

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 28 Issue 1



January 2013

Expanding Lives Promotes Young Women's Development

Submitted by Leslie Natzke

An RPCV from another country once told me that Niger RPCVs talk so much about how they love and miss Niger. But Niger-folks do much more than talk. We act. Niger RPCVs are working across PCV-generational lines to promote leadership among young women in Niger. Expanding Lives was founded in 2008 by Rachel Mossi (Tillaberi, education, 89-91) and Leslie Natzke (education, 87-90) with a lot of red tape help from law school professor Tom Kelley (Fandou Berri, ag, 86-88). Since then, over 20 young women have participated.

Expanding Lives works with MICA, a Niger-based organization, to identify first generation high school (lycée) students who are doing well and who have leadership potential.

Expanding Lives then brings them to the Chicago-area for 6 weeks of leadership training.

The young women, aged 16 to 21, are chosen based on an application asking to identify personal challenges and strengths and to do a problem analysis. Their answers and their grades determine who is chosen. It is a tough job for board members, including Christine Holmes (Fandou Djadi, NRM, 04-06), Jennifer Rice (Boumba, NRM, 02-05) Jessie Wilt (Dosso, CYE, 04-07). In the past, students from Maradi, Aguié, Madaoua, Tahoua, and Niamey secondary schools have attended, and EL hopes for more diversity every year.



RPCV Jessica Garrels (right) arranged a visit for past and present EL girls with Catholic Relief Services in Niamey. MICA founder Haoua Diatta is on far left.

In Spite of Turmoil, FON is Engaged and Funds are Needed for Worthwhile Grassroots Projects

In spite of natural and man-made disruptions, grassroots development projects continue in Niger and your contributions are desperately needed. As an example, FON has just helped fund reconstruction of a well in response to a request from the American Embassy and Ambassador Bisa Williams. See page 3 for additional details.



Board of Directors Friends of Niger

Excerpts of A Letter from the FON Board to the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

The board members of the American NGO Friends of Niger (FON) write you to express their strong support of Niger's application for a Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact grant. FON is an organization composed largely of ex-Peace Corps Volunteers who have served in Niger over the last half century, as well as others who have worked in that country through non-governmental organizations. Members of the FON board have made sustained efforts in various capacities over that same half century to support the efforts of Niger's people to develop their country and improve their own life prospects.

Against this background we urge you to approve an MCC compact grant for Niger, as a follow-on to the threshold assistance program grant which MCC awarded the country in 2008. As you are aware, the threshold grant ran for a year and half before MCC was legally required to suspend it in 2009 in light of a governance problem (a coup d'état mounted to remove a sitting president contemplating an unconstitutional extension of his term in office into a life presidency). MCC restored the threshold grant 18 months later, in June, 2011, after the coup group ceded power on schedule to a newly elected civilian government. The latter gave serious indications of seeking to meet MCC criteria in good governance, combating corruption, encouraging economic freedom and investing in people and human rights. That led MCC to reinstate the grant. Our recommendation reflects a number of factors.

In addition to potentially destabilizing violence, Niger has suffered serious damage to its food production capacity occasioned by floods on the Niger River in the country's prime rice production area, and by other natural calamities.

It is important to note, however, that the GON has in the recent past taken steps to enhance economic freedom at the local level in rural areas and, through an astute policy change, enhanced food production potential. Despite having lived under seven different constitutions and a tumultuous succession of civilian and military governments since independence in 1960, Nigerien voters again went to the polls in large numbers in January 2011 to elect Niger's current governments – legislators and an executive at the national level, regional council presidents and members, and local-level mayors and councils in 266 communities. The common people in Niger have *not* given up on democracy, but they can certainly use any help available to allow them to consolidate a stable system of good governance.

FON believes that MCC approval of a compact grant would enable the current government to pursue efforts initiated with the first challenge grant in support of girls' schooling, against corruption, favoring economic freedoms and securing fundamental human rights. In light of the dangers now threatening the country and its people, we collectively urge you to take this action.

Status: The MCC Board met December 20 and determined that Niger was eligible for the compact grant, a large 5-year grant.

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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.**

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

It's time to support Friends of Niger (FON) with your DUES!

Please send your dues in January (unless you paid anytime during 2012)

The Simplest Way: Make your \$20 check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to: PO Box 5823, Washington DC 20016-9998. Please give your name and email address. Otherwise, please use the Preferred Way below.

In an effort to simplify dues collection and bring in more support for FON's projects, we are asking that annual dues always be paid in January from now on. If you didn't send in your dues during 2012, please mail your \$20 to us before the end of January 2013. If you did send in dues anytime during 2012, your next payment wouldn't be until January 2014. If you are not sure, just choose either January 2013 or January 2014, as you like.

Please keep in mind that 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) -- all contributions are fully tax deductible.

The Preferred Way:

Print out the Membership Form page of this newsletter and mail that in with your payment. We would like to know more about you and stay in touch, so this form asks for more contact information as well as for information about your connection to Niger, your dates and location in Niger, and your program or involvement in Niger. You can also order Friends of Niger T-Shirts with this form. If you want to support both the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) and FON, a \$55 check will cover both. A 3rd option is to pay dues through the NPCA website.

Thank you for supporting FON!

FON Supports Construction of Well in Touloukh

FON is working with the mayor of Ingall to rebuild a well in the rural commune of Ingall in the Agadez region. The ONG TAGHILTE, a local non-governmental organization that provides hydraulic aide is also a partner in the effort. FON received the proposal for assistance via the American Embassy self-help program which has more requests than it can support. The well is for herders in the area. With the floods in Niger last year many wells in the Agadez region collapsed. The local community will provide manual labor and supplies. The mayor sends his thanks to the Friends of Niger. The rebuilding should begin immediately as this is a good time for working on wells and be completed in about 45 days.

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Expanding Lives

Once the girls are chosen, a MICA representative meets with parents and leads the girls through the passport and visa process. Former participants also meet with the new girls to prepare them. Last year's group had Jessica Garrels (Dokoro, NRM, 02-05) and Lindsay Goldberg (Education 09-11) in Niamey to set up meetings with professional women from CRS, AFRICARE, the US embassy, and others. At the end of the program, the girls present a problem analysis about a situation in Niger to an American audience, everyone devours peanut sauce and rice, and there is a lot of pride, "Barka!", and tears.

Our self-confident girls return home and lead. Mariatou and Aissa gave lessons about HIV/AIDS and gave out condoms to their 1e classes. Assamaou has given up her Wednesday afternoons for 2 years to teach primary teachers and kids to knit plastic bags. Djamilta taught the girls in her neighborhood about women's health. Chamsya fixed her brother's bike her first day home. Eight girls attend university; one has recently graduated and is looking at a Masters.

No one in EL gets paid, so our costs are low-just over \$4000 per girl including scholarships and a laptop. It helps to have Sara Chambers (Dosso, MCD, 09-11) working with board members to raise money, and RPCVs like Susan (Kavanaugh) Susanke (Guidan Roumdji, ag, 87-89) who held a fund-raiser in Virginia with the help of Ryan Morris (CYE, 08-10). We also had donations this year from RPCVs of every decade that Peace Corps served in Niger.

In leadership class, we work with the Nigeriennes to identify assets in their community and their family. Expanding Lives has an easy job of playing role model in this. RPCVs obviously hold our Niger community close enough to do more than just talk about our fond memories. **For more information about Expanding Lives, go to expandinglives.org.**



Above: Warm up games in theater teach girls to pay attention to others.



Above: Salamatou, 2008, learns to fix a flat.



Below: TaiKwon Do class kicks are led by a 17 year old double black belt.



Left: The girls send e-mails before starting research on early marriage.

Mene ne Mother Tongue Editions?

by John P. Hutchison, Founding Editor



1. Introduction to Mother Tongue Editions

Mother Tongue Editions (MTE) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of African languages and cultures, in all forms in which they are manifested. Initially involved uniquely in publishing, today *MTE* produces and distributes a variety of culturally significant representations of language and traditional artisanry. *MTE* seeks also to promote the use of African languages in education and throughout society in Africa. The strategy adopted by *MTE* is to produce credible and significant documents in African languages that demonstrate the importance and the power of those languages as vehicles of the transmission of knowledge, both to their own speech communities as well as to the rest of the world. Profits from the sale of *MTE*'s products are destined to be shared by their authors and creators, and to be collected for the purchase of strategically important equipment for use in encouraging the promotion of African languages and cultures throughout the world. Profits from the sale of artisans' objects are used to promote the work of African artists and artisans.

2. The Story of Mother Tongue Editions

At a conference in the 1980s, *MTE* founder John Hutchison met Kassim Kone, a Malian student in the US who was doing a doctorate in anthropology and linguistics. While discussing publishing, Kone informed Hutchison that he had written a novel set in Mali in French, and wanted to know if it could be published. Hutchison told Kone that if he really wanted to contribute to publishing in Mali, it would be better if he thought about publishing in his own language, Bambara or Bamanankan. This was the beginning of a long period of collaboration focusing on the documentation of Bamanankan, and other Malian languages. Kone became an integral part of *MTE*. Kone produced an important body of literature in Bamanankan all of which were published in spiral bound photocopied form by *MTE*. Kassim Kone is today tenured professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York at Cortland and also serving as the President of the Mande Studies Association. During the 1990s, Kone wrote the first monolingual dictionary of Bamanankan which was published by *MTE* in 1994. The dictionary was later printed in a new edition in 2010. *MTE* promotes the publication of monolingual dictionaries as one of the primary documents that can contribute to the credibility and legitimization of a language that is subject to political or cultural marginalization.

3. Mother Tongue Editions Today

MTE's mission has evolved over time, and today this charitable organization is involved in a gamut of activities pertaining to African art, artisanry, language and culture. During one of his visits to Niger from Nigeria, Hutchison had met Yazi Dogo in Zinder in 1975 when Yazi was teaching in one of the first Hausa-medium primary schools of Niger. Their friendship and collaboration has endured since that time. Hutchison taught in the Department of Linguistics in Niamey in 1984-85 and was subsequently involved in a linkage between l'Université Abdou Moumouni (Niamey) and BU that eventually led to BU establishing a study abroad program in Niamey that lasted from 1987 to 2011. Yazi Dogo became an instructor in that program for a number of years, offering a course in the Performing Arts of Niger. *MTE* has collaborated with Yazi Dogo and his wife in various non-profit efforts. Today they are linked to *MTE* through Yazi's work in education through theater, his wife Hadja Aminata Djima's women's N.G.O. known as Aiki Yanke Talauci, Hutchison's sister city organization with Guinea known as Alliance Dalaba-West Newbury, Hadja Nafissatou Bah's girls and women's organization in Dalaba known as *Coopérative Sisal 2*, and also Lois Ferguson's non-profit organization known as *Glean and Gain*.

Hutchison had followed the activities of the *Friends of Niger* from a distance over the years. He maintained contact with quite a few of his fellow trainees from the Niger training program of 1966 in San Francisco. In 2012 he reconnected with a significant group of RPCVs from Niger when he attended the Santa Rosa reunion held at Bob and Gayle Reid's home there. It was during that time that *MTE* began raising funds in order to be able to invite Yazi Dogo and his wife Hadja Aminata Djima to come to the US to make contact with FON and its officers and members, with students and faculty at Boston University, the Embassy of Niger and the Ambassador of the Republic of Niger to the US, S.E. Maman Sidikou, and also with the various chapters of the Council of Nigeriens in the USA (CONUSA). (cont'd on p.6)

Expanding Lives continued from page 4

Once the young women arrive in Chicago, they spend 3 days on a retreat with American teens getting acclimated before moving in with host families, and formal classes start. Brian Tinger, who also led our recent website revamping, (Gaya, CYE, 09-11) took on the challenge of computer classes. GunnerHamlyn (Konni/Maradi, Ag/MCD, 04-07) has led nutrition classes in Hausa. Other volunteers teach English, women's health, leadership, peer mediation, business skills, social entrepreneurship, yoga, TaeKwonDo, community health and bike repair, two classes for which we recruited Burkinabe RPCV Sara Laurino. The girls also do cultural activities with Americans twice a week.

Mother Tongue Editions continued from page 5

The generous contributions from members of the *FON* made a significant contribution to their trip, and the meetings with members of *FON* were extremely important. We are now discussing the possibility of fundraising for the purpose of funding a possible tour of the US by Yazi Dogo's Hausa Theater Group. It is hoped that the fruitful collaboration between the *FON* and *MTE* can continue into the future.

MTE with her recently established website (see <http://www.mothertongue.us/>) has served as a vehicle for fundraising, and also a point of sale for the distribution of greeting cards and other items of Nigerian artisanry from the Musée Nationale.

The range of activities in which *MTE* is involved today is shown here:

- * commemorate and promote traditional artisanry through the sale of greeting cards depicting African artisanry;
- * participate in fundraising activities that support African artisans, artists, and authors;
- * publish African language literature;
- * promote and support African language literacy;
- * document African languages;
- * encourage authors to create monolingual dictionaries of African languages;
- * increase awareness of African literature in indigenous scripts;
- * remunerate African language authors with royalties;
- * encourage African language publishers;
- * promote awards and recognition for African language writers.
- * promote women and women's organizations engaged in the arts, literacy, publishing, and micro-credit.



Kassim Kone

Mother Tongue Editions is grateful to the *Friends of Niger* for this opportunity to let more people know about her history and her activities. May this collaboration continue long into the future.

For more information on the life story of Yazi Dogo and his family, visit the African Language Materials Archive at the following url: <http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/yazi-dogo> to see a Hausa language video of the Yazi Dogo story that was filmed by Hutchison in 2004 in Niamey.

A selection of Hausa readings assembled by Chaibou Dambagi entitled Littahin karatun Hausa na daliban Jami'ar Boston a Kasar Nijar was published by MTE in 1994 for the use of BU students in Niger.

Dalaba known as Coopérative Sisal 2, and also Lois Ferguson's non-profit organization known as Glean and Gain.

Mother Tongue Editions founder John P. Hutchison

The founder of *MTE*, John Hutchison, was a Crossroader to Niger in 1965 and participated in the construction of a community center that still stands in Niamey. This led him to apply to the Peace Corps. Though he was invited for Niger 4 and trained with them, he ended up being a volunteer in Chad 1 in a village of 200 on the eastern shores of Lake Chad working in rural and community development, animal traction farming and well digging. He then worked for his PhD in Linguistics and African Languages, spent 5 years working on Kanuri and Kanembu in the Nigerian university system, and eventually was hired to run the African language program at Boston University where he worked for 30 years until his recent retirement. He has maintained a close connection with Niger ever since 1965. His career has been dedicated to contributing to the documentation of under-documented and marginalized languages, be it internationally or domestically. He founded *MTE* in 1988 after publishing

a collection of Kriolu (Cape Verdean) children's riddles with one of his Hausa students (from Cape Verde) for the public school system.



Sample greeting cards available on the MTE website

2013 FRIENDS OF NIGER MEMBERSHIP FORM

It's time to support Friends of Niger (FON) with your DUES!
Please send your dues in January (unless you paid anytime during 2012)

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.

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.