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The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea

Advocacy, Information, and Networking for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea



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World Price Increases Hit Guinea

The price of a 50 kilogram sack of rice jumped 10% recently to 220,000 Guinean Francs (GF) in Conakry, which is more than double the price from a year ago. With the official exchange rate hovering around 1US Dollar = 4,500 GF, the current cost is approximately \$49 per sack, and prices are higher outside of the capital. The price of gas also jumped in April, to 7,300 GF (\$1.62) per litre, which translates to over \$6 per gallon. This has resulted in higher transportation costs and elevated prices on most other items as well. The Guinean government recently announced that they will begin to set up an emergency stockpile of rice, claiming they will create a security stock of 25,000 tons per month for the next six months. The government gave no indication of how they would pay for this endeavor, but the move came just days after a protest in Conakry against the high cost of basic items.



Peace Corps Director Ron Tschetter visited Guinea in mid-April. He met with volunteers in the Basse Cote at their sites. For more information and photos, see the article on the Peace Corps website. At www.peacecorps.gov click on "More News" on the lower left of the page. The articles are sorted by date, and "Peace Corps Director Visits Guinea" was posted on April 16. Above: (l to r) PCV Adam, PCV Jim, Director Tschetter, American Ambassador Carter, Country Director Steve Peterson, PCVs Katie and Liz. Photo credit: G15 PCV Jim.

Back to Guinea

Annie Mascorro (Kerouane, 2000-2002)

Recently my partner Smatt and I quit our jobs and sold everything we owned in preparation for a return to Guinea where we met while serving as Peace Corps volunteers from 2000 to 2002. We had promised ourselves and our Guinean host families that we'd be back someday, and this seemed as good a time as any. We were in the midst of several transitions, and I was struggling to find direction in my life. Much to our family's chagrin we bought one-way tickets and told them we were open to staying in Guinea as long as it "felt right." Many thought we were crazy.

Almost five and a half years after having left Guinea, our plane landed in Conakry as the sun was rising. We had waited 24 hours at the Leopold Senghor Airport in Dakar for our 45 minute flight to Guinea in what we had forgotten to be typical Air Senegal fashion. Their motto: "You'll love our company." The delay though seemed, well, almost quaint.

Everything did. The landscape, the taxis, the street sellers. Everything was as I had remembered. I was giddy with recognition. This place that had so captured the imagination of my burgeoning adulthood was, in fact, real. I found myself exclaiming "I've been down this street before!" more times than I'd like to admit. Conakry, a place that had never impressed me in the past, was now a wonderland of familiarity. The old man with the pineapple cart was still selling by the slice on the Avenue de la Republique. Akwaba, the Lebanese shawarma shop was where I had left it, and the open-air Niger market was as chaotic as ever.

The climax of this exhilaration was the reunion with my host family. I had imagined the worst - "What's your name again?" Instead, there were running hugs, tears of joy, and a slaughtered chicken. Time had passed: the newborn had somehow become a kid, the children were taller, and my host mother's face revealed the slightest creases of age and fatigue. According to the family, I, too, had changed. What Guinean reunion would be complete without celebratory screams that the newly arrived was now "bigger" - read "fatter" - the ultimate compliment to which I feigned pride and satisfaction?

Much was the same, though. My old hut was still there, and the mango trees, the home-made toy cars the children make, the potato leaf sauce, the curdled milk in calabashes. Mostly, though, I was relieved and overjoyed to find my host family more or less how I had left them. They seemed to feel the same about me. We slipped easily into the past. I became, once again, a 22-year-old Peace Corps volunteer, my Guinean family's charge, untouched by the loss of innocence that comes with time.

If we had left soon after this reunion, Guinea, my Guinean family and friends, and I would once again be freeze-framed, stored in another album. But Smatt and I have stayed a bit longer. Six months to be exact. The awe and jump-up-and-down excitement of our first few weeks here have given way to quieter moments. I have come to anticipate the long conversations with my host mom under the mango tree when we're in Kerouane. There's much to share. These years apart have filled us with stories and struggles, and it has been both reassuring and cathartic to connect our stories into a greater one, a time line that goes both backwards and forwards.

To be fair, this has not been an easy visit. The same frustrations that I remember from my time in the Peace Corps are here: long waits at the taxi park, children screaming at me, and the incessant come-ons. Much more disturbing, though, is witnessing the daily consequences of the current economic crisis. The rising cost of fuel and food is hitting our friends and family here hard. Each day we watch as people struggle in ways they hadn't before just to get by. Sauces are thinner, lines for gas are longer, and individuals as well as whole communities are now hoarding foodstuffs. In recent months familiar problems such as the water crisis, the deteriorating national highway, and the shortage of public school teachers and medical supplies have become more acute.

On a much smaller scale we know that we've played our part in the challenges of this trip. Over these past few months we have pushed the limits of hospitality and frustrated everyone with our lack of clear plans, not to mention jobs.

It is clear that this visit has been joyous and messy at once. My relationships here have grown deeper, but also more complicated. The juxtaposition of the chaos in the family concession and those peaceful chats with my host mom has taken some getting used to but has also opened up a space for me to begin to find the middle ground in my own life.

I came to Kerouane, Guinea, fresh out of college almost eight years ago. Since then I have stumbled through my 20's, given and received second chances, gotten lost, found new paths, given up, started over and laughed and cried until I was sick.

When I walk past my old hut in Kerouane I feel a flash of longing so intense I can almost smell the hut from the inside, that cozy, musty smell that comes after the rain. I'm in there alone, reading by candlelight, my whole life ahead of me. But I can't go back and my time here has shown me that I wouldn't if I could. I am no longer that young woman. My host family is right: I am truly "bigger," and I can see now that everyone else is too.

It might have been tempting to remember Guinea as an "experience," the last hoorah of my youth, but it never has been and never will be. It's a place, like any other, with people who cannot be captured in a single photo. Time can't be stopped. We are, all of us, constantly moving forward, along roads full of potholes and curves and red dust so thick we can't always see exactly where we're headed.

-KanKan, Guinea, May 2008

Annie Mascorro has her MFA in Creative Writing from The University of Montana. Her poems and essays have appeared in Calyx, Epilepsy U.S.A., Knucklebones, Five Fingers Review and on Montana public radio. She and her partner Smatt will return to Western Montana in June. For descriptions and photos of her time in Guinea check out her blog: www.bactoguinea.blogspot.com

Communications Report

Dear Friends of Guinea members,

If you haven't already, please check out the FOG blog at: <http://friendsofguinea.blogspot.com/>. In it, I regularly post all kinds of news items relating to Guinea, the Peace Corps, and FOG as well as development and human rights issues. If you have any news items or tips you'd like highlighted in the blog, please email me. Additionally, I would like to diversify the content in the blog by seeking outside submissions of all kinds. If you have any memoirs, old journal entries, political essays or any other writings on the above topics or subjects that might interest FOGers, please email them to me. I'd like to make the blog one of the central sites in English for news, information and commentary about Guinea.

Brian Farenell, FOG Communications Director

communications@friendsofguinea.org

Culture Crossing Website

Hello Friends of Guinea,

We are looking for help as we launch www.culturecrossing.net, a community built guide to cross cultural etiquette and understanding for living, working and studying in the global community. CultureCrossing.net is an evolving database of cross-cultural information about every country in the world. This user-built guide allows people from all walks of life to share essential tips with each other about how to navigate our increasingly borderless world with savvy and sensitivity. It is easy to navigate, free to use, and organized into topics such as communication styles, eye contact, gestures, taboos, dress, negotiations, meeting etiquette, school rules, gift giving, and more. If you would like to help with the Guinea pages, please contact us at info@culturecrossing.net and we will send along a brief questionnaire.

Michael Landers, Director - Culture Crossing

School-to-School International: Making a difference in the lives of elementary school children

Mark Lynd, Founder School-to-School International
mail@sts-international.org, www.sts-international.org

How can Americans make a difference in the lives of Guineans, who suffer increasingly from rising gas and food prices, deteriorating health and education standards, and a tense political situation with no end in sight? When the price of a sack of rice exceeds the beginning wage of a teacher and protesters are shot with live ammunition, with no trials to bring the perpetrators to justice, how can the world send a signal that Guineans have friends who care, and who are prepared to contribute to the development of their country?



Artwork from pen pals

One response is School-to-School International (STS), a nonprofit organization that has been working in Guinea since 2002. STS is currently providing assistance to 24 elementary schools in Coyah, Dubréka, and Boké by training teachers in French and math instruction, developing local language and health instruction manuals, delivering 8,000 books to its schools (provided by partner NGO Partage Quebec Guinée), and providing funds for communities to dig wells and latrines, build school libraries and procure first aid kits. STS has also organized letter exchanges between schools in Portland, OR, and San Francisco, CA, where 4th and 5th grade students have exchanged letters with counterparts in Guinea. Last year, students at Metropolitan Learning Center in Portland raised over \$2,500 to support wells and first aid kit delivery for partner schools in Guinea.

Since STS began, over 4,000 Guinean children, their teachers and parents have benefited from our support, improving their educational and health status and thereby giving them the means to stay in school and a reason to hope for a better future. STS has been able to achieve these gains with help from the Alcoa Foundation, through grants and contracts for educational services and research, and through private donations. STS encourages all friends of Guinea to visit our website or contact us directly in order to learn more about our work, and to become a part of it.

School-to-School International

PO Box 371056, Montara, CA 94037-1056

Tel: (650)728-7138

PC Guinea News

A group of 22 teachers are going to Guinea in early July.

What is...

CaVa?

Ca Va is the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea and seeks to maintain contact and community among members as well as inform them of the official activities of the organization. We welcome submissions!



Edited by: Mackenzie Dabo
Email: newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

Who are we?

FOG is run by a small group of volunteers.
Consider joining our ranks!



*Email us @friendsofguinea.org
(eg., "projects@friendsofguinea.org")*

Stephanie Chasteen . .	secretary
Mackenzie Dabo	newsletter
Brian Clappier	membership
Shad Engilterra	finances
Claire Lea	projects
Brian Farenell	communications
Nathan Shepherd . . .	web
Urska Manners	listserv
Lance Constien	registry
Sharon Buehler	gps (parents)

Friends of Guinea

Friends of Guinea is a non-profit organization made up of former and currently serving 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. Dues are \$15 annually for individuals, and \$23 for families.

email: info@friendsofguinea.org
website: <http://friendsofguinea.org>



Communities Planning for the Promotion of Health and Human Rights in the Forest Region

Cody N. Donahue, Tostan International

Representatives from 70 communities in the N'Zérékoré and Guèkedou prefectures gathered in the village of Níampara, twenty kilometers north of N'Zérékoré, in an inter-village meeting on May 10, 2008. The event, which was organized by the communities themselves with the support of Tostan and UNICEF/Guinea, was a time dedicated to sharing lessons learned during the first year of classes by the Tostan Community Empowerment Program. This sharing of experiences ended with the creation of a common quarterly plan to promote health and human rights—in particular, the abandonment of female genital cutting (FGC), child/forced marriage, child trafficking and gender-based violence—in the Forest Region.

The Prefect of N'Zérékoré closed the meeting with words of encouragement, supported by representatives from the United Nations in N'Zérékoré and Conakry. All the authorities engaged with the 70 communities to support their community-led development efforts. Twenty of the communities are currently benefiting directly from the UNICEF-funded Tostan Community Empowerment Program, which is a 30-month non-formal education program centered on educating participants about human rights and the promotion of health and hygiene. Each of the 20 communities has a Community Management Committee (CMC) trained by Tostan during the first year of the program in order to raise awareness about the themes covered in the program. These CMC members reached out to three non-participating communities each to bring them into the efforts of human rights promotion.



The CMC Coordinators presented their committee's achievements since joining the Tostan program in 2006. They also presented the representatives from the communities where their group presented awareness-raising activities on topics such as human rights and



responsibilities, democratic behavior, problem solving processes, and health and hygiene.

In particular, each CMC cited the concrete community impact they had had, including registering births, retaining girls in school, encouraging pregnant mothers to seek pre-natal consultations, cleaning up community spaces, and building improved-wood stoves.

The assembled community representatives revised the action plan established during the last Tostan-sponsored inter-village meeting held in Guèkedou Lélé in December 2007. This new action plan will promote the abandonment of FGC, child/forced marriage, child trafficking, and gender-based violence.

Níampara, a community of over 2,000 people, holds special significance for FGC abandonment in the N'Zérékoré prefecture: it traditionally gives permission to the neighboring villages to practice FGC. The President of the District, herself a member of the Tostan class, asked that Níampara no longer authorize girls being cut. The crowd applauded the President's initiative.

One local man from the Guèkedou prefecture shared the story of losing his daughter many years ago to complications related to FGC. He felt that the education he received from Tostan only reinforced what he already knew about the negative effects of FGC.

One of the most unique aspects of this inter-village meeting was including the theme of child trafficking. In part due to the thousands of refugees from conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, child and women trafficking has posed particular challenges to communities in this zone.

UNICEF Guinea has funded this project since 2006 in partnership with Tostan and the Government of Guinea. Tostan has also worked in Lower, Middle, and Upper Guinea in partnership with USAID since 2003. Tostan is a US 501(c)(3) nongovernmental organization based in Dakar whose mission is to reinforce the capacities of African communities for sustainable development in the respect for human rights.

Photos from the community meeting in Níampara.

Welcome New Officers

In March, Friends of Guinea members elected new officers. Many are returning faces, but some are new to the organization. Here is a brief look at each officer. Email addresses are all ...@friendsofguinea.org. For complete officer bios, visit: <http://friendsofguinea.org/aboutofficers.shtml>

Stephanie Chasteen – Secretary; secretary@...

Stephanie served as a Community Development and Public Health volunteer in Waway (outside of Fria) from 1997 to 1999. She has a PhD in physics and currently works as an education researcher in that field.



Claire Lea - Projects Director; projects@...

Claire was a Math Education volunteer from 2002 to 2004. She lived in the town of Banian, which is between Faranah and Kissidougou on the main highway. Claire is currently a high school language teacher.

Brian Clappier - Membership Director; membership@...

Brian served as a physics teacher in Hafra (near Labe) from 2004 to 2006. Originally from Wisconsin, Brian now lives relatively close to home in the Windy City where he works as an advocacy specialist with the Shriver Center



Brian Farenell - Communications Director; communications@...

Brian served as a Math Education volunteer from 1995-97 in Beindou Centre, a tiny village less than 10 miles from Kissidougou. He had a great experience there and is pleased to still be in contact with his best friends from Beindou.

Shad Engkilterra - Financial Officer; finances@...

Shad was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Banko from 1998 to 2000. Just over a year ago, Shad was promoted to the Southeast District Director position for the American Red Cross of Alaska.

Sharon Buehler - Parent Support gps@...



Sharon is a PCV parent who manages an import company. Her son Brian (G8) served two years as a teacher in Kouroukoro (upper Guinea), then as the GAAD Coordinator based in Conakry during his third year. He served from July

2004 until evacuation in February 2007. Sharon visited Brian in Guinea in Dec 2005, including Christmas in Conakry, hiking with Hassan Bah near Pita, and a week in Brian's village.

Mackenzie Dabo - Newsletter newsletter@...

Mackenzie was a math education volunteer in Saramoussaya (between Mamou and Dabola) from 2000-2002. She spent a third year with Peace Corps in Conakry as Gender, AIDS and Development coordinator. She is currently a middle school math teacher.



Rita Gerlach - Newsletter Distribution Manager; rita@...

Rita is current PCV mom who has been volunteering to experience new people and places for many years. She also enjoys riding her Harley.

Nathan Shepherd - Webmaster; web@...

Nathan was an education volunteer in Dinguiraye from '01 to '03. He is currently living in Jordan working with a non-profit business association as he takes a



break from his Master's studies at Princeton.

Urška Manners -

Listserv Administrator; listserv@...

Urška was a math teacher in Siguiri from 2000 to 2002. She is currently finishing her PhD.



Le Griot Nous Dit...

- RPCV Aaron Sharghi (Tiro/Kankan, 1998 – 2001) is marrying Jeanne Françoise Faye from Thies on September 5th and 6th in Dakar and Thies, Senegal.
- G0 volunteer Emily Ramsur (Koubia '00-'02) and her husband Andrea recently welcomed their first child into the family. Emily writes: *"We are so happy to introduce our baby girl, Elena (pronounced in the Italian way, EL-ena, like Ellen with an "ah" on the end). She made her grand entrance at 6 pounds 12 ounces, 20.5 inches. She arrived after 13.5 hours of labor at 4:26pm on 3/17/08."*



Classifieds

If you were in Peace Corps/Guinea, class of 1997, please join <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Guinea1997> to participate in discussions about a possible reunion in 2009, on the occasion of the 10-year anniversary of COS. Membership in the group is open (no invitation necessary). Just go to the address above and click the big "Join this group!" button to sign up.

What COSing volunteers can look forward to -- "Ways RPCV's know they have readjusted:
<http://friendsofguinea.org/fun/readjust.shtml>

Girls Conference is back! Projects Report and How to Donate...

Claire Lea (Banian, 2002-2004) Projects Director

Recent Successful Projects:

- FOG donated about \$3,000 to Partage Quebec-Guinée in November, 2007, that resulted in a large shipment of books delivered to Guinea in January, 2008. They have been delivered to sous-prefectures and libraries throughout the country. Check out <http://www.pqg.qc.ca/main.html> for more information on the project.
- Kimberly Mason's water pump project that FOG helped fund has begun. Efforts are currently underway to provide clean, potable water to a remote community in the Haute. Good luck to Kimberly in completing this project, and we look forward to seeing some of the results in the next newsletter!
- URGENT! 2008 Girls Conference** Funds Needed: \$1828

Many of FOG's members and RPCVs realize what an important project this is for the youth of Guinea. The conference is very soon, and FOG has donated about 3,800 USD (which was the money we raised for a previous conference that was canceled). Please consider donating TODAY to bridge the gap and ensure this year's conference will indeed take place. It is scheduled for June 22-26. To make a tax deductible donation or read the project proposal, go to www.peacecorps.gov and click on "Donate Now" on the left. Under "Donate to Volunteer Projects" you can do a search by country of service; Girls Conference is the only current project for Guinea. Alternately, you may visit <http://www.friendsofguinea.org/projects.shtml> to make a donation earmarked for the Girls Conference.

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Visit us at: <http://friendsofguinea.org>