

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

September 2025

Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503

In this issue:

1. Grant cycle 2025 Application Tidal Wave!
2. Grants Funded in 2025
3. Tuareg Diaspora of America Holds Second Annual Meeting
4. Spotlight on/Interview with partner DIMA
5. Niger-related News
6. In Brief
 - Grants in action
 - National Peace Corps Conference and Embassy visit
 - NEW BOOK: Negotiating Mistrust : Patients and Healers Across Traditional, Islamic, and Biomedical Health Sectors of Niger, by Scott M. Youngstedt
 - NEW PODCAST, SoftPower/FulStoriesby Christopher Wurst, Producer & Host
 - TCP Global seeks a French speaking board member
 - Tee shirts available

Dear Readers,

We have been very busy this year with a huge grant cycle. We received no less than 88 proposals. The board is extremely grateful for the volunteers who stepped up to help review those proposals that met basic criteria. Still, it comes as no surprise that we are now madly strategizing about how to manage this workload while still keeping the door open to help the 'little guys', small village groups who have good ideas for community-based projects. One of those strategies is the idea of a paid internship. This short-term opportunity is currently being fleshed out and we are eager to hear your ideas and benefit from your connections.

In the midst of our heavy workload, we got a massive morale boost in the form of a donation of \$50,000! We are still pinching ourselves and feeling the warm glow of appreciation for such amazing support. The donor is not interested in recognition and has made this gift with no strings attached, further demonstrating confidence and appreciation for the program we have created and what we are able to accomplish. WE ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL AND HUMBLD.

Merci, Fofo, Mun gode, Tanimert, Foma, Thank you --

Amy Wilson & Scott Youngstedt

**On a housekeeping note, if you did not receive a letter from us in the mail last November, please update you contact information so that we are not wasting money sending letters to old addresses.

1) Grant cycle 2025 ***** Application Tidal Wave!

FON has been discovered! This year we received 88 requests for funding! Needless to say, that was like a tidal wave for an organization with no paid staff. We persevered, plowing through them all to select the best prospects for funding.

We could never have accomplished that effort without the thoughtful participation of our 22 volunteer reviewers. These volunteers worked independently to review a small batch of proposals and then discussed with a small group to select and forward the most promising proposals to the Grants Committee and the board. Join us next time—it is not too demanding and it's fun to work with like-minded folks to do good.

THANKS TO REVIEW TEAM

Alhassan Souna
Alix Fedoruk
Amy Wilson
Ann Byerly
Ashley Fairleigh
Chris Burns
Connie Hansen
Dane Miller

Deb Parker
Douglas Steinberg
Eric Ames
JoAnn Lewis
John Baird
John Heylin
John Klingler
Leah LaCivita

Madalynn Paquette
Mary Abrams
Mitch Wolgamott
Pamela White
Sarah Singletary
Scott Youngstedt

Our outreach continues to be via our website and through a contact list from inquiries that has grown to 240 organizations in Niger. We do anticipate receiving more proposals in future cycles. In coming months, we will strategize how to deal with the inevitable increase in grant applications. We are always eager to incorporate more members in the process and we welcome your ideas and participation at every stage of the process.

As noted above, we are discussing the idea of a paid internship to help with some of the much-increased grant workload. While we are hesitant to add paid staff, this idea of short-term paid assistance at this peak time is very attractive as a way to support the volunteer approach. We welcome your input, ideas and offers of assistance.

2) Grants funded in 2025

A total of \$83,677 was awarded for 20 projects through the competitive process in 2025. Grants continue to be distributed around the country and cover a number of sectors.

Geographic distribution		Primary Sector*	
Agadez	4	agriculture	3
Diffa	2	economic	1
Dosso	3	education	8
Maradi	4	environment	1
Niamey	4	health	5
Tillabery	2	water	2
Zinder	1	**Note nearly all projects directly benefit women	

Grant applications continue to show improvement and grantees eagerly share updates and photos. The enthusiasm of grantees getting the funds to do projects they really want is really contagious.

GRANTS AWARDED IN 2025 COMPETITIVE CYCLE

<u>ORGANIZATION</u>	<u>PROJECT</u>
SCOOPS INCIN MATASSA	Develop a garden for women and girls in Tillabery region
DFAO BEGUE	Purchase goats for vulnerable women in Guecheme who will pay it forward
ILDDAR JIMIRI NGO	Purchase small ruminant livestock for women in Rigia Zangui
MICA	Train Maradi girls in Income Generating Activities to help them support blind and other disabled family members
AMNIS NIGER	Replace classroom roof in Balembouk (Agadez)
ALHIKMAT	Repair classroom roof in Temilt (Agadez)
TAMAKRAST	Purchase computers for Agadez high school
Les Puits du Désert	School gardens in Dabaga et Souloufet (Agadez)
CGDES Ecole Mahaman Saley Guy	Welding workshop for repairing school desks (Diffa)
ASSOCIATION MOUJEE-GABA	Provide technology training for teachers in Diffa
CGDES de Koundoumaoua	Fabricate and install school desks in Koundoumaoua
CGDES CET TESSAOUA	Fabricate and install school desks in Tessaoua
Potentiel Terre	Establish tree nursery and train youth to grow and sell trees in rural Dosso
MICA	Install solar panels on a health clinic in Dan Kori
Assoc. des Jeunes Prof. pour l'Eau et l'Assainissement (AJPEA-NIGER)	Construct latrines at Bafoundou elementary school (Ny)
Récupération des Mendiants (RECUP)	Treat 100 cataract patients in the outskirts of Niamey
Hoops4Kids, Inc	Support Girls basketball league in Niamey
Ensemble Secourons les Populations Opprimées pour l'Inclusion et la Résilience au Niger » (ESPOIR-NIGER)	Drill a borehole for drinking water in Fari Moro, Ouallam
Groupe des Filles Leaders d'Expanding Lives/MICA	Drill a borehole for drinking water, Aguié
Association Nigérienne pour les Services Humanitaires ANSH	Construct latrines at Koubia Kaina2 Primary School (Ny)

3) Tuareg Diaspora of America Holds Second Annual Meeting

Submitted by Eric J. Schmidt

Guided by the motto “building community, celebrating identity” (*akaras n-toumast id agaz n-agna*), the Tuareg Diaspora of America organized its second annual meeting in Bloomington, Indiana over the July 4 weekend. With the diaspora dispersed across several US states, this was a special opportunity to bring the community together in one place to celebrate Tuareg heritage, organize on behalf of the community in the Sahel, and discuss the particularities of being Tuareg in America.

The TDA organized its first annual meeting last fall in Ohio, realizing a goal that members of the community have been envisioning for twenty years to hold a grand reunion of American Tuaregs. Last year's gathering set a high bar with two special guests: Abdoulahi Attayoub, who leads the [Organisation de la Diaspora Touarègue en Europe](#), and the star guitarist Bombino. This year raised the bar again, bringing Attayoub for an encore visit alongside guitarist Mdou Moctar and his bandmates, Ahmoudou Madassane and Souleymane Ibrahim.

Unsurprisingly, the event was full of music late into the night as attendees danced *takamba* to the accompaniment of rollicking guitar, fireworks in the surrounding neighborhood, and fireflies flitting through the warm summer evenings. The Kel Indiana served as phenomenal hosts, not only preparing delicious banquets of lamb, rice, dates and *takomert* (Tuareg cheese) and keeping the tea flowing all weekend, but also in welcoming new and old friends of the Tuareg community to the event, including several guests from Bloomington.

Indeed, a highlight for the event was a visit by Kerry Thomson, the Mayor of Bloomington. The TDA organizers introduced her to the Tuareg community by discussing the current conditions in the Sahel that have led many Tuaregs to resettle in the US, presenting a coming-of-age *tagelmoust* (turban) ceremony, and inviting her to share shots of tea and to dance to the music of Mdou Moctar. Familiarizing Americans with Tuareg people was an important goal and topic of discussion throughout the meeting, and by all accounts it was a resounding success.



Of course, the most important aspect of the event was that it represented a family reunion. Attendance for the gathering grew significantly from last year, bringing together a bigger family of Tuaregs with roots across the Toumast—including Niger, Mali, Algeria, and Libya—and who



are living all over the US, including many youth born here. This posed special challenges, since no one language was shared by everyone attending, but TDA organized a Tifinagh youth workshop in which many young Tuaregs growing up in the US had the opportunity to learn to write their names, an important step in sustaining the Tamasheq language. Keep an eye out for future editions and follow the [Tuareg Diaspora of America](#) on Facebook to stay up to date on community news.

4) DIMA-- Dispositif d'Initiatives pour les Métiers de l'Artisanat

DIMA-- Dispositif d'Initiatives pour les Métiers de l'Artisanat—is an artisan training program for youth who have not finished school. Weaving, sewing and leatherwork is taught with the intention of building the skills to independently produce marketable, even exportable products. The school is developing business and literacy programs to accompany the artisan training. The training is free and in-depth, requiring students to demonstrate skills achieved in regular testing.

DIMA has also been working with some traditional weavers to revitalize a type of cloth that has practically disappeared. Special programs have been developed to offer sewing skills to fistula patients, who develop skill in tailoring and leave the program with their own sewing machines (both FON and Jane Huser Maxwell Fund helped to make this possible).

Starting training programs in 2017, DIMA has worked with over 250 beneficiaries. Activities have included:

- Trained 26 refugees from Mali in tailoring.
- Graduated 96 tailoring and leatherworking students from a 3-year program ; a year later 33 of the graduates had paying work, several had started their own businesses, some worked in workshops destined for the export market.
- Started a weaving school 10 students, trained 4 master weavers and 2 students in the use of European-style floor looms
- Equipped a tailoring classroom at a national obstetric fistula clinic and gave 30 patients 9 months of training. Each student was given her own sewing machine.
- Two weeks of training in the production of soap, skin lotion, and incense was given to 30 women in the town of Hamdallye in August 2023. Regional leaders have requested that we establish a tailoring school in the town and we are seeking funding.
- Built a weaving shed in the village of Kirubbe Keyna; a weaving school was formally opened for 10 students.
- Nine months of training was provided to an association of 50 leatherworkers who are polio survivors and their workshop was renovated and equipped.



The Camel Express talked to Soumana who is the founder of the organization. He lives in Pennsylvania and visits Niger as often as he can.

Camel Express: What inspired you to create DIMA?

Soumana: It is simple. I did not go to school and artisan work was the only way I was able to find success. DIMA creates a way for youth who did not go to school to find success through building artisan skills. DIMA gives the opportunity to young people to have a job, stay occupied and stay out of crime. Also, artisan work is dying and young people need to learn the art to keep it alive.

Camel Express: What are your biggest assets- to what do you credit your success?

Soumana: What makes it successful is that all the people who participate are artisans themselves. They understand and believe in the work. It started out as a completely volunteer activity with everyone donating their time. For the first two years it did not even have a bank account.

Camel Express: What have been your biggest obstacles?

Soumana: People do not understand why we do DIMA. They don't see that the long training period really pays off. One of our students has her own atelier now with 5-6 apprentices, another has her own workshop and has 3-4 apprentices. We follow our students' progress. It takes time to find and talk to all the right people and get them to understand our model and learn what makes DIMA successful.

Camel Express: What are you most proud of?

Soumana: DIMA is the only organization in Niamey providing training for artisans by artisans and the training is free.

Camel Express: What has surprised you most in the process of developing the program?

Soumana: The people on the ground in Niamey are managing DIMA very well even while I am not there, living in the US. Often when diaspora try to help out at home it is hard to keep it going when you're not there.

Camel Express: How have you found/motivated staff & volunteers & supporters?

Soumana: The team is made up of fellow artisans who I have known for a long time. We work with people on the activities that they themselves want. We are not telling them what to do and ask them what they need.



Camel Express: What opportunities do you see on the horizon for Niger and/or DIMA?

Soumana: If we continue a lot of young people will have jobs and get on the right path. Trainees gain real skills and create family. They stay in contact through WhatsApp and support each other.

Camel Express: What do you think is different and special about your organization?

Soumana: The training provided is free! We welcome ideas. I had the first idea to form the organization and now we welcome new ideas to build on it, improve and expand it.

Camel Express: What foods do you miss most living in the US?

Soumana: dumbu and beriberi

A description of DIMA is incomplete without a mention of their stateside volunteer Judith. Although she has never been to Niger, through the power of friendship that many of us can relate to, Judith has become an avid supporter of DIMA. From her base in Washington state, she finds obscure funding sources, writing grant proposals, making phone calls, sending FON photos and updates and developing relationship with potential partners. Inspired by Soumana's commitment, she has found a way to effectively participate from afar to support and advance their mission.

5) Niger-related News & Info

Gunmen kill 22 after shooting at baptism ceremony in Niger

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce863x3g7jko>

Niger–Suisse : 14 milliards FCFA pour l'éducation, l'irrigation et l'entrepreneuriat agricole

<https://www.actuniger.com/politique/21334-niger-suisse-14-milliards-fcfa-pour-leducation-lirrigation-et-lentrepreneuriat-agricole.html>

Airstrike kills at least 30 near market in western Niger, sources say *by Reuters*

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/airstrike-kills-least-30-near-market-western-niger-sources-say-2025-09-26/>

Niger says it wants to build two nuclear reactors in partnership with Russia *by Reuters*

<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/niger-says-it-wants-build-two-nuclear-reactors-partnership-with-russia-2025-09-25/>

5th Annual Grilling Festival of Niamey

À Niamey, la rentrée de septembre rime désormais avec convivialité et découvertes culinaires. Le Festival des Grillades, qui souffle cette année sa cinquième bougie, s'impose comme un rendez-vous incontournable de la gastronomie nigérienne et africaine. Plus qu'un simple événement, c'est une véritable célébration du goût, du partage et de l'art culinaire. <https://nigerdiaspora.net/les-nouvelles-du-pays?view=article&id=21930&catid=36>

Here are some sources of information to peruse and bookmark:

- ActuNiger: <https://www.actuniger.com/>
- Sahel Research Group – [sign up for email](#):
- RFI in Hausa: <https://www.rfi.fr/ha/nijar/>
- Agence Nigérienne de Presse :<http://www.anp.ne/>
- <https://www.infos-niger.com/>
- <https://tamtaminfo.com/>
- <https://www.lesahel.org/>

6) In Brief

- **Grants in action**
 - School desks delivered in Tessaoua and Takieta regions



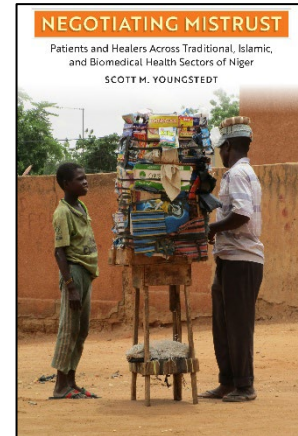
- Work begins on school latrine project - Niamey



- **National Peace Corps Conference and Embassy visit.** Board member Douglas Steinberg represented us at the conference and led a small delegation to meet with Niger Embassy officials. Our thanks to Yari Rabiou for coordinating the visit. L-R: Dr. Aron Primack, Douglas Steinberg, Yari Rabiou, Chargé d'Affaires, Hassane Idi, Frmr US Ambassador Eric Whitaker, Niger Consular Officer Abdou Chaibou



- **NEW BOOK: *Negotiating Mistrust* : Patients and Healers Across Traditional, Islamic, and Biomedical Health Sectors of Niger**, by Scott M. Youngstedt (FON Board member)
Negotiating Mistrust examines a wide diversity of patients and healers—and interactions between them—in Niamey, Niger through the analytical prism of mistrust. It offers a holistic study of the medical landscape in Niamey by focusing on the intersections between three medical sectors: traditional, Islamic, and biomedical.
<https://www.pennpress.org/9781512828825/negotiating-mistrust/>



- **NEW PODCAST, *SoftPower/FulStories* by Christopher Wurst**, Producer & Host
 Announcing the launch of a new podcast, *SoftPower/FulStories*, which is out today! It is a series that showcases U.S. soft power, foreign assistance, and cultural diplomacy globally. I know that it will resonate with the Friends of Niger group.
 I have leveraged more than two decades as a diplomat to collect stories of human connection—from ambassadors and diplomats, USAID alumni, Peace Corps volunteers, NGO leaders, historians, novelists and artists, businesspeople, farmers, travel influencers, and more—covering more than six decades in every corner of the world. Except for the implicit belief that constructive U.S. engagement with the world is essential, the program (mostly) eschews politics, policy, and punditry, focusing instead on impactful stories.
 The program can be found on Apple, Spotify, YouTube, or wherever people get their podcasts. If listeners like what they hear, I strongly encourage them to follow, like, review, and share the podcast with others.
 Listen on Apple / Spotify / YouTube
- **TCP Global seeks a French speaking board member** with a deep commitment to Niger.
 With Zakari Hasane of Potentiel Terre doing the work on the ground, TCP Global is building permanent, locally-managed loan pools to serve 50 marginalized communities throughout Niger in perpetuity. To date, \$350K in seed funds has supported 7000 loans worth \$1.3M and generated \$235K in program earnings to support local projects.
 In Niger some of our efforts have been limited by language barriers, in other countries, we assist partners to leverage those funds for WASH and other projects, but in Niger we have been less active in this program.
 Our board meets virtually 6 times per year. Ideally, a board member focused on Niger would monitor the Potentiel Terre website and chat group to forward important information to the president to be included in the TCP bi-monthly newsletter. We have asked Zakari to pilot an arbor-loo model in 2-3 sites to see if it is feasible in Niger. Water filters, which are highly effective in curbing diarrhea, have been distributed on a limited basis in Niger and we would like to explore ways to cost-share for wide-scale distribution. We would also like to explore options for affordable wells at sites near rivers and we would like to conduct an additional impact survey in Niger and locate the loan sites more accurately on the map. Someone to help with any or all of the above would be most welcome. If interested, contact helenedudley@yahoo.com

- **Tee shirts still available**



We still have a handful of tee shirts available in medium, large, and extra-large—get them while they last for \$25 each (includes postage)!

Email president@friendsofniger.org to request an order form.

- **NPCA is a Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) charity #11708**

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

Friends of Niger is an organization 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 in Niger,
2. Supporting development and humanitarian activities in Niger, and
3. Advocating for and educating about Niger.

Friends of Niger is an all-volunteer tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. EIN 65-1267451. To donate write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to
NEW ADDRESS: Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503,

OR go to www.friendsofniger.org to use PayPal.

Board of Directors

Officers: Amy Wilson/President, Alix Barstow Fedoruk/Vice President, Mary Abrams/Secretary & Grants Management Committee, John Baird/Past President; At Large Board members: Paige Pihl Buckley, Alhassan Ali Mamadou Souana, Douglas Steinberg, Nafissa Salihou, Scott Youngstedt, Soufiane Younoussi

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: [\(Friends of Niger\) FON](#)
- Submit news topics and articles: camelexpress@friendsofniger.org
- Contact President Amy Wilson, president@friendsofniger.org

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

