

Project Proposal Cover Sheet

2006 Peace Corps Guinea Girls Conferences

Community Name: *Middle School and High School Guinean girls from volunteers' sites*

Country: *Guinea*

Community Population: *Eighty-five girls participating in two separate four-day conferences, held simultaneously in different regions; twenty-five professional women serving as mentors and presenters during the conferences*

PCV Name & Mailing Address:

Brian Buehler

Corps de la Paix Americain

BP 1927

Conakry, Guinea, West Africa

PCV's e-mail: *brian_d_b@yahoo.com*

Community Leader Responsible for Project:

Mohamed Fofana, APCD Education

PCV's US Hometown: *San Diego, CA*

PCV's Primary Assignment:

3rd year agency initiatives coordinator

PCV's COS Date: *16 August 2007*

Type of Project: *Education, Health and Skills Development*

Total Project Cost: *USD*

Number of Beneficiaries - Direct: *100 girls and professional women*

Project Request: *USD*

Exchange Rate Used: *FG to USD*

Indirect: *countless*

In the attached proposal please find:

Proposal Summary

Background Information

Verification of Partnership Guidelines

1. Project meets a pressing community need;
2. Project is community initiated and directed;
3. A well-developed plan for project implementation and sustainability exists for the project;
4. The community contributes at least a 25% of the total project cost;
5. Indicators of success have been outlined in the proposal.
6. A well-developed budget in local currency and US dollars detailing both the community contribution and requested funds.
7. The Proposal contains a statement to the effect that the community has been informed and understands that there will be no additional funding beyond the authorized amount on the proposal as submitted;
8. Funds are to be used only for costs associated with the project.

Support Data

We verify that this project is needed by the *school-aged girls of Guinea*, the intended beneficiaries.

Project Coordinator _____
(PCV's signature) (Date)

Community Leader _____
(Signature) (Date)

I have reviewed this proposal and certify that it is well planned, accurately budgeted, and that it will be successfully supervised through to its completion.

Peace Corps Country Director _____
(Signature) (Date)

Volunteer Referrals

In an effort to identify persons who may be interested in supporting this project, I have provided the following names and addresses of relatives, friends, schools, community civic groups, and organizations:

(Please complete this section and check the appropriate box. **A contact name must be included.**)

Name: Stephanie Chasteen	Relationship to you: Friends of Guinea Webmaster
Address: secretary@friendsofguinea.org	

Name: Dana Schneider	Relationship to you: Friends of Guinea Fundraising Chair
Address: projects@friendsofguinea.org	

Name: _____	Relationship to you: _____
Address: _____	Phone: _____

Name: _____	Relationship to you: _____
Address: _____	Phone: _____

Name: _____	Relationship to you: _____
Address: _____	Phone: _____

Project Coordinator: _____
(PCV's signature)

Proposal Summary

The Volunteers of Peace Corps Guinea, in accordance with the Girls' Education Initiative of Peace Corps Washington, are working with Guinean counterparts to encourage girls to continue their education and develop the capacity to make independent, conscientious decisions.

To this end, we propose the 2006 Peace Corps Guinea Girls Conferences. The Girls Conferences are two simultaneous four-day conferences held in the regional capitals of Mamou in Middle Guinea and Kankan in Upper Guinea from December 4-9, 2006. The participants are 85 school-aged Guinean girls from the volunteers' respective towns and villages. Local contributors, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and volunteers work together to direct the Conference, planning interactive sessions on topics crucial to the success and well-being of the girls. The girls learn techniques for success in school, educational and professional possibilities, and personal health (including preventing HIV transmission and family planning), amongst other things. At the same time, they develop skills such as critical reasoning and public speaking so that, by the end of the Conference, they will be able to present and speak confidently about the information that they've learned.

Background Information

For each of the past nine years, Peace Corps Guinea has, with the help of numerous host-country contributors, conducted the regional Girls Conferences. Each year, the Girls Conferences host about 100 young women from the widespread prefectures, sub-prefectures, and districts that host volunteers. These girls are usually students between grades six and twelve, aged 12 to 22. The conferences have represented an invaluable opportunity to expand horizons, not only for the girls, but also for their peers and communities.

The conferences cover a wide range of material, focusing on issues relevant to young scholars: their health, their education, and their future careers. Each subject is explored in depth and important points are reiterated. The conference emphasizes the importance of developing study skills, peer pressure coping strategies, communication skills and problem solving strategies for social as well as academic problems. This is often facilitated by activities from the Peace Corps Life Skills Manual.

A group of professional Guinean women contribute their time to allow the girls to both shadow them at their places of work and converse with them in a panel discussion on personal and career success. For many participants, this is their first such encounter. The program always includes a day spent on women's health issues with presentations about HIV/AIDS, family planning and Female Genital Cutting. Recent conferences have also included: basic computer skills, viewing of films about relevant topics (including women's rights, HIV/AIDS, and genital mutilation), invited speakers about women's role in Islam, guided discussions about polygamy and the effects on women, workshops on communication skills and public speaking, and participation in sports and extracurricular activities encouraging teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking skills.

Peace Corps Guinea volunteers and their Guinean colleagues have been running these conferences side-by-side for nine years, and many volunteers feel that this is the most rewarding project of their service. For the participants, the conferences provide the inspiration and knowledge to educate their peers, and encourage them to make invaluable contributions to their communities. Volunteers gain valuable cross-sector collaboration experience. The conference also establishes a working relationship between the volunteer and participant, which is then continued back in the village.

Verification of Partnership Guidelines

1. Community Need

In Guinea, as in all of West Africa, there are many challenges for a young woman seeking an education. Limited resources, social and cultural expectations all play a part. Many families are too poor to send all of their children to school and when forced to choose, send sons before daughters. A young woman attending school is often also expected to continue to play the traditional role of housewife, mother, and caregiver, whether for her siblings or her own children. A Guinean girl can be married off as young as 13 or 14, which usually increases her domestic responsibilities and affects her scholastic career. There are a host of gender-specific problems: exhaustion from domestic work, little to no free time to study or complete school work, sexual harassment by teachers and other school officials, unequal treatment in the classroom, and ridicule in the school and community settings (for either doing too well or too poorly). The social status of a girl or young woman in Guinean society means that she has very little say, and very little experience making her own decisions.

These factors result in a remarkable disparity in Guinea between male and female's level of education. For example:

UNICEF statistics

Rate of literacy among the Guinean adult population (from 2000):

Men: 55% Women: 27%

Rate of enrollment at Guinean Primary Schools (from 2004):

Boys: 73% Girls: 58%

Rate of enrollment at Guinean Secondary schools (from 2004):

Boys: 28% Girls: 13%

In UNICEF's 2004 annual report on the State of the World's Children, the lack of girls' education was cited as an obstacle to a country's development progress. The report states that girls still suffer illiteracy rates far higher than men and at least nine million more girls than boys are left out of school every year. The report concludes that enabling girls to get a basic education would improve their health and well-being. Countries with the lowest secondary school enrollment rates for girls also endure the highest rates of child mortality. Educated women are more likely to have healthy children and more likely to ensure that their children, both boys and girls, complete school. The Girls Conferences attempt to address this need by not only encouraging the participants to succeed through education, but also by giving them the tools to do so.

In addition to education, Guinea faces several other crises. The rate of female genital mutilation still tops 95 percent, resulting in health risks and suffering for an entirely new generation of young women. Malnutrition results in death, blindness, and countless other health problems for Guineans nationwide. Educating young Guinean women – the future matriarchs of their families – on the benefits of foods to which they already have access is essential to improving overall health. In its impoverished state, Guinea's youth also face the spread of HIV: "Out of every nine [Guineans], five are children or young people...Because of poverty, they are made vulnerable to epidemics like HIV/AIDS," according to UNICEF country representative Marcel Rudasingwa (UN News Services 2006). These topics form the foundation of education that takes place at Girls Conferences each year.

2. Community Initiation and Direction

The regional Girls Conferences have not only become an institution for the volunteers, but for their villages, the regional capitals that host them, and the Guineans that help direct them. Many sites have generations of girls who have benefited – either directly as participants or indirectly as friends and peers of participants who share the experience – from the Girls Conferences.

The thrust of the project comes from our Guinean counterparts. These are the real leaders of the Girls Conferences each year – and, accordingly, the participants come to view them as mentors over the course of the Conference. Dr. Sidibé, a French-trained Guinean doctor based in Kankan, has worked for many years with the Kankan Girls Conference to lead a lecture and question/answer session on reproductive health. The girls get the rare occasion to speak with a doctor on issues such as puberty, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. The session on female genital cutting has historically been led by local NGO's, currently Tostan. Professional women lead career day and the professional women's panel, as described above. University students offer to lead book discussions and computer classes in Kankan. Maybe most importantly, our female regional coordinators and a female member of the Peace Corps headquarters staff serve as role models throughout each Conference. They testify to what are for the participants new and difficult concepts (such as the dangers of genital cutting) and encourage the girls in all facets of the conference.

3. Project Implementation and Sustainability

As Peace Corps Volunteers and their counterparts have directed the Girls Conferences for eight years running, they are very adept at planning, scheduling, and managing the Conference. They begin meeting more than six months before the Conference, and through regular meetings and individual preparation, the Conference takes shape. The budget and proposal are drawn up; coordinator positions for such tasks as food, lodging, and materials are assigned; individual sessions are planned; and volunteers invite their participants and make plans to come. All regional volunteer conference coordinators have previous conference experience, and these coordinators assume responsibility of all monetary transactions, ensuring a seamless event.

As described in "Community Initiation and Direction," the Conferences have become an establishment in the regional capitals and in the volunteers' villages. The NGO's who help direct the Conference also have the opportunity to spread the word about their causes and to improve the quality of their sessions through work with volunteers. Such collaboration also encourages these local groups to initiate similar projects independent of Peace Corps, as seen with Tostan's 2006 declaration against excision in the Labé region.

Most importantly, the Girls Conference participants often return to their villages not only more confident and able, but also as agents for change. Past Gender Conferences have conducted large-scale presentations during the Conference to prepare the participants to share the information. Before leaving the Conference, every participant fills out a plan of action for activities she would like to perform in her village. The volunteer then facilitates these and other projects, and encourages the participant to share the information in her daily life. The village is naturally curious to hear about the experience, and this provides a great vehicle for change.

4. Community Contribution

The communities of Kankan and Mamou have grown into partners for the Girls Conferences in a mutually beneficial relationship. The Prefet of Kankan has, for years, lodged the participants in a family dwelling free of charge, and the University of Kankan opens the doors of its conference room and computer lab each year. The forestry school ENATEF in Mamou provides discounted rooms for our conferences. The participants of our Girls Conferences return the favor by performing awareness raising sessions and promoting the Conferences' values through their numerous community interactions.

Please see the attached budget for further information.

5. Indicators of Success

After the conference, each participant completes a survey, and we review the number of girls who have changed their opinion regarding the behaviors discussed.

We also send a survey to the volunteers a few months after the conference. The volunteers are asked to evaluate the effect of the conference on their participant in several ways: if she has taken school more seriously, if and in what capacity she has shared the information with the village, and if any projects have been completed.

Most participants report having done such conference-related activities in their community. Examples include awareness raising sessions or workshops, or more long-term projects such as clubs to promote health and AIDS awareness, and girl's sports teams. Participants have spoken about the topics covered in the conference at the primary and secondary schools and other community venues. Other activities include having one-on-one talks with their peers, forming small discussion groups, and performing plays dealing with HIV/AIDS and the importance of education. These activities reach countless additional girls, boys, and community members.

6. Budget Information for 2006 Conferences

See attached budgets for detailed breakdown. Figures are based on FY2006 conferences with an increase of 25% for inflation¹.

Total FY 2006 Donation Demand: FG = 6,026.07 USD (at current exchange rates)

Total community contribution: FG = 1,976.45 USD

TOTAL BUDGET: FG = \$ 8,002.52 USD

Community Contribution = 25 %

Donor Contribution = 75%

We are asking for a total of 6,026.07 USD for the 2006 Girls' Conferences.

¹ "A joint mission to Guinea by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in May issued a report which said the central bank had completely run out of foreign exchange by the end of last year. It also expressed alarm at a rapidly rising budget deficit. The report, which was published in full last week by the independent newspaper Le Lynx, said **inflation rose to 13 percent in 2003 and was likely to reach 27 percent** this year unless corrective measures were taken." (Irin News, July 8, 2004).

7. Community Expectations

This is the ninth year in which Peace Corps Guinea has implemented the Girl's Conference project, and the community understands that there will be no additional funding beyond the authorized amount on the proposal submitted.

8. Partnership Funds

The funds granted for this project will be used only for costs associated with the project as outlined in the attached budget.