

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

March 2019

Please note we have changed our mailing address to PO Box 612, Decatur IL 62525

JOIN US IN BOSTON!!! Sunday, April 7, 2019, from 2-4 p.m., we invite you to come socialize with the FON board and with each other. After the FON board retreat we'd like to meet you, share some of our ideas and hear your input.

Please join us at the **Social Restaurant and Bar, 320 Washington Street, Newton MA**, www.socialrestaurantandbar.com . Map: <https://goo.gl/maps/gJb2DnJPnZ72>

We have reserved a private room and will be ordering up some snacks to share. It will really help us to know how many are attending, so please RSVP to amibula.wilson@gmail.com ASAP,—we'd really like to meet you!

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Message from the President

The Board has been active on many fronts in the last few months. We REALLY want you to join us on Sunday April 7th for a social get together with **any and all friends** of Niger. We are excitedly preparing for the retreat in Boston where we have some great discussions planned.

The board has new committees revising the bylaws, and reviewing and making recommendations on financial management. If you have expertise in any of these fields we would love to add members to our working committees.

Board transitions and opportunities: We must all thank Larry Koff for more than 20 years of service as the Treasurer! Larry has been a vital contributor to the work of FON in the role of Treasurer. We really need to thank Larry for taking on the sometimes challenging process of sending funds overseas which he has done with determination and perseverance. Also Transitioning from his role in supporting the website and all things PayPal we need to thank Steve Bushell who has served on the board for 10 years. Steve has helped us with all things technological and has maintained our virtual presence on the web.

We are looking to the membership for folks to step up and help fill in some of these duties in financial management and tech support. Technology is making it easier to split up some of these functions and spread th workload among more helpers. Can you help? Do you have expertise to share to achieve the mission of the Friends of Niger? Please think about getting more involved and contact us to talk about ways you can contribute.

John Baird president@friendsofniger.org

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

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.

Please keep in mind these two resources about Friends of Niger:

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

1) FON Members Light up with Solar!

FON members are embracing the solar electricity initiative. Living in Niger gave most of us personal awareness of the value of electricity and the possibilities it brings to a health clinic. Here are two different approaches to helping -- both models get the job done! What's your style?

Karen Brenner educates and crowd sources

Karen Brenner got inspired reading a recent mailing from Friends of Niger and mobilized to do something for Bande, where she served as a nutritionist in 1990. Karen who is now a pediatrician living in Ann Arbor, immediately reached out to her contacts in the village via WhatsApp to see if solar electricity at the health center seemed like a good fit for them. They thought it sounded like a great idea to ease power costs and support health workers.

Karen got busy.

She got in touch with John Hutchison, the FON board member who in turn put her in contact with Moustapha Harou. Moustapha is a health worker who is very interested in seeing more rural clinics equipped with lighting and being less dependent on costly generated power. Moustapha has developed a list of rural clinics in need. Moustapha assessed the situation and developed a list of needed components and prices.

Meanwhile, back in the US Karen held a couple of fundraiser events. Her events were relatively small hosted parties where she shared information about health care needs in Niger and the benefits of installing solar electricity. She told her own story of the expedience of working in Niger and the value of the relationships she is still maintaining with Nigeriens. The fundraising parties were about 2 hour sessions in private homes.

She held one gathering at a house in Los Angeles and with only 20 or so people attending was able to raise \$6,000!! Back home in Ann Arbor she invited a Nigerien in town to participate and the party guests were very appreciative to have the opportunity to meet her and get to know her better. To help her out with the bigger event in her home she recruited her best friend from Peace Corps days to come make for a visit and to participate in the fundraiser.

Karen turned this need to fundraise into an opportunity to educate and to reconnect with Peace Corps friends while she was at it.

Karen's efforts have resulted in \$12,125 from 40 different donors for solar in Niger!!



Dr. Karen Brenner

John Baird puts his money where his heart is

While our FON president contributes an enormous amount of time to the presidency and leadership of FON to help all of Niger, he has a particular soft spot for Djiratawa.

“The people of Niger showered me with friendship and kindness during my time there in a way that I associate with living in rural America in the 1930s. I'm so glad for this opportunity to honor my brother, Idi Gonda, and his late wife, Mariama, as well as the people of Djiratawa, for their friendship and kindness, with this solar electrification of their health clinic.”

The process John followed to install solar electricity in this village health clinic was similar to Karen's experience where John got in touch with Moustapha, who again did the ground work to gather information on what the health clinic might need.



John Baird with his friend Idi in 2011

2) Where are they now -

MICHAEL KLINGER, Niger RPCV 1979-81, Managing partner ANZU GLOBAL LLC, ACTON MA.

Then.

Michael Klinger went into Peace Corps service after college by tagging along with a friend who was going to an interview with a recruiter. “It sounded like a great idea to have an expense-paid travel opportunity.” Serving as a volunteer from 1979 to 1981, Michael Klinger didn’t act like it was a free trip; he dedicated himself to the service aspect of Peace Corps, teaching English in Guidan Roumji. At the time the population was around 5000 people. Although physical education was not his assignment, he saw the need and opportunity to help out teaching a couple of physical education classes in addition to English. During his tenure they increased the offerings for students by developing a dirt basketball court and a sand volleyball court. Michael’s background included training in movement therapy so the Phys. Ed seemed like a natural thing to add to his official assignment.



Now

Leaving Niger he was still interested in the field of Movement Therapy and made a film based on traditional dance in Niger as a means to apply for masters programs. That did not really pan out long term as a career and he ended up doing an MBA and has moved into international business staffing for technology. He is managing partner in a business called, ANZU GLOBAL LLC, which counts Google and Apple among their clients; check it out at <http://www.anzuglobal.com/>.

Anzu Global, LLC provides temporary and permanent pre-qualified globalization resources to clients worldwide. Candidates are chosen based on their technical and linguistic, skills, education, cultural fit, availability, cost and geographic proximity.

Soon after returning home, Michael encountered a man on the street who by his dress and manner was clearly from West Africa. He was lost and when Michael responded to his request for directions in Hausa the man seemed to take no notice that their encounter had just taken place in Hausa. He had just arrived in the US and it apparently did not occur to him that not everyone

spoke Hausa! Michael is still connected to some of his RPCV friends and occasionally still bumps into Hausa speakers, although he has had little contact with West Africa in his work despite being in a global field.

In 2007, Michael visited Niger with his 15 year-old daughter and it struck him how there really had not been a lot of progress on addressing some issues and there were still a lot of needs. He got to thinking about what he could to lend a hand and thought that the US has so much, there had to be a way to help. Rather than guess at their needs and impose his ideas, he convened village elders to hear what their needs were. These discussions lead to the creation of a non-profit called Bokai. They have taken on a number of projects at the request of village elders and have developed a sister city relationship between Guidan Roumji and Acton, Mass. Way to go on that third goal of Peace Corps Michael!! *Check out the nonprofit and consider donating or volunteering to support their activities at <http://bokai.org/>.*



How has your experience in Niger influenced your life

“I don’t really know how it shaped me. I realize how unique and privileged we are to be living where we are. People who are just like me except they were born and raised in Niger look ten years older” because of the hard living conditions.

What do you miss from Niger?

“I appreciated the sense of community and family in Niger. In every culture there is something you can learn from. I miss the people and that sense of comfort in another culture--the sight and sounds of Niger.”

more on Bokai from the website:

“It is said, in your country, a real problem is obesity. In our country, a real problem is starvation. Maybe we can work together to solve each other’s problems.”

...The elders identified several areas of concern. There was a lack of access to medicine for their children. There were water shortages and wells in need of repair and new ones to be built. Irrigation pumps were needed to facilitate watering crops. There was a food shortage in the months preceding the rainy season. There was a lack of basic educational materials for their children in the schools. . . .

Please suggest candidates for future “Where are they now” features. Who do you want to hear about?

3) Niger Diaspora, lending a helping hand

Dr Abdou Illia, a native of Zinder, is now an accomplished, published IT business professor at Eastern Illinois University. He has recently sponsored a project at his former elementary school in Zinder. Dr. Illia provided funds to build a substantial brick wall around the school yard to create a safe space for the kids to play, to protect them from traffic and help keep them focus on school while they are there. Before the concrete wall was built too many students were being injured by passing vehicles. Check out this short video about the project.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCiTOdwaknQ>

Thank you for paying it forward Abdou!



Dr Illia and

the school wall.

4) CALLS TO ACTION-

- Make your voice heard to support Peace Corps \$\$
- Connect a Nigerien artist to an interesting opportunity.

Make your voice heard to support Peace Corps \$\$

A message from Anne Baker (Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Fiji 1985-87) Vice President National Peace Corps Association. Direct line: 202-981-2690. [PeaceCorpsConnect.org](https://www.peacecorpsconnect.org)

After four consecutive years of flat funding (\$410 million) for the Peace Corps, an effort is underway to give the Peace Corps a raise. **We are at a critical moment right now in the House of Representatives, as a very important letter which every House Rep has the opportunity to sign, is now circulating.** The letter asks for \$450 million for the Peace Corps in Fiscal Year 2020. Last year, this letter was signed by 180 Congressmen/women. We've been told no other similar letter contains that many signatures, and it carries a lot of clout when funding decisions are made later in the year.

You Can Help: Wednesday, March 27th is the deadline for House members to sign the letter. Please write, call or talk to your representative now and urge them to sign the Peace Corps funding Dear Colleague letter!

Monitor Progress: Before taking action, bookmark and [revisit the bottom of this blog post for regular updates](#) on which members of the House of Representatives have signed the letter. If your rep has already signed, your action is to thank them!

[Follow this link](#) to personalize and send a message to your House Rep. This is a House of Representatives action only. (A similar letter may be introduced later in the Senate, but do not contact your Senators at this time).

We only have until March 27th to secure signatures on this message. With your help, we can bring attention to the importance of the Peace Corps and help a nationwide effort to have a record 185 lawmakers sign this letter!

Looking for a Nigerien Artist for a Women's Health Collaboration

Here is an interesting request we received recently. Do you know anyone who might fit the bill?

Dear Friends of Niger,

I found your site while searching for Nigerien artist collectives. I am a textile designer working in the health and development field. I create textile designs in the West African "wax print" style to spread education and awareness of women's health in West Africa. There are a few examples of my work in Mali on my website: <http://www.elizasquibb.com/>

Currently, I have two potential projects in Niger to promote children's health, so I'm looking for a Nigerien artist to collaborate with on the drawings of women and children. Do you have any contacts with artists living in Niger (or Nigeriens living abroad) who might be interested in this type of health and education project?

Please feel free to share my contact info with them, or direct me to any resources you think would lead me in the right direction. *Many thanks for your time, Eliza Squibb.* squibbeliza@gmail.com

5) NIGER NOW - WhatsApp

<<Allo, Allo>> <<Fofu>> << Sannu>>

When was the last time you talked to you friends in Niger? Unlike the old days where lands lines were crazy bad and overseas calls were prohibitively expensive, you now have great options. Possibly the most popular option is WhatsApp -- <https://web.whatsapp.com/>

More than 1 billion people in over 180 countries use WhatsApp to stay in touch with friends and family, anytime and anywhere. WhatsApp is free and offers simple, secure, reliable messaging and calling, available on phones all over the world.

Cell phones have permeated rural village life to a surprising degree. It may be a bit of a puzzle to get hold of the phone numbers for your friends, but chances are, there is someone you know who has access to a phone and may be able to use WhatsApp.

With WhatsApp you can send and receive a variety of media: text, photos, videos, and documents as well as make voice calls.

6) Did you know? Kola Nuts

Kola nut, the one thing that unites 140 million Nigerians – and possibly their neighbors to the north

Read more at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/05/kola-nut-nigerias-seed-of-togetherness/>



Cola acuminata. General description (Wikipedia)

The kola nut is a caffeine-containing nut of evergreen trees of the genus *Cola*, primarily of the species *Cola acuminata* and *Cola nitida*. [1] *Cola acuminata*, an evergreen tree about 20 metres in height, has long, ovoid leaves pointed at both the ends with a leathery texture. The trees have yellow flowers with purple spots, and star-shaped fruit. Inside the fruit, about a dozen round or square seeds develop in a white seed-shell. The nut's aroma is sweet and rose-like. The first taste is bitter, but it sweetens upon chewing. The nut can be boiled to extract the caffeine.

Kola nuts contain about 2- 4% caffeine and theobromine, as well as tannins, alkaloids, saponins, and flavonoids.

Kola nuts are an important part of the traditional spiritual practice of culture and religion in West Africa, particularly Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia. [6] The 1970s hit "Goro City", by Manu Dibango, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwmjNvnHjFs> highlights the significance of kola nuts (called "goro" in the Hausa language) [7] to the capital of Niger, Niamey. Kola nuts are used as a religious object and sacred offering during prayers, ancestor veneration, and significant life events, such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals.

Friends of Niger Membership Form (Please print legibly)

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip+4 _____

Phones: (H) _____ (C) _____ (W) _____

Email _____

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____ Dates in Niger _____

Location in Niger _____ Program or Involvement _____

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.

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.

DONATIONS

You may make a donation at any time. To make a payment now, you can either go to www.friendsofniger.org to Donate with Paypal, or write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to: **FRIENDS OF NIGER, PO BOX 612, DECATUR IL 62525**. Thank you very much.

“please reply to this email to unsubscribe”