



RCA Missionary Update

from the Johnsons

The Evangelical Church of the Republic of Niger (EERN is its acronym in French) is the RCA's mission partner in Niger. Founded shortly after Niger's national independence in 1961, EERN is the oldest and largest Protestant denomination in this Muslim-majority (98 percent) country.

Located in the Sahara Desert, Niger is the world's poorest country (174th out of 177 on the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index, a composite measure of life expectancy, education, and living standard), and 50 percent of its population is under the age of 15. EERN ministries reflect this context: they focus on evangelization, education, health, and community development.

Tom Johnson, an international development specialist, and his wife, Aïchatou, represent RCA missions in Niger. They have three daughters, Marie-Florence, Laurey and Elisabeth.

Niger facts:

- Population: 11,361,000
- Size: 1,266,700 square kilometers (slightly less than twice the size of Texas)
- Major religion: 98 percent Muslim



MINISTRY

Community Development

LOCATION

Niger

PARTNER

Evangelical Church of Niger,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Dear Friends,

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I'm writing this letter to you during Niger's hot season, which lasts from late March through the arrival of the rains in late May or June. Daily highs are 108F and the nightly lows only sink to 80 F. Life slows down accordingly, as the heat and the sun sap your energies. Yet, surprisingly, we are very busy and I even manage to lead the Bible school students for an hour of required "practical work" for the school each weekday afternoon. We're still working on finishing the infrastructure for our goat project. We're making plans to fence in a garden and install a water line with multiple hydrants for the hand-irrigation of student plots. Additionally, I finished constructing a small mud-brick office outside our home and an outdoor latrine and shower for our Nigerien workers. The Bible school teachers and students are so impressed with the coolness of our thatch-roof goat shed (*see photo below*),



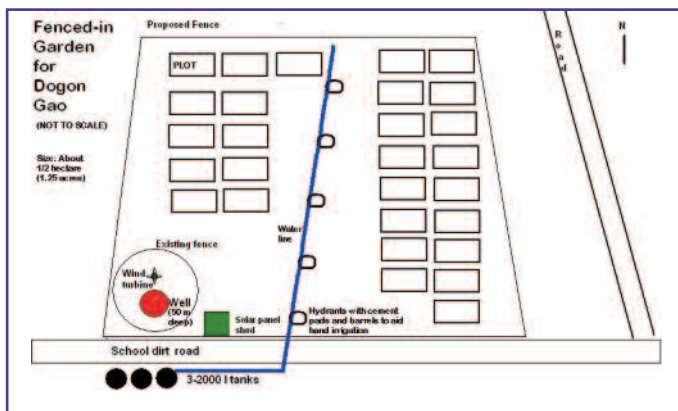
This goat shelter was built with local materials and a metal frame. 8 birthing stalls are on its west side.

that they want to build something similar for our Sunday church services, which now take place in a crowded, hot, classroom. We'll be rushed to complete this structure before the rains come, but I'm hopeful that the students will help in its construction.

We've been experiencing some challenges with our goat project. When we took possession of the goats in mid-January of 2009 from the government's goat breeding center, we discovered that they had already placed the billies with the females in late December/early January. With a 151-day gestation period that means the majority of our goats will deliver during the hottest time of the year! As a result, our females are giving birth to weak, premature kids, many of which are born dead, as the heat provokes early births and even late-term abortions. We may just have to chalk this up to "experience" and make sure that this doesn't ever happen again. Sadly, this will delay our giving the Bible school students female kids to raise and then breed. We have largely completed the construction for our goat "complex" by building a large thatched shed, a barn, 16 pens for birthing and a billie shed and pen are still in progress. A veterinary technician from the Goat Center recently came out to inspect our herd and facilities and he was quite impressed with our progress.

Next on the list of new work will be the creation of a

school garden. We've discussed this for years and with the help of funds from Faith, Zeeland, MI, the garden will finally become a reality this year. The first step is to fence the terrain because if you can't protect the garden from goats, sheep, donkeys, chicken, guinea fowl, cattle and camels (all which cross our land), plus unauthorized people, you'll never harvest a crop. The availability of water isn't a problem, but the storing and distribution of it presents some hurdles to overcome. With a great deal of reluctance, we're going to connect the garden to our drinking water supply, so that we can get started. One day we'll need either a new larger reservoir that is either dedicated to the garden or one which will otherwise increase our total water stock at Dogon Gao. The idea with hand-watering is that it is more consistent with actual conditions in Niger, thus the students can take what they learn here to any other garden. It also drastically reduces the amount of water we'll use, since the students will have to take the effort to haul whatever water they need for their personal gardens. We're helping them by placing several 1 1/4" water hydrants and barrels throughout the garden to make access to water a bit easier. Interestingly, the goat project guardian started his own hand-watered garden a few months ago (the first at Dogon Gao!) and now the students and especially their wives are very interested in having gardens. His garden shows the students what is possible! Here's a drawing of what our garden will look like.



Approximately 1 1/4 acre will have easy access to water for hand irrigated gardens

For family news, Aïchatou has decided that she is ready to work with the EERN's recording studio. We've long hoped that this might happen. She's been asked to prepare a 15 minute weekly program in French and in Hausa on personal and spiritual health. This will be broadcast on over 20 radio stations in Niger each week, theoretically reaching the majority of Niger's population, as radio is the most popular form of entertainment and news.

The three girls are growing and Ellie (1 year) and Marie (5 years) celebrated their birthdays on March 24 and April 14, respectively. We'll soon be saying good-bye to their teacher, Elizabeth, who will return to her family in Michigan in mid-May. We quite concerned that we have



The girls celebrate Marie's 5th birthday. Laurey's band-aid is from getting scratched by tree branches.

still been unable to find a replacement teacher for September of 2009 for the girls. As Aïchatou will be busier than normal with the radio broadcasting, we truly need a volunteer who can work with Marie (5) and Laurey (almost-4 in September) in the mornings, so that we can do ministry.

As you may be aware, the RCA Global Missions has taken several steps to manage declining resources during these difficult financial times. For us personally, that means that we weren't permitted a home assignment for 2009. The earliest we'll be able to return to the U.S. is mid-2010. We're very grateful for all the churches and individuals who are committed to our ministry and we want to thank you for remembering us in your prayers and in your budgets! The mission field of Niger requires a long-term presence and we're thankful that so many of you are willing to make this type of investment for the Kingdom!

PRAYER AND PRAISES

- We're thankful for volunteer Elizabeth and her work with our girls. We've seen so much progress in the past year and the girls like school a great deal. We pray that a new volunteer will accept the call to come teach in September.
- We pray that all the details will be worked out for Aïchatou to have a weekly radio program in French and Hausa and that she and the Nigerien population will be richly blessed by her efforts to share health and spiritual truths.
- Pray that we'll be able to finish up our most important projects before the rains start. All work with mud bricks stop when the rains begin. Pray for a bountiful rainy season.
- Pray for our goat herd and that our current problems will not seriously deter or delay our objectives to help the students.

In Christ,

Tom and Aïchatou

Tom, Aïchatou, Marie, Laurey and Ellie.

To access extensive information about the Johnsons, or to make a financial gift for their ministry, simply go to www.rca.org/johnson.