

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

January 2019

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1) Message from the President

Dear Friends of Niger,

Our new year is off to a great start with many of you responding to our yearend fundraising letter with generous donations. You are guaranteeing another year of efforts to help Niger and Nigeriens as well as keeping us in touch with each other.

If you haven't had a chance yet to send your support, you can do that at any time with the information provided on the last page of this newsletter. Thank you very much.

If you need a quick recap of the projects FON funded last year and what we're looking at for 2019, here's the report that accompanied our recent appeal letter to you:

http://www.friendsofniger.org/pdf/projects_2018_2019.pdf

Guess what? Your FON Board is meeting the weekend of April 5, 2019 in the Boston area. Although we volunteers have interacted plenty on your behalf via email, phone calls, Zoom conference calls, etc., some of us have never met. At this retreat, besides meeting socially, we'll also work hard to do things like clarify our mission, hone our organizational structure and procedures, update our bylaws, and plan upcoming projects. Incidentally, while board members will pay most of their own expenses, we are grateful for a donation that has been earmarked for building capacity of the organization. The donor, who is among our members, has specifically directed funds to our efforts to advance the organization including the retreat, a website update and activities to build and engage the membership. At the retreat we will be reviewing the suggestions that 104 of you supplied when you completed the member survey last year. Thank you again for those insights!

You are invited! On the last day of the Boston retreat, Sunday, April 7, 2019, from 2-4 p.m., we invite any of you in the neighborhood to come socialize with us and with each other. Location yet to be determined. Please stay tuned for details and contact us with suggestions. We welcome your input and ideas any time.

FON regional get togethers! What? Just planting a seed that there may be ways for our nationally spread-out membership to pull together with regional get-togethers. If you are interested in pursuing this idea, please raise your hand!

Thank you again, and best wishes for 2019!

John Baird

president@friendsofniger.org

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



2) FON Updates

Thanks to your generous donations we are looking forward to a new year of support for projects in Niger. The Project Committee is fine-tuning the review and implementation process, starting with setting a schedule of quarterly application reviews. We anticipate continued support for projects that promote women’s economic advancement, solar electrification and Moringa plantations.

We also want to provide you, the members, with inspiration, ideas and support for projects that you might be able to initiate in your villages in Niger. What ideas do you have? Do you have connections to help implement some of these successful projects in your village? For example, electrifying small clinics in rural areas with solar power is a relatively inexpensive and uncomplicated project you may want to take on with our support and connections. The technology used is simple and adapted to rural community capacity, the supplies are local and each one costs as little as \$1,000. Friends of Niger is happy to support projects you may be already engaged in with other partners through promotion among our membership, engaging our contacts and fiscal sponsorship.

If you are interested in working with us on any projects please check out the application and project information at our website: <http://www.friendsofniger.org/about/projects/>

3) FON Member Updates –



In the News: Lisa Curtis PCV 2010-11 who worked on Municipal/Community Development in Safo, Maradi was featured on the cover of Specialty Food Magazine for her entrepreneurial work with Moringa. Check out a sweet little video explaining how she started this work based on her experience in Niger.

<https://www.kulikulifoods.com/>

Inspiring new Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has a link to Niger:

‘. . . at Boston University, Ocasio-Cortez studied abroad in Niger, doing rotations at a maternity clinic on the outskirts of Niamey.’ Read More: [HERE](#)



4) Where are they now – Pat Alio

Then

Pat Alio was among the Peace Corps pioneers who went to Niger in the early years, serving as a volunteer from 1964 to 1966. Her assignment was teaching Physical Education in elementary schools. In practice this translated to creating a Track and Field program for girls. They had little to no equipment so they used rocks for the shot put, tied elastic cord between trees for the high jump and engaged the students in the creative, make-do exercise. The kids loved it, teachers loved it and principals loved it! They held competitions among schools in spite of lack of funding and some of those students went on to be national champions. The program helped build self-esteem and kids learned to work together not compete against each other. “The great thing about Peace Corps is the idea that you are going to learn as much as teach. You don’t know it all.”



In the category of other duties as assigned, she and other Peace Corps volunteers spent a lot of time teaching English to President Hamani Diori, who was very interested in the early stages of the Peace Corps program. In those early days Niamey was but a big village and people were very friendly and interested in the Peace Corps volunteers. Pat bought a horse with her settling in allowance (probably not what Peace Corps had in mind!) and rode to church and to the market; note there were very few cars in Niamey at the time.

Pat was invited to go back and carry on her work at the expense of the Niger government from 67-71. She was happy to take on new duties adding middle school, high school programs for youth in Niamey.



I Arbor Day tree planting

Pat never left Niger. She met her Nigerien husband and was married in 1970. She switched to teaching English, enjoyed being welcomed into her husband’s family, and raised their own 4 children and adopted a fifth. She went 21 years without travelling home to the states even though she considers both places home. She has continued to contribute to educational programs teaching and directing the English Language Program at the American Cultural Center, developing curriculum, teaching teachers and influencing the lives of countless Nigeriens and other expatriates working in Niger.

Now

As Pat’s children started coming to the US for schooling and her husband sought medical treatment in the US she came back to the US for longer visits and stays while still travelling back to Niger on a regular basis. She has enjoyed helping her daughter launch a school and lending a hand to develop English curriculum for the budding African Development University. She says now she is just a stay-at-home grandmother, but this seems like an understatement.

The impact of your experience in Niger.

Pat's great joy and fulfillment comes from meeting former students in Niger and hearing from them how the educational opportunities and influences she provided has impacted their lives. "When you are teaching, you don't realize that you are helping shape their lives. Getting students to ask questions and search for answers, seeing them open up and get self-confidence."

What do you miss from Niger?

Friends and family, food and the life there.

Please suggest candidates for future "Where are they now" features. We are hoping to spotlight representatives from all the decades of service and diverse paths. Who do you want to hear about?

5) Call to action: Pump Project in Ourogo, Say Arrondissement, Niger

Join hands with the village of Ourogo, Water Charity, NPCA and **Ken Patterson** to repair 3 foot pumps.

*"I'm going to be doing a water project in the village where I was a volunteer with the help of **Water Charity** (watercharity.org). For anyone interested, I'll provide details on the project as it advances. I have a dependable project manager on the ground in Niger. Perhaps he'd be willing to support some other projects.*

Thanks for your help! --Ken

Go to the Water Charity link for [more project info](#)

6) NIGER NOW - telecommunications



Charging cell phones in the market at Nya Beeri

If you have not been in touch with Niger lately it may be hard to imagine that cell phones have completely permeated Niger. Effectively skipping the stage of developing landlines, they jumped ahead to cell phones. This goes all the way from the streets of Niamey where hawkers at every intersection sell cards to put minutes on your phone, all the way out to villages without electricity that rely on charging their phones weekly at the market.

In recent news one of the big providers of cell service has been shut down for failure to pay taxes. Read the story here: <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/682250/economie/niger-apres-orange-des-locaux-dairtel-niger-fermes-par-le-fisc/>

The Nigerien authorities have ordered the closure of the premises in Niamey to the largest operator in the country, Airtel Niger telecoms, for "non-payment of taxes", announced Saturday of the officers of the company and the local media.



Airtel is one of four companies that shared the 7.7 million mobile phone subscribers, of a population of 19 million people.

Cell phones are having a big impact and penetrating far into Africa and this is only expected to grow. According to CNN in Africa less than one in three people have a proper drainage system, half of the population live in areas without paved roads, and only 63% have access to piped water. Yet, 93% of Africans have cell phone service. [Read more from CNN <https://www.cnn.com/2016/01/19/africa/africa-afrobarometer-infrastructure-report/index.html> and about Sub Saharan Africa: <http://www.africanews.com/2017/07/25/over-half-a-billion-mobile-subscribers-in-africa-by-2020-hi-tech/>]

Sub-Saharan Africa currently has 420 million unique mobile subscribers with a 43% penetration rate. By 2020, this number is expected to hit over half a billion, making Africa the fastest growing mobile market.

Communication and much related development is vastly facilitated by the proliferation of cell phones, however, the technology is not without its problems. In 2013, unregistered phones were associated with crime, including the kidnapping of two French nationals in 2011 and other terrorist activity. Phones are now required to be registered, putting to an end a system where previously up to a third of the numbers were unregistered. Read more here: <https://phys.org/news/2013-11-niger-mobile-crime.html>

Technology Roundup According to Wikipedia

Main phone lines	100,500 lines in use, 145th in the world (2012)
Mobile cellular	5.4 million lines, 107th in the world (2012)
Internet users	230,084 users, 150th in the world; 1.4% of the population, 205th in the world (2012)
Fixed broadband	3,596 subscriptions, 166th in the world; less than 0.05% of the population, 185th in the world (2012)
Internet hosts	454 hosts, 185th in the world (2012)

7) Did you know? Fauna updates

Saving the last West African giraffes in Niger

In the mid-1990s there were only 49 West African giraffes left in the wild. As a result, the subspecies was listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species in 2008.

Efforts by the government of Niger in collaboration with local and international partners have led to a resurgence of the West African giraffe. The population has now increased to 600 and last month, the subspecies was downgraded to vulnerable by the IUCN. READ MORE from BBC: [HERE](#)

Dama gazelle Update-- from Janet Donaghy, who is a Volunteer Guide at the National Zoo: Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute/National Zoo is doing excellent work with Dama gazelles, native to Niger, Mali, and Chad. The Scimitar Horned Oryx, another Niger and Chad

animal, was extinct in the wild until SCBI, GOC and others implemented a reintroduction program. In Chad, SCBI designed and created special collars to track the Oryxes once they were released.

Sahara Conservation Fund

Check out more work being done in West Africa under the direction of a familiar face, John Newby, CEO of Sahara Conservation Fund. Their mission is to conserve the wildlife of the Sahara and bordering Sahelian grasslands.

CHAD - Scimitar-horned Oryx Reintroduction

CHAD & NIGER: Addax Conservation, Dama Gazelle Conservation, Health Care Missions

NIGER - Giraffe Conservation

<http://www.saharaconservation.org>

8) Important info:

Notes from the Editor, Amy Wilson

We want **your** input! Please share any news, ideas, articles and ideas for other categories for your newsletter and let us know what you think of the changes in format and frequency.

We are looking for content that falls into these categories:

Niger now | Culture | FON Projects | Niger Diaspora | FON Update | Calls to Action |
Where are they now? | Did you know?

Please keep in mind these two Friends of Niger resources:

- Our website (new webmaster needed): <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfNiger/>

CONTACT US AT: Camel Express FON camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com

Friends of Niger Board of Directors

President - John Baird

Vice President - Phyllis Dichter Forbes

Treasurer - Larry Koff

Secretary - Cheryl Turner

Members at large: Tom Corcoran, Seybou Douma, Dale Downes, John Hutchison, Amy Wilson,
Penni St. Hilaire, Rabiou Yari.

Friends of Niger Membership Info – *Please submit with dues*

Name:

Address/City/State/Zip+4:

Phone:

Email:

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.):

Dates in Niger:

Location in Niger:

Program or type Involvement:

DUES & DONATIONS

Membership dues & donations help fund FON activities – including The Camel Express newsletter, 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. We send receipts so you can take charitable tax deductions.

Dues are payable on January 1st of each calendar year. You may make a donation at any time. The first \$20 of your donation will be considered your annual membership unless it is earmarked for a specific project. To make a payment at any time you can either go to www.friendsofniger.org to donate via PayPal, or write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to: PO Box 1999, Brookline MA 02446-0017. Thank you very much!

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 information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.

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