

Subject: Hello from Niger!

Hi everyone, I've been in Niamey, Niger for 2 weeks now and have yet to write. Sorry about that.

It's great to be back. It feels like I never left. The muggy heat of the rainy season, the marriage proposals from the taxi drivers, the worried look that people have this time of the year when the fruits of last year's harvests are running out and this year's crop won't be ready until October...and I still remember how to speak Zarma:)

I am enjoying my work with Helen Keller International (HKI). Work starts at 7:30am and ends at 6pm. So much for "African time." I am really impressed with the staff. The director, Dr. Adou, is from Cote d' Ivoire and was formerly a professor of medicine in Abidjan. My program supervisor, Aissa, is from Agadez (she's a very motivated woman and is highly respected by the men that work here). In addition, Aissa's husband is from Kiota, the town where I worked for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer.

Tomorrow morning I will begin the 2-day trip to the city of Diffa with HKI staff. Once I arrive in Diffa, I will be assisting with an evaluation of a nutritional rehabilitation program that HKI implemented in 113 government clinics in the Diffa region. HKI helps train health workers and provide them with supplies for the rehabilitation of malnourished children. In a "good" year, the region of Diffa only produces enough food to cover 50% of their needs. You can imagine what happens when the harvest is poor. As one doctor put it " HKI's program really comforted the health workers by supporting them during the food crisis in 2005. Can you imagine being confronted with thousands of malnourished children and not having the supplies necessary to help them?"

I am really thrilled to be working with HKI because they are one of the only NGOs in Niger that worked directly with the Nigerien clinics during the food crisis of 2005. Non-profits like Doctors Without Borders set up shiny centers staffed with the best technology and mostly white doctors. These organizations cure thousands of kids (very impressive), but what happens when the NGOs leave??

I think it's important to treat as many malnourished kids as possible, but it's also important to empower Nigerien health workers with the means to help their own people. (Okay, enough PR about HKI)

I went back to the town where I lived for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer, Kiota. It was wonderful to be back!! Unfortunately, I was only there for 2 days. It was quite a whirlwind tour. I felt like I had to make sure to see everybody (they would be highly offended if I was in town and didn't say hi). After I return from my trip to Diffa, I hope to go back and spend some more quality time there.

My best friend Indi just finished her 2nd year of nursing school--and she finished top in her class! For those of you who don't know the story, Indi is a young woman from Kiota who adopted me into her family. A family from my church back home paid for her to go to nursing school (in Niger it is only the richest people who can afford to pay their child's way through

nursing school). Indi is an incredibly talented person who wants to go work in a clinic in the bush when she finishes school. Many Nigerian nurses from upper class families would prefer to stay in cities rather than work in rural areas. Indi comes from the country herself and is intent on serving the kind of people that she grew up with. This country seems so tragic at times, but Indi's outlook on life gives me hope.

I'll write more once I arrive in Diffa. Take care!!

Best,

Kati