

Friends of Niger fon

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Sannu! Fofu! Owyem! Wushiwushi!

"hello!" in Hausa, Zarma/Fulfulde, Tarmachek and Beri Beri, the languages of Niger.

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger
October 2005

'Pieces from Niger'
by [Anna Aguilar \(RPCV Niger 1986-89\)](#)

[Editor's note: This essay describes the roots of Niger's current food crisis. See our [Media Page](#) for more recent news from Niger, and please consider donating to one or more of the [organizations providing aid to Niger](#).]

One day in November a cry went up in the village. A young boy, Midou came running into my yard, yelling that the locusts were coming back. It was the hottest part of the day and as I walked into the sun I saw them. The locusts fly incredibly high in layer after layer as deep as the eye can see. I watch as they fly over the village. There are so many of them. "This is nothing," Midou says. "When they came the first time they blocked out the sun." Most of the village men and women run to their fields to try to protect the few crops that hadn't been eaten when the locusts came through the first time. One farmer stopped near me to watch the locusts fly overhead. Mournfully he said to me before leaving for his field: "You should go home, there will be no food here."

I was first here in the village of Mondolo as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1986 and now I am back in 2004 for another visit. I notice a man on the plane carrying a map labeled FEWS - the Famine Early Warning System. My first impression of the village is surprise that people have got even thinner. Most of the men and even the older teenage boys have left the village to find work in neighboring countries. The women as usual are overburdened with work. The young children are doing more work than ever before. They are all muscle and too small for their ages.

You would never know that anything was wrong just by looking from the road. From the back of the bush taxi the millet fields look normal. The millet stalks are tall and plentiful. It is only when the villagers take me to their fields that I can see the damage done. They show me that, although all the stalks are standing and the long leaves

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are untouched, every single bit of the grain has been removed. They show me and they still seem to be bewildered by how such a catastrophe could have happened. How could you not be surprised by watching months of work destroyed by millions of locusts in a matter of minutes?

Almost immediately the price of millet sacks start to rise. It goes quickly out of reach of many of the villagers. I remark to the Chief that there is greater interest in starting the vegetable gardening earlier than usual. He replies: "Where there is hunger there is gardening." I join them in the gardening but they do all the hard work: putting up fencing, pulling water from the well, and chopping plots in the rock hard ground. Somehow many of the plants survive.

Mondolo is lucky that it is on the road and only a few kilometers from where the government has a grain distribution center in Tondikiwindi. Outside the warehouse wait various groups representing the numerous villages from the surrounding areas. We will wait most of the day for the grain distribution to begin. On the first day Mondolo purchases ten sacks of grain for the entire village. For many days afterwards, the villagers will rise before the morning prayers and head to the warehouse; sometimes they get some grain, sometimes they don't. Always they are using up energy and time trying to secure food.

It is unimaginably difficult to see people starving. It is even worse when you know their names and their stories. The village gets eerily quiet when someone dies. My friends in Niger are amazingly generous to me. They live by the rule that if you have lots of what another person needs then you share with them. I know they will not be surprised if they learn that we are gathered here to help them get the food that they need. It would be more surprising if we didn't give assistance when we could.

Please Donate What You Can

Friends of Niger encourages all to visit one or more of these websites to donate much-needed funds toward aid agencies working directly in Niger. Be sure to designate your donations for famine relief in Niger.

[Action Against Hunger](#) (programs in Maradi, Dakoro, and Tahoua)

[Africare](#) (35-year involvement in programs throughout Niger)

[CARE](#) (programs in six of Niger's eight regions)

[Catholic Relief Services](#) (programs in Dogon Doutchi, Ouallam, Tanout, and Tillabéri)

[Islamic Relief](#) (programs in Ouallam and Tillabéri)

[Concern Worldwide](#) (programs in and around Tahoua)

[Lutheran World Relief](#) (programs in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)

[Médecins Sans Frontières](#) (programs in Aguié, Dakoro, Keita, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder; but no longer soliciting donations for Niger)

[Mercy Corps](#) (programs in northern Filingué)

[Oxfam](#) (assisting nomadic people in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri)

[Save the Children](#) (providing food and supplies to thousands of families in the most acutely affected areas of southern Niger)

Visitor 

[United Nations World Food Programme](#) (coordinating all bulk food distributions in southern Niger)

[World Vision](#) (programs in and around Zinder)

FON Needs Your Help Too

Recent visitors to our website may have noticed that Friends of Niger have been re-energized by the need to respond to Niger's food crisis. In the last few months, tens of thousands of dollars have been raised for other organizations through our collective efforts. We are eager to promote additional fundraisers on this page; please e-mail your information to [Bill Stein](#).

As the current crisis fades into the world's memory, our organization would like to continue our work with small sustainable development projects in Niger. We encourage all visitors to this site to consider supporting Friends of Niger through [membership dues and/or donations](#). We're also looking for a new webmaster. Please contact [John Soloninka](#) with any questions. *Mun godi!*

<http://www.friendsofniger.org>

