

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 27 Issue 2



September 2012

Nigériens Feed Nigériens The 3 N Initiative Nigériens Nourissent Nigériens

President Mahamadou Issoufou, elected with the restoration of democracy in March 2011, has continued this policy of open acknowledgement of the problems Niger faces in food supply. A programme to bolster national food production, “les 3N” – was a central plank of his campaign programme for last year’s election. The government is now starting to put this into effect.

Background

Les Nigériens Nourissent les Nigériens (“Nigériens feed Nigériens”) was at the heart of Issoufou’s election agenda. Technical work on the policy was entrusted to a sector specialist who supports Issoufou’s PNDS party (Amadou Alahouri Diallo, an irrigation engineer who had held senior government agricultural posts before working elsewhere in Africa for the World Bank and FAO.) This was innovative in its public recognition of the food insecurity problems that face Niger; indeed, it was unusual for a political candidate to set out specific sectoral policies in any detail in an electoral platform, rather than relying purely on personal, regional and ideological themes.

Urgent actions

The 3N programme is not, of course, the first attempt by a Nigérien government to promote domestic food production. But what marks the strategy out is a deliberate focus on community initiative. Rather than entrusting the role of project initiator to central government and its local agencies, the new approach aims to encourage individual villages and municipalities to assess their own needs and put forward proposals for government to assist. However, in the current 2011-2012 agricultural year, central government is leading from the front, because a poor 2011 rainy season has left Niger facing serious food supply risks.

Niger’s First Lady Visits the U.S.

On Friday, May 23 the Niger Embassy and the Friends of Niger (FON) in Washington held a reception to welcome First Lady of Niger, Aissata Issoufou Mahamadou to Washington and to give her the opportunity to meet Friends of Niger and Nigériens living in the Washington, DC area. Niger’s U.S. Ambassador, Maman Sidikou, escorted the first lady to the reception at the home of FON Board Secretary Penni St. Hilaire and her husband, Tommy Tomlinson (continued on page 6).





Letter from Niger's First Lady

August 27, 2012

To Former Peace Corps Volunteers & Friends of Niger

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Back in my country, Niger, after spending a most enjoyable stay in your great and beautiful country, the United States of America, I am very pleased to express my complete appreciation, not only for the fruitful talks we had, but above all for the unwavering loyalty in your friendship with the people of Niger.

In that respect, I avail myself of this opportunity to thank you sincerely for your readiness and continued actions for Niger and its People.

I would like to reaffirm my eagerness and yearning to create an active and productive partnership between **"Guri Vie Meilleure,"** a foundation I established and chair, with you and partners you would have helped identify, so that together we work for the improvement of the living conditions of the Niger People whose hardship is well known to you.

I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks for your successful cooperation and for the reception you so kindly organized in my honor.

Please accept the expression of my highest consideration,

Mrs. ISSOUFOU AISSATA
First Lady of Niger'
Chairperson, **"Guri Vie Meilleure"** Foundation

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

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The Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund Supports Small Local Nigerien NGOs

FON continues to fund small projects that have a direct and tangible impact on Nigeriens. The following report was submitted by Pam White.

The Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund recently donated \$1,500 to the Danja Fistula Center in Niger, established by the Worldwide Fistula Fund (www.worldwidefistulafund.org) to serve the women of West Africa. Here's a link to an excellent article by Nicholas Kristof which appeared in the NY Times in May, describing the devastating impact of fistula on the lives of women, and the way in which the Danja Fistula Center will profoundly improve the lives of women suffering from this condition. <http://worldwidefistulafund.org/in-the-news/> The founding of this Center is a major development in the treatment of fistula among West African women, and Jane, whose Peace Corps work in the 1960's focused on improving the lives of Niger's women and children, would be gratified to support this work!

Donations to the Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund can be sent to FON. (Designate "Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund" on the memo line.) This fund is administered in Jane's memory, to support grassroots initiatives in Niger.

The August 2011 issue of Camel Express carried an article (with photos) about ODI, a small but very active Nigerien NGO dedicated to work with Niger's disabled population. I have worked with this organization since 2006, through Harouna Salifou, the field agent responsible for the Balayera Commune. The Aug. 2011 article reported that the FON Board had recently elected to contribute \$1,000 to ODI's work. I have received the following report from Harouna Salifou, on behalf of ODI, detailing how the FON funds were used:

- a. Twelve animals -- two ewes and one ram per person -- were provided to four disabled individuals for a small-animal breeding project. The animals are held in the name of the disabled person, providing a source of income-generation and self-sufficiency, and enhancing that person's value to the family and to the community. The individuals were: Aliou Doula, amputee; Moussa Yahaya, a blind youth enrolled in school; Boubacar Nouhou, deaf; and Djibrilla Moussa, blind.
- b. In addition, five boxes of phenobarbital were purchased and dispensed, without charge, to 136 epileptic patients at the quarterly mental health clinic conducted on market day in Balayera.
- c. Also at the mental health clinic, treatment and psychiatric medications were provided free of charge to three individuals suffering from mental illnesses including schizophrenia. (The medications purchased included chlorpromazine [Thorazine], haloperidol [Haldol], artane [Trihexyphenidyl], and modecate [Fluhenazine].)
- d. The remaining funds were used to construct a second disabled-access ramp for a Balayera school, this one in the quartier of Aggou. (Previous funds donated through the Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund had also constructed a ramp at another school.)

On behalf of ODI, Harouna sends the following message of thanks to FON: "In the name of the entire commune of Balayera and particularly in the name of all the beneficiaries, please accept our distinguished greetings and profound thanks."

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Continued from page 1

Nigériens Feed Nigériens The 3 N Initiative

Urgent action has obviously been necessary to tackle this and help local communities recover from the current crisis and prepare for the new planting season. (The rains normally fall between July and October.) Even so, already the government is preparing to start applying the new “bottom up” approach; resources for this have been allocated under the 2012 budget. (Niger uses a January-December budget year.)

Longer term resilience – the 3N in detail

The 3N aims to develop a long term response to Niger’s problems of food insecurity. It was born out of a recognition that each time the annual rains are inadequate the country faces a crisis and the risk of famine. Even if donors provide emergency aid on time, the country remains exposed to the risk of a repeat experience the following year – and, without a fresh approach, the situation risks getting worse, as climate change leads to increasing unpredictability in rainfall.

But although Niger is a Sahelian country with average per capita income among the lowest in the world, the Issoufou administration believes that insecurity can be reduced. Senior officials point out that some other countries in the region have managed to establish a more secure supply base. Moreover, Niger does have cards to play: it has substantial artesian water reserves and it has a large national livestock herd and strong pastoral traditions. The government can expect a moderate increase in its spending power, because of the rise in global demand for Niger’s uranium (because the need to tackle global warming has renewed interest in nuclear energy) and because it has now started commercial production of oil, serving national needs and West African markets.

The 3N seeks to provide a comprehensive strategy for bolstering national food output and enhancing the positive impact this has on levels of food security, nutrition, household welfare and economic activity. In late 2011 Issoufou established an agency to drive the strategy forward – the Haut Commissariat des 3N – headed by his key technical adviser on the subject, Amadou Alahouri Diallo. This unit reports directly to the president. It has only a small staff and its purpose is not to duplicate the work of government ministries, but to act as a motivator and coordinator, mobilising state agencies, the elected leaders of local communities, donors, NGOs and the private sector into mounting a coherent and sustained national effort. Senior sources say that at present there is a lack of synergy between ministries, while NGOs tend to choose their project locations solely according to their own criteria rather than dovetailing into a national strategy. The role of the 3N High Commission is to produce a more joined up and strategically coordinated approach.

The programme looks beyond Issoufou’s current five year term of office. But the hope is that even if he failed to secure a second term, a successor administration would continue this coordinated approach. For the first five years, the prime focus will be to increase food production, both in the traditional main cereal crop season and through initiatives to support irrigated market gardening during the dry, lean months (*la soudure*), livestock, fish farming and the planting of orchards and firewood lots. But the strategy also looks further, to the reinforcement of crop processing, conservation and marketing networks, improvements to household nutrition and social programmes, for example, to strengthen the position of women. Community mobilisation is a key theme throughout – and this is to be a particular focus of the work of the 3N High Commission. (continued on page 8)

2013 Reunion of Niger RPCVs Planned

Board member Bob Jackson alerts FON membership to the following planned reunion.

Joe and Sharon Marley were PCVs in Niger from 1994-1998. They will host a reunion in July, 2013 at their farm near Ferryville, Wisconsin. Joe and Sharon Marley encourage RPCVS from Niger and Friends of Niger members to come visit the Driftless area of Southwestern Wisconsin for a Peace Corps Niger reunion July 25-28, 2013. The reunion will be held at their forty acre farm a few miles east of the Mississippi River. "Anybody with a connection to Niger is welcome to attend," according to the Marleys.

Joe and Sharon served together in the village of Sounga Me near Kirtaci in southeastern Niger. They worked in agriculture extension. Following their extended PC service they first lived in Alaska before moving back to the midwest in 2004. They bought a property on Rush Creek and have building their farm since. Besides building up their goat herd and raising beef, they are also raising three children in the house they built themselves. With other PCVs from their era, they have been planning a reunion for some time. They have expanded their turkey flock so they have plenty of smoked turkey on hand and intend to donate a prime steer for the occasion. Camping will be available on their land. There are other campgrounds on the Mississippi and lodging nearby.

For more information on the reunion, to donate to support it and add your ideas, join the nearly hundred RPCVs already planning to attend on Facebook at Peace Corps Reunion 2013. Joe will answer your questions by e mail at jmarley@yksd.com

Also, check out the Driftless area of Wisconsin, east of the Mississippi between LaCrosse and Prairie du Chien (two hours west of Madison). You will not only enjoy a fine reunion but be glad you visited a truly unique and scenic area of the country you likely have never heard of before. See you in late July next year.

FON Welcomes New Board Member Brian Kimmel, in charge of Project Coordination.

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FON encourages members to submit articles on any Niger-related topic, including personal accounts and photographs of PCV experiences or follow-up actions, to the Camel Express editor at: [judeheyjude@hotmail.com](mailto:judeheyjude@hotmail.com)



## Niger's First Lady Visits the U.S.

On Friday, May 23 the Niger Embassy and the Friends of Niger (FON) in Washington held a reception to welcome First Lady of Niger, Aissata Issoufou Mahamadou to Washington and to give her the opportunity to meet Friends of Niger and Nigeriens living in the Washington, DC area. Ambassador Mamane Sidikou escorted the First Lady to the home of FON secretary, Penni St. Hilaire and her husband Tommy Tomlinson. Harouna Tchiany, President of the Conseil du Nigeriens aux US (CONUSA), welcomed Madame Issoufou on behalf of CONUSA. Madame Issoufou thanked the former Peace Corps Volunteers for their service to Niger and remarked that volunteers joined in village life and lived just like Nigeriens. Madame Issoufou is a chemical engineer and has a foundation: GURI: Making Life Better, that promotes education, particularly of girls, health and nutrition, and a healthy environment, including alternate energy sources and fighting against deforestation. The Embassy provided me'chui and Washington FON members provided typical American potluck.



*Above Left—Guests gather with the flag of Niger in the background.  
Right- Ambassador Sidikou of Niger (right) talks with the First Lady (blue jacket).*



*Left : The First Lady thanks Penni St. Hilaire and her husband Tommy for their hospitality.  
Right—The First Lady and the Ambassador greet guests as Tommy Tomlinson (left, yellow shirt) looks on.*





**Left: Ambassador Maman Sidikou presents Niger's First Lady to FON. Right: First Lady Mme. Aissatou Issoufou Mahamadou addresses the guests. Below: Photos of guests.**



## **Guri Vie Meilleure—Guri Making Life Better**

### **A Foundation Established and Chaired by Niger's First Lady**

Mme. Aissata Issoufou Mahamadou, through her foundation, is helping the most vulnerable populations to reach food self-sufficiency, access to healthcare, and education, and ultimately to live in a healthy and sustainable environment. The foundation focuses on programs and projects which fight against HIV/AIDS, and which use targeted interventions to improve maternal and child health and the nutritional status of children and women of childbearing age. Among the strategies the foundation uses are capacity building, advocacy and lobbying, and communication for behavioral and social change. The contact information for the foundation follows: BP 409, Niamey. Tel: (227) 946 28668. [contact@gourivm.com](mailto:contact@gourivm.com)

## Zoolkoski Update on Galmi Hospital

Dr. Marc Carrigan is one of my colleagues here at Galmi Hospital. Marc is in the kind of physical shape that I would like to be in. So when he asked me if I'd like to join him on a mountain bike ride over the foot and donkey paths connecting some of the small neighboring villages, of course I said yes. Our goal was to reach the village of Tsaidaoua. Neither of us had ever been there before but we knew it was in the area because we've seen patients who've come from there. We chose Tsaidaoua because 6 months ago a woman from there died of eclampsia following childbirth. Three weeks later the baby's grandmother brought Sifiyanou to our pediatric clinic very weak and severely underweight.

During the hospitalization, we learned that she had been feeding him with a powdered infant formula which probably would have been fine if she hadn't been preparing it so dilute. We showed her how to mix it up using the correct proportions of powder with clean, boiled well water. We asked her to bring him back in a week for another weight check. But none of us had seen him since he left the hospital 5 months ago. We didn't know if this house call would turn out to be a reassessment of Sifiyanou's health status or if it would be a visit offering condolences to his family. After an hour of pedaling in the hot sun over dirt roads that were at times rocky and at times sandy, we arrived in the village and were escorted to the house of the chief. He welcomed us and brought us a mat to sit in the shade. We explained the reason for our visit: that we had come to check on an orphan baby whose mother had died. He didn't immediately recognize the names we gave him but after consulting his advisors eventually led us on foot to a house on the other side of the village. After a 20 minute walk, we entered a courtyard where we were greeted by the smiling grandmother holding well-nourished Sifiyanou. In a short time, a sizeable crowd of curious onlookers had gathered. Dr. Marc and I took the baby in our arms and gave thanks to God.

Working hard to keep up with Marc as we pedaled back to Galmi, my legs were sore but my spirits were high. In this country where access to health care is so limited, there are daily victories and there are daily defeats, usually back-to-back. What keep us going are outcomes like this one here. Christopher for the Zoolkoskis



Continued from p. 4

### The 3 N Initiative

A checklist of targets for development provision has been set at national level. The 3N strategy aims to ensure there is a basic development "kit" or checklist of possessions, structures, equipment and services at every level of society locally.

- ✓ For an individual household: improved seeds and fertiliser, access to water and training in how to conserve and use it most effectively, and at least a couple of chickens and a rooster, and a goat or a sheep.
- ✓ For each village: a cereal reserve, a communal bank or shop supplying agricultural inputs, an animal vaccination unit, a communal supply of farming tools and shared machinery (a threshers), a women's market garden, a recovery centre for malnourished people and a "farm field school" for learning about new techniques and crops.
- ✓ For each municipality (usually 15-20 villages, with a combined population of 30-40,000): a market, all-year vehicle road access (to reach urban markets), a central purchasing unit for equipment, a cereals store, a hub for trading agricultural products.

The 3N High Commission estimates the cost of developing this national strategy over the next four to five years at \$2 billion. The commission hopes that individual villages and municipalities, and their elected local councillors, will put forward the practical suggestions for the actual detailed implementation of the programme in their villages.



# Niger Proactive in Dealing with Food Crisis

Denise Brown of the World Food Project contributed the following:

Hamadou Djibo Issaka is getting a lot of attention these days though most of us had probably never heard of Hamadou before the Summer Olympics 2012. He is a rower, from Niger, who recently competed in the men's 2,000 meters singles sculls, and came last. But the point is that Hamadou, who only started rowing a few short months ago, was in the Olympic Games representing his country, and the world paid attention.

In 2011, the Government of Niger sounded an early warning call for Niger anticipating a looming slow onset food security crisis. The call was launched internationally, transparently and the world paid attention.

Using the national early warning systems that had been developed over the years, it was clear that once again the rains were failing the people of Niger and the poorest households would slowly but surely exhaust their food stocks and resort to out-migration (pulling children out of school), selling remaining assets, typically livestock (the few goats that remained) and deepening their level of debt. The drama of the situation became clear as families who had been hit by the crisis of 2010 were also those in the line of fire for 2012.

But the story of Niger this year is not one of perpetual doom and gloom; there is good news. The early warning systems were used; a national response plan was prepared in October 2011 (revised in February 2012 following the national vulnerability survey) and is being implemented by the humanitarian actors in Niger and overseen by the Dispositif National, which includes Government, donors, UN and NGOs.

As early as November 2011, cash and food for work activities were scaled up in the most vulnerable areas; community screening for malnourished children intensified; and the sale of subsidized cereals began. The overall objective was to stabilize vulnerable populations and limit migration to urban areas and neighbouring countries. Keeping people in their villages meant that farmers would tend to their irrigated crops, thanks to seed distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the FAO, and indeed in 2012 a record of 1, 8 million metric tons of vegetables were grown. The preventative nutrition programme, referred to as "Blanket Feeding" began in April, ahead of the traditional lean season, as a recognition of the difficult months to come and is a powerful tool in the fight against malnutrition. And the vulnerability survey of November – December 2011, found 6, 4 million people living in zones at risk of food insecurity while the updated figure in June found 5, 5 million people in vulnerable zones, a decrease in the number of potentially vulnerable people. Some good news!

Niger is not out of the woods yet and the hardest month, August, is yet to come. In addition to the food security and nutrition crisis, there is the looming threat of locusts devastating the harvest and cholera in the western part of the country. Armed conflict in neighbouring Mali is affecting the country, which is hosting more than 40 000 refugees in areas which are already food insecure.

The Government and the international actors in Niger are, however, not satisfied with a mere response to the crisis. The "heads up approach" has been adopted so as to respond to the immediate needs of the most vulnerable while planning for the future, a dismantling of the structural challenges – before food security and nutrition crises in Niger become the new "normal" state of affairs.

As with Hamadou, the Nigerien rower at the summer Olympics, who didn't win his race, Niger has many many hurdles to overcome but the country is at the starting line and the world is paying attention.



## A New Photo Essay on Niger: "Smallpox, Slavery, and Toubou Warriors"

Friends of Niger thought you might like to be aware of this photo essay.

**"Smallpox, Slavery and Toubou Warriors"** by former Peace Corps Volunteer, Guy Immega available on the Apple iBooks Store (\$1.99 for iPad only). Here is a summary:

This photo-essay provides a glimpse of the African Sahel, south of the Sahara, in Niger from 1966-68. During that period, our Peace Corps medical team fought a smallpox epidemic in the lands of the nomadic and warlike Toubou tribe. Survival in the Sahel, slavery and Toubou insurrections are illustrated with photos.

Guy Immega, 3668 Blenheim St., Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6L 2Y2  
Tel: 604-222-8700 (h); 604-250-6599 (c) [guy.immega@kinetic.ca](mailto:guy.immega@kinetic.ca)  
Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.): RPCV Dates in Niger: 1966-1968  
Location in Niger: N'Guigmi (far eastern Niger, on Lake Chad)  
Program or Involvement in Niger: Peace Corps medical team (3 doctors, nurses, health education, tech support) that re-established medical services in eastern Niger after independence from France.

Smallpox, Slavery and Toubou Warriors  
A Journey into the Sahel



### THIRD GOAL EVENTS

There are two upcoming Third Goal Expos highlighting ways to bring the Peace Corps experience to classrooms and communities this September.

**September 22 in Providence, RI: inspirational panelists share their stories in The Peace Corps Experience: Shaping Lives and Careers**

**September 29 in Los Angeles, CA: share your story to start the school year!**

All Expos are free and open to the public and feature World Wise Schools programs, Around the World exhibits PLUS speakers from Peace Corps, the National Peace Corps Association, and the co-hosting local NPCA member group on topics including RPCV Brainstorming: Elevate the Third Goal and Engaging RPCVs in the Classroom. Please assist us in our planning and register online. Be sure to update your contact information with the Peace Corps by visiting their website at [www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/info](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/info). Anne Baker, Vice President, National Peace Corps Association

### OBITUARY - Susan Black Elwell, 1941 - 2012

Susan Elwell, wife of Richard Elwell, Peace Corps director in Niger in the 1960s, died May 8, 2012 at her home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. She was a victim of breast cancer. Susan was born in Ontario, moved to Pittsburgh, where she graduated from Chatham College with a degree in Political Science. She moved to Washington and joined the Washington Office of the newly created Peace Corps where she met Dick. They eventually went to Niger for two years. She was active in local politics, a real estate agent, a master gardener and a member of the historical society. Susan is survived by her husband, their son Martin and three stepsons; David, John and Peter. Her fourth stepson, Robert, predeceased her.

# 2012 FRIENDS OF NIGER MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone (w) \_\_\_\_\_

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Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Dates in Niger \_\_\_\_\_ Location in Niger \_\_\_\_\_

Program or Involvement in Niger \_\_\_\_\_

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*Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities - including The Camel Express, 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.**

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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 New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

☐ 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 prefer to receive my copy of the Camel Express by USPS in black and white;

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