

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 23 Issue 1



April—May 2008

Young Girls' Scholarship Program Thanks FON & Finds a Home in PC Niger Gender & Development Program

The idea of the Peace Corps's Gender and Development (GAD) program sprang from years of practice and observation of the unequal roles of men and women throughout the world. Though not in every Peace Corps nation, its objective is to address the great educational, health, and economic disparities between men and women in countries that suffer these inequalities the most, and has been functioning in Niger since 1997. The program's idea is to support Peace Corps volunteers working with community leaders in the field to give women more control over their personal and economic well-being and that of their families. GAD activities include health education, literacy campaigns, income generating programs, education advocacy, and others.

On Thursday, March 13, 2008, the Peace Corps and other members of the American community in Niger gathered together to celebrate the achievements of the program's projects and to raise more funds for the coming months. Silent and live auctions highlighted by an American community talent show raised over 2.9 million CFA (about \$6500). These funds will be distributed over the next six months to volunteers for projects seeking to address GAD's principles. Some examples of these projects include women's gardens, income generating activities such as sewing, crafts, and soap-making, colorful school map and nutrition murals, girls soccer tournaments, radio shows, and literacy classes.

Funding for GAD projects requires that the community contribute at least 15% of the project's budget through in-kind, labor, or financial means and that the project is strongly sustainable. The best GAD proposals involve the transfer of skill, the consideration of the family as a whole, the education of men, women, boys and girls, and the potential for community growth. Volunteers take maximum advantage of the availability of these funds for their projects, and they will need further replenishing *soon*.

The Young Girls' Scholarship Program, funded in large part by the Friends of Niger, is one of GAD's core projects. The Young Girl Scholars that are sponsored by FON and the GAD program receive monthly stipends, as well as school uniforms, materials, and books to make their formative moments in adolescence productive and fulfilling. On behalf of Peace Corps, thank you so much for your continued, much-needed, and much-appreciated support.

By Mark Seaman, Coordinator, HIV/ AIDS & Gender Development Programs, PC Niger



LEFT: YGSP
Participants do a
job-shadow at a
Maternité.



RIGHT:
Participants Rabi,
Maimouna and
Mourja.



Dear Friends of Niger,

2007 was a year of particular note as the 45th uninterrupted year of partnership between the Peace Corps and the people of Niger. We are very proud of the work accomplished across those 45 years and we hope to have many more AND to eventually be able to say that our partnership has reached its goal.

Unfortunately, 2007 has not been a great year for security and stability in Niger. In February, the rebellion in the North resumed and continued to disrupt assistance and daily life there throughout the year. The result is reduced activity in, information on and access to this otherwise vital part of Niger. It also suspended PC Niger's discussions on returning Volunteers to the North for work in the Agadez region. This is a sad and unfortunate drain on resources and energy for all of Niger.

2007 ended with several serious incidents involving landmines in the southern part of the country. The incidents were in urban centers – Maradi, Tahoua, Dosso, Tanout, and Niamey, and several innocent civilians were killed. We have not had any incidents since January 8 and we are determined not to let these malicious activities slow down the good work of PCVs working side by side with Nigeriens.

I'd like to highlight a sampling of the positive energy that we continue to bring to and find in Niger – and in this newsletter I'm going to focus on education.

First we have been very fortunate to receive donations from the Friends of Niger and others that we have directed to our Young Girls' Scholarship Program to support 18 young girls as they work through their secondary education. We have used that money to support the girls directly and also to prepare and produce two conferences for the girls in the program (in Niamey and Zinder). These conferences bring the girls into the regional capitals and provide life and education skills sessions while introducing the girls to successful women role models. The conferences provide a unique experience, and are often the first exposure a girl has to other female students struggling with the same difficulties in the educational system.

In addition, we have a program that helps primary students elect and support student governments. This program has been a huge success, starting in Kollo with one PCV, her counterpart, and 12 schools and now spreading as far as east of Maradi. The students elect their own student government in a process virtually identical to the one used to elect the municipal and national governments and then the elected governments actively work with the school administrations. I witnessed the election of a student body president, and the seriousness of the students and the effort their parents and teachers brought to helping them understand basic civics was truly moving. This is an excellent blend between our Education and our new Municipal and Community Development projects as it helps community members learn about their roles and responsibilities in government.

We also have a program on environmental education that was started by one PCV who extended for a third year to try out the NASA-

(Continued on page 3)

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

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



Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership or join us for the first time. You'll find the **FON 2008 Membership & Order Form** on page 7.

Message from Peace Corps Niger Director Mary Abrams (cont'd)

sponsored GLOBE environmental education system. This system teaches students and teachers how to monitor and evaluate their physical and biological environment. The first PCV left the program in the excellent hands of a couple of PCVs who were moved to Niger when the PC program in Guinea was evacuated. These two not only expanded the program in Niamey but developed (and translated into French) a manual that they used to host a workshop to train other PCVs and counterparts. Now many of our Natural Resource Management PCVs are actively using the manual and bringing real environmental education to even small bush villages. PCVs, teachers, and students all love the program.

Please remember education is not our only work here at PC Niger – we continue to do much more. Because there is such a need for education and the exchange of information is so rewarding, PCVs incorporate some form of education into their work regardless of their primary project. In the next Camel Express we'll highlight some of our other work. In the meantime, the "cold" season is over and the days are now routinely over 105°F and we are moving into the "Hunger Season," that tough part of the year when many people don't have enough to eat. The drastic drop in the value of the dollar and the similarly steep rise in the price of petroleum have exacerbated this already difficult time of the year by causing a significant increase in the cost of staple foods.

That is all for now, as Garrison Keeler always says – Be well, do good work, and stay in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

All the best, Mary M. Abrams
Country Director, Peace Corps/Niger



PCVs help primary students elect & support student governments.

RPCVs Dedicate Retirement to the Maine-Soroa Hospital Project

Four people, including three Americans, have traveled to the village of Maine-Soroa to provide Nigeriens with much-needed medical assistance. Dr. Bill Kirker and his wife Barbara, Dr. Steve Humphrey and Dr. Orietta Barquero. Their mission is to revitalize a hospital which the Kirkers worked to establish during their Peace Corps service in the 1960s. They were forced to leave due to civil unrest, and the hospital slowly deteriorated over the years. Now, with the support of the Nigerien government and nonprofit organizations like MedShare International, they are dedicating their retirement to expand the hospital's services. The Kirkers established KAMRA (Kirker African Medical Relief Association) to fulfill their mission. KAMRA's immediate goals are to assure a regular supply of expendable supplies from MedShare as well as equipment as the hospital expands; assure a regular supply of critically needed medicines from Medical Assistance Programs (MAP) International (www.map.org); obtain additional equipment to support the work of U.S. doctors providing short-term specialist services; and obtain funding for a new nutritional program for patients.

In June 2007, MedShare shipped a container full of much-needed medical supplies to the remote village in Eastern Niger, near Lake Chad. The shipment allowed the health-care providers at Maine-Soroa to vastly increase their patient capacity and quality of service. The shipment contained disposable items such as bandages, syringes, disinfectant and surgical instruments, as well as blood pressure meters, laryngoscopes, and a blood gas analyzer.

The hospital lacks air conditioning and adequate lighting, and record-keeping is done by hand. However, the Government of Niger is doubling the physical size of the hospital, upgrading its infrastructure and increasing the number of Nigerien personnel assigned to the hospital.

To donate to KAMRA, send a check made out to National Christian Foundation to: KAMRA, 4840 Forest Drive PMB 156, Columbia, SC 29206 and note KAMRA Fund on the memo line. Your donation will be earmarked and directed in full to KAMRA.

Friends of Niger Mission Statement

Friends of Niger (FON) supports a variety of activities for the benefit of Niger, Nigeriens, and the membership of FON. These activities seek to foster education, community development, socio-cultural activities, and the promotion of understanding and goodwill between Niger, the United States of America, and the citizens of both countries. FON's support for these activities include but are not limited to food assistance, education, health and social welfare, environmental restoration, and advocacy on behalf of Niger and Nigeriens. FON concentrates its efforts and resources on projects, programs, and advocacy activities which engage and support local initiatives, address an under-served population, have a sustainability component, and can provide periodic reports including financial reports; additionally, FON seeks to provide moral support to Peace Corps Niger and currently serving and returned Peace Corps Volunteers and financial support to those activities which have Peace Corps Niger sponsorship.

Friends of Niger Advocacy Statement (2007–2010)

Friends of Niger (FON) is committed to the future of Niger and her people. Considering UN reports that indicate that women endure more than 60% of the poverty in Africa and that Niger ranks among those countries in which women suffer disproportionately to men, along with a recent study of change in traditional societies (Harrison, The Central Liberal Truth) that states that the key to change in Africa is "improving female literacy," and responding to the personal experiences that FON members have had with programs that support women and young girls in Niger, FON while committed to supporting a variety of development and socio-cultural activities in Niger seeks to explicitly promote those programs and projects that advance the potential of Nigerien women particularly highlighting those activities devoted to economic opportunities for women (micro credit programs) and women's education (basic literacy, vocational/technical and formal education). Furthermore, FON is committed to raising awareness among its membership and others concerning the issues confronting Nigerien women and advocating on behalf of Nigerien women and the activities that seek to address their issues. During 2007–2010, FON pledges to intentionally support development activities that directly and specifically promote the well-being of Nigerien women and their families.

Children's Chewable Vitamin Project Update

Sue Rosenfeld reports from Niger that a big supply of vitamins were transported to the pediatric ward of Niamey Hospital on Mouloud (March 19) by Waikwarai (Phoebe) and Tanko (Charles). The interim administrator, Zeinabou Oumarou, received them in her office, where they built a pyramid of the 33 bottles for a photo. The 33 bottles each contained 300 vitamins for a grand total of 9,900 vitamins! In December, Dr. Lydia Englehardt, a volunteer physician at Galmi Hospital, was able to purchase and carry \$120 worth of the pediatric vitamins. 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 on page 7.

A Heartfelt Thanks to the Manhattan Theatre Source (MTS) for Supporting the YGSP

FON received a \$2,000 donation from the MTS (www.theatresource.org) for the Young Girls' Scholarship Program in January. The group raised the funds as part of the 8th Annual EstroGenius Festival for the YGSP in Niger. One of the festival's former volunteers, Ginger O'Neill, is a current PCV in Niger, and has sent stories created by young Nigerien women to be performed by NYC teenagers as part of their Voices of Africa program. Mohamed Seidou, Executive Secretary of the Consulate of Niger, attended the performances. Lanie Zipoy, Co-Executive Producer of the Festival, said, "We have even bigger plans for next year."

Niger Scrub Becomes Last Sanctuary for Giraffe Herds



by Staff Writers Koure, Niger (AFP) Dec 30, 2007

The last West African giraffes have found a refuge in the acacia scrub just one hour's drive outside Niger's capital Niamey. Far from poachers and other predators, babies in tow, they extend their long necks to grab a mouthful of thorny acacia bush.

Since hunting was banned ten years ago, these giraffes have found a haven of peace in the tiger bush scrub here. At the end of the last ice age 10,000 years ago, when the Sahara was still green, giraffes could be found all the way across North and West Africa, from Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal, down to Cameroon.

Just a century ago they still could be found in Senegal, Mali, Niger and northern Nigeria but their numbers have diminished dramatically since then. Now, apart from a few animals in Mali, the only viable herds of *Giraffa camelopardalis peralta* are here in Niger.

Their record of coexistence with the local population has had its ups and downs. In 1996, after a decade of intensive poaching and the severe drought of 1984, their numbers had fallen to just 50 animals. Now there are around 170 of them, according to a recent census by the Association to Safeguard Giraffes in Niger (ASGN). If we lose these ones that means the end of the peralta sub-species," warned Jean Patrick Suraud, ASGN's scientific coordinator. "We don't kill giraffes any more. We look after them like we look after our children," said Amadou Yacouba, the chief of Kannare village in the heart of the giraffe zone. The giraffes are not afraid of humans and so they come right up to the huts in the village. "We see them crossing the school yard like top models," a village teacher said.

The giraffes are gaining notoriety in other ways. For the past few years guides and researchers have been baptizing the offspring. Armed with patience and a bit of good luck, the ever more-numerous tourists who come here can meet "Patricia" or "Siddo" in the middle of the bush. In 2003 local peasants went as far as wearing mourning dress for two giraffe calves offered by Niger's president to one of his African counterparts and who perished on their way.

But cohabiting with the giraffes is not always easy. "Sometimes the farmers get mad because the giraffes are eating their bean harvests," explained Kimba Ide, a tour guide. "To put things into perspective we explain to them that hippopotami are protected and yet they are more dangerous than giraffes and do more damage," Ousmane Zodi, another ASGN worker explained.

To encourage local people to protect giraffes ASGN and its partners, including Doue la Fontaine zoo in France, have provided bore holes, cereal banks, grain mills, seeds and fertilizer. The women get interest-free loans to help them set up small shops.



But despite the new giraffe-friendly mood in Koure, the peralta giraffes still face challenges: deforestation is destroying their habitat, while one or two have perished in road accidents.

Editor's Note: While the article doesn't mention it, Peace Corps Volunteers in the Natural Resources Program have been involved in the giraffe project, contributing their energy to the survival of these elegant mammals.



Friends of Niger: The Last Ten Years

Those attending the 35th Anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger in July 1997 were moved to revitalize the almost defunct Friends of Niger group, which had been started by Meredith McGehee; a balance of \$6,000 remained in a bank account in Washington, DC. The process took almost a year and now ten years later seems like a good time to look back and celebrate the accomplishments of Friends of Niger as Niger has just celebrated the 45th anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger.

1998 - Jim Schneider, as Acting President, formed an Interim Executive Committee and an election was held in June.

2000 - The newsletter and website are up and running. FON received an award from NPCA for its newsletter, which was produced by Jim Schneider. Membership was up to about 160 paid dues. Annual income and expenses were running round \$5,500.

2002 - The October trip to Niger for the 40th anniversary of the Peace Corps resulted in the documentary entitled Brother from Niger, which was produced for Canadian television. It was first a video and later a DVD fundraiser for FON projects in Niger. 500 pounds of children's chewable vitamins were personally distributed to the hospital in Niamey, the Notre Dame Orphanage in Niamey, and the hospitals at Galmi and Maradi. The group also visited the Mata Masu Dubara operated by CARE Niger to see first hand the benefits derived for FON's contributions of \$1680. They were also able to visit MICA's Oxcart Project in the Maradi area, which received \$2,300. That year we also developed the T-shirt fundraiser and contributed to a Peace Corps Partnership program in Niger

2004 - The FON meeting in conjunction with the NPCA National Convention was a wonderful social gathering of Niger volunteers and featured information and exchange sessions for RPCVs and Nigeriens. FON continued its contributions of chewable vitamins, the Oxcart project, and CARE Niger's program Mata Masu Dubara. FON also provided \$500 to fund a local organization providing relief for women and children, ORUCWOCA.

2005 - Famine relief efforts. FON played an important role in informing our members and the general public about the devastating effects of the famine in Niger. They were encouraged to support the efforts of NGOs operating in Niger and many private fundraisers were organized and publicized through the web site and the Camel Express.

2006 - Donation of \$1000 to the Tin Hinan micro-credit project. In order to assist 20 women in Goroubi, in the Say - Tillabery region, a fourteen-month project that ended in March 2007.

Donation to the Fraternite Notre Dame Orphanage and donations of chewable vitamins to the National Hospital in Niamey.

Donation of \$500 to insure the publication of a Peace Corps Volunteer Health Manual for children.

Donation of \$3600 to support the education of 18 Nigerien young women for the 2006 - 07 school year. Educate Tomorrow events in 2006.

FON advocacy efforts to reopen the USAID office in Niamey were rewarded when Mark Wentling was sent to Niger as USAID's permanent program manager.

2007 - Donation of \$3600 to support the education of 18 Nigerien young women for the 2007- 08 school year. FON also received a donation of \$2,000 from the Manhattan Theater project to continue funding the Young Girls Scholarship Program. The Theater Group raised the money from a production "Voices of Africa" which was written by Nigerien students under the direction of a Peace Corps volunteer.

It is evident when you look at the FON web site now or read the Camel Express that FON serves as an important connection for a number of other projects such as Art Think -- painting to feed Niger, Educate Tomorrow, Rain for the Sahel and Sahara and the Niger Guinea Worm Eradication Project, to name a few, all working to improve the lives of the Nigerien people. FON also has an important role in informing our members and the general public about issues important to the Nigerien people. FON is proud of its service over the past ten years and pledges to continue to serve the people of Niger in the years to come.

FRIENDS OF NIGER

2008 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

Name(s) _____

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
- ☐ Enclosed is \$35 for a FON Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)
- ☐ I am a current Niger PCV, entitled to Free Membership
- ☐ I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

New and renewing members are entitled to one FREE copy of *Brother from Niger*

Format Choice: DVD ____ VHS ____ No Thanks ____

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Format Choice: DVD ____ VHS ____
at \$20 (2 for \$35) (Shipping Included) _____
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at \$18 each (Shipping Included) _____
T-Shirt Sizes: S ____ M ____ L ____ XL ____

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



Zali, YGSP participant, with her school notebook.

BELOW: Participants of the YGSP learning study skills.



Inside *THE CAMEL*...

- Page 1 - Young Girls' Scholarship Program
- Page 2 - Message from the PCD
- Page 3 - Message from the PCD cont'd
- Page 3 - Maine-Soroa Hospital Project
- Page 4 - FON Mission & Advocacy
- Page 4 - Vitamin Project Update
- Page 4 - Thank you to EstroGenius
- Page 5 - Niger as Giraffe Sanctuary
- Page 6 - Brief History: the Last 10 Years
- Page 7 - Membership Form

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

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



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Address Correction Requested