

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 27 Issue 1



April-May 2012

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Board of Directors Friends of Niger

Letter from the FON President—April 23, 2012

Dear Friends,

It was a great honor for me and board members Penni St.Hilaire and Jude Andreasen to represent all of you during the official DC welcoming reception of the new Nigerien Ambassador Maman Sidikou at the ambassador's residence in January. Penni also hosted a welcoming at her home for Ambassador Sidikou, FON members, friends and guests (see some of the pictures on page 8). Since arriving in Washington, Ambassador Sidikou has reached out to many individuals, private organizations, and government agencies with a message of sincere and genuine thankfulness for the many past contributions made to and on behalf of Niger and a call to continue to build on these past friendships and collaborative efforts to support a new 21st century holistic partnership. I was very impressed with Ambassador Sidikou and want to report that he is hopeful for the future of Niger and has invited us as Friends of Niger to join with him in finding creative and collaborative programs that will mutually strengthen our personal commitments and connections with our Nigerien family and friends. Along those lines, Ambassador Sidikou is keenly aware of the Peace Corps situation in Niger and has committed to work together with us and the Peace Corps Washington office identifying opportunities and milestones in the long journey ahead of us to reinstate the Peace Corps Niger program.

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In addition to your participation in the upcoming FON board election, we continue to seek your opinions, ideas, and contributions on how we as an organization can be more active and meaningful. Please let us hear from you! Peace!

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John W. Soloninka, PRESIDENT
 Gabriella Maertens, VICE-PRESIDENT
 Penni St. Hilaire, RECORDING
 SECRETARY
 Larry Koff, TREASURER
 Steve Bushell, WEBMASTER
 MEMBER-AT-LARGE
 John Baird, MEMBERSHIP
 MEMBER-AT-LARGE
 VACANT, NIGER LIAISON
 Bob Jackson,
 MEMBER-AT-LARGE
 Jude Andreasen,
 CAMEL EXPRESS EDITOR

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 president@friendsofniger.org and you will find FON on the web and this newsletter in **FULL COLOR** at: www.friendsofniger.org.

Editor: Jude Andreasen

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FON Supports Project Play Africa

Soccer as a Tool for Development



FON continues to provide funding for Project Play Africa (PPA), the first project to use the new FON funding application. The following is an excerpt from an article by Jana Tomasello of PPA.

Project Play Africa was conceptualized on the belief that a simple soccer ball could bring joy to children in impoverished Africa. Our founders, passionate about soccer from their youth, started PPA with the goal to make an annual trip to deliver soccer balls to rural communities in West Africa. Our mantra became “putting smiles on the faces of children, one ball, one village, one country at time.”

Sports teach teamwork, discipline, tolerance and respect - skills needed if the energy and aspiration of African children are to be invaluable assets to eradicating poverty and creating sustainable economic development. It is documented that sports are effective for social mobilization, for supporting health and education and also can be an economic force providing jobs and community development.

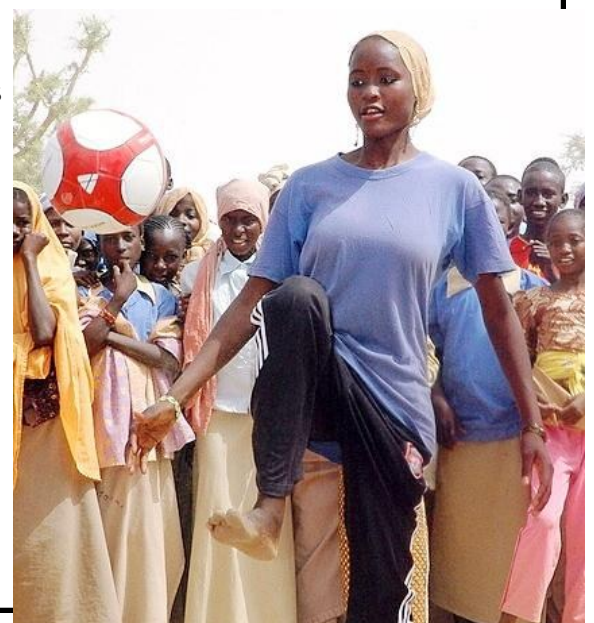


This is our story. Incorporated in 2006, Project Play Africa embarked on our first journey to Africa in 2008 having shipped 2000 soccer balls which the American Embassy received in advance of our arrival. The PPA staff arrived in Niamey with loosely coordinated plans to work with the Peace Corps. In 10 days, we traveled over 1,500 miles from Niamey to Zinder and back distributing balls, pumps and encouraging community leaders, school administrators and other NGOs to organize youth programs and facilitate daily play for children. Additionally, the balls were being used to encourage attendance at school and participation in health and hygiene programs.

In 2010, PPA made plans to return to Africa and selected Benin on the recommendation of Brownie Lee, then Peace Corps Director. This time with well-coordinated plans and an itinerary organized by PCVs, PPA traveled to Benin and embarked on a 3,000 mile trek visiting five regions distributing equipment. Many of the programs are still active today. With two missions under our belt, PPA began to reevaluate our objectives. PPA is 100% volunteer with a small staff - our time is limited.

For our organization to remain viable our mission had to be sustainable and repeatable. We needed to focus and add more value. In late 2010 we enlisted the help of Robin Mednick, President of Pencils for Kid who was doing incredible work in the community of Libore, Niger. Robin provided sage advice - focus on one community, develop a model that engages the community, provide the resources for the community to develop and grow programs on their own and expect the community to help expand to neighboring communities. Her advice solidified our decision to return to Niger and focus our efforts on the community of Libore.

continued on page 4



FON SUPPORTS SOCCER AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT *continued from page 3*



Two months before our scheduled departure, PPA was faced with the tough decision whether to heed the travel advisory not to travel to Niger. We went anyway! Now twelve months after our 2011 visit, the Libore Futbol League is thriving and just voted in their second board. Last year, 17 of the 23 communes fielded adult teams and 25 schools have teams participating in youth tournaments. In a recent update, Hamani wrote, "Futbal (soccer) is undoubtedly the only sport through which we can unite people of religion, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds."

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supporting the adult club teams is promoting involvement of the entire community. The matches and tournaments are creating community pride, entertainment and participation. Spectators are learning the sport. Children aspire to practice, play for recreation and competition. The league is promoting leadership and education - establishing rules, training, and an organization. It is systemic and organic growth.

Returning to Libore in May 2012, we hope to make inroads for an even greater impact. We have solid support in Niger with Pencils for Kids, Hamani Djibo as our Libore coordinator and PPA friend and journalist, Ibbo Abdoulaye, who has provided on-going support since 2008. Our top priorities are to increase structure in the youth programs, encourage more local government support - land for fields and finances. We will also investigate the possibility of manufacturing equipment - balls, goals posts, nets, uniforms currently brought into Niger - thereby locally creating jobs and economic opportunities. Lastly, we plan to recruit support and train Libore mentors to assist in expanding PPA programs and make introduction to neighboring communities. As our mission has evolved our commitment and vision have expanded. Collaborating with organizations like FON and Pencils for Kids has the potential to expand our reach and make a greater impact through networking, consultation and shared resources. Project Play Africa ... because a ball can change the world! For more information about Project Play Africa email us at info@projectplayafrica.org or visit our website <http://www.projectplayafrica.org>



Update on the 2012 FON Trip To Niger

We here at Friends of Niger are still hoping to organize a trip back to Niger in 2012 for anyone who is interested in joining us. We put out a call in May of 2010 to see who might come along. If you responded then, rest assured that we still have your contact information. In reality the trip is most likely to occur in 2013, or late 2012 at the earliest.

Organizing the trip has been complicated by the cancellation of the Peace Corps program in Niger. We try not to lean on the Peace Corps office, but it does help to have their advice and guidance in-country.

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Friends of Niger Board Elections

Election 2012

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For the 2012 elections, the current FON Board members are seeking additional FON members who would like to participate in the FON Board activities, which are conducted by email and at quarterly phone conference meetings. The FON Board members oversee the activities of FON which include the content and publishing of the Camel Express Newsletter, maintenance of the FON Website and webpages, the selection of projects to support in Niger and the collection and disbursement of funds collected by FON for these activities. Persons who can be liaisons with Niger, Niger NGOs or Nigeriens in the USA are especially invited seek nomination to the FON Board. To participate in the election process for the FON board, we encourage you to submit your name and brief resume following the guidelines on the attached document. Deadline for receiving nomination forms is June 1, 2012. Electronic or paper form is acceptable. After responses from this "call for nominations" are collected, we will send a ballot of nominees to FON members in good standing by the end of June 2012. Current Friends of Niger Board Members are listed on Page 2.

FON member Lorraine Krusa has agreed to serve as our "third party" to collect nominations. Please forward your nomination to Lorraine by post or email:

Lorraine Krusa, 27 Rose Ct., Glen Carbon, IL 62034

email: elections@friendsofniger.com

NOMINATION FORM

Friends of Niger Board of Directors — Elections 2012

I. I am a member of Friends of Niger, and I would like to stand for election to the Board of Directors of FON. If elected, I am willing to participate in up to four quarterly phone conference meetings (dates vary) with other FON Board members:

Name: _____

My contact information:

Address: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____ Phone: _____

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

Dates that you lived, worked, or served in Niger: _____

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).

The NH Seacoast Community Celebrates with Bombino in an Evening of Music and Hope for Niger



Bombino (center) & his band with Ambassadors Sidikou of Niger (3rd from left), and Moussa-Adamo of Gabon (2nd from right).

Music with a message of peace. On April 5th, 300 people, along with the Ambassadors of Niger and Gabon, danced, clapped and cheered for Tuareg sensation Bombino at The Music Hall in Portsmouth, NH to support RAIN's programs in Niger.

At the reception before the performance, Portsmouth Mayor Eric Spears was on hand to deliver to Bombino and the Ambassadors a special welcome and to proclaim April 5, 2012 as **West Africa Day in Portsmouth**, expressing pride in the city's role in bringing new life to RAIN's partner nomadic communities.



Mayor Spears presenting proclamations with RAIN founder Bess Palmisciano.

Representing Friends of Niger were John Hutchison and Larry Koff. RAIN and FON have worked together to petition for Peace Corps reinstatement in Niger as well as support for NGOs in the region in Washington D.C.

During the concert, Bombino sang songs about unity and reconciliation, of the beauty of the desert and of nomadic life. He spoke to the audience about the importance of education in his homeland, sharing his plans for an upcoming Peace Tour to promote Niger as a model of peace for the West African region.

Continued on page 10

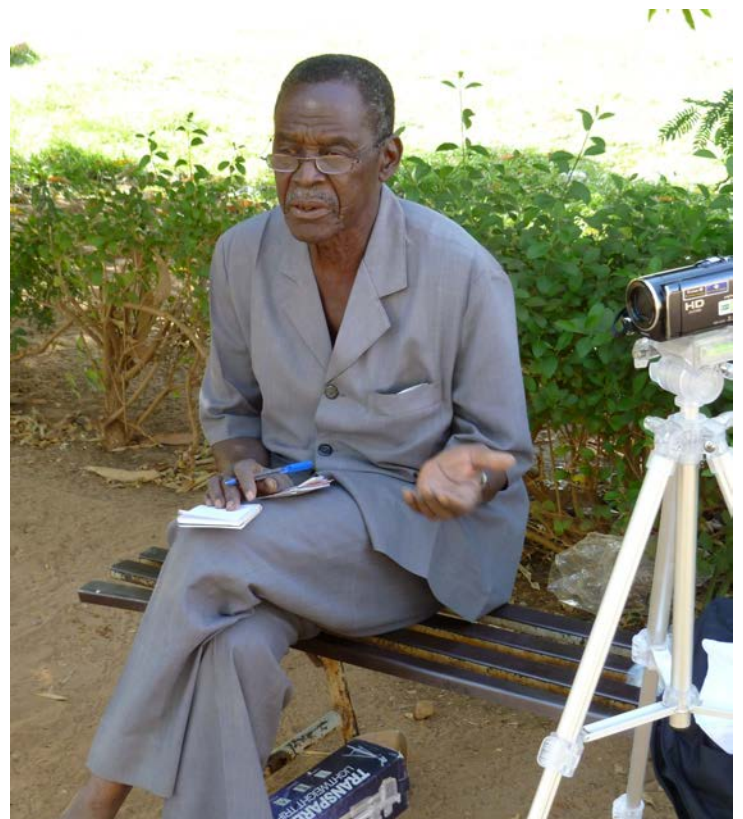
Nigerien Icons, Pioneers in Women's Rights, Education and Development Visit the U.S.



ABOVE: :Hadja Aminata Djima
RIGHT: Yazi Dogo.

Yazi Dogo (from Dogondoutchi) and his wife Hadja Aminata Djima have been invited by John Hutchison, Professor Emeritus of African Languages & Linguistics at Boston University's African Studies Center, to visit the US during this spring and summer. Hutchison has been collaborating with the Friends of Niger since earlier this year on fundraising to make this visit possible. Thanks to contributions from the Friends of Niger and also through funds raised by Mother Tongue Editions, their visit is now possible, and imminent! FON officers contacted FON members and facilitated the FON portion of the fundraising effort! All of the stakeholders are extremely grateful to the FON for this aid.

Yazi and Hadja are about as old as the oldest former volunteers from Niger. Yazi is 70 years old this year. John Hutchison first met Yazi in the 1970s in Zinder. Hutchison was working in the Nigerian university system as a research fellow specializing in the Kanuri language and often left Maiduguri to work with colleagues on language issues in Niger. Yazi Dogo at the time was a primary school teacher, teaching in the Hausa language in the first Hausa medium primary school in Niger. He was a pioneer in this field. He went on to establish a Hausa theater troop known as Kungiyar Yazi Dogo which is well known throughout Niger and in West Africa. *(continued on page 9).*



Ambasssador Sidikou Hosts Reception



Left to Right: FON President John Soloninka, Cleve Overton, FON Secretary Penni St. Hilaire, and her spouse, Tommy Tomlinson enjoy the Ambassador's reception.



Ambassador Sidikou, left holding paper, welcomes diplomats, friends, and Friends of Niger board members and their spouses.

FON Secretary Penni St. Hilaire Welcomes Ambassador Sidikou to Washington



LEFT: Ambassador Sidikou chats with Penni St. Hilaire at her home.

RIGHT: The ambassador shares coffee with Meredith MeGehee, an original founder of Friends of Niger in 1989.



ABOVE: The Ambassador mingles with members of Friends of Niger.

Continued from page 7

Visit by Nigerien Pioneers in Women's Rights and Education



Aminata Djima with a student.

The following was submitted by John Hutchison.

Since 1987 Yazi Dogo has also taught Boston University students first in French and Hausa, and later in the performing arts during their semester abroad in Niger. Aminata Djima has worked in public health throughout her life as a nurse and a public health educator. Recently she founded a women's group known as Aiki Yanke Talauçi which is a micro-credit NGO in Niamey established to help the women of the Route de Filingué quartier to become financially independent through the establishment of small

business enterprises. Both of them appear on the African Language Materials Archive website (alma.matrix.msu.edu). Yazi is a cultural icon, comparable to a Bill Murray in our country. When you move around Niger with Yazi Dogo, you have a passport that opens every door.

Having them visit the U.S. is an opportunity and a way to enable us to honor our relationship with Niger by honoring this quite remarkable couple. Yazi Dogo epitomizes all that the Friends of Niger love and admire about the language and culture of Niger.

Yazi and Aminata will be here during late April and throughout the month of May this spring and summer. They will be in New England and in the New York/New Jersey and Washington, D.C. area. They will be interviewed by the Hausa Section of the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. We would be pleased to arrange meetings for any of you who will be in the area to meet them during their stay.

For more information contact John Hutchison, Coordinator of the African Language Materials Archive at 978-476-3078, or see the following website:

<http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/yazi-dogo>

Bombino Music and Hope *continued from page 8*

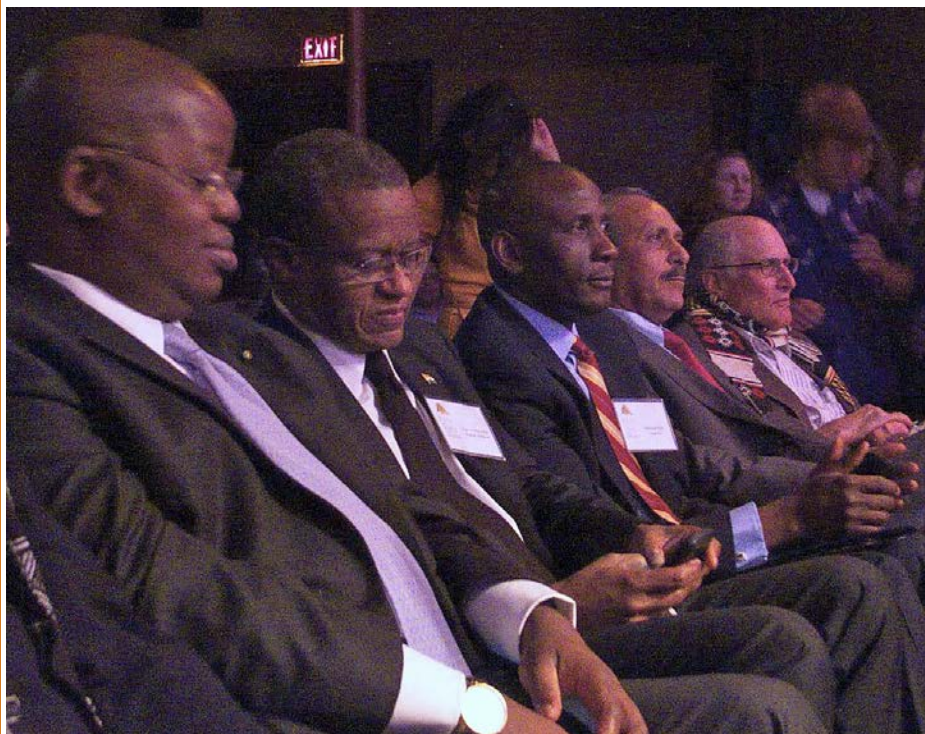
The Ambassador of Niger, the Honorable Maman Sidikou, spoke of the resiliency and hope of his country. He expressed that despite recent unrest, Niger is a country of diverse people, unified in their identity as Nigeriens and in their shared goal of engagement with each other and their neighbors. He also expressed how inspired and moved he was by the huge show of support for his country demonstrated that evening by their New England friends.



Ambassador Maman Sidikou (Niger) with Bombino.

New Friends, New Partners

The air of excitement and enthusiasm was palpable as the Portsmouth audience gave Bombino and his group multiple standing ovations. Said Bess Palmisciano, founder of RAIN*, "We couldn't have asked for a warmer reception and are excited to share our vision of a Niger where people with access to education, food and water have the freedom to choose to live in their tradition in safety and good health with a wider circle of supporters.



Left to Right:

Amb. Moussa-Adamo (Gabon), Amb. Maman Sidikou (Niger), Boubacar Rilla, Counselor to the Embassy of Niger, RAIN Board member Zenagui Brahim, and Larry Koff, FON Treasurer, enjoy the concert.

- *RAIN is a 10-year old NGO, one of the few working in remote areas of Niger with the Wodaabe and Tuareg people of West Africa. Their website notes that the event above raised \$80,000 for Niger (<http://rain4sahara.org>).*

2012 FRIENDS OF NIGER MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s) _____ Date _____

Address _____

City/ State _____ Phone(h) _____

Zip _____ Phone (w) _____

E-Mail Address _____

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____

Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____

Program or Involvement in Niger _____

Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities - including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON Archives, and Projects such as Those Listed Below.
**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 New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

- In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of _____
- Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed a General Contribution of _____

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

**Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts
 at \$15 each (Shipping Included) _____**
 T-Shirt Sizes: S _____ M _____ L _____ XL _____ T-Shirt Color: _____ brown _____ beige

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

PRIVACY POLICY

Your contact information is requested and maintained by FON so that we can contact you in the future. FON does not share your contact information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.

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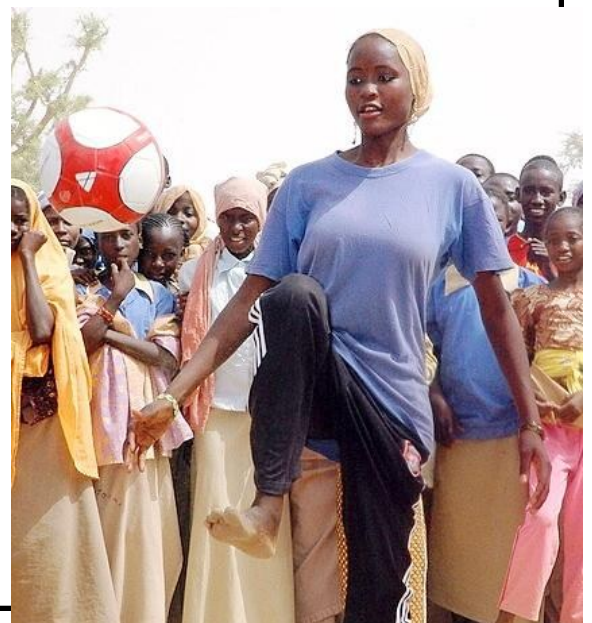


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Representing Friends of Niger were John Hutchison and Larry Koff. RAIN and FON have worked together to petition for Peace Corps reinstatement in Niger as well as support for NGOs in the region in Washington D.C.

During the concert, Bombino sang songs about unity and reconciliation, of the beauty of the desert and of nomadic life. He spoke to the audience about the importance of education in his homeland, sharing his plans for an upcoming Peace Tour to promote Niger as a model of peace for the West African region.

Continued on page 10

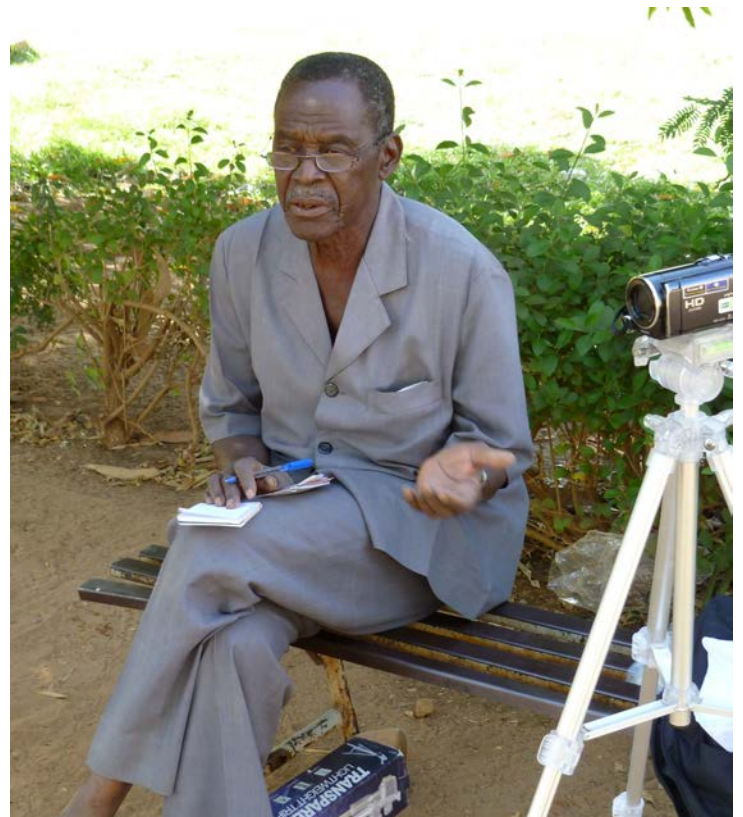
Nigerien Icons, Pioneers in Women's Rights, Education and Development Visit the U.S.



ABOVE: :Hadja Aminata Djima
RIGHT: Yazi Dogo.

Yazi Dogo (from Dogondoutchi) and his wife Hadja Aminata Djima have been invited by John Hutchison, Professor Emeritus of African Languages & Linguistics at Boston University's African Studies Center, to visit the US during this spring and summer. Hutchison has been collaborating with the Friends of Niger since earlier this year on fundraising to make this visit possible. Thanks to contributions from the Friends of Niger and also through funds raised by Mother Tongue Editions, their visit is now possible, and imminent! FON officers contacted FON members and facilitated the FON portion of the fundraising effort! All of the stakeholders are extremely grateful to the FON for this aid.

Yazi and Hadja are about as old as the oldest former volunteers from Niger. Yazi is 70 years old this year. John Hutchison first met Yazi in the 1970s in Zinder. Hutchison was working in the Nigerian university system as a research fellow specializing in the Kanuri language and often left Maiduguri to work with colleagues on language issues in Niger. Yazi Dogo at the time was a primary school teacher, teaching in the Hausa language in the first Hausa medium primary school in Niger. He was a pioneer in this field. He went on to establish a Hausa theater troop known as Kungiyar Yazi Dogo which is well known throughout Niger and in West Africa. *(continued on page 9).*



Ambasssador Sidikou Hosts Reception



Left to Right: FON President John Soloninka, Cleve Overton, FON Secretary Penni St. Hilaire, and her spouse, Tommy Tomlinson enjoy the Ambassador's reception.



Ambassador Sidikou, left holding paper, welcomes diplomats, friends, and Friends of Niger board members and their spouses.

FON Secretary Penni St. Hilaire Welcomes Ambassador Sidikou to Washington



LEFT: Ambassador Sidikou chats with Penni St. Hilaire at her home.

RIGHT: The ambassador shares coffee with Meredith MeGehee, an original founder of Friends of Niger in 1989.



ABOVE: The Ambassador mingles with members of Friends of Niger.

Continued from page 7

Visit by Nigerien Pioneers in Women's Rights and Education



Aminata Djima with a student.

The following was submitted by John Hutchison.

Since 1987 Yazi Dogo has also taught Boston University students first in French and Hausa, and later in the performing arts during their semester abroad in Niger. Aminata Djima has worked in public health throughout her life as a nurse and a public health educator. Recently she founded a women's group known as Aiki Yanke Talauçi which is a micro-credit NGO in Niamey established to help the women of the Route de Filingué quartier to become financially independent through the establishment of small

business enterprises. Both of them appear on the African Language Materials Archive website (alma.matrix.msu.edu). Yazi is a cultural icon, comparable to a Bill Murray in our country. When you move around Niger with Yazi Dogo, you have a passport that opens every door.

Having them visit the U.S. is an opportunity and a way to enable us to honor our relationship with Niger by honoring this quite remarkable couple. Yazi Dogo epitomizes all that the Friends of Niger love and admire about the language and culture of Niger.

Yazi and Aminata will be here during late April and throughout the month of May this spring and summer. They will be in New England and in the New York/New Jersey and Washington, D.C. area. They will be interviewed by the Hausa Section of the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. We would be pleased to arrange meetings for any of you who will be in the area to meet them during their stay.

For more information contact John Hutchison, Coordinator of the African Language Materials Archive at 978-476-3078, or see the following website:

<http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/yazi-dogo>

Bombino Music and Hope *continued from page 8*

The Ambassador of Niger, the Honorable Maman Sidikou, spoke of the resiliency and hope of his country. He expressed that despite recent unrest, Niger is a country of diverse people, unified in their identity as Nigeriens and in their shared goal of engagement with each other and their neighbors. He also expressed how inspired and moved he was by the huge show of support for his country demonstrated that evening by their New England friends.



Ambassador Maman Sidikou (Niger) with Bombino.

New Friends, New Partners

The air of excitement and enthusiasm was palpable as the Portsmouth audience gave Bombino and his group multiple standing ovations. Said Bess Palmisciano, founder of RAIN*, "We couldn't have asked for a warmer reception and are excited to share our vision of a Niger where people with access to education, food and water have the freedom to choose to live in their tradition in safety and good health with a wider circle of supporters.



Left to Right:

Amb. Moussa-Adamo (Gabon), Amb. Maman Sidikou (Niger), Boubacar Rilla, Counselor to the Embassy of Niger, RAIN Board member Zenagui Brahim, and Larry Koff, FON Treasurer, enjoy the concert.

- *RAIN is a 10-year old NGO, one of the few working in remote areas of Niger with the Wodaabe and Tuareg people of West Africa. Their website notes that the event above raised \$80,000 for Niger (<http://rain4sahara.org>).*

2012 FRIENDS OF NIGER MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s) _____ Date _____

Address _____

City/ State _____ Phone(h) _____

Zip _____ Phone (w) _____

E-Mail Address _____

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____

Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____

Program or Involvement in Niger _____

Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities - including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON Archives, and Projects such as Those Listed Below.
**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 New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

- In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of _____
- Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed a General Contribution of _____

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

**Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts
 at \$15 each (Shipping Included) _____
 T-Shirt Sizes: S _____ M _____ L _____ XL _____ T-Shirt Color: _____ brown _____ beige**

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

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

PRIVACY POLICY

Your contact information is requested and maintained by FON so that we can contact you in the future. FON does not share your contact information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 27 Issue 2



September 2012

Nigériens Feed Nigériens The 3 N Initiative Nigériens Nourissent Nigériens

President Mahamadou Issoufou, elected with the restoration of democracy in March 2011, has continued this policy of open acknowledgement of the problems Niger faces in food supply. A programme to bolster national food production, “les 3N” – was a central plank of his campaign programme for last year’s election. The government is now starting to put this into effect.

Background

Les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens (“Nigériens feed Nigériens”) was at the heart of Issoufou’s election agenda. Technical work on the policy was entrusted to a sector specialist who supports Issoufou’s PNDS party (Amadou Alahouri Diallo, an irrigation engineer who had held senior government agricultural posts before working elsewhere in Africa for the World Bank and FAO.) This was innovative in its public recognition of the food insecurity problems that face Niger; indeed, it was unusual for a political candidate to set out specific sectoral policies in any detail in an electoral platform, rather than relying purely on personal, regional and ideological themes.

Urgent actions

The 3N programme is not, of course, the first attempt by a Nigérien government to promote domestic food production. But what marks the strategy out is a deliberate focus on community initiative. Rather than entrusting the role of project initiator to central government and its local agencies, the new approach aims to encourage individual villages and municipalities to assess their own needs and put forward proposals for government to assist. However, in the current 2011-2012 agricultural year, central government is leading from the front, because a poor 2011 rainy season has left Niger facing serious food supply risks.

Niger’s First Lady Visits the U.S.

On Friday, May 23 the Niger Embassy and the Friends of Niger (FON) in Washington held a reception to welcome First Lady of Niger, Aissata Issoufou Mahamadou to Washington and to give her the opportunity to meet Friends of Niger and Nigériens living in the Washington, DC area. Niger’s U.S. Ambassador, Maman Sidikou, escorted the first lady to the reception at the home of FON Board Secretary Penni St. Hilaire and her husband, Tommy Tomlinson (continued on page 6).





**Board of Directors
Friends of Niger**

Letter from Niger's First Lady

August 27, 2012

**To Former Peace Corps Volunteers &
Friends of Niger**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Back in my country, Niger, after spending a most enjoyable stay in your great and beautiful country, the United States of America, I am very pleased to express my complete appreciation, not only for the fruitful talks we had, but above all for the unwavering loyalty in your friendship with the people of Niger.

In that respect, I avail myself of this opportunity to thank you sincerely for your readiness and continued actions for Niger and its People.

I would like to reaffirm my eagerness and yearning to create an active and productive partnership between "**Guri Vie Meilleure**," a foundation I established and chair, with you and partners you would have helped identify, so that together we work for the improvement of the living conditions of the Niger People whose hardship is well known to you.

I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks for your successful cooperation and for the reception you so kindly organized in my honor.

Please accept the expression of my highest consideration,

Mrs. ISSOUFOU AISSATA
First Lady of Niger'
Chairperson, "**Guri Vie Meilleure**" Foundation

- John W. Soloninka, PRESIDENT
- Gabriella Maertens, VICE-PRESIDENT
- Penni St. Hilaire, RECORDING SECRETARY
- Larry Koff, TREASURER
- Steve Bushell, WEBMASTER
- MEMBER-AT-LARGE
- John Baird, MEMBERSHIP
- MEMBER-AT-LARGE
- VACANT, NIGER LIAISON
- Bob Jackson
- MEMBER-AT-LARGE
- Jude Andreasen, CAMEL EXPRESS EDITOR
- Brian Kimmel
- PROJECT COORDINATOR

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 president@friendsofniger.org 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.

PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU PREFER TO RECEIVE YOUR COPY BY E-MAIL ONLY.



The Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund Supports Small Local Nigerien NGOs

FON continues to fund small projects that have a direct and tangible impact on Nigeriens. The following report was submitted by Pam White.

The Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund recently donated \$1,500 to the Danja Fistula Center in Niger, established by the Worldwide Fistula Fund (www.worldwidefistulafund.org) to serve the women of West Africa. Here's a link to an excellent article by Nicholas Kristof which appeared in the NY Times in May, describing the devastating impact of fistula on the lives of women, and the way in which the Danja Fistula Center will profoundly improve the lives of women suffering from this condition. <http://worldwidefistulafund.org/in-the-news/> The founding of this Center is a major development in the treatment of fistula among West African women, and Jane, whose Peace Corps work in the 1960's focused on improving the lives of Niger's women and children, would be gratified to support this work!

Donations to the Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund can be sent to FON. (Designate "Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund" on the memo line.) This fund is administered in Jane's memory, to support grassroots initiatives in Niger.

The August 2011 issue of Camel Express carried an article (with photos) about ODI, a small but very active Nigerien NGO dedicated to work with Niger's disabled population. I have worked with this organization since 2006, through Harouna Salifou, the field agent responsible for the Balayera Commune. The Aug. 2011 article reported that the FON Board had recently elected to contribute \$1,000 to ODI's work. I have received the following report from Harouna Salifou, on behalf of ODI, detailing how the FON funds were used:

- a. Twelve animals -- two ewes and one ram per person -- were provided to four disabled individuals for a small-animal breeding project. The animals are held in the name of the disabled person, providing a source of income-generation and self-sufficiency, and enhancing that person's value to the family and to the community. The individuals were: Aliou Doula, amputee; Moussa Yahaya, a blind youth enrolled in school; Boubacar Nouhou, deaf; and Djibrilla Moussa, blind.
- b. In addition, five boxes of phenobarbital were purchased and dispensed, without charge, to 136 epileptic patients at the quarterly mental health clinic conducted on market day in Balayera.
- c. Also at the mental health clinic, treatment and psychiatric medications were provided free of charge to three individuals suffering from mental illnesses including schizophrenia. (The medications purchased included chlorpromazine [Thorazine], haloperidol [Haldol], artane [Trihexyphenidyl], and modecate [Fluhenazine].)
- d. The remaining funds were used to construct a second disabled-access ramp for a Balayera school, this one in the quartier of Aggou. (Previous funds donated through the Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund had also constructed a ramp at another school.)

On behalf of ODI, Harouna sends the following message of thanks to FON: "In the name of the entire commune of Balayera and particularly in the name of all the beneficiaries, please accept our distinguished greetings and profound thanks."

Continued from page 1

Nigériens Feed Nigériens The 3 N Initiative

Urgent action has obviously been necessary to tackle this and help local communities recover from the current crisis and prepare for the new planting season. (The rains normally fall between July and October.) Even so, already the government is preparing to start applying the new “bottom up” approach; resources for this have been allocated under the 2012 budget. (Niger uses a January-December budget year.)

Longer term resilience – the 3N in detail

The 3N aims to develop a long term response to Niger’s problems of food insecurity. It was born out of a recognition that each time the annual rains are inadequate the country faces a crisis and the risk of famine. Even if donors provide emergency aid on time, the country remains exposed to the risk of a repeat experience the following year – and, without a fresh approach, the situation risks getting worse, as climate change leads to increasing unpredictability in rainfall.

But although Niger is a Sahelian country with average per capita income among the lowest in the world, the Issoufou administration believes that insecurity can be reduced. Senior officials point out that some other countries in the region have managed to establish a more secure supply base. Moreover, Niger does have cards to play: it has substantial artesian water reserves and it has a large national livestock herd and strong pastoral traditions. The government can expect a moderate increase in its spending power, because of the rise in global demand for Niger’s uranium (because the need to tackle global warming has renewed interest in nuclear energy) and because it has now started commercial production of oil, serving national needs and West African markets.

The 3N seeks to provide a comprehensive strategy for bolstering national food output and enhancing the positive impact this has on levels of food security, nutrition, household welfare and economic activity. In late 2011 Issoufou established an agency to drive the strategy forward – the Haut Commissariat des 3N – headed by his key technical adviser on the subject, Amadou Alahouri Diallo. This unit reports directly to the president. It has only a small staff and its purpose is not to duplicate the work of government ministries, but to act as a motivator and coordinator, mobilising state agencies, the elected leaders of local communities, donors, NGOs and the private sector into mounting a coherent and sustained national effort. Senior sources say that at present there is a lack of synergy between ministries, while NGOs tend to choose their project locations solely according to their own criteria rather than dovetailing into a national strategy. The role of the 3N High Commission is to produce a more joined up and strategically coordinated approach.

The programme looks beyond Issoufou’s current five year term of office. But the hope is that even if he failed to secure a second term, a successor administration would continue this coordinated approach. For the first five years, the prime focus will be to increase food production, both in the traditional main cereal crop season and through initiatives to support irrigated market gardening during the dry, lean months (*la soudure*), livestock, fish farming and the planting of orchards and firewood lots. But the strategy also looks further, to the reinforcement of crop processing, conservation and marketing networks, improvements to household nutrition and social programmes, for example, to strengthen the position of women. Community mobilisation is a key theme throughout – and this is to be a particular focus of the work of the 3N High Commission. (continued on page 8)

2013 Reunion of Niger RPCVs Planned

Board member Bob Jackson alerts FON membership to the following planned reunion.

Joe and Sharon Marley were PCVs in Niger from 1994-1998. They will host a reunion in July, 2013 at their farm near Ferryville, Wisconsin. Joe and Sharon Marley encourage RPCVS from Niger and Friends of Niger members to come visit the Driftless area of Southwestern Wisconsin for a Peace Corps Niger reunion July 25-28, 2013. The reunion will be held at their forty acre farm a few miles east of the Mississippi River. "Anybody with a connection to Niger is welcome to attend," according to the Marleys.

Joe and Sharon served together in the village of Sounga Me near Kirtaci in southeastern Niger. They worked in agriculture extension. Following their extended PC service they first lived in Alaska before moving back to the midwest in 2004. They bought a property on Rush Creek and have building their farm since. Besides building up their goat herd and raising beef, they are also raising three children in the house they built themselves. With other PCVs from their era, they have been planning a reunion for some time. They have expanded their turkey flock so they have plenty of smoked turkey on hand and intend to donate a prime steer for the occasion. Camping will be available on their land. There are other campgrounds on the Mississippi and lodging nearby.

For more information on the reunion, to donate to support it and add your ideas, join the nearly hundred RPCVs already planning to attend on Facebook at Peace Corps Reunion 2013. Joe will answer your questions by e mail at jmarley@yksd.com

Also, check out the Driftless area of Wisconsin, east of the Mississippi between LaCrosse and Prairie du Chien (two hours west of Madison). You will not only enjoy a fine reunion but be glad you visited a truly unique and scenic area of the country you likely have never heard of before. See you in late July next year.

FON Welcomes New Board Member Brian Kimmel, in charge of Project Coordination.

~~~~~

FON encourages members to submit articles on any Niger-related topic, including personal accounts and photographs of PCV experiences or follow-up actions, to the Camel Express editor at: [judeheyjude@hotmail.com](mailto:judeheyjude@hotmail.com)

## Niger's First Lady Visits the U.S.

On Friday, May 23 the Niger Embassy and the Friends of Niger (FON) in Washington held a reception to welcome First Lady of Niger, Aissata Issoufou Mahamadou to Washington and to give her the opportunity to meet Friends of Niger and Nigeriens living in the Washington, DC area. Ambassador Mamane Sidikou escorted the First Lady to the home of FON secretary, Penni St. Hilaire and her husband Tommy Tomlinson. Harouna Tchiany, President of the Conseil du Nigeriens aux US (CONUSA), welcomed Madame Issoufou on behalf of CONUSA. Madame Issoufou thanked the former Peace Corps Volunteers for their service to Niger and remarked that volunteers joined in village life and lived just like Nigeriens. Madame Issoufou is a chemical engineer and has a foundation: GURI: Making Life Better, that promotes education, particularly of girls, health and nutrition, and a healthy environment, including alternate energy sources and fighting against deforestation. The Embassy provided me'chui and Washington FON members provided typical American potluck.



*Above Left—Guests gather with the flag of Niger in the background.  
Right- Ambassador Sidikou of Niger (right) talks with the First Lady (blue jacket).*



*Left : The First Lady thanks Penni St. Hilaire and her husband Tommy for their hospitality.  
Right—The First Lady and the Ambassador greet guests as Tommy Tomlinson (left, yellow shirt) looks on.*



**Left: Ambassador Maman Sidikou presents Niger's First Lady to FON. Right: First Lady Mme. Aissatou Issoufou Mahamadou addresses the guests. Below: Photos of guests.**



## Guri Vie Meilleure—Guri Making Life Better

### A Foundation Established and Chaired by Niger's First Lady

Mme. Aissata Issoufou Mahamadou, through her foundation, is helping the most vulnerable populations to reach food self-sufficiency, access to healthcare, and education, and ultimately to live in a healthy and sustainable environment. The foundation focuses on programs and projects which fight against HIV/AIDS, and which use targeted interventions to improve maternal and child health and the nutritional status of children and women of childbearing age. Among the strategies the foundation uses are capacity building, advocacy and lobbying, and communication for behavioral and social change. The contact information for the foundation follows: BP 409, Niamey. Tel: (227) 946 28668. [contact@gourivm.com](mailto:contact@gourivm.com)

## Zoolkoski Update on Galmi Hospital

Dr. Marc Carrigan is one of my colleagues here at Galmi Hospital. Marc is in the kind of physical shape that I would like to be in. So when he asked me if I'd like to join him on a mountain bike ride over the foot and donkey paths connecting some of the small neighboring villages, of course I said yes. Our goal was to reach the village of Tsaidaoua. Neither of us had ever been there before but we knew it was in the area because we've seen patients who've come from there. We chose Tsaidaoua because 6 months ago a woman from there died of eclampsia following childbirth. Three weeks later the baby's grandmother brought Sifiyanou to our pediatric clinic very weak and severely underweight.

During the hospitalization, we learned that she had been feeding him with a powdered infant formula which probably would have been fine if she hadn't been preparing it so dilute. We showed her how to mix it up using the correct proportions of powder with clean, boiled well water. We asked her to bring him back in a week for another weight check. But none of us had seen him since he left the hospital 5 months ago. We didn't know if this house call would turn out to be a reassessment of Sifiyanou's health status or if it would be a visit offering condolences to his family. After an hour of pedaling in the hot sun over dirt roads that were at times rocky and at times sandy, we arrived in the village and were escorted to the house of the chief. He welcomed us and brought us a mat to sit in the shade. We explained the reason for our visit: that we had come to check on an orphan baby whose mother had died. He didn't immediately recognize the names we gave him but after consulting his advisors eventually led us on foot to a house on the other side of the village. After a 20 minute walk, we entered a courtyard where we were greeted by the smiling grandmother holding well-nourished Sifiyanou. In a short time, a sizeable crowd of curious onlookers had gathered. Dr. Marc and I took the baby in our arms and gave thanks to God.

Working hard to keep up with Marc as we pedaled back to Galmi, my legs were sore but my spirits were high. In this country where access to health care is so limited, there are daily victories and there are daily defeats, usually back-to-back. What keep us going are outcomes like this one here. Christopher for the Zoolkoskis



Continued from p. 4

### The 3 N Initiative

A checklist of targets for development provision has been set at national level. The 3N strategy aims to ensure there is a basic development "kit" or checklist of possessions, structures, equipment and services at every level of society locally.

✓ For an individual household: improved seeds and fertiliser, access to water and training in how to conserve and use it most effectively, and at least a couple of chickens and a rooster, and a goat or a sheep.

✓ For each village: a cereal reserve, a communal bank or shop supplying agricultural inputs, an animal vaccination unit, a communal supply of farming tools and shared machinery (a threshers), a women's market garden, a recovery centre for malnourished people and a "farm field school" for learning about new techniques and crops.

✓ For each municipality (usually 15-20 villages, with a combined population of 30-40,000): a market, all-year vehicle road access (to reach urban markets), a central purchasing unit for equipment, a cereals store, a hub for trading agricultural products.

The 3N High Commission estimates the cost of developing this national strategy over the next four to five years at \$2 billion. The commission hopes that individual villages and municipalities, and their elected local councillors, will put forward the practical suggestions for the actual detailed implementation of the programme in their villages.

## Niger Proactive in Dealing with Food Crisis

Denise Brown of the World Food Project contributed the following:

Hamadou Djibo Issaka is getting a lot of attention these days though most of us had probably never heard of Hamadou before the Summer Olympics 2012. He is a rower, from Niger, who recently competed in the men's 2,000 meters singles sculls, and came last. But the point is that Hamadou, who only started rowing a few short months ago, was in the Olympic Games representing his country, and the world paid attention.

In 2011, the Government of Niger sounded an early warning call for Niger anticipating a looming slow onset food security crisis. The call was launched internationally, transparently and the world paid attention.

Using the national early warning systems that had been developed over the years, it was clear that once again the rains were failing the people of Niger and the poorest households would slowly but surely exhaust their food stocks and resort to out-migration (pulling children out of school), selling remaining assets, typically livestock (the few goats that remained) and deepening their level of debt. The drama of the situation became clear as families who had been hit by the crisis of 2010 were also those in the line of fire for 2012.

But the story of Niger this year is not one of perpetual doom and gloom; there is good news. The early warning systems were used; a national response plan was prepared in October 2011 (revised in February 2012 following the national vulnerability survey) and is being implemented by the humanitarian actors in Niger and overseen by the Dispositif National, which includes Government, donors, UN and NGOs.

As early as November 2011, cash and food for work activities were scaled up in the most vulnerable areas; community screening for malnourished children intensified; and the sale of subsidized cereals began. The overall objective was to stabilize vulnerable populations and limit migration to urban areas and neighbouring countries. Keeping people in their villages meant that farmers would tend to their irrigated crops, thanks to seed distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the FAO, and indeed in 2012 a record of 1, 8 million metric tons of vegetables were grown. The preventative nutrition programme, referred to as "Blanket Feeding" began in April, ahead of the traditional lean season, as a recognition of the difficult months to come and is a powerful tool in the fight against malnutrition. And the vulnerability survey of November - December 2011, found 6, 4 million people living in zones at risk of food insecurity while the updated figure in June found 5, 5 million people in vulnerable zones, a decrease in the number of potentially vulnerable people. Some good news!

Niger is not out of the woods yet and the hardest month, August, is yet to come. In addition to the food security and nutrition crisis, there is the looming threat of locusts devastating the harvest and cholera in the western part of the country. Armed conflict in neighbouring Mali is affecting the country, which is hosting more than 40 000 refugees in areas which are already food insecure.

The Government and the international actors in Niger are, however, not satisfied with a mere response to the crisis. The "heads up approach" has been adopted so as to respond to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable while planning for the future, a dismantling of the structural challenges - before food security and nutrition crises in Niger become the new "normal" state of affairs.

As with Hamadou, the Nigerien rower at the summer Olympics, who didn't win his race, Niger has many many hurdles to overcome but the country is at the starting line and the world is paying attention.



## A New Photo Essay on Niger: "Smallpox, Slavery, and Toubou Warriors"

Friends of Niger thought you might like to be aware of this photo essay.

**"Smallpox, Slavery and Toubou Warriors"** by former Peace Corps Volunteer, Guy Immega available on the Apple iBooks Store (\$1.99 for iPad only). Here is a summary:

This photo-essay provides a glimpse of the African Sahel, south of the Sahara, in Niger from 1966-68. During that period, our Peace Corps medical team fought a smallpox epidemic in the lands of the nomadic and warlike Toubou tribe. Survival in the Sahel, slavery and Toubou insurrections are illustrated with photos.

Guy Immega, 3668 Blenheim St., Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6L 2Y2  
Tel: 604-222-8700 (h); 604-250-6599 (c) [guy.immega@kinetic.ca](mailto:guy.immega@kinetic.ca)  
Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.): RPCV Dates in Niger: 1966-1968  
Location in Niger: N'Guigmi (far eastern Niger, on Lake Chad)  
Program or Involvement in Niger: Peace Corps medical team (3 doctors, nurses, health education, tech support) that re-established medical services in eastern Niger after independence from France.

Smallpox, Slavery and Toubou Warriors  
A Journey into the Sahel



### THIRD GOAL EVENTS

There are two upcoming Third Goal Expos highlighting ways to bring the Peace Corps experience to classrooms and communities this September.

**September 22 in Providence, RI: inspirational panelists share their stories in The Peace Corps Experience: Shaping Lives and Careers**

**September 29 in Los Angeles, CA: share your story to start the school year!**

All Expos are free and open to the public and feature World Wise Schools programs, Around the World exhibits PLUS speakers from Peace Corps, the National Peace Corps Association, and the co-hosting local NPCA member group on topics including RPCV Brainstorming: Elevate the Third Goal and Engaging RPCVs in the Classroom. Please assist us in our planning and register online. Be sure to update your contact information with the Peace Corps by visiting their website at [www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/info](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/info). Anne Baker, Vice President, National Peace Corps Association

### OBITUARY - Susan Black Elwell, 1941 - 2012

Susan Elwell, wife of Richard Elwell, Peace Corps director in Niger in the 1960s, died May 8, 2012 at her home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. She was a victim of breast cancer. Susan was born in Ontario, moved to Pittsburgh, where she graduated from Chatham College with a degree in Political Science. She moved to Washington and joined the Washington Office of the newly created Peace Corps where she met Dick. They eventually went to Niger for two years. She was active in local politics, a real estate agent, a master gardener and a member of the historical society. Susan is survived by her husband, their son Martin and three stepsons; David, John and Peter. Her fourth stepson, Robert, predeceased her.



# 2012 FRIENDS OF NIGER MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/ State \_\_\_\_\_ Phone(h) \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (w) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Dates in Niger \_\_\_\_\_ Location in Niger \_\_\_\_\_

Program or Involvement in Niger \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

*Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities - including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON Archives, and local Nigerien Projects .*

**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.**

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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 New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

- In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of \_\_\_\_\_
- Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed a General Contribution of \_\_\_\_\_

- I prefer to receive my copy of the Camel Express by USPS in black and white;
- I prefer to receive my copy of the Camel Express by e-mail as a full-color PDF.

- Please send \_\_\_\_\_ Friends of Niger T-Shirts  
at \$15 each (Shipping Included) \_\_\_\_\_  
T-Shirt Sizes: S \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ XL \_\_\_\_\_ T-Shirt Color: \_\_\_\_\_ brown \_\_\_\_\_ beige

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

### PRIVACY POLICY

***Your contact information is requested and maintained by FON so that we can contact you in the future. FON does not share your contact information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.***