Life in Niger

Niger is a large country of fifteen million in Africa. It is found below the Sahara Desert. It is a difficult place to live. Here are some facts and statistics. The nation’s government does not have a lot of money. For example, there is about $700 per capita (purchasing power parity). Almost everyone does farming. The problem is that from time to time, there is drought, or, for example in 2005, locusts ate all of the harvest, [ga baki daya], the lack of food is a big challenge that faces the nation.

I will continue with statistics. Usually, the life expectancy is 53 years. Also, women have about 8 children each. But for every 1000 births, there are 117 deaths. The infant mortality rate is 117 per 1000 births. Concerning health, there are many kinds of illnesses, like malaria, HIV/AIDS, diarrhea, and hunger/malnutrition. In addition, there are not a lot of hospitals, especially in the bush.

Once, I was a volunteer in Niger. I lived in a small village suburb of Dakoro in the Maradi region because the residents of the suburb wanted help. If the help is not wanted, it’s not required (to invite a volunteer to live with you). After I started to hear Hausa, we started working together. We had a meeting about HIV/AIDS in the large town of Maradi. From every village where there was a volunteer, one brought one man and one woman so that they could learn everything about HIV/AIDS. They met someone with HIV so that they could understand that one can’t tell someone has HIV just by looking (literally: see HIV with their eyes). This is the kind of project that raised awareness—when they returned to their cities, they shared the information so that their fellow residents could protect themselves from this illness. That is how the nation will progress.

So that one can confront the challenge of food shortages, there are a lot of paths. In the village where I lived, we did three kinds of projects. First, we planted trees with leaves that contained vitamin A. Vitamin A is useful because it strengthens eyes and helps skin health. Vitamin A is found in milk, cheese, liver, carrots, mangoes, and squash. Unfortunately, these things are expensive in the market.
but if you have these trees in your village, it’s not a problem to obtain this kind of vitamin. In addition, the leaves taste good in sauce.

Second, we had a big garden in the village. Everyone had a plot and seeds. They started by preparing the plots—they made tree fencing to surround their plots; they mixed manure with dirt; for one week, they watered the plots in the morning and in the afternoon; after that, they planted the seeds and they continued to water twice a day. After 14 or 18 days, they started to see sprouts. After 2 months, they had carrots, onion, tomato, cabbage, and garlic—this is like traditional medicine for the body.

Third, since they approached me with their ideas, we built a grain bank. The purpose [of a grain bank] is to reduce the price of food during the rainy season, or when food in the market is expensive, or when there are locusts. Since neither myself nor the people in the village knew how to run a grain bank, we visited a neighboring village where there was a 4-year old grain bank. Three people went to the village so that they could learn about management, problems, and the usefulness of a grain bank—all the things one needs to know in order to succeed. After this investigation, they decided to move forward. Everyone helped with the construction of the bank and everyone brought 10 measures of grain so that they could accumulate inventory. Even now, after 5 years, they are profiting from the bank [literally: they are eating the profits of the grain bank].

Together, we accomplished a lot of goals. Despite the fact that I only lived there for 2 years, even today they are moving forward with the work we did. I hope that all the effort that we put in was worth it. I hope that all the work has reduced their suffering. If they see this video, I would like to greet everyone in Dakoro and everyone in MaiLafiya—I greet you.