

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

December 2002

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Message from the President

Dear Friends of Niger -

It's been a while - too long, in fact - but we think that you will enjoy this issue of the newsletter and we'll try not to take quite so long before getting back to you with the next edition of *The Camel Express*.

A portion of our dilemma continues to be related to the cost of the hardcopy edition. We've had a good membership year, thanks to many of you, and we need a yet better one in order to be able to maintain the award-winning quality of both the newsletter and the web site as well as the frequency of newsletter production and distribution. This issue, in effect, launches our 2003 membership drive. We hope that you'll help by using the [FON 2003 Membership and Order Form](#) to renew your membership, to join for the first time, and/or to contribute to our various activities in one or more of the ways listed on the form.

You will likely notice that NPCA membership fees have increased by \$10 while we have held the line on our fee structure. None of the NPCA increase will find its way to **Friends of Niger** or, for that matter, to any other of the organizations affiliated to the NPCA. This in spite of the fact that we had been led to believe that the increase would be split equally between the two sets of organizations. **FON** continues, of course, to support NPCA and continues to value its affiliation with that organization, as disappointed as we are with this decision.

The featured stories in this edition revolve around the **FON** late October trip to Niger and the announcements made in Niger regarding new and expanded FON support for microcredit activities and the addition of new institutional partners to the **FON** children's vitamin campaign. The first eleven stories below cover those developments. Jim Bullington's column, *Inside Peace Corps Niger*, also appears along with a description of the new video, *Brother from Niger* -, featuring **Friends of Niger** and its project partners - and information on how to get a copies of the video, the 2003 International Calendar and the popular **FON** T-Shirt.

You will also want to check out other news and stories related to Niger and **FON**..

On behalf of the **FON** Board of Directors, may I wish each of you the happiest of holiday seasons and the best for the new year.

Enjoy the newsletter and, please, stay in contact.

Peace.

Jim Schneider
President

Twenty-Eight Travel to Niger with FON 15 Day Trip Includes Visits to Communities of Service and Friends of Niger Project Sites:

FON Announces New Project Partners and New Initiatives

The long anticipated **Friends of Niger** trip, more than two years in the planning, took place with little more than minor hitches, as 28 people traveled together to Niamey - arriving there tired but happy at 3 AM on Thursday, October 17. By the time that they left Niger, early in the morning of November 1, trip participants had visited countless locations across the country; reconnected with old friends and made new friends; had an exchange with current Peace Corps staff and volunteers; made direct contributions to **Friends of Niger** and other project activities in Niger; and, witnessed the expansion of **FON**'s on-going activities in Niger as well as the launching of new **FON** initiatives with project partners old and new.

The 28 trip participants included 18 RPCVs, five friends or family of RPCVs, and five friends or family of PCVs in service. After a couple of days in Niamey - spent marking the 40th anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger and visiting the Pediatric Ward at the National Hospital and the orphanage of the Fraternité de Notre Dame - people dispersed across the country to Ouallam, Dosso, Dogondoutchi, Birni N'Konni, Maradi and Zinder. From these regional locations, some participants continued on to Manahuri, Galbi, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Kantche, Dadin Serki, Mayahi, Serkin Bougaje, Madaroumfa, Chadakori, Bouza, Madaoua, Ayerou, Hamdallaye, Baleyara, Agadez and points north.

Over the course of the 15 days in Niger, **FON** President Jim Schneider met with the organization's project partners in Zinder, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Maradi, Galmi and Niamey and announced **Friends of Niger** support for new microcredit initiatives with new partner Africare as well as the expansion of support for the microcredit activities of CARE and MICA and the addition of the Maradi Hospital and the Notre Dame orphanage to **FON**'s on-going children's multivitamin campaign.

Details and photos of these and other stories related to the trip can be found below.



On their last evening in Niger, trip participants join PC Niger staff, current PCVs in service, representatives of **FON** project partners, and other friends at the **Friends of Niger** Thank You Reception and Mishwi held at PCHQ in Niamey.

FON Uses Occasion of Trip to Niger to Expand its Vitamin Campaign & to Broaden its Commitment to Microcredit Initiatives in Niger

The recent **Friends of Niger** sponsored trip was designed - all good common sense advice to the contrary - to be many things to as many people as possible. This design objective had two quite different origins.

In the first place, we - the Board of **FON** - had long ago promised that we would try to facilitate such an opportunity: the opportunity, simply put, to go back.

Then, as we began an exchange with people who had expressed an interest in this possibility - through questionnaires and e-mail messages - we came to realize that people wanted different things from the trip.

Virtually everyone wanted to return to their community of service. Most wanted to reconnect with Niger and to try to find old friends and coworkers. Some wanted the chance to visit parts of Niger that they had never made it to the first time around. Many wanted to once again make some manner of contribution to a people and a country to which they had maintained a commitment. Some wanted to pursue professional interests.

So we tried to put together a range of opportunities and potential activities that would, as much as possible, allow people to do their own thing - and which would allow **Friends of Niger** to pursue some organizational objectives as well. We wanted to use the occasion of the visit as a means for meeting with the organizations and groups with which we have developed something of a partner relationship as well as a means of acquainting trip participants with what we were doing within these partnerships. And we wanted to use the trip as an opportunity, in country as it were, to announce our support for new activities with new partners and expanded support of existing programs.

Consistent with our organizational objectives, and in one of the many messages and updates that I sent to trip participants, I reminded people about the ongoing **FON** campaign to supply children's chewable multivitamins to health care institutions in Niger and I suggested that they might want to throw a couple of bottles of vitamins into their luggage. The response was overwhelming. Operating each pretty much on their own, in league with friends and family, church groups, schools and local business, people filled their suitcases with more than 500 pounds of vitamins and other health related supplies for Niger's children.

This set the tone for the trip, a tone whose resonance is hard to communicate but whose spirit we've tried to convey below. - Jim

FON Joins Africare/Niger Effort to Bring Microfinance to Women's Groups in Dosso Region

The department of Dosso in the southwest of Niger has been reported by the United Nations (2001) to be the second poorest area in Niger. There, in the arrondissements of Dosso and Birni N'Gaouré, Africare/Niger's Women's Micro-Finance Program is assisting more than 50 women's groups in an attempt to generate new economic activity.

Groups of three women work together. They are trained to create a business plan and are given technical training related to the specific income-generating activity that they choose.

Most often, as shown in the example on the left, the women choose small business activities such as mat making, sewing, and small animal breeding and fattening.

According to Africa/Niger directrice Sheryl Cowan, \$500 will assist with the formation of three new groups. In October, during the **FON** sponsored visit to Niger, **Friends of Niger** President Jim Schneider announced that the organization has made an initial commitment to financial support for three such groups.

Africare/Niger joins CARE Niger and MICA as **FON** partners in support of microcredit activities in Niger, where **Friends of Niger** now helps finance fifteen such initiatives in six of Niger's seven regions - Dosso, Tahoua, Tillaberi, Maradi, Zinder and Agadez (see related stories below).



Mat weaving (above) and the breeding and fattening for resale of small animals such as lambs (below) are amongst the economic activities generated by the micro- finance programs organized by Africare in Niger and supported with funds from **Friends of Niger**.



AboukanAboukan Niger Revisited: FON Extends its Support for Botsotsoua Group

In late 2001, **Friends of Niger** began a relationship with a group of women from a village located about 40 kilometers south of Matamaye in department of Zinder. The village is named Botsotsoua and the women are members of a microcredit collective organized by CARE Niger as part of its Mata Masu Dubara - 'women on the move' - program. The group calls itself *Aboukan Aboukan Niger* - 'friends of Friends of Niger' - in recognition of the funding from **FON** which allowed CARE to provide startup training.

FON President Jim Schneider visited the group in January of 2001, shortly after its creation, and had an exchange with its membership as part of the content of the video *Brother from Niger*. By the time he returned to Botsotsoua in October, the group had accumulated capital and interest in excess of 1.2 million CFA about one third of which was divided between the groups 41 members for the purpose of supplementing family food supplies prior to the 2002 harvest.

With the remaining fund of almost 800,000 CFA, the group continues to make small loans to its members for the purpose of income

generating activities. Soon group leaders will attend an advanced training session, designed to familiarize participants with the range of governmental and non-governmental services and to help them build strategies for accessing these and other resources. To assist Aboukan Aboukan Niger with this and other forms of advanced training, **Friends of Niger** deposited 100,000 CFA with CARE Niger.



FON President Jim Schneider presents copy of *Brother from Niger* to Hadiza Mamane, President of *Aboukan Aboukan Niger*.

... And Reinforces its Commitment to CARE Niger's Mata Masu Dubara with Funding for New Groups in Tahoua & Tillaberi Regions

Barely a year ago, **Friends of Niger** made its first financial commitment to the Mata Masu Dubara program of CARE Niger, in the form of funding for the training of two groups - one each in the departments of Agadez and Zinder (arrondissement of Matamaye). While in Niger in late October, **FON** President Schneider was able to announce the decision of the **FON** Board of Directors to expand this commitment by funding the startup costs of two new groups - one each in the departments of Tahoua and Tillaberi.

FON and MICA Extend Oxcart Program to Youth Groups in Gazaoua and Aguié

At Celebration of Niger 2001 in Washington, DC last summer, Friends of Niger first announced that it had established a working relationship with Microcredit Africa, Inc. and that the FON Board of Directors had approved funding for six women's microcredit groups to be organized under MICA's Oxcart Project. Over the course of the past year, this funding has been instrumental in the establishment of the program in the arrondissements of Aguié and Mayahi in Niger's department of Maradi - including the communities of Gazaoua, Aguié, Dan Keri and nKanembakaché.

While in Niger in October of this year and after meetings with MICA staff in both Maradi and Niamey, FON President Schneider announced that Friends of Niger has agreed to fund a pilot project which will undertake to extend the Oxcart Project two youth groups - one each in Gazaoua and Aguié.

MICA Joins FON Vitamin Campaign

Schneider and MICA President Haoua Diatta also announced that MICA will be working with FON on its ongoing vitamin campaign by providing storage facilities and inventory control for the program in the Maradi area.



(Above) -**Friends of Niger** donated cart being guarded by les enfants de Gazaoua and members of the **FON** funded Oxcart Project group in Aguié. (Below)
- Schneider meets in Maradi with MICA coordinator Zanaba Hamib, and animatrice Halima Mazaou (photo taken by MICA adult education specialist Issoufou Kané); and, in Niamey, Schneider at the MICA office with Aminata Oumar, Hadiza, and Illiassou Na Indo.



Micro Niger - How You Can Help -

Contributions to our ongoing support for microcredit in Niger should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **Micro Niger c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the **Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form**.

FON Vitamin Campaign Grows: Orpelinat de Notre Dame & Maradi Hospital Join Program

It's been three years since **Friends of Niger** joined the program initiated by Sue Rosenfeld - then then based in Niamey as Resident Director in of Boston's University's Study Abroad program - to supply children's chewable multivitamins to the Pediatric Ward at the National Hospital in Niamey.

Soon after, when Chris Zoolkoski went to the SIM Hospital at Galmi for his internship, the program was expanded to include that institution.

The **FON** sponsored October 2002 trip to year was the occasion for another program expansion - with the orpelinat de Notre Dame in Niamey and the National Hospital in Maradi being the new program partners.

RPCV Pat Johnson Alio (64-66), now Directrice of English Language Training at the American Cultural Centre in Niamey continues to oversee distribution of the vitamins once they reach Niger.

Vitamin Campaign - How You Can Help -

Donations to FON's ongoing vitamin campaign should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to **Vitamins, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164**.

Message from Allan Quinn: Administrator, SIM Hospital, Galmi

Dear Jim,

Thanks so much for your visit here on Sunday and for dropping off the vitamins. We were actually right out of Children's Vitamins and we are thrilled to have them. They will be well used and will make a difference in many young lives here, helping to ensure good growth and development. ... We can use all the vitamins that you can supply. We saw 10,000 patients in October alone, and around 1500 of these were children or babies. In the weekend one of our compound gardeners lost a son through bad diet; he was very anemic and died very quickly after probably getting malaria. We are extremely grateful for any vitamins or other products you may be able to

send. We have very good control systems in the hospital and you can be assured that the medicines you give reach the people who really need them.

FON Helps Finance Playground for Orphanage in Niamey



Sister Brigitte-Marie of the Fraternité de Notre Dame surveys the site for the proposed orphanage playground during a visit by the participants in the recent **Friends of Niger** trip to Niger - along with **FON** President Jim Schneider and Tom Shafer (RPCV, 64-66, Madaroumfa). Charleen Pratt (RPCV, 70-73, Zinder), seen in the background, was among the twenty-two trip participants who visited the orphanage, delivered more than 125 pounds of vitamins and medicine, and spent time with the children currently in residence. At the **Friends of Niger** Thank You Reception and Mishwi, held the last evening of the group's time in Niger, Schneider announced and **FON** Treasurer Larry Koff presented a \$300 donation to the orphanage's playground fund.

Video Production that Features FON Available for Purchase



The 42 minute documentary on Niger, originally produced for Canadian TV and shot in Niger in January 2002, is now available for purchase from **Friends of Niger**.

From the blurb of the video's jacket - "In a '*Brother from Niger*', award winning journalist Andrew Younger brings a story of courage, hope, and struggle from one of the world's poorest countries. '*Brother from Niger*' follows **Friends of Niger** president Jim Schneider as he returns to a country he once called home, a country that's still as poor as when he left it.

The video was shot on location in Niamey, Maradi, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Kantche and Zinder and includes interviews with Haoua Diatta of the Oxcart Project as well as with Schneider, representatives of **FON**'s Nigerien partner organizations and others.

Copies of the videotape may be purchased for \$20 each (2 for \$35). Use the [FON 2003 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check or money order, made payable to **Friends of Niger**, to **Video, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164.**

“Serve, serve, serve. That's the challenge. For in the end it will be the servants that save us all.” - Sargent Shriver .

Friends of
Niger

**You're Gonna
Love This T-Shirt**

**Available in 4
Sizes
- S, M, L, XL**



**Makes a
Great
Gift!!**

**It'll Look
Good on
You as
Well!!**

Introducing - Friends of Niger T-Shirts...
You're gonna love this T-Shirt!!

Based on a design originally created by our neighbors at Friends of Burkina Faso, **FON** had produced its first and very own T-shirt. The short-sleeved shirts are 100% cotton, pre-shrunk beefy-T, natural muslin-colored fabric. The design (above) is four color: brown, black and the orange and green of the flag of Niger. You'll notice a nifty proximity map of Niger within the map of Africa which appears in the branches of the baobab tree. The shirts are available in Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes and sell for \$18 each, shipping included. Use the [FON 2003 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check made out to **Friends of Niger** (indicating the number of shirts by size), along with your name and address to: **Shirts. c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**

***... And the International Calendar 2003
from RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison
The Absolute Best Calendar on the Market!!***



Since 1987 the RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison have been producing and distributing one of the finest quality calendars on the market - the International Calendar. This year the calendar is once again available through **Friends of Niger**. The calendar is open size, 12 1/4" x 18 3/4", features 13 color photos along with information from past and present Peace Corps service countries, and is printed with soy-based ink on recycled paper. Each day of the year is annotated with holiday and event information; each month includes information on lunar and celestial events; and each photo is complimented by material related to the country portrayed. Use the [FON 2003 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check for \$12 US (\$8 after January 12, 2003) made payable to **Friends of Niger**, along with your address to: **Calendars, c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**

INSIDE PEACE CORPS NIGER



Dear Friends of Niger:

After a vacation and Peace Corps Country Directors conference in sweltering Washington, it is good to be back in the relatively pleasant weather of the rainy season in Niger.

Some of you may have read reports in the international media in early August about military mutinies and coup threats in Niger. Here is what happened

Mutinies and Coups

On August 5, Peace Corps staff and others were awakened at 3 a.m. by a call from the Embassy reporting the outbreak of gunfire at the Army barracks on the eastern edge of the city. The gunfire, which continued for more than two hours, was noisy and intense, but it was mostly wild shooting in the air and did little damage. There were no reported casualties.

We soon learned what was happening via a report on Radio France International. Their Niamey correspondent was at the scene, and the Prime Minister called them to give out the government's account of events. Some troops from the Niamey garrison had mutinied and attempted to seize the main armory. Loyal troops quickly quelled the mutiny, however, and by 8 a.m. traffic had returned to its usual flow, markets were open, and most people resumed their normal routines. We kept those Volunteers who were in town and other Americans off the streets until mid-afternoon, however, just to be sure all the shooting was over.

The Niamey mutiny was apparently related to a similar but temporarily more successful mutiny that had taken place a few days earlier in Diffa, Nguigmi and Ngourti. There, the mutineers captured and held hostage the prefect and other officials. Their demands were mostly related to pay (currently about \$35 a month for privates), but they also called for the dismissal of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff. By August 9, loyal forces sent from Niamey had freed the hostages, arrested 235 mutineers, and restored order. Two soldiers were killed in the fighting.

According to the Prime Minister, the mutiny represented an organized attempt to destabilize and overthrow the government, with the mutiny in the Diffa region intended to draw enough troops away from the capital to permit a successful coup. Four officers associated with a previous military government were arrested on suspicion of involvement.

These events demonstrate that political stability in Niger remains fragile. There were two successful military coups during the 1990s, and there are no guarantees that this history won't be repeated.

However, I've been encouraged by the government's response. First, it put down the mutinies quickly and with little bloodshed, demonstrating both the weakness of the rebels and the loyalty of the bulk of the armed forces. Moreover, it adopted a reasonably open communications policy and sent Cabinet Ministers to all parts of the country to explain to people what had happened. And with help from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, it quickly organized a seminar for military officers on civic responsibility and the role of the military in a democracy. Finally, it promised to do what it can to improve pay and living conditions in the barracks.

Moreover, all Nigeriens are vividly aware that the 1990s coups brought on a decade of disaster and further impoverishment for this already desperately poor country. They know that the violent overthrow of the current democratically elected government would lead to the suspension of most foreign aid, without which a successor government could not long survive; and this message has been quietly reinforced by the donor community.

I recognize that stupid, illogical things can happen, particularly in politically fragile countries, but my expectation is that there won't be any more coups any time soon, at least not successful ones, and that order will be maintained.

Our PCVs and staff were never in any danger from these events. We do not have any Volunteers in the Diffa region. Peace Corps operations continue normally.

Peace Corps Growth

Peace Corps/Niger's growth plans for FY-03, which begins October 1, have now been approved and funded. We will change from one PST per year with trainee input of 56, to two PSTs, in December and July, with a combined trainee input of 84. The December PST will be for agriculture and natural resource management trainees, and the July PST will be for trainees in the health sector and the new Community and Youth Education project.

Over the next two years, we project growth to an average of about 135 Volunteers, from about 95 currently.

Jim Bullington
Country Director Niger

FON to Host Website for Niger's Embassy to Canada

The **Friends of Niger** website will host the webpage for Niger's Canadian embassy after discussions between Her Excellency Rekiatou Mayaki, Niger's Ambassador to Canada, and **FON** President Jim Schneider. The material for the webpage, currently under development, will be accessible through the *Niger News & Info Links* section of the **FON** site - which is located along the right hand column of the site's front page.

Baobabinfo Linked to FON Site: Coordinator Seeks French-English Translation Assistance

[Baobabinfo](#) - an on-line newsletter produced in Niger, which features news, reviews and other items including online news of the state owned Radio Station Voix du Sahel and two private radio stations R&M and Tenere FM. Disponible en français, but soon to be mirrored in English.

Baobabinfo promoter Saidou Hangadoumbo is looking for help with English translation of the site's material. Saidou can be contacted at - shangal@siu.edu.

Good News for Niger in IMF Review of Economic Reform

According to a recent International Monetary Fund review, Niger's attempts to carry out economic reforms aimed at reducing poverty have met with "commendable success." The evaluation was part of an IMF review of the performance of the Nigerien economy for 2001 and was in reference to criteria set down by the IMF in December 2000 as conditions for Nigerien government access to as much as \$78 million dollar in loans at concessionary interest rates.

It its most recent review of the arrangement, IMF deputy managing director noted that "the authorities took strong actions to keep the programme on track... and to correct a budgetary slippage that occurred in the last quarter of 2001," said Mr Aninat.

Niger's economy grew by 7.6% in 2001 and inflation was down to 3.2% as the economy rebounded from a two year recession, partially due to a record cereals crop and partially as a result of the economic reforms which followed on the political reforms of the previous year.

Hausa & Zarma on the Web

News from Niger APCD Don Osborn - the Peace Corps Zarma Dictionary is now "officially" on the web at <http://www.bisharat.net/Zarma/>. Don also passed along the URLs for the [Hausa Database Online Dictionary](#) and for the [Hausa site at UCLA](#).

Credits and Other Information

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

FON can be contacted via the post at **P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164;**

by email at **lorenz3@magi.com**; and you will find FON on the web at the following Internet address - **www.friendsofniger.org**.

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FRIENDS OF NIGER 2003 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM