

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

April 2023

Friends of Niger PO Box 452 Haverford, PA 19041

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Dear Readers,

We are in full swing in our first of two grant review periods for 2023. We received 31 grant applications this time around and we have 14 fabulous volunteers pitching in on review teams. Three requests were rejected for not meeting basic eligibility criteria and the remaining 28 were all translated (yay Google Translate!) scrutinized, discussed and scored against our criteria. A special shout out to Mary Abrams who is doing a stellar job leading the grant review effort. The Committee and Board will be finalizing decisions soon. We continue to be pleased with the range of proposals and the improving quality of applications—word is getting out!

We welcome Brandon Bragato to the board and want to remind you that there are still positions available which can be filled by appointment now or in regular elections later this year if you are interested in board service.

Merci, Fofu, Mun godey, Tanimert, Foma, Thank you

Amy Wilson

1) Partner Meeting held with small NGOs working in Niger—like us!

In mid-March FON convened a gathering of smaller nonprofits working in Niger. Our target was to assemble colleagues with similar interests to learn more about each other and look for opportunities for mutual support.

We had representatives from the following:

- NANEY, launched by former volunteers to serve villages in and around where they served. They have had great success with microloans, enabling women to fatten sheep and better support their households. They have formed a new partnership with a local NGO which gives them more opportunity to expand.
- SIM Emergency relief program. Emergency relief efforts have expanded to include more development and sustainability. Programs are focused on internally displaced people.
- TCP Global was started in Columbia by former Peace Corps volunteers and has now expanded through former Peace Corps Volunteer connections to offer microloans in Niger.

We shared updates, brainstormed ideas about fund raising, and commiserated on the difficulty of international money transfers. A good time was had by all and we look forward to adding more people to the conversation in the future.

2) GRANT UPDATES

Landscape Restoration for Ecosystem Recovery

Submitted by Amman Imman: Water is Life

In early 2022, Amman Imman launched the first stage of a Landscape Restoration for Ecosystem Recovery program (often referred to as LRER, we'll call it Restoration/Recovery for this article--*editor*). This entailed a preliminary study, funded by FON, to gather data, establish sociological needs, and determine best techniques for ecosystem restoration in an 80 hectares zone east of Abalak. Members of the local communities belonging to the zone were involved in every step of the study, helping to gather sociological and ecological data.

The Restoration/Recovery program will contribute to Africa's Great Green Wall initiative by restoring ecosystems -- forests, savannahs, pasturelands and watersheds -- that have been degraded by climate change. More specifically, Restoration/Recovery will implement nature-based solutions that will viably address Niger's severe water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, and persistent desertification, beginning in the northern Tahoua and Agadez regions of Niger.

Meeting with the community and taking soil samples.



Benefits and Impact

Wetlands, forests, and pastures in Niger play a significant role in the preservation of biodiversity, reducing gender inequality, and promoting resilience and economic opportunity. They specifically mitigate the effects of climate change by acting as carbon-stores and micro-climates promoting rainfall.

Restored ecosystems will, among many other benefits, promote ecological and human resilience; replenish biodiversity; recharge under and above-ground water stores; enrich soils and prevent ecosystem erosion; rebuild effective carbon-stores; and create rainfall-inducing microclimates.

With our Nature-based Solutions, we intend to successfully achieve durable carbon dioxide removal, which would enable expansion and further phases of our ongoing work, both on-site and in new locations, to be self-funded via the sale of carbon dioxide removal credits. Furthermore, a portion of the credit income will be reinvested into the stakeholder communities.

Along with its environmental impact, Restoration/Recovery will promote economic opportunity, limit migration, create ideal conditions for rebuilding herds sustainably, and provide access to food and crops.

This initiative will improve conditions especially for women and girls who, once empowered with opportunities, can be resilient leaders for their communities. With time, we intend to scale our ecosystem restoration work throughout Niger and the Sahel, thereby supporting effective climate change remediation and contributing to Africa's Great Green Wall.

Help from Friends of Niger, and future goals

Our initial study, conducted with FON funds, identified various possible restoration techniques, including: silvo-pastoral/silvo-arable agroforestry; forestry/permaculture; riparian tree-buffer-zone restoration; traditional and innovative techniques -- such as demi-lunes and Zai -- to prevent erosion and retain rainwater; watershed restoration; and assisted natural regeneration of trees in pasturelands and naturally-occurring forests.

Community stakeholders (environmental leaders and local farmers/pastoralists) will be taught restoration/regeneration techniques. They will also be trained in the sustainable/non-invasive harvest of tree resources (leaves, fruits, medicinal bark), along with sustainable pastoral practices, for personal and profitable purposes. These community stakeholders, along with local traditional/political leaders, local reforestation/ecosystem restoration experts, and regional Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Protection, and Forestry will be involved in Restoration/Recovery design, implementation, training, monitoring, reporting, and verification calibration and Monitoring & Evaluation. Community participation at all levels of program implementation will ascertain the stakeholder buy-in and participation.



Submitted by Debra Kahn, Associate Director, Program Director, Wells of Love

Job Skills for fistula patients/ DIMA

In our last round of grant making, FON provided funds to support a project to benefit 30 women recovering from fistula. In their proposal, they indicated that they had not secured all the funding needed to equip the women with their own sewing machines once they completed the training—an element essential to the long term goal of economic independence.

This request sounded like it was right up the alley of the Jane Huser Maxwell Fund. This fund was created by a small but mighty group of women who call themselves the Sahara Sisters. To honor their friend Jane, they have been gathering annually since 2010 to pool their funds to benefit some activity in Niger, with FON administering these funds for them. This year the Jane Huser Maxwell fund contributed \$2,400 toward the purchase of sewing machines to complete the funding need for this project. DIMA also receives funding through Global Giving where they post reports, see link below.

DIMA reports:

“In January we equipped a tailoring classroom at the Centre National de Reference des Fisticules Obstetricales (CNRFO) and began training 30 patients at the clinic. Niger has one of the highest rates of obstetric fistula in the world. Obstetric fistula is one of the most serious childbirth injuries. Causes include early marriage age, malnutrition, and lack of prenatal care. Symptoms often lead to social ostracism of the patient. Part of the healing process is reintegration into the community through jobs skills training. DIMA will give 9 months of training to patients at the clinic. And, thanks to a donation from the Jane Huser Maxwell fund

that was facilitated by Friends of Niger, DIMA will be able to give each of the tailoring students at the clinic a sewing machine to take with her when she returns to her village, so she will be able to earn a living.”

Check out this great report: <https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/job-skills-for-young-people-in-niger/updates/>



3) Obstetric fistula in Niger

During the process of delivery, a fistula, or tear, can develop between the vagina and anus. Fistulas can result in a lack of bowel and urine control, leading to embarrassment and shame amongst women who are suffering the condition, as well as other medical conditions and complications including reduced chance of safely having another child. Many young women with fistula are shunned by their communities as the condition can frequently lead to bad odors, and inability to keep oneself clean.

Tragically, there is a strong association between fistula and stillbirth, with research indicating that approximately 90 per cent of women who develop obstetric fistula end up delivering a stillborn baby. Women suffering fistula are often also grieving the loss of the child and the possibility that future childbearing could be impossible or risky.

In Niger, the incidence of obstetric fistulas is increasing, in line with population growth and the continuing lack of understanding about the causes of the condition. Child marriage, early pregnancy, lack of prenatal care or medical intervention in delivery all contribute to the growing number of cases in Niger and across sub-Saharan Africa. The exact number of affected women in the sub-Saharan region is

not known, although the United Nations estimates it could be up to one million. Women, who likely had poor access to health care before fistula, often do not seek treatment and statistics are unreliable.

Niger has a National Fistula Center as well as 11 fistula treatment centers in Niger. In one center the average age of patients is 18, but they frequently see girls as young as 12 or 13. The risk of a fistula is far greater for young pregnant girls whose bodies are not yet fully formed.

Beyond surgery, a holistic approach that addresses the psychosocial and socioeconomic needs of fistula survivors is required to ensure full recovery and healing. Counselling and other forms of support – such as livelihood skills, literacy, job training and health education – may also be necessary to help women reintegrate into their communities, rebuild their lives, and regain their dignity and hope after surviving fistula. (*United Nations Population Fund*) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/07/1014172>

Statistics from a study of 384 fistula patients in Niger:

- married young (average 15.9 years),
- teenage first pregnancies (average first delivery 16.9 years),
- experienced prolonged labor (average 2.3 days)
- Poor outcomes (89% stillbirth rate).

(published in *International Urogynecology Journal*, 2018; 29(3): 345–351

The mission of the World-wide Fistula Fund is ‘To protect and restore the health and dignity of the world’s most vulnerable women by preventing and treating devastating childbirth injuries.’ They are currently working in Burkina Faso, Niger, Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda.

<https://worldwidefistulafund.org/what-we-do/partners/danja-fistula-center>

Wikipedia has an excellent entry on fistula: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obstetric_fistula

4) Niger in the News

Secretary of State Blinken travels to Niger!! Here is a roundup of news and opinions.

- What does the US hope to achieve from Blinken’s visit to Niger? | Politics | Al Jazeera <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2023/3/17/what-does-the-us-hope-to-achieve-from-blinkens-visit-to-niger>
- Secretary Blinken’s Travel to Ethiopia and Niger - United States Department of State <https://www.state.gov/secretary-blinkens-travel-to-ethiopia-and-niger/>
Blinken brings U.S. aid to Sahel for fight against Islamist insurgencies | Reuters <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/blinken-brings-aid-praise-niger-it-battles-insurgents-2023-03-16/>
- Secretary Antony J. Blinken And Nigerien Foreign Minister Hassoumi Massoudou at a Joint Press Availability - United States Department of State <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-nigerien-foreign-minister-hassoumi-massoudou-at-a-joint-press-availability/>
- Blinken Announces Aid for Niger and Its Neighbors <https://www.voanews.com/a/blinken-announces-aid-for-niger-and-its-neighbors-/7009252.html>
- Blinken bolsters support for Niger as Russia expands nearby - France 24

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20230317-blinken-bolsters-support-for-niger-as-russia-expands-nearby>

- Secretary Antony J. Blinken with Moussa Yahaya of TeleSahel - United States Department of State
<https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-with-moussa-yahaya-of-telesahel/>
- Antony Blinken au Niger : Que savons-nous de la visite historique du Secrétaire d'Etat américain ? - BBC News Afrique
<https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c89yx511w9wo>
- US Secretary of State Blinken visits Niger on Africa tour | AP News
<https://apnews.com/article/niger-antony-blinken-us-secretary-state-mohamed-bazoum-jihadis-islamic-extremists-cb35b9b2c543fae94c093e332b556146>
- As Blinken visits Niger, daily struggles are laid bare in city market – The Irish Times
<https://www.irishtimes.com/world/africa/2023/03/16/as-blinken-visits-niger-daily-struggles-are-laid-bare-in-city-market/>
- Blinken hails Niger as model of cooperation, promises to ‘deliver results’ in Sahel – The North Africa Post
<https://northafricapost.com/66163-blinken-hails-niger-as-model-of-cooperation-promises-to-deliver-results-in-sahel.html>
- Blinken says US must show it can ‘deliver results’ to Sahel | Politics News | Al Jazeera
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/16/blinken-says-us-must-show-it-can-deliver-results-to-sahel>
- Blinken making ‘historic’ trip to Niger as forces shift in Sahel | Politics News | Al Jazeera
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/15/blinken-becomes-highte>

American hostage Freed. An American aid worker who was taken captive by militants in West Africa more than six years ago has been freed, his family and the Biden administration said Monday, but the details surrounding his release remain unclear. By John Hudson, Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/03/20/jeffery-woodke-hostage-niger/>

Drones And Motos: After Two Decades of U.S. Military Support, Terror Attacks Are Worse Than Ever in Niger, by Nick Turse, *The Intercept*

https://theintercept.com/2023/04/02/us-military-counterterrorism-niger/?fbclid=IwAR2aUodaqg3FR-BJkFX7Iiz4TqTsmAdTJkOi1mWWeiR5nAiwVYpKN_HYtwo



5) In Brief – Peace Corps Virtual Service possibilities

Join the +500 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who have participated in Peace Corps’ Virtual Service. By donating 5-15 hours a week, you will support an international community without ever leaving home. There are short-term projects available in all six program sectors, so there’s

truly something for everyone! Explore the [Virtual Service opportunities](#) and express interest in up to three projects. Make sure to subscribe to [receive exclusive Virtual Service updates](#). Contact program specialist Miranda Deighton, Returned Volunteer, Georgia 2015-2017 385-216-4652.

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

Friends of Niger is an organization founded by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to initiate and support activities related to Niger and its people. We pursue three main purposes:

1. Connecting and engaging people who have connections to Niger including diaspora, and those who have worked or are working Niger,
2. Supporting development and humanitarian activities in Niger, and
3. Advocating for and educating about Niger

To donate write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to PO Box 452 Haverford, PA 19041, OR go to www.friendsofniger.org to use PayPal.

Board of Directors

Officers: Amy Wilson/President, Alix Barstow Fedoruk/Vice President, Gary Geoghegan/Treasurer, Mary Abrams/Grants Management Committee, John Baird/Past President

At Large Board members: Kelsey Andersen, Brandon Bragato, Paige Pihl Buckley, Kimberly Dixon, Alhassan Ali Mamadou Souna, Douglas Steinberg,
CONUSA representative: Seybou Douma

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/676485096587560/>
- Submit news topics and articles: camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com
- Contact President Amy Wilson, president@friendsofniger.org

“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”

