

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 23 Issue 2



August—September 2008

Niger RPCV Makes A Difference

Northeastern University Professor & Students Learn & Contribute to Village Development in Niger

[Excerpted from "Students' Enthusiasm Leads to a Life-Changing Journey" by Kristin Stanley: Northeastern University Arts & Sciences Chronicle, Spring 2007].

When Political Science Professor William Miles set out to teach his undergraduate Politics of Developing Nations (PDN) course for the first time at Boston's Northeastern University (NU), he never expected that the experience would physically lead him across the globe back to West Africa, a region he had come to know well since his days in the Peace Corps. As a specialist in borders, development, and decentralization, Miles had returned many times to Niger, where he had served as a Volunteer from 1977 to 1979. But his students' untraditional, yet typically NU reaction to studying development prompted a trip unlike any other he had made.



Students wanted to apply their classroom knowledge in an effort to make a real impact on the lives of the people whose world they studied in the course. But, exactly how does a student in the wealthiest, most-developed country in the world make an impact on those living in the poorest country on earth (according to the Human Development Index of the United Nations)? With money, of course! The class was spurred into

action by what they heard from Professor Miles, and set out to spend their own money on some very unusual purchases: bulls and carts to support the people of two Hausa villages, one on each side of the Niger-Nigeria border.

(Continued on centerfold pages 6—7)



Professor Miles and his students in a Niger village.

Letter from the President



Dear FON Members,

The membership of Friends of Niger continues to grow with committed and giving individuals. We are now close to 200 members and each year new members join us. Our friendship, support, and advocacy on behalf of and with Niger and Nigeriens remain strong. On a recent trip to Washington, DC, I had the pleasure to make a courtesy call on the Niger ambassador, Her Excellency Mrs. Toure A. D. Maiga, and the Niger embassy counselor Sounna Amadou. We discussed the activities of Friends of Niger, and how we continue to promote Niger and her people with our limited resources but heartfelt desire to remain a part of the Nigerien extended and global family. Ambassador Toure made some excellent suggestions for us as an organization that you will be hearing more about in future editions of the Camel Express. She encouraged us to increase the number of Nigerien organizations that we partner with especially women's organizations and the possibility of connecting with the Nigerien communities throughout the United States. Ambassador Toure was very supportive of the activities of Friends of Niger and expressed her sincere wishes for FON's continued involvement and partnership with Niger and Nigerien organizations.

One of the main activities of Friends of Niger the past two years has been the promotion and financial support of the Peace Corps Niger's Young Girls Scholarship Program. We've highlighted the work of this program in past newsletters and on the FON website. The Nigerien girls who have received these scholarships will continue their education thanks to the generosity of many FON members. Additionally some of our FON members made it possible for us to receive special grants and funds from their employers and other funding agencies. Please receive my sincere personal thanks and the thanks of the other members of the FON Board for this outpouring of financial support. FON's involvement with the Young Girls Scholarship program will continue in the coming year.

It's nothing new that FON members once they leave Niger find very personal ways to be involved with their Nigerien host families and villages, and we celebrate with you your on-going personal connections to Niger. In this issue we would like to acknowledge two individual contributions our members have made and are making in Niger. Read about Professor Bill Miles, (77'-79') connecting his class at Northeastern University with his Niger family and village, and 17 year old Bowen Kelley's well project in Saabu Dey. We want to share your experiences, too. So please write to us.

Finally, I would like to encourage your participation in the FON election of members for the Board of Directors. We have included in this issue a self-nomination form for members to consider.

Peace,

John Soloninka, (Niamey, LWR, 90'-96') FON President

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

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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.



Expanding Lives Brings Young Nigerien Women to the U.S. for Training

Expanding Lives is a new organization which sponsors short-term educational conferences for young women from Niger in the U.S. Two board members are RPCVs (Rachel Sonnenshein Mossi, Tillibery, and Guidan Roudmji, Tahoua, Niamey). Expanding Lives has taken stock in the learning that takes place when one is exposed to new ideas, language and culture. Their goal is to support young women so that they can use this type of learning experience to become leaders when they return home. To this end, they expose young women who are succeeding in school to as many new skills and ideas as possible that may have value on their return home.

The first group of participants learned to ride bicycles, opened e-mail accounts, and produced a short newsletter. They began peer mediation, community health and leadership training, and visited Chinatown, a bee farm, and a community garden. They are taking formal classes in Senegalese dance and yoga and will begin courses in HIV/AIDS prevention and victim advocacy, CPR and first aid, democracy, and grant writing during their 6-week stay.

The organization is seeking financial help and support for the returning participants. They would like the information to reach RPCVs this year who served in Aguié, Maradi, and Niamey and would like to connect with their "hometowns." If you would like more information, please look at their website and e-mail Leslie Natzke (1987-1990) at mail@expandinglives.org

Web site: www.expandinglives.org.

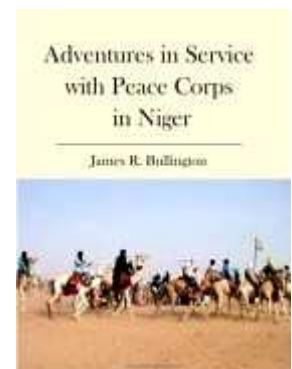
BOOK REVIEW

Adventures in Service with Peace Corps in Niger by James Bullington (BookSurge, 2007, 215 pp. \$16.99; Amazon.com) Excerpted from a review by Henry Mattox, co-founder and former editor of *American Diplomacy*. The author and current editor, Jim Bullington, had a Foreign Service career followed by service as Peace Corps Director in Niger (2000- 2006).

The author of this informative collection of well-organized and clearly written essays treats of two subjects not widely addressed or even thought about in these days of so much focus on terrorism and Middle East wars and rumors of wars. The country of Niger, peripherally linked with the war in Iraq through supposed efforts to obtain WMD materials, has been little noticed by the rest of the world since it gained its independence from France in 1960. The other story line concerns America's Peace Corps, that President Kennedy created by Executive Order back in 1961. While by no means as little known to Americans as the nation of Niger, the Peace Corps nonetheless in recent years has received relatively little publicity and attention. Nothing finer than this compendium could be found to inform the reading public about the life of Peace Corps Volunteers and their accomplishments in sub-Saharan Africa. About 2,800 Americans, mostly young people, have served there over the years with the Peace Corps. More than 400 of these Volunteers took up their duties in the country under the leadership of Ambassador Bullington during his tenure in Niamey as Peace Corps Director.

The author provides a stream of graphic descriptions of the country and accounts of the life and activities of American Volunteers in Niger, with many illustrations, covering topics ranging from a to z: from Agadez to Zinder, from agriculture to zoology.

Niger, as varied and interesting a nation as it is, poses hardships for those living there, including an 8-month dry season with incessant hot winds and temperatures reaching 120 degrees. This volume serves well to emphasize the fortitude of the PCV's under the leadership of the author, who all strove to better conditions in Niger.



German Aid Worker Photographs the Aïr

Ine Stolz Works to Improve Agricultural Yield Until the Political Situation Makes the Aïr Off Limits to Foreigners

Until the Tuareg rebellion resumed in February 2007 and all foreign projects left the region around Agadez in Northern Niger, Ine Stolz of the German development cooperation was helping hundreds of farmers to improve their yields in gardens in the oasis throughout the Aïr Mountains. Ine Stolz spent three years in the region organizing farmer field schools (FFS) with local sedentary Tuareg people living from their animals (sheep and goats) and vegetable gardens. As FFS members, the farmers have personal responsibility for all aspects of its operation from the inception. Compared to the traditional system of information transfer adopted in Sahelian countries, directed top-down from researchers to extension agents and then to farmers, FFS are a direct, decentralized and more effective and therefore sustainable development tool. The farmers are empowered to rely on their experiences and observations and make their own decisions about managing their environment.

In 2006, an intensive training was held in Agadez for 20 facilitators who were chosen during a participatory rural appraisal to later direct the FFS. The facilitators were trained in all relevant themes, including: how to set up and run agricultural cooperatives and associations, the use, safe application and role of fertilizers and pesticides, biological control and how to prepare organic manure, common pests and diseases, etc. After that training, pilot FFS in three villages in the Aïr Mountains, each including 30 gardeners who voluntarily joined, started operating. The original facilitators trained the new gardeners in new techniques of production and crop protection, including composting, soil preparation, fertilization, optimal plant spacing and cultural methods of pest control. Knowledge was transferred using experimental plots where different methods were compared with each other and with the traditional method. Farmers who participated in these pilot FFS then had the knowledge to become facilitators of new FFS in neighboring villages.

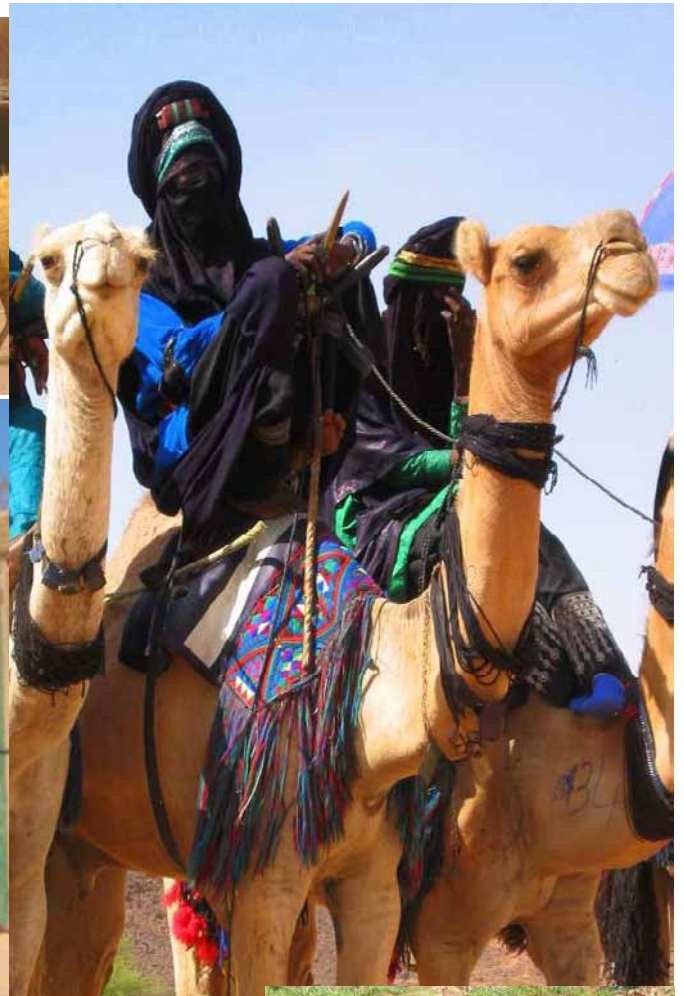
Throughout 2006 and 2007, increased production was noted. For example, a typical yield for a 100 square meter garden planted in potatoes had been about 83 kilograms. Using improved techniques and 2.5 kilograms of manure raised production to about 167 kilograms of potatoes.

Information on the work of the FFS was broadcast by the local and national radio, the press and, during National Farmers Day, on national television. Unfortunately the rebellion put an end to all future interventions and currently the region is closed by military.

Ine Stolz made many friends in the Aïr and took many beautiful photographs. She gave permission for us to include some of them in this issue. She is currently in Germany, and still hoping to return and continue working with the farmers in Niger when the region stabilizes.



Photos by Ine Stolz.



Photos by
Ine Stolz



Northeastern University Partnership with Niger

Donations from Students and RPCV Professor Have a Mutually Beneficial Impact

Miles never expected this reaction to his lectures and slides but his students viewed the activity as second nature. "The practice, the experience, this is what NU is all about," they told him. Professor Miles was hesitant at first about incorporating a fundraising activity into his course. He experienced a "professional crisis of conscience." As a teacher, could he really encourage his students to take money out of their tuition-depleted pockets and support the betterment of faraway villagers? Would some students feel pressured by their peers into donating? Would the activity itself politically polarize the classroom? He had personally supported the area for the last 30 years through financial contributions as well as his scholarship but was it appropriate to encourage the students to follow his lead? In the end, the students' enthusiasm overwhelmed his qualms.

Michael Norman (African-American Studies '05) had been the first student to step forward, writing out a check for the entire class to jump-start the money transfer before the rainy season set in and delayed operations. Michael trusted that his fellow students would simply pay him back – which they did. "For me, the minimal amount of money that we were contributing to the village meant so much to them, while for us it meant not going out for a weekend or buying a less expensive pair of shoes." Students from the Fall '05 PDN class aspired to match the funds provided by Michael and their other predecessors. So began a domino effect of generosity.

The Political Science department contributed matching funds and drafted development proposals to guide dispensing of funds. The graduate students (by coincidence, all female) were particularly sensitive to the issue of widows in the villages, who occupy a marginal status in village society and receive no income. It was essential to keep in mind that the close proximity of these two villages made it necessary to support both equally, lest either one feel slighted. The contribution of the Political Science department, faculty and students, made this equitable distribution possible, and after many months of careful planning, hard work and personal sacrifice, a plan and funds were in place for implementing the project.

Professor Miles, personally well connected in the region, traveled over the spring break period to buy two bulls, two carts and 28 goats. A livestock expert from each village accompanied him to the outlying open-air market. He put in an order with the metal maven of each villager for a custom-made cart – each one bearing the NU name (in English in the Nigeria village, in French in the Niger village.) Funds were also allocated to primary schools in each village for purchasing basic school supplies such as chalk and pens.



Students & villagers with bull, cart & goats.

As similar as the process was supposed to be, when it came down to actually dispensing the goods and animals, administrative, cultural, and political differences between the villages made things more interesting. One village had a women's association that could advise Miles on the widows who would benefit the most from the distribution of the goats, but no equivalent organization with respect to the cart-and-bull. In the other village, the problem was the reverse: a pre-existing youth group could easily take charge of the bull and cart, but which women would get the goats? At one point, Miles was caught in the middle of a political dispute between rival factions aligned along party lines. Fortunately, a visiting friend, a Muslim priest from where Miles had served in the Peace Corps nearly 30 years before, saved the day by offering sage advice. He proposed that the students who had designed the plan in the first place - and who technically still own the livestock and carts - should be the ones to decide. That freed Miles to set up a "permanently provisional arrangement" by which the bull and cart would be made available for daily use by anyone who needed it. A scribe keeps track of the users and use (e.g., hauling crops from distant farms). The town crier publicized the program, and especially the eligibility of the village indigent.



Professor Miles left the region with the satisfaction that his classroom message had dramatically changed many of his students, for whom this was their first exposure to development. Graduate student Alisa Houghton stated, "After being involved with the course, I developed a great interest in development and also in Africa, an area of the world I wasn't very interested in before the course." The Chair of the Political Science Department, John Portz, recalls writing a memo to Accounts Payable to justify the expenses of goats and carts and can only imagine the reaction of staff upon reading the expense report. Miles has developed the African Borderlands Community Development (ABCD) program as a way to continue graduate student involvement, match undergraduate student involvement, and extend the program into the NU community and beyond. (Visit the PDN-ABCS web page at www.polisci.neu.edu/achievements/development_projects.)

Over the 2007 winter break, Miles led a political science Special Topics class to Niger as an "embedded" Dialogue of Civilizations course. Students from the Bouve College of Health Sciences and the College of Arts & Sciences spent their break in Niger and were introduced to the realities of village life and development agencies' efforts to help alleviate poverty in rural areas. Students participated in a pre-travel orientation course, and capped the experience with a research paper on issues facing the region.

Student Esther Chou stated, "Professor Miles has taken this relatively simple fundraising initiative and turned it into an opportunity to visit West Africa and see, with our own eyes, how western aid is used and implemented." In anticipation of their trip, NU students partnered with the Eliot School to deliver school supplies collected by the Needham elementary schoolchildren through the Pencil Box Project. And once in Niger, the students bought their own bull and cart to add to the growing stock of NU good will and development aid.

Want to mentor Niger RPCVs? Let FON know—we will set up a partnership if members are interested. In the 2007 pilot program (in Miami , Chicago and Portland , OR), the groups hosted an orientation, communicated regularly with the mentors and mentees and involved them in their activities and programs. The RPCV Mentoring Program is now online and both potential mentors and mentees are signing up! The RPCV Mentoring program was started in 2007 with a fundamental goal in mind: to connect recently returned Peace Corps volunteers with RPCV mentors. Via phone, email and face-to-face meetings, these mentors help ease the difficult transition, provide a connection to the RPCV community at large, and say some of the most comforting words in the English language, namely, “I know what you’re going through. I’ve been there.”

1. Interested mentors and mentees apply by creating their online mentoring profile in www.rpcvmentoring.org. That profile includes not only basic contact information, but also allows individuals to prioritize their particular needs and/or strengths.
2. NPCA staff review the applications and assign each individual to an NPCA member group based on their geographic location and/or country of service.
3. Group mentoring administrators review the profiles of their assigned mentors and mentees and make appropriate matches.

Since we reported receiving over \$4,000 for the Peace Corps YGSP project in the December 2007 Camel Express, we have received additional contributions to the project of over \$5,000. A sincere thank-you to all those who contributed. Donors to the Young Girls Scholarship Program since November 15, 2007 though August 1, 2008 include the following members and friends of FON:

Irene Abdou (Tera, Torodi, '95 – '99)
 Marion & Frances Abrams (in honor of sister & daughter Mary Abrams)
 Linda Hager Bailey (Zinder, Tessoua, Say, '66 – '68)
 Lianne Kennedy Boudali (Konni, '00 – '02)
 Karen Brenner (Bande/Zinder, '87 – '90)
 Meg Garlinghouse ('90 – '92)
 Gary Geoghegan (Zinder, 81 – '83)
 Major Elisha Gray (Tahoua, Tessoua, '66 – '68)
 Elizabeth Hall
 Mattie Harms (Niamey, '64 – '66)
 Myra Herlihey (parent of RPCV, San Guine, '85 – '87)
 Matthew Kenny (Lili, Maradi, '87 – '90)
 Kokari Foundation
 Leah Lacivita
 Paul Lorenz (Maradi, '72 – '74)
 Gabriella Maertens (Zinder, Niamey '64 – '72)
 Mary Ann Matheson (Madaoua, '66 – '68)
 Deb Parker (Bouza, '77 – '79)
 Frances Raycroft (Loga, '86 – '87)
 Thomas Shafer (Maradi, '64 – '66)
 Roy Simpson (Ibecitin, Tahoua, '80 – '82)
 Walter Tavaska (Illela, Madaoua, '69 – '71)
 Wendy Wallin (Say, Tera, '67 – '69)

Call for Nominations

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger is pleased to announce FON Board member elections 2008. The members of the board are elected by the FON members every two years. 2008 is an election year for Friends of Niger. **See page 2 for list of current board members.**

In 2006, all the FON members who submitted their names for election were placed on the board by acclamation. This year we are seeking your participation in the election process and encourage you to submit your name for board membership. If you would like to nominate yourself for the FON Board, please complete a brief resume following the guidelines in the form below. Please submit your nomination by September 19, 2008. (If submitting electronically, submit by September 19th; if submitting by mail, please have your nomination post marked by September 19th.)

Please send your nomination to FON by post or email to:

Friends of Niger

PO Box 5823

Washington, DC 20016-9998 Email: President@FriendsOfNiger.org

NOMINATION FORM

Friends of Niger * Board of Directors * Elections 2008

I. I am a member of Friends of Niger, and I would like to stand for election to the Board of Directors:

Please Print Contact Information. Name : _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Phone: _____

II. Tell us about yourself. (This information will be shared with the FON voting membership).

Dates you lived, worked, or served in Niger and location: _____

If you worked in Niger, for which organization did you work? _____

Other information about your experiences in Niger or life experiences that you would like to share.

III. What experiences, ideas, service, or vision would you be willing to bring to the table as a member of the Board of Directors of FON? (Please limit your response to one-half a page).

Peanut Paste for Malnutrition — Plumpy Nut

Milton Tectonidis, a Paris-based nutrition specialist for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), told the International Herald Tribune during Niger's 2005 food crisis, "Plumpy Nut can restore a starving baby whose skin sags over tiny bones to normal roundness in two to four weeks." The TV show 60 Minutes first covered the Plumpy Nut story on October 21, 2007, and updated it during the June 20, 2008 broadcast. It reported a good news story about malnutrition, which kills 5 million children per year, one every 6 seconds. Plumpy Nut is cheap, easy to make and use, and being manufactured in Congo, Ethiopia, Malawi and Niger. Marketed in foil packages small enough for a child to hold and squeeze, it consists of 500 calories of fortified peanut butter, powdered milk, vitamins, minerals and protein. Relief organizations are using them in Darfur, allowing mothers to bring children out of the crowded field hospitals and treat them at home. Badly nourished babies can gain one to two pounds a week eating Plumpy Nut. A four-week supply for one child costs \$20 and it has a 2-year shelf life. Stay tuned for news on FON support for Plumpy Nut projects.

AT THE CENTER OF THE EARTH -- of Wells and Men --

This documentary film by Ingrid Patetta / Caméra Nomade won the **Golden Giraffe Award** in April 2008 at the **International Environmental Film Festival of Niamey**. The film was also an official selection for the **International Water and Cinema Events World Water Forum** to be held in Istanbul in March 2009. The 25 minute documentary, shot in Zinder, honors the traditional skills of the Hausa well diggers of Niger, and illustrates the pride and determination of these Sahelian men, who dig the earth with their bare hands in order to access water. Ms. Patetta is considering making the film available for sale and will inform FON if she does.

Synopsis of the film:

A man stands at the mouth of a well. He is donning a rudimentary rope harness that he wraps around his legs. Camera in hand, he dives into the well and starts a 126 meters drop, at the end of which he reaches two men working indefatigably at the center of the earth. We have just entered the world of the traditional well-diggers of Niger. In the course of interviews of a master well-digger and his laborers, the film reveals the tradition and the customary know-how of these men, who battle against sand in order to reach water. Shot in desert landscapes, the film treats the following themes : access to water, desertification and its impact on the communities of nomadic cattle breeders.

A WELL FOR SAABU DEY

Bowen Lightfoot Kelley is the 17 year old son of RPCV Tom Kelley (Niger 86-88). He's from Chapel Hill, North Carolina and is a rising senior at Choate Rosemary Hall, a boarding school in Connecticut. The Kelley family spent the 2003-2004 academic year in Niger where Tom, a law professor at UNC-Chapel Hill, had a Fulbright Scholarship. Bowen and his father returned to Niger during the summer of 2007 and visited villages in the region where Tom had served as a volunteer. In the course of their stay, village elders explained the hardship that they and their people faced as a result of a growth in population without a corresponding growth in available drinking water. The elders in the small village of Saabu Dey asked for help digging new wells to meet their crucial need for clean, drinkable water. Last year Bowen initiated a project to raise funds to build a well for the people of Saabu Dey. With the support of the Student Council at his school and a contribution from the American Women's Club of Niamey, Bowen is well on his way to raising the \$7,500 needed to purchase supplies and employ traditional well-diggers.

Bowen's fundraising campaign continues this summer with help from Friends of Niger, which is acting as fiscal sponsor for the Saabu Dey well project. He has sent out letters to friends, family and former volunteers seeking funds to build the well and welcomes any and all contributions to the project. Any surplus funds will go towards building a second well in a neighboring village. Please send any contributions to Friends of Niger. All contributions are tax-deductible through the organization's generous fiscal sponsorship. To contribute please make a check out to Friends of Niger and include "Saabu Dey Well Project" in the memo line and send it to the following home address:

Bowen Kelley
8106 Kit Lane
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27516

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 _____

- ☐ 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 want to support FON's Young Girls' Scholarship Program (YGSP) activities with
a Contribution of _____
☐ I want to support FON's Microcredit in Niger activities with
a Contribution of _____
☐ I want to support FON's Youth Education activities
with a Contribution of _____
☐ I want to support the FON Chewable Vitamin Campaign
with a Contribution of _____
☐ Please send _____ copies of *Brother from Niger*/DVD
Format Choice: DVD _____ VHS _____
at \$20 (2 for \$35) (Shipping Included) _____
☐ Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts
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



FON Participaction Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on Page 11.

- ☐ Will help set up local FON group
- ☐ Would participate in local FON group
- ☐ Will be local FON contact person
- ☐ Would be FON contact person for potential PCVs to Niger (contact us at the address on page 11 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

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Editor: Jude Andreasen

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Address Correction Requested