

Zinder primary school classroom and students.

"It's incredible to consider that in 2007 we started with **27 students** and we now have a total of **499 students.**" *-Harouna Labo*

The Remember Niger Coalition celebrates 10 years in Zinder!



The first class of 8 students in Zinder, shown here in 2012 when they were in 6th grade.

Working with the school in Zinder has been one of my greatest joys over the past ten years. I can vividly recall getting to know those on the school committee for the first time while sitting around in a circle of plastic chairs. We sat outside of the nearly completed, first classroom on a hot and windy day in 2007. The land was dry and hard with a few thorn bushes and a brick wall surrounding the two acres. Harouna Labo, the school administrator, described the vision for the land and future buildings in such a way that they came to life right there in that circle. Harouna and his wife have entrepreneurial spirits and, as the saying goes, almost everything thing they touch turns to gold. This is primarily due to their intuitive sense for success and determination to see projects through.

This March, I had the opportunity to discuss with Harouna the progress made over the past ten years.

Kara: The new middle school in Zinder is exciting! How is it going?

Harouna: It's great! We started this fall with two classrooms – 20 students in 7th grade and 8 students in 8th grade. But, that will change soon.

Kara: It reminds me of how the primary school started. Didn't you have 8 students in that first class?

Harouna: Exactly! We had 8 students in 2nd grade, 8 students in 1st grade, and 11 students in Kindergarten. It's incredible that in 2007 we started with 27 students and we now have a total of 499. This year, we had so many parents enrolling their children that we had to turn the cafeteria and computer lab into classrooms to accommodate everyone. We ultimately had to turn students away, which was difficult.

Kara: Wow... I guess that's what they call a "good problem!"

Harouna: We'd really like to build three more classrooms for the primary school so that we can meet the demand. The third building of classrooms has a strong foundation, so we can build up. But, our priority has to be to complete the middle school. We will need a third classroom next year so that we can grow.



Harouna Labo and his family



The second primary school building, shown above, was completed in 2011 and provided 3 more classrooms.

Kara: When do you plan to build the final middle school classrooms?

Harouna: Whenever we have funding!

Kara: Good point! Our plan is to raise the money this June during our Laying the Foundation Campaign. We will transfer the money as soon as it starts coming in.

Harouna: Please pass our thanks on to your supporters. We are praying continuously for you and your efforts. We are very grateful for your continued support. I'm not sure where we'd be without it.

Kara: It's really our pleasure! We're so thankful to be able to work with you, and I cannot imagine having better partners. I'm curious – what has been the greatest challenge in establishing the school?

Harouna: There are always challenges when starting something new. The one that comes to mind is finding and keeping excellent teachers. In the beginning, it was difficult because we weren't getting enough money from student fees to meet our budget. There just weren't enough students. That's why the support Remember Niger provided was so important. It was critical to getting us through those lean years. Also, the projects that have helped enhance the school have been essential to the growth that we have experienced.

Kara: Do you mean projects like the computer lab? During our visit to Ague yesterday, I saw that they have already started construction on the computer lab.

Harouna: That's a great example! Computer labs and libraries have been a key to the type of education we can provide and have been instrumental in creating a good reputation for the school. That then helps us get and keep good teachers and attracts more students to the school, which allows us to collect enough school fees to pay and keep great teachers.

Kara: It's all very cyclical. I'm happy to see that Zinder and Ague Schools are in the thriving part of the cycle! What is the vision for the school?

Harouna: Eventually, we would like to have a complete campus with a high school and then add higher learning schools including a teachers college and possibly a university. However, right now we're focused on making sure that the school continues to provide a very high quality of education. We're proud that we have a reputation for excellence within the community, and we intend to ensure that we maintain that level and even improve on it.

10 YEARS IN ZINDER!



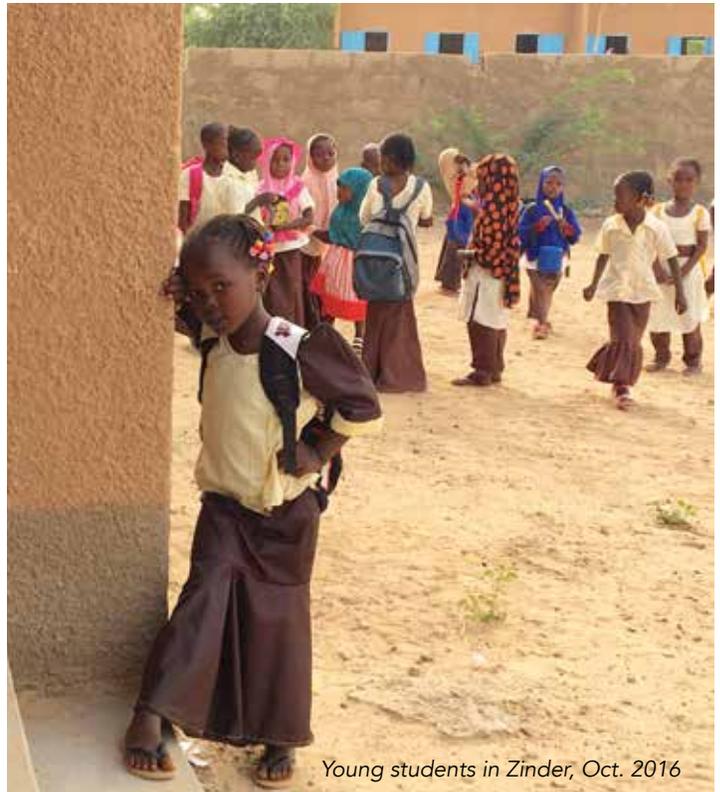
First teachers and staff



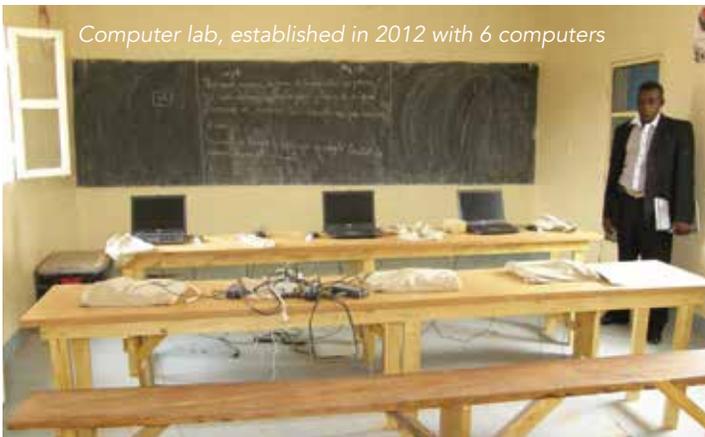
Third school building in Zinder



First school building, complete with 3 classrooms in 2008.



Young students in Zinder, Oct. 2016



Computer lab, established in 2012 with 6 computers



MOVING FORWARD IN ZINDER

2017: 2 new classrooms will be added to complete on the new middle school

2018: 3 new classrooms will be added to the primary school

2019: Construction will begin on the new high school

Be Connected!

The Remember Niger Coalition is working with schools in the United States to connect them with students in Niger!

We kicked off our "Be Connected" program in 2016 to connect students in the U.S. with students in Niger. We are getting a great response and it has proven beneficial for both students in the U.S. and in Niger.

Remember Niger staff members and volunteers visit local schools and present about "A day in the life of a student in Niger." The presentation includes pictures, video, and a question and answer session.

Last Fall, we partnered with Memminger Elementary in Charleston, South Carolina. Third grader Jaleiya Westpoint came to the school counseling office to ask what she could do to put "compassion into action." She had been inspired by the social/emotional learning unit that all Memminger students had been working on - having and modeling EMPATHY, part of their year-long campaign, #Empathy-ForAll.

Heather Anderson, guidance counselor at Memminger, was familiar with Remember Niger and invited us to meet Jaleiya and to help her launch a coin drive at her school. We told the Memminger students about young Mariama, a third grade student in Niger who was in need of a sponsorship to attend school. They quickly organized their fundraiser and got to work!



Heather Anderson, guidance counselor at Memminger Elementary, Jaleiya, and Julie Frye with Remember Niger.

Each morning for two weeks, counselors visited classrooms to collect change that students had brought from home. Students discussed how to ask friends and family for help paying for Mariama's sponsorship. They talked about Remember Niger on the morning and afternoon announcements; they talked to parents in the car line, and they made posters and placed them throughout the school. Faculty/staff, volunteers, and other visitors contributed as well.

We are thrilled to report that Memminger Elementary greatly surpassed their goal. They raised more than \$800, enough to send TWO students to school in Niger!

GREAT JOB, AND THANK YOU, MEMMINGER!

Invite us to your school!

If you are interested in inviting us to your school, please email Julie Frye at jfrye@rememberniger.org. We are excited about forming new school partnerships with all ages!



Since learning about Mariama and other students in Niger, the children at Memminger have been known to play "Mariama's life" on the school playground. We love that they were impacted by the stories we shared with them!



Kara VanderKamp, founder and director of the Remember Niger Coalition, shows the students at Memminger what they might wear if they lived in Niger.

A volunteer's perspective

Tory Gentry was one of 6 volunteers who traveled to Niger in March, 2017. Below, she shares some reflections from her trip.

It's easy to blurt out, "of course I can read!" so I suppose I have always taken literacy for granted. As a young professional female living in D.C., my life would be much different without the educational opportunities I've had. I learned to read at a young age, graduated from high school, graduated from Vanderbilt, and am now considering graduate school. However, that is not everyone's reality – neither here in D.C. nor abroad. In Niger, only 29% of citizens have set foot in a classroom and only 9% of girls move on to middle school. It was this that sparked my interest and inspired me to travel to Niger.

My biggest takeaway from the trip was my reaffirmation of the importance of education for all children. Education opens doors and provides children with more opportunities for their future. The excitement in the classrooms we visited was palpable. The students were focused, well behaved, and engaged. On the chalkboards, we could see lessons ranging from basic arithmetic to human anatomy. Our group did an art project with a few classes. Through this activity, we witnessed students' creativity as they drew pictures transforming a stray squiggle into a car or snake. We played soccer

"These experiences showed me the joy that the students feel while at school. These schools truly brighten their lives."

with some of the older girls (in 105+ degree sun, I might add) and laughed with them as they began to loosen up. These experiences showed me the joy that the students feel while at school. These schools truly brighten their lives. Perhaps, even more astounding than the joy of the students, is the joy of the teachers. These teachers give so much to these students – they work against insurmountable odds to give the students the best educations possible.

Since coming back to the states, I have been asking myself the question, "What now? Do I just go back to work? Have I been changed?" Yes, I have been changed. I am driven to continue supporting Remember Niger as an ambassador of the organization by telling the stories of what I learned and saw. I am going to find ways to advocate for education here in D.C. There are small steps that each of us can take to



Tory Gentry with students in Niger.

support these students – we can pray for them; we can sponsor them; we can visit them. I know that these efforts will go a long way in improving the lives of many students in Niger for years to come.



Tory and the students playing soccer.

Interested in going to Niger?

You might be feeling the desire to visit Niger, but maybe also thinking, "ME? Go to Africa? I could never do that!" Rest assured, we are here to answer your questions and encourage you to experience this life-changing trip. Since 2007, we have taken many volunteers to Niger. These supporters have interacted first-hand with the students, toured the schools, and gotten a true taste of what life is like in this impoverished nation where money is scarce, but joy is plentiful. Reach out and let us answer your questions about upcoming trips!



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SAVE THE DATES!

JUNE 11:
Hudsonville, MI
Hudsonville Christian Middle School

SEPTEMBER 23:
Woodbury, MN
Trinity Presbyterian Church

OCTOBER 7:
Charleston, SC
School Spirit Run for Niger
James Island County Park

OCTOBER 15:
Potomac, MD
Carderock Pavilion

OCTOBER 21:
Washington DC
Georgetown Presbyterian Church



Remember Niger Coalition is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to uniting people and mobilizing resources to expand quality educational opportunities in Niger, West Africa. To date, the organization has helped its Nigerien partners construct, furnish, and support six primary schools and one secondary school in Niger. To learn more about Remember Niger, please visit www.rememberniger.org.

In the Numbers

