



The Newsletter of the Friends of Guinea
Advocacy, Information, and Networking for Guinea and Peace Corps

#### NPCA ERF Committee Update

By Hannah Koeppl FOG Communications Assistant

The National Peace Corps Association Ebola Relief Fund Steering committee met on August 26th to discuss a number of issues as we begin to finish and close out our work. Final reports are coming in from projects. Memos, protocols and lots of discussion ensued a few action items.

In efforts to replicate and improve relief efforts for the next Peace Corps post, the committee has decided to write and present a memo to Peace Corps Washington about formalizing NPCA and the evacuation process. By enhancing training and therefore technically and psychologically preparing volunteers, they can continue relief work through NPCA relief efforst from the States and promote good will for future Peace Corps collaborations at their evacuated post.

I am personally writing, editing, and trying to the proper way to present the memo to headquarters. Once completed I would like to organize a forum and obtain Returned Peace Corps Guinea Volunteer or any RPCV help and support.

Feel free to contact me if you would like to read the current draft, add your own ideas or would like to participate in the forum once organized. Many thanks in advance for your support and all that you do as members! I nu wali! On jaarama! I ni ke! Merci!

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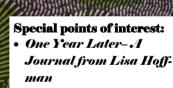
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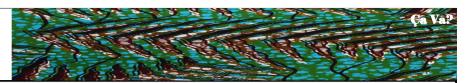
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DTI- Dare to Innovate
by Hilary Braseth



## A Journal By Lisa Hoffmann

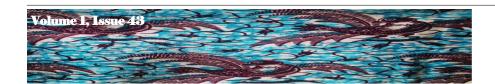
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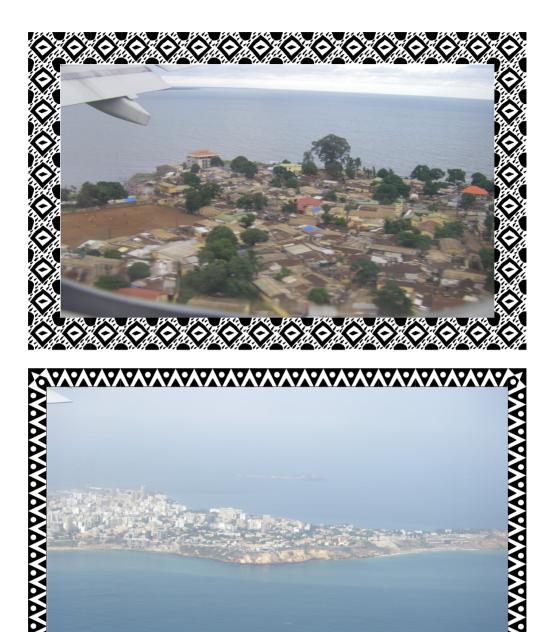
As the one-year mark of my return from Guinea passes, I reflect on my experiences and initial perceptions of the country I cherish. As soon as I received my invitation, I remember Googling 'Guinea' and scanning articles about Guinea Pigs. People would nod their heads when I mentioned Guinea and ask about the climate on the Pacific Island. For better (Guinea is now visible, no longer confused for its similarly named Bissau or Papua New) or for worse (it is no longer confused because of a devastating disease that has swept across West Africa), times have changed. For those of us that have lived and loved there, the country represents a place where community and family is the top priority, where one can sit all afternoon with neighbors perhaps even in silence and enjoy the simple presence of a friend, and where one learns the warmth so generously extended by an invite to eat rice and sauce from the same large pot.

Sometimes though, our memories are not enough, and for that I turn to my journal. Filled with raw, detailed reflections, I often find myself rereading entries. I would like to share my first entry with the readers of FOG in hopes that my words and emotions may evoke memories of your own stories and initial feelings when you arrived in Guinea for the very first time.

#### December 3, 2013

We arrived in Guinea this evening after a long trip. We flew from JFK to Brussels to Dakar to Conakry. The flights were not bad and I was able to sleep on them for a while. It was physically exhausting and with the time difference, mentally exhausting too. We flew in at dusk and it was incredible to see all the homes so faint in the distance with little to no lights to brighten the city streets. We went through the Guinean Airport and I was amazed at the open areas of the building. It is only half built at the baggage claim. The most eye-opening part was the bus ride to the PCV House. Another volunteer and I squeezed in the front seat because literally the entire van was packed with all 33 of us. We had the best seat because we saw everything. I was speechless as I watched hundreds walk, sit, sell, direct traffic, and drive the streets of Conakry. The scene was unlike anything I have ever seen before. I couldn't believe that I was seeing Guinea. There were mixed emotions of happiness as I watched friends laugh and smile as they walked through the streets and extreme sadness to the point where I almost cried seeing young children alone and living in poverty. Many of the buildings were rundown; there were no traffic laws, signs, or markings on the roads. I saw several popcorn machines, which were the only familiar objects. We arrived at the house and were greeted warmly by PC staff and current volunteers. We shared shawarmas (veggies, onions, and French fries in a flatbread wrap- yum!) and Cokes. I took a shower and the spout was spraying water every which way and the curtain was gross, but it was ok. It was strange, in the middle of a shower that would completely repulse me in the states; it was such a luxury after the long flight and I am sure will be even more so once I am at post. I thought to myself "You are in Guinea, and this is going to be the experience of a lifetime."





Bird's eye view of Conakry upon arrival in Guinea.



### Where Do the Peace Corps Volunteers Go?

Reflections on my time representing Friends of Guinea at the NPCA's Peace Corps Connect conference in Berkeley June 5-6, 2015. **By Hilary Braseth FOG Guest Writer– RPCV 2011-2014 Dalaba** 

Last month FOG was proud to sign, on behalf of its membership, the annual Peace Corps funding request letter to President Obama. With this action, FOG and many other affiliate groups of the NPCA joined together to voice our desire

As I reached the end of the exhibition hall, a tiny, leafy-green unit caught the corner of eye. I paused, turning towards the table and gasping with excitement at what I saw: there, in the middle of Berkeley, California, sat a vibrantly green Moringa tree in its full, potted glory. I approached the woman at the table, who was selling the trees and sharing the species' amazing, healing abilities — how a serving contains 22% of your daily value of Vitamin C, 41% of your daily value of Potassium, 61% of your daily value of Magnesium, 71% of your daily value of Iron, 125% of your daily value of Calcium, and 272% of your daily value of Vitamin A — and how the tree almost refuses to grow anywhere other than places that presents some of the harshest growing conditions — like the deserts of West Africa.

This woman, as I came to discover, had spent her entire life in the police force until she reached the age of retirement and heard a voice telling her she needed to leave and do something bigger, greater (I was interested — was the police force not enough?). She applied to the Peace Corps, almost before she could even consult herself first, and in late-2010 deployed to a small village in the middle of Mali. Some of her most meaningful memories, as she told me, were from her time in the fields with the ladies of her village, growing and pulling the leaves off the Moringa tree for sauce. Now that she was back in the states, she had managed to bring the seeds to Northern California, succeeding in growing them and beginning a tiny farm to spread the wonders of the tree with others while educating and raising awareness around Malian culture.

I was struck by her story, and the stories of many others I met that weekend at the National Peace Corps Association conference in Berkeley. Much of the conference contained talks on life after Peace Corps, success after Peace Corps, and also featured a talk from Carrie Hessler-Radelet, who shared how Peace Corps is becoming more innovative, connected and relevant with our current global, interconnected reality.

The conference also featured an exhibition hall with representation from many organizations that returned volunteers are involved with, spreading the third goal. I met an entrepreneur who had jump-started a chocolate business in Madagascar, called Madacasse, which manufactures chocolate from cacao beans that are sustainably grown by local farmers. I talked with a young female entrepreneur who is currently trying to break into the U.S. health food movement, leveraging its buzz to empower local women growing Moringa in Mali through a business called Kuli Kuli, which re-purposes the superfood into energy bars and a raw powder available for purchase in bulk. I met a man who had spent his Peace Corps service in Kenya and who went on to create a successful career in banking at Credit Suisse. I met a woman who spent her service in Honduras and who now runs the high-profile social good side of LinkedIn. I saw Carrie Hessler-Radelet speak, I saw Congressman Sam Farr and Congressman John Garamendi speak — all of whom had done the Peace Corps, all of whom said that to this day, their Peace Corps service is still the most meaningful and transformative experience than any other they've had in their lives.

Most remarkable to witness, however, were the hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers who had come together from across the country, many of whom had completed their service in the early 60s — the inaugural years — using this conference as an excuse to reunite with their friends. I was in awe throughout the weekend, easily one of the youngest attendees by at least 20 years, and couldn't help but ask myself: where were all the others? The representation didn't nearly tap into the breadth and depth of the Peace Corps alumni network, and it was unfortunate to know that no news outlet was present to capture and share the amazing stories of all these people, all in the same room, unified by the same mission.

And this brings me to our call to action, rallied by Congressman Farr and Carrie Hessler-Radelet, who shared that the demand to be a volunteer is stronger than ever, but that the Peace Corps' current funding allotment only allows fewer than 25% of applicants to be admitted. For a country that still faces unemployment, and for a job that costs near-"zero", as Congressman Farr put it — shouldn't the Peace Corps be the easiest jobs-creation outlet available? He implored us all to consider how vast our network truly is — spanning entrepreneurs, farmers, business-leaders, politicians, lawyers, doctors alike — and to ask ourselves: how might we rally as an alumni base to lobby for more funding? To allow for those who desire to transform and to be transformed by the experience, to have it? Imagine a country with an entire population of returned volunteers who had spent more than two years among a foreign culture — what rich perspective we'd contain!

And so I ask you, Friends of Guinea, returned volunteers: imagine that you hadn't received your invitation to embark to Guinea, hadn't ever tasted a bowl of rice and maffe, never experienced life as a Peace Corps volunteer? How would your life be different? What friends might you not have? What perspective might you be missing?

Let's begin a dialogue around how we can catalyze a movement among the returned volunteer base to rally our vast alumni network and push for increased funding for the Peace Corps. How might we do this? I invite you to share your thoughts and connect with the Friends of Guinea (<a href="mailto:info@friendsofguinea.org">info@friendsofguinea.org</a>), write your Congressman or Congresswoman to ask for more funding, or connect with the National Peace Corps Association on Facebook.

In all, it was an honor and a pleasure to be part of the conference, to represent Friends of Guinea and also Dare to Innovate, an organization that was founded during my service in Guinea (2011-2014). I look forward to future opportunities to connect and collaborate, and was proud to call Guinea my home while with others at the conference.

Has this article made you interested in attending the next Peace Corps Connect event? It will be held in Washington, D.C. September 22 - 25, 2016. It will also coincide with the 55th Anniversary of the founding of the Peace Corps!

# Daring to Catalyze Change in Guinea By Hilary Braseth- FOG Guest Writer- RPCV 2011-2014 Dalaba

Dare to Innovate, an organization founded in 2013 by six PCVs during their time in Guinea, catalyzes youth across West Africa in the fight against unemployment through a network of interconnected, human-centered initiatives and social entrepreneurship.

In Guinea, West Africa, more than 50% of the population is classified as youth, and 70% of them are unemployed. Forget Ebola — this has been Guinea's story for decades beyond the recent epidemic. Ranked the world's "worst economy" by Forbes for three years running and consistently falling among the bottom 10 countries on the Global Human Development Index, Guinea is both blessed and cursed with a land-scape full of potential and challenge. And despite a plethora of untapped iron ore, gold, diamonds and bauxite, Guinea's economic growth projections have slowed to 0% for 2016 in the wake of the Ebola epidemic.

It is within this context that Guinea's most precious, untapped resource — its youth — resides.

In late 2012, we founded Dare to Innovate to meet this challenge head-on. We were six Peace Corps Volunteers strewn across the country who had grown acutely aware of the mark that many "development initiatives" were missing. In an earnest attempt to merge problems with possibility we asked ourselves: "How might we match the unemployment delta with the myriad of social challenges that youth face in a sustainable, catalytic way?"

Dare to Innovate, incorporated and implemented by local organizations, takes a systematic approach to bind collaboration, design-thinking, self-awareness activities and creative challenge to catalyze and support youth in the fight against unemployment. Through a human-focused, context-specific curriculum, youth are guided through the ideation process to arrive at a tangible business solution to a pressing social issue. They are then challenged to pitch their ideas before judges and, if successful, are granted start-up funds to actualize their ideas as social entrepreneurs.

What's magical about this process is that while we are fighting unemployment, each member of youth is working to combat a social problem that they feel passionate to change, truly believing that they play a role in the healthy progress of their country. Though each of our founders has a full-time job after Peace Corps, none of us has backed away from our deep-found belief in Dare to Innovate, nor our passion for investing in Guinea. We have now rooted our operations and earlier this year, expanded our model to Benin after two of our founders took personal vacation and personally funded a journey to train local Beninese counterparts and Peace Corps volunteers in our model.

It's rare that good news comes out of Guinea. I can attest and I'm sure you all can too, as returned Peace Corps Volunteers from the country. I have a Google alert scheduled to notify me each time the country is mentioned in the world news and before Ebola, Guinea hardly showed up at all. The work that Dare to Innovate has catalyzed, though, deserves a few large, bold BBC or Wall Street Journal headlines.

"Fatoumata Diallo, Dare to Innovate fellow, started a childhood nursery in one of Conakry's busiest neighborhoods in late 2013. She now has more than 90 students and is overwhelmingly recognized in her neighborhood market by the women who now are able to leave their children in security with her while they go to sell in the market. The women surround her whenever she goes to buy groceries and praise her, giving her free produce. She's become such a local celebrity that she rarely goes to the market. Whereas before she wasn't respected by family, she now is the only sibling that no longer asks her parents for money and the fact that she can take care of herself and impact her community in such a way has completely changed her life."

"Aliou Barry, Dare to Innovate fellow, started a mobile veterinary clinic in late 2013 that provides vaccinations to herders in the remotest of villages that don't otherwise have access to them. His success has grown so significantly that he was recently chosen by the Ministry of Elevage as the regional point of contact for any governmental vaccination campaigns, meaning he will win any government contract in vaccinations for Pita and Labe regions. He has trained veterinary interns in 5 of the 11 Prefectures in Pita and Labe and because of his business, there is a growing education and interest around regular vaccinations for healthier and more profitable animals."

"Youssouf Barry, Dare to Innovate fellow, started an organic banana plantation in late 2013 to create a frozen organic banana treat as a fresh, healthy alternative to the myriad of imported, sugar-dense candies that children consume. Thanks to Dare to Innovate's training and support, Youssouf won the start-up competition with Blue Zone, a high-profile event hosted nationally in Conakry. Even though he had a slow start with his organic banana plantation (in two years he still hadn't cultivated any bananas because of a lack of technique), he has continued to preservere and has never let go of his idea and dream. He treats his business idea like his own child. With the help of Dare to Innovate he will be harvesting his bananas for the first time. He has since been able to plant another acre of bananas, pineapples, peppers and tomatoes, hire a technician, and train others in entrepreneurship. He proudly claims the title of social entrepreneur and is a true leader in his community."

"Duris Riane, Dare to Innovate fellow, started a tutoring center in late 2013 to fill in the gaps in his city's education system. Parents have begun to bring their children from all over the city and he now has outgrown his space because of the extremely high demand for his training. Before Dare to Innovate, at 29 years old Duris had been struggling to secure work despite having finished university. Duris now has income and is a respected community leader in Dalaba. Even adults and government officials come to him to ask him to write business plans. Now, instead of looking for work for himself, he employs four people and is looking to expand to create more jobs. Instead of thinking only of himself and how he can get a job, Dare to Innovate has given him the ability to think of employing others and changing his community, and for that he is extremely proud."

Our Dare to Innovate participants are no longer youth. They have transformed into adults who are truly changing their communities, their country from the inside-out. If you'd like to learn more or become involved, please visit <a href="www.DaretoInnovate.com">www.DaretoInnovate.com</a>, or email Hilary Braseth, at <a href="hilary@daretoinnovate.com">hilary@daretoinnovate.com</a>.





Friends of Guinea is a non-profit organization made up of former Guinea Peace Corps Volunteers, Guineans inside and outside of Guinea, and others interested in promoting the cause of Guinean development in the world at large. We are a country-of-service affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association.



Do you want to contribute a piece to the next newsletter? Contact Fog Communications Assistant Hannah Koeppl at <a href="mailto:newsletter@friendsofguinea.org">newsletter@friendsofguinea.org</a>

