
The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

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Young Girls' Scholarship Program 2008 Progress Report

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

Project Summary

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

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

(Continued on page 3).



LEFT: YGSP participants with Brooke at ORTN.



RIGHT: Participants 2008 school year.



Dear Friends of Niger,

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

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

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

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

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www.friendsofniger.org.

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

YGSP UPDATE (cont'd from page 1)**YGSP Background Information**

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



YGSP Participants do a job-shadow at a Maternité.

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

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



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

YGSP participants learning study skills.

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

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

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

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

Children's Chewable Vitamin Project Update

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



Things Are Looking Up for Niger's Wild Giraffes



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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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

New Friends of Niger T-Shirt in the Works

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



EstroGenius Festival's Voices of Africa

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

FRIENDS OF NIGER

2009 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

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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
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a Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support FON's Microcredit in Niger activities with
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- ☐ I want to support FON's Youth Education activities through a NEW PARTNER, AAWEL (see page 4)
with a Contribution of _____
- ☐ I want to support the FON Chewable Vitamin Campaign
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Make Check or Money Order Payable to Friends of Niger and mail with this form to:
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FON Participation Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on Page 11.

- ☐ Will help set up local FON group
- ☐ Would participate in local FON group
- ☐ Will be local FON contact person
- ☐ Would be FON contact person for potential PCVs to Niger (contact us at the address on page 11 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

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



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Address Correction Requested

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