yourself. (This information will be shared with the FON voting membership).

Dates you lived, worked, or served in Niger and location: _____

If you worked in Niger, for which organization did you work? _____

Other information about your experiences in Niger or life experiences that you would like to share.

III. What experiences, ideas, service, or vision would you be willing to bring to the table as a member of the Board of Directors of FON? (Please limit your response to one-half a page).

Peanut Paste for Malnutrition — Plumpy Nut

Milton Tectonidis, a Paris-based nutrition specialist for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), told the International Herald Tribune during Niger's 2005 food crisis, "Plumpy Nut can restore a starving baby whose skin sags over tiny bones to normal roundness in two to four weeks." The TV show 60 Minutes first covered the Plumpy Nut story on October 21, 2007, and updated it during the June 20, 2008 broadcast. It reported a good news story about malnutrition, which kills 5 million children per year, one every 6 seconds. Plumpy Nut is cheap, easy to make and use, and being manufactured in Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi and Niger. Marketed in foil packages small enough for a child to hold and squeeze, it consists of 500 calories of fortified peanut butter, powdered milk, vitamins, minerals and protein. Relief organizations are using them in Darfur, allowing mothers to bring children out of the crowded field hospitals and treat them at home. Badly nourished babies can gain one to two pounds a week eating Plumpy Nut. A four-week supply for one child costs \$20 and it has a 2-year shelf life. Stay tuned for news on FON support for Plumpy Nut projects.

AT THE CENTER OF THE EARTH -- of Wells and Men --

This documentary film by Ingrid Patetta / Caméra Nomade won the **Golden Giraffe Award** in April 2008 at the **International Environmental Film Festival of Niamey**. The film was also an official selection for the **International Water and Cinema Events World Water Forum** to be held in Istanbul in March 2009. The 25 minute documentary, shot in Zinder, honors the traditional skills of the Hausa well diggers of Niger, and illustrates the pride and determination of these Sahelian men, who dig the earth with their bare hands in order to access water. Ms. Patetta is considering making the film available for sale and will inform FON if she does.

Synopsis of the film:

A man stands at the mouth of a well. He is donning a rudimentary rope harness that he wraps around his legs. Camera in hand, he dives into the well and starts a 126 meters drop, at the end of which he reaches two men working indefatigably at the center of the earth. We have just entered the world of the traditional well-diggers of Niger. In the course of interviews of a master well-digger and his laborers, the film reveals the tradition and the customary know-how of these men, who battle against sand in order to reach water. Shot in desert landscapes, the film treats the following themes : access to water, desertification and its impact on the communities of nomadic cattle breeders.

A WELL FOR SAABU DEY

Bowen Lightfoot Kelley is the 17 year old son of RPCV Tom Kelley (Niger 86-88). He's from Chapel Hill, North Carolina and is a rising senior at Choate Rosemary Hall, a boarding school in Connecticut. The Kelley family spent the 2003-2004 academic year in Niger where Tom, a law professor at UNC-Chapel Hill, had a Fulbright Scholarship. Bowen and his father returned to Niger during the summer of 2007 and visited villages in the region where Tom had served as a volunteer. In the course of their stay, village elders explained the hardship that they and their people faced as a result of a growth in population without a corresponding growth in available drinking water. The elders in the small village of Saabu Dey asked for help digging new wells to meet their crucial need for clean, drinkable water. Last year Bowen initiated a project to raise funds to build a well for the people of Saabu Dey. With the support of the Student Council at his school and a contribution from the American Women's Club of Niamey, Bowen is well on his way to raising the \$7,500 needed to purchase supplies and employ traditional well-diggers.

Bowen's fundraising campaign continues this summer with help from Friends of Niger, which is acting as fiscal sponsor for the Saabu Dey well project. He has sent out letters to friends, family and former volunteers seeking funds to build the well and welcomes any and all contributions to the project. Any surplus funds will go towards building a second well in a neighboring village. Please send any contributions to Friends of Niger. All contributions are tax-deductible through the organization's generous fiscal sponsorship. To contribute please make a check out to Friends of Niger and include "Saabu Dey Well Project" in the memo line and send it to the following home address:

Bowen Kelley
8106 Kit Lane
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27516

FRIENDS OF NIGER 2008 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 Young Girls' Scholarship Program (YGSP) activities with
a Contribution of _____
- I want to support FON's Microcredit in Niger 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 11 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

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- Page 4 & 5 Photographs & Tale of the Air
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- Page 10 - Well Project & Film
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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>



Friends of Niger
 P.O. Box 5823
 Washington, D.C. 20016-9998
 20033-0164



Address Correction Requested

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 23 Issue 3



December 2008

Young Girls' Scholarship Program 2008 Progress Report

Friends of Niger funded the scholarships of 12 young girls during the 2007—2008 school year, as well as two regional conferences in the Eastern and Western regions of Niger. The amount provided by FON for that period was \$5,752. All of the donations were earmarked for the YGSP. Although FON was the sole funding source, not all of the donors who contributed were FON members. The new Peace Corps Niger coordinator for the YGSP is Michelle Stoner, who provided the status report and photos below. YGSP has requested \$5,076 for the 2008—2009 school year, and the FON board has agreed to provide the needed funds. If you would like to contribute to this worthy cause, please use the form on page 7.

Project Summary

Peace Corps Niger has already begun sponsoring young girl scholars for the Young Girls' Scholarship Program for the 2008-2009 school year. So far, Peace Corps Niger has selected 13 young girls and supplied them with school supplies, books, school uniforms and a monthly allowance of 10,000cfa (\$22.00) for two quarters of the school year, or 6 months out of 9. To fulfill its commitment, the YGSP needs to secure funding for Quarter Three of the school year (April-June) for these 13 young girls. Additionally, Peace Corps Niger would like to expand the YGSP this year to reach the maximum amount of girls possible. Seven additional young girl scholars will be selected and sponsored from our existing long waiting list of worthwhile and needy young women, bringing the total to 20 young girl scholars for the 2008-2009 school year.

These 20 young girls, as part of their scholarship, will have the opportunity to attend a 5 day conference with a variety of relevant classes to build their confidence and increase their experience and knowledge. They will explore their own unique perspectives and exchange with peers and others in order to expand the capacity of their awareness and skills, thus empowering themselves. The conference is designed to get the girls to think about their future, and to expose them to successful women who will empower them to follow in the same footsteps. Peace Corps volunteers and school officials and teachers will work closely with the 20 young girl scholars, to ensure that they have the most successful and advantageous school year possible.

(Continued on page 3).



LEFT: YGSP participants with Brooke at ORTN.

RIGHT: Participants 2008 school year.





Dear Friends of Niger,

As we begin 2009, we're asked to believe in many things – it's going to be a mild winter, the stock market will recover, change is coming to politics, the (put your favorite team's name here) will win the World Series this year, etc. Each new year brings with it the belief and hope that life will be better for us. We are optimists. When I lived in Niger, I never asked the people I knew if they had this same belief, hope and optimism, but my recollection is that most Nigeriens I knew believed that God would see them though today, and if it was his will, God would provide for tomorrow and the next. With faith like that and God on their side, I believe in the people and the future of Niger. I also believe that Niger's future is in the hands of the young Nigeriens who are expanding their knowledge and receiving an education in Niger and abroad. Some of Niger's present leaders and certainly many of Niger's future leaders have had the opportunity to have known and even worked with a Peace Corps Volunteer; a few will have even benefited from educational scholarships provided to them through Peace Corps Niger's scholarship program. Friends of Niger is proud to have facilitated the many generous gifts collected among our members and others toward this program.

FON began its support of Peace Corps Niger's Young Girls Scholarship Program (YGSP) in the 2007-2008 school year with a commitment to support 20 young women. This academic year, 2008-2009, 13 of the original 20 young women will continue on in the program. While our belief and hope is that all 13 of these young women will complete their education, social and academic obstacles that they encounter along the way may lead them to take a different path. Nevertheless, we believe that by participating in this program, these young women have received a gift that will benefit them throughout their lives. These young women go forth with the knowledge that someone believed in them and gave them a chance; someone reached out to them with a helping hand, an encouraging word, and a belief in them wrapped up in the form of a scholarship. The Young Girl's Scholarship Program gave this message to these young women, "We believe in you." That is a powerful message for a young person to hear, regardless of where they live.

How these young women will respond to this message and take advantage of the knowledge and opportunities eventually afforded them by this scholarship program is unknown. But my belief and hope is that this small group of young women will eventually make a difference in the lives of their families, their villages, and their country by emulating this gift -this belief- and passing it on to others. Life in Niger will be better because someone took the time and the effort to believe in someone else, who then in turn believed in someone else, who then in turn believed in someone else. FON is proud to join in and support this chorus of believing in the people and the future of Niger.

Some of you are NPR listeners and are familiar with the program, "This I believe." Similar to this series, I would like to hear from you and what you believe about Niger and her people. Please send me your short statement by post or email, and we will edit your submissions for our next edition of the Camel Express. Best wishes for a peace filled 2009! - John

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CAMEL EXPRESS EDITOR

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

FON can be contacted via the post at

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and you will find **FON** on the web and this newsletter in **FULL COLOR** at:

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.

YGSP UPDATE (cont'd from page 1)

YGSP Background Information

Girls' education is a problem throughout Africa, particularly in Niger. Only one in ten women can read and write. One of three girls attends primary school, and only one in twenty attends secondary school. In some communities sending girls to school is not valued. Other villages do not even have schools. Instead, girls work all day-- pounding millet, pulling water, and taking care of their siblings. Even if girls do finish primary school, most do not continue their studies. Secondary schools are located far from their remote villages, in towns and cities where families cannot afford to send their daughters. Girls stay in their villages, marry as young as 12, and do not reap the benefits of secondary education.



YGSP Participants do a job-shadow at a Maternité.

In 2000 Peace Corps Niger decided to do its part in ending this cycle. The YGSP was created with a vision to allow talented girls in need to go to secondary school. With assistance from local teachers and school directors, Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) hand out applications to schools in the areas where they serve. To move on to secondary school, and, therefore, to qualify for the scholarship, girls must pass a comprehensive, nationwide test. After reviewing the results and applications, PCVs select the recipients, based on talent and need.

In 2007, YGSP Niger held two young girls conferences in which all of the young girl scholars for the 2007-2008 school year were invited to attend a conference of 5 days full of workshops with activities such as life-skills lessons, confidence building, money management, career choices, and self-defense just to name some. The importance of these conferences cannot be stressed enough. During the conferences, the young girl scholars are given valuable life-skills knowledge and are exposed to professional women in their regions who discuss their success as professional women in Niger, and some of the benefits and obstacles that come along with it. Even more valuable, is that these young girls come together to share their experiences as young women in Niger.



The outcomes and impact of these conferences are profound. The conference is designed to make the girls think about their futures and what they hope to achieve with their education. The aim is to motivate them in their studies, give them some tools to improve their study methods, help them build their self-confidence, and also just to have fun!

YGSP participants learning study skills.

Friends of Niger Contributes to a New Partner: The Alliance for African Women's Education and Leadership (AAWEL)

FON has identified a solid new partner doing grassroots work at six schools in Niger. AAWEL is a small NGO founded by Dr. Hassana Alidou, a Nigerien woman who lives and teaches in the U.S. but spends several months a year in Niger working with second-chance schools and the deaf school in Niamey (which was founded years ago by a PCV). The project currently reaches 200 children and includes both academic and vocational studies. AAWEL also partners with the Nigerien Organization of Innovative Educators (ONEN), another small Niger-based NGO.

Dr. Alidou has been working with ONEN for a number of years conducting summer leadership academies with students at impoverished schools in Niamey. The intensive summer literacy and leadership training focuses on literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving. The project has expanded to include vocational education because the deaf school only goes through primary grades, and many of the second-chance students may not pass the exams necessary to rise above the lower grades. The program provides them with marketable skills such as sewing/tailoring, animal husbandry (poultry), gardening, etc.

FON has confirmed that the organization is worthy of support and comes highly recommended. Donations can be earmarked for this project on the membership/contribution form on page 7, or simply by indicating AAWEL in the notes section of your check.

Children's Chewable Vitamin Project Update

FON Treasurer Larry Koff reports that Boston University students heading to Niger agreed to transport 20 large bottles of childrens' vitamins in December. As usual, the vitamins will be donated to the pediatric ward of Niamey Hospital and Galmi Hospital. The 20 bottles each contain 300 vitamins for a grand total of 6000 vitamins. Larry will hand carry the bottles to Boston U. students, who will deliver them to former FON board member Sue Rosenfeld for distribution. FON continues to ensure that your donations for vitamins are well-spent by arranging for them to be hand carried and delivered. To donate please see the form (p. 7.)



Things Are Looking Up for Niger's Wild Giraffes



By Jennifer Margulis, *Smithsonian* magazine, November 2008 (excerpt)

While Africa may have as many as 100,000 giraffes, most of them live in wildlife reserves, private sanctuaries, national parks or other protected areas not inhabited by humans. Niger's giraffes, however, live alongside villagers, most of whom are subsistence farmers from the Zarma ethnic group. Nomadic Peuls, another group, also pass through the area herding cattle.

The "giraffe zone," where the animals spend most of their time, is about 40 square miles, although their full range is about 650 square miles. There are nine giraffe subspecies, each distinguished by its range and the color and pattern of its coat. The endangered *Giraffa camelopardalis peralta* is the one found in Niger and only Niger; it has large orange-brown spots on its body that fade to white on its legs. In the 19th century, thousands of peralta giraffes lived in West Africa, from Mauritania to Niger, in the semiarid land known as the Sahel. By 1996, fewer than 50 remained because of hunting, deforestation and development; the subspecies was heading for extinction.

The author taught English at the American Culture Center, where one of her students was a young French ethologist named Isabelle Ciofolo. Ciofolo studied Niger's giraffe herd for 12 years and was the first to publish research about it. In 1994, she helped found the Association to Safeguard the Giraffes of Niger (ASGN), which protects giraffe habitat, educates the local population about giraffes, and provides microloans and other aid to villagers in the giraffe zone. The ASGN also participates in an annual giraffe census.

Wild giraffes need a lot of trees. They live up to 25 years and eat from 75 to 165 pounds of leaves per day. During the dry season, Niger's giraffes get most of their water from leaves and the morning dew. They're a bit like camels. "If water is available, they drink and drink and drink," says Suraud. "But, in fact, they seem not to have a need for it." Most woodcutting is prohibited in the giraffe zone. But Lt. Col. Kimba Ousseini, commander of the Nigerien government's Environmental Protection Brigade, says people break the law, despite penalties of between 20,000 and 300,000 CFA francs (approximately \$40 to \$600) as well as imprisonment. He estimates that 10 to 15 people are fined each year. Yet wood is used to heat houses and fuel cookfires, and stacks and stacks of spindly branches are for sale at the side of the road to Niamey.



The ASGN is trying to help the giraffes by making small loans to villagers and promoting tourism and other initiatives. In the village of Kanaré, women gathered near a well constructed with ASGN funds. By bringing aid to the region in the name of protecting giraffes, ASGN hopes the villagers will see the animals as less of a threat to their livelihood. At the same time, giraffes can be a nuisance. They occasionally eat crops such as niebe beans, which look like black-eyed peas and are crushed into flour. The villager's feelings about the giraffes, from what I gather after speaking with them, are not unlike what people in my small town in southern Oregon feel about deer and elk: they admire the animals from a distance but turn against them if they raid their gardens.

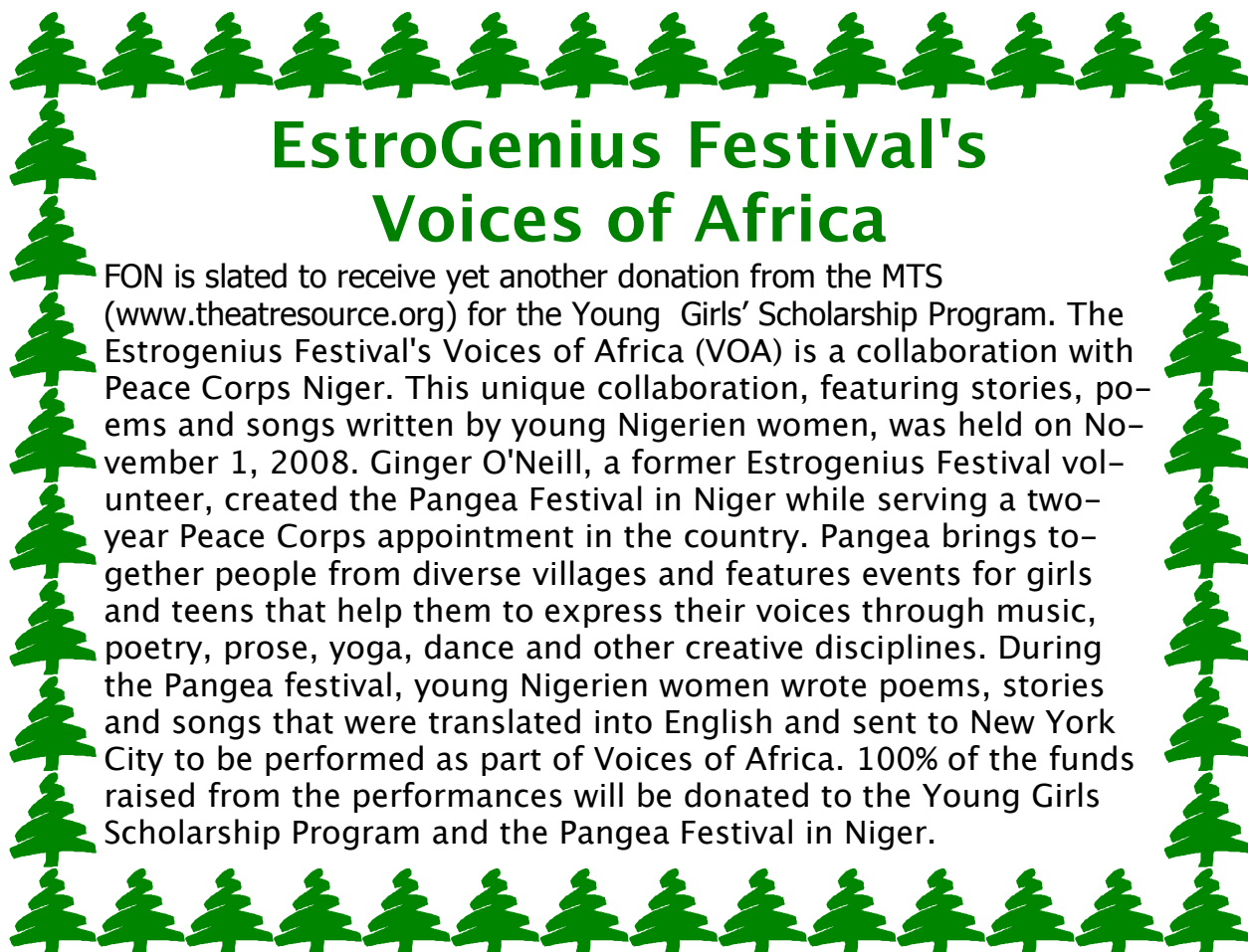
Unlike giraffes in other parts of Africa, Niger's giraffes have no animal predators. But they face other dangers. During the rainy season, giraffes often come to the Kollo road, about 40 miles east of Niamey, to nibble on shrubs that spring from the hard orange earth. On two occasions in 2006, a bush taxi hit and killed a giraffe at dusk. No people were injured, but the deaths were a significant loss to the small animal population. Villagers feasted on the one-ton animals.



The Niger government outlaws the killing of giraffes, and Col. Abdou Malam Issa, a Ministry of the Environment official, says the administration spends about \$40,000 annually on anti-poaching enforcement. In addition, Niger has received money from environmental groups around the world to support the giraffes. As a result, giraffes face little danger of being killed as long as they stay within Niger. But when a group of seven peraltas strayed into Nigeria in 2007, government officials from Niger were unable to alert Nigerian officials quickly enough. Villagers killed one of the giraffes and ate it. The mood is hopeful—at least 21 calves have been born recently, more than expected. And indeed the official results are heartening: 164 giraffes were photographed in 2007, leading the researchers to estimate that the population is around 175 individuals. While that number is dangerously small, it's up from 144 in 2006 and represents a 250 percent increase since 1996.

New Friends of Niger T-Shirt in the Works

Lisa Krusa-McLaren, a talented graphic designer and daughter of a Niger III Peace Corps Volunteer, has designed and donated several attractive logo proposals for a new FON T-shirt. FON President John Soloninka is gearing up for production, so look for the design and purchase offer in the April 2009 issue of the Camel Express.



EstroGenius Festival's Voices of Africa

FON is slated to receive yet another donation from the MTS (www.theatresource.org) for the Young Girls' Scholarship Program. The Estrogenius Festival's Voices of Africa (VOA) is a collaboration with Peace Corps Niger. This unique collaboration, featuring stories, poems and songs written by young Nigerien women, was held on November 1, 2008. Ginger O'Neill, a former Estrogenius Festival volunteer, created the Pangea Festival in Niger while serving a two-year Peace Corps appointment in the country. Pangea brings together people from diverse villages and features events for girls and teens that help them to express their voices through music, poetry, prose, yoga, dance and other creative disciplines. During the Pangea festival, young Nigerien women wrote poems, stories and songs that were translated into English and sent to New York City to be performed as part of Voices of Africa. 100% of the funds raised from the performances will be donated to the Young Girls Scholarship Program and the Pangea Festival in Niger.

FRIENDS OF NIGER 2009 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

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Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____

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Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities - including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON Archives, and Projects such as Those Listed Below.
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Membership and contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.**

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

- Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON
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- Enclosed is \$35 for a FON Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)
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- I want to support FON's Youth Education activities [through a NEW PARTNER, AAWEL \(see page 4\)](#) with a Contribution of _____
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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 11 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

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

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



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