



Friends
of Guinea

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

A Letter from the Editor

Dear FOG Members,

Happy Spring! A short but sweet newsletter this quarter and one very exciting announcement for you!

We have a lovely article from Helen Bond, the executive director of the organization Motherland Rhythm Community's Benkadi Project detailing, their work in Guinean communities.

Continuing our green theme, our FOG focus on the environment will describe historical and current ecological issues in Guinea from RPCV Michelle Evans.

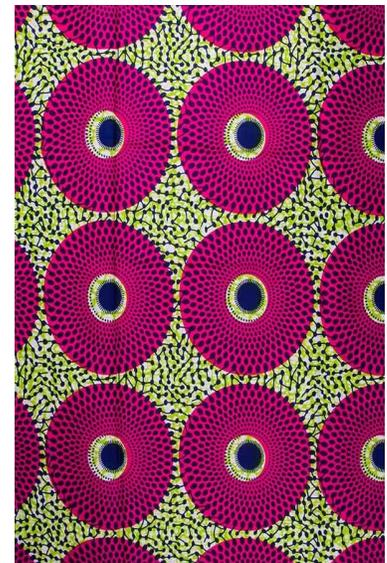
Enjoy!

Cheers,
Hannah Koeppl



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Friends of Guinea By Laws Published

Check out our Friends of Guinea's By Laws recently posted to our website (<http://www.friendsofguinea.org/>). Publication of the By Laws brings us one step closer to our goal of establishing Friends of Guinea as a non-profit organization. This will help us provide more support to Guinea! If you have interest in FOG's organizational development, please contact Anne Redmond Sites, FOG's Secretary, at info@friendsofguinea.org

WHAT FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE OF DRUMMING ACCOMPLISHED IN GUINEA

BY: HELEN BOND, FOG GUESTWRITER

A trip to Guinea in 2001 to study traditional drum rhythms, songs, dance and the culture lead to long time friendship and the desire to help friends in need. Motherland Rhythm Community's Benkadi Project, a 501© 3 non-profit organization, is working to provide clean water to people in Guinea, West Africa. I am the executive director of the organization and a 17 year-student of traditional drumming in Guinea. After myself and a friend/co-founder Amy Lusk traveled to Guinea we raised funds to build a school house in the village of Sangbaralla outside of Kouroussa which expanded the educational opportunities for students in the village who had outgrown their small three room school house.

After the successful opening of the new school house in 2005, we continued to provide a helping hand by digging and repairing wells in villages, supporting students in school and providing emergency medical and food assistance.

While traveling there I was constantly aware of the need for clean water and I noticed that residents often drink from polluted streams and contaminated wells, causing serious and recurring illness and even death from cholera, dysentery, typhoid and E. Coli bacteria. Something as simple as clean drinking water can literally save lives in Guinea. Motherland Rhythm Community's Benkadi Project builds and delivers innovative biosand water filters to homes in Guinea to address this problem. The work in Guinea is managed by fellow drummer and Project Manager Fode Camara. We employ community members to construct the filters and teach residents how to use them. The families are not charged for the biosand water filters they just need to help by washing the sand and gravel which will be used in the filters to clean the water.

To date, we have delivered more than **300** filters to families near Conakry, Guinea. That means **more than 3,000 individuals now have access to clean water.** People who used the filters reported a dramatic reduction in

To date, we have delivered more than **300** filters to families near Conakry, Guinea. That means **more than 3,000 individuals now have access to clean water.** and improved health and well-being. Each filter provides clean water to 10 people for 10+ years, at a cost of just \$30 per person. Our production is based on our fundraising. We are ready to extend these life saving and environmentally-friendly biosand filters to families in Guinea. To ensure our project's long term sustainability, we will also train other community leaders and organizations in Guinea to build and use the biosand filters, further expanding our impact.

In addition to your clean water efforts we are also working on a food security project by making Universal Nut Shellers (UNS). The UNS is also made out of concrete. The UNS can shell peanuts in one hour the amount of peanuts which take 5 women all day long to shell. One UNS will typically provide the shelling needs of a village of 2,000 people and is expected to last 25 years or more. We have already installed our test units and will be continuing fabrication and deployment over the years.

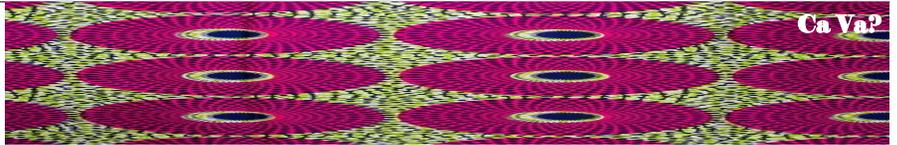
All of the work on these project are handled by local residents who are proud and excited to work and help their communities. We are based in Cimenterie, Conakry.

You can see our Facebook page (which shows photos of all our work since the beginning and our videos on youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2ZnQI4OFKI>

Helen Bond is adjunct faculty at Lake Forest College teaching the West African Drumming Ensemble and Chamber group. She is the winner of the 2015 Jack Benny Arts and Humanities Award from the City of Waukegan, IL.





FOG FOCUS: A Newsletter Series

L' Environnement



Past and Present By: Michelle Evans RPCV 2012-2014 Bordo

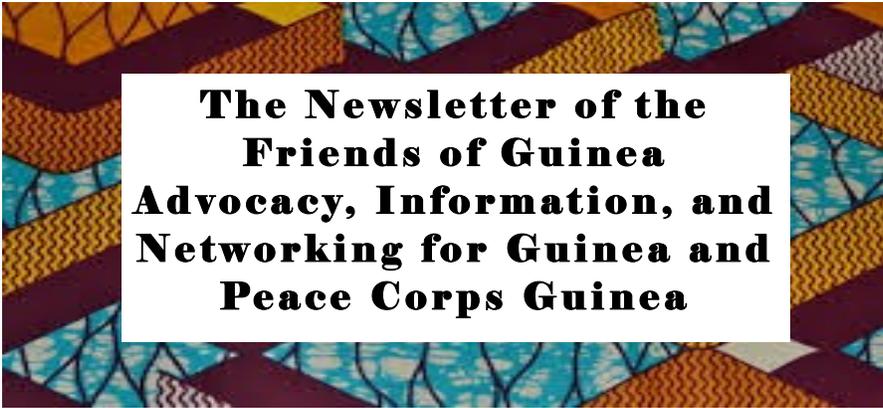
Forests are dynamic, shifting over time as they fall under the influence of man and nature. The forests of Guinea are no different, and range from the humid rainforests of *Guinee Forestiere* to mangroves along the coast, with a savanna-forest matrix in between. When European forest researchers arrived in the early-1900s, they found a sea of arid savanna dotted with islands of green forest surrounding each village. Forestry agents interpreted this as evidence of the assumed rampant deforestation resulting from the agricultural practices and population expansion of Guinea, and placed restrictions on the use of forest products and upland farming. However, a study by two anthropologists, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, found that these patches of forest were not a "relic" of past forests, but a direct result of reforestation efforts by the villagers, who valued the forest for agriculture, wildlife and fuelwood. Agriculturalists practiced a rotating long-fallow system (allowing fields to regrow into forest between plantings), which provided fertile soil for crops and encouraged forest growth. Contrary to the initial perspective held by outsiders, people were not the enemy of the forest, but stewards.

The environment continues to play an important role in life in Guinea, just as Guineans continue to play their role as stewards. Most households rely on firewood and charcoal for fuelwood in the kitchen, and forest ingredients, such as *sumbara* and kola nuts, feature in Guinean cuisine. Footballers cheer on *sylis nationale*, the national football team whose mascot is the elephant, found in the Ziama Forest of Guinea. However, there are many ecological threats that Guinea currently faces, many due to the period of rapid development the country has recently entered, and, as with all economic development, the pressure on natural resources grows stronger.

Unlike agricultural systems of the past, there is little to no time for forests to fallow and recover following a crop harvest. The intensification of palm oil production, which has had environmentally devastating effects in other countries in West Africa, can lead to conversion of old-growth forests to palm monocultures, which are unable to support the diversity of wildlife as a healthy forest could. Mining, one of the fastest growing industries in Guinea, poses, arguably, the greatest threat. The largest untapped iron reserve in the world sits in the Nimba mountain chain in the Forest Region of Southeastern Guinea. In addition to the loss of forest from the mining itself, toxic chemicals used in the extraction process can seep into rivers and groundwater. Additionally, the forests are under direct threat from logging interests, especially those based in China, whose markets demand the hardwoods which are so plentiful in Guinea. Forest loss and fragmentation directly reduces the availability of forest products to Guineans, impacting their livelihoods, and leads to environmental degradation such as soil erosion, but some consequences are more difficult to trace back to deforestation. Land use change on a massive scale can upset the natural balance of systems, causing feedbacks within the wildlife populations and changes in their movement and behavior. In addition to its direct impacts, deforestation increases the chances of spillover of zoonotic disease, and has recently been directly linked to Ebola outbreaks in Central and West Africa (see <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep41613> for

This list of threats paints a dark portrait of the ecological state of Guinea, however Guinea is capable of tackling these issues. Compared to neighboring countries, Guinea still retains large portions of its old-growth rainforests. West African lion populations continue to live in several areas of Guinea, and Guinea is home to the largest chimpanzee populations in West Africa . More importantly, environmental stewardship in Guinea remains strong. There are many civic organizations in Guinea focused on these ecological issues, such as Green Hand Action from the last newsletter. Guinean researchers at centers across the country continue to address questions directly related to ecological issues the nation is facing. Peace Corps Guinea's Agroforestry program's success can be attributed to the wealth of ecological knowledge and environmental engagement already present in the country. Just as it always has, forests are rapidly changing in response to pressure from humans, but this does not have to result in deforestation. If people continue to stand up as stewards, it is possible, although admittedly difficult, for the country to continue to develop economically, without such a great cost to the environment.





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Friends of Guinea is a nonprofit 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 Koepl at newsletter@friendsofguinea.org



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