



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

*A Letter from the Editor*

Dear FOG Members,

Closing out the year with a few fresh things.

Our FOG focus series has shifted to the environment. Suzanne Worthington, a former IFESH volunteer in Kankan started the very successful organization Green Hand Action. We have a lovely piece detailing the GHA's work.

Lillian Mattacio, FOG's advocacy chair, attended the NPCA Peace Corps Connect conference and summed up her experience for our newsletter.

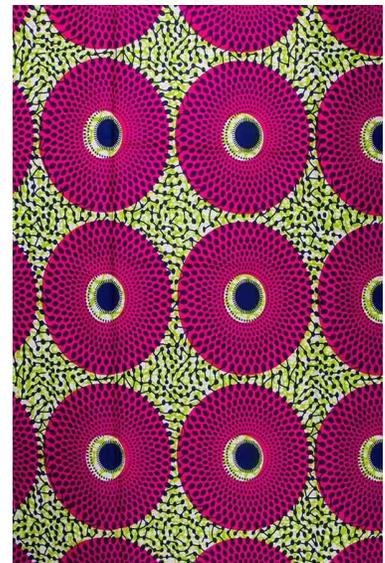
We also have a request for volunteers at a African art show in Northern New Jersey. If you are in the area and would like to participate please see page 3.

Happy Holidays! Until next year!

Cheers,  
Hannah Koepl  
FOG Newsletter Editor

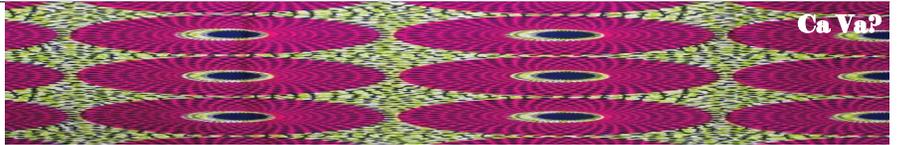
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*“GLOBAL APPLAUSE-Vive les volontaires”*

Monday December 5th marked a day of celebration and positivity in Guinea, National volunteer day. A day to honor people who donate their time and energy to bigger development projects in Conakry and smaller community projects This year's theme was "Global Applause-Vive les volontaires" from the secretary general of the United Nations. The Guinean Minister of Youth noted the importance of volunteering for serving their country, developing professional skills, and diversity training. A round of applause for all volunteers globally. Special thanks to members and Peace Corps volunteers!!



**Friends of Guinea Attends Peace Corps Connect 2016**  
**By Lillian Mattiaccio**

Friends of Guinea (FOG) had the opportunity to attend the 2016 Peace Corps Connect conference this past September, the Peace Corps community's annual conference hosted by the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) to connect, advocate and impact. Lillian Mattiaccio, FOG Advocacy Co-Chair, attended and participated in a variety of conference sessions and events.

This year's conference, "Peace Corps Beyond", focused on celebrating 55 years of Peace Corps and the limitless potential of our community to continue creating change. The conference highlighted work being done by community members and partner organizations and explored how, through increased collaboration, we can continue to champion the ideals of Peace Corps.

The conference offered a number of varied activities, ranging from an International Day of Peace Film Festival and a workshop highlighting Stories of Peace, to a Walk for Peace and call to action through a Capitol Hill Advocacy Day event.

The Affiliate Group Network Annual Meeting provided FOG an opportunity to connect with other affiliate groups (i.e. "Friends of" groups), share best practices, and discuss NPCA initiatives, projects and opportunities. Highlighted initiatives included refugee support through the Ad Hoc Committee for the Support of Refugees and Migrants, promoting the Peace Corps' third goal, and building support networks for RPCVs and the LGBT RPCV community.

More creative projects presented were the ongoing development of a Museum of the Peace Corps Experience and a mobile photographic exhibit available for rent called Spirit, showcasing the determination and engagement of 15 Peace Corps volunteers, offered through 70 South Gallery, a New Jersey art gallery.

Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet addressed the audience during the opening plenary session, along with NPCA President and CEO Glenn Blumhorst, providing a comprehensive look at the agency's changes and reforms, including how strategic partnerships have enhanced the agency and how innovations in technology have increased volunteer effectiveness.

The conference breakout sessions focused on five key UN Sustainable Development Goals: **Economic Development, Environmental Sustainability, Equality and Justice, Global Health, and Peace and Security.**

FOG received the NPCA Loret Miller Ruppe Award for Outstanding Community Service, and this honor bestowed on FOG was a definite conference highlight. The award recognized FOG, along with Friends of Liberia and Friends of Sierra Leone, for their leadership in founding and operating the Ebola Relief Fund in 2014—a fund established to provide assistance to small aid agencies in Guinea working in Ebola relief. Recent volunteer evacuees Ryan Plesh, Sara Laskowski, Amanda Newlove, and Hannah Koepl acted as FOG-ERF liaisons finding local organizations to apply for awards, vetting proposals, and presenting their projects to the board. The ERF collected over \$90,000 in donations from over 400 individuals and 17 affiliate groups, which then funded 26 communities and assisted over 300,000 people in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. These efforts contributed significantly to a community-led response to Ebola, and in some communities directly to eradication efforts.

Members of the Guinean Embassy to the U.S. diplomatic corps were in attendance at the awards ceremony. Additionally, Ms. Mattiaccio had the honor of meeting Nobel Laureate and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf backstage, who just graced the Peace Corps community with her address during the presentation of the Deborah Harding Women of Achievement Award. The conference brilliantly showcased the strengths of Peace Corps and its volunteers, and FOG is both delighted and thankful to be a part of such a diverse, intelligent, and dynamic community.

## The Masks We Wear: Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Share Stories of Service and Identity in Africa

Calling all RPCVs in the New Jersey and New York area! If you're interested and willing to share stories about your service in the context of an art exhibit that will feature masks and some wood-carved figures from several African countries. This exhibit is scheduled to run from January 26-March 26, 2017 with a special program for Thursday, March 23 from 6-7.30pm.

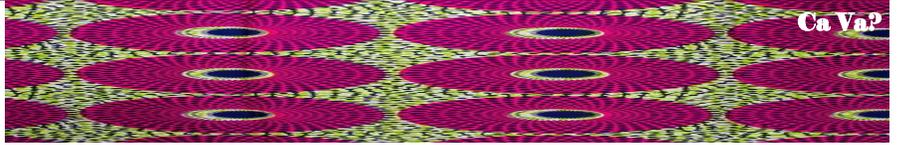
The program will be entitled "The Masks We Wear: Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Share Stories of Service and Identity in Africa". This would involve four RPCVs (each from a different country represented in the exhibit), each speaking for 10-15 minutes about their service and connecting questions of identity that many RPCVs face with some of the masks and/or sculptures on display. The four speakers would be followed by a Q&A.

Please contact Adam Swart if you are interested in participating!

Adam Swart  
RPCV Nepal  
Art Gallery Education Coordinator  
University Art Galleries/George Segal Gallery  
[973.655.6941](tel:973.655.6941)

<http://www.montclair.edu/arts/university-art-galleries-george-segal-gallery/>





## ***FOG FOCUS: A Newsletter Series***

**L' Environnement**



### **Green Hand Action: One Tree At A Time**

By Suzanne Worthington

Green Hand Action is an organization in Kankan, a counterpart to Peace Corps volunteers, contributing to environmental education and a more sustainable city.

Green Action Hand was born at the University of Kankan in Guinea in 2007 after the Guinean national strike. An American professor, Suzanne Worthington, challenged her students: "The strike is over, you educated young Guineans have an obligation and an opportunity; what will you do for your beloved Guinea? As President Kennedy challenged my generation: "ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. " Their response, "We can plant trees for Guinea like Wangari Maathai did for Kenya." This gave birth to Green Hand Action, a student club with the slogan, "Plant trees to protect the environment." The word "Action" reflects our determination to act to solve problems. Since 2007, GHA has helped protect the environment through the involvement of citizens in tree plantings and by raising awareness about the importance of protecting the environment to improve the quality of life of communities in Guinea.

The rainy season in Upper Guinea is short. Previously, there were 9 months of rain there; now there are only 5 or 6 months of rain—sometimes less. Sources of water are characterized by unprecedented interruption—evidence of the consequences of desertification, deforestation, and wildfires. In Kankan, the only trees are still standing are the large mango from the colonial era.

**Our projects include** working with the Guinean National Directorate of Water and Forest (DNEF) reforesting the banks of the Milo River, creating green areas with the urban community of Kankan, sponsoring annual Environmental Conferences with the University of Kankan and the American Center (PCV's have participated with GHA in these conferences, and launching environmental youth clubs with public schools and neighborhoods in Kankan.

GHA most recent project entails cashew trees. We connect tree planting with agriculture, community well-being, sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem conservation, and education; and, in addition, it promotes community pride. The cashew tree project provides for some of the villages socio-economic needs—lack of income, health and food resources—because the cashew apple and the nuts are a sources of sustainable income, food security, and they attract animals. GHA provides good seeds, seedlings, tools, and ideas for increasing performance/ yields and we plant the seedlings that we have grown from seeds with our partner farmers.

Given their virtues of resilience, the cashew tree helps improve the quality of soil and water and will help preserve biodiversity and restore the ecosystem for 30 years.

All parts of the neem tree have medicinal properties; therefore, GHA has planted over 60 Neem trees in downtown Kankan where the community can gather bark and oil for their medicinal properties, an important household activity. One of the professors at the university takes his students there to learn to collect the neem oil.

#### ***Environmental Impacts***

The main environmental impact of GHA's Cashew Tree Reforestation Project is the conservation and sustainable use of degraded land resulting in improving community livelihoods and well-being by generating valuable revenue (which can be used for the nutrition and education of children) and in promoting new attitudes and acquiring habits toward protecting trees in this very arid, economically marginalized region (Haute Guinea), while fighting against desertification and other causes of climate change at the same time.

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GHA launched the 50 hectares Reforestation Project with cashew trees because the cashew tree has a 30 year lifespan, is drought resistant, adapts to poor soils, and can generate income and food—a " Win- Win "for people and the environment .

A Guinean proverb says, "He who has planted a tree has not lived in vain."

Because GHA carries out its activities with the strong participation of diverse communities, another impact of our tree plantations is the assimilation of the entire community of all ethnic groups, allowing a change in the hearts of everyone in sharing feelings of accomplishment and unity.

### ***Resilience and Adaptability***

Since 2007, citizens of Kankan have witnessed the trials and errors of GHA in achieving our goals—by demonstrating resilience, devotion and courage, we have won the respect of the community and inspired the community to want to get involved in our activities.

With emphasis on education, GHA contributes to community resilience shown by the participation of citizens, schools, and other organization in our events. Schools want to involve their children in our activities. As a result, the community is becoming more aware and acquiring more knowledge about how prevent and how to adapt to environmental changes.

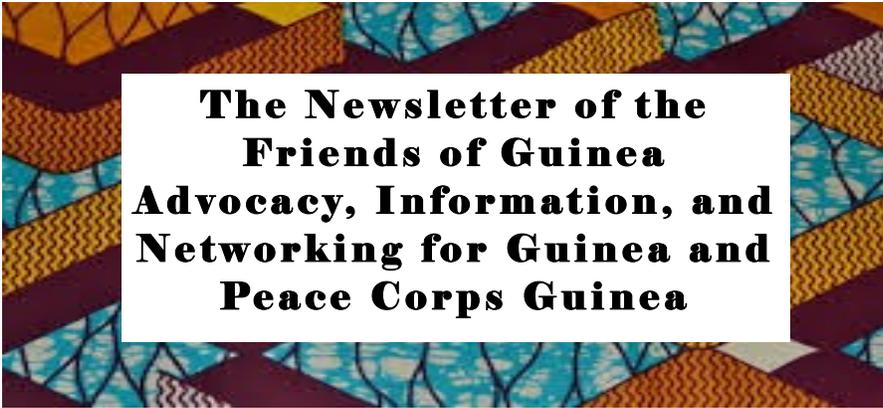
Our approach to sustainable land management is to improve the durability of the land and to reduce desertification. After a brushfire destroyed most of the trees we had planted with the DNEF along the Milo River, GHA began to establish an innovative partnerships with farmers to protect the trees planted. Planting cashew trees benefits the farmers and the community and the planted benefits from "protected" trees, which promote biodiversity. At the same time, neighboring farmers (seeing the good results) are planting more cashew trees and also food crops between the trees.

### ***Sustainability***

Despite meager resources, abundant human resources allow GHA to aspire to achieve bold objectives. GHA is based on the principles of participation and inclusion; these principles, which underlie the actions of GHA, allow us to be close to the community and to find adequate means with the help of the community to overcome any potential difficulties in the implementation of our activities.

Young people are the future of GHA and indeed the world. GHA is currently installing environmental youth clubs in Kankan schools and neighborhoods to educate the future generation about the importance of the environment in their lives—socially, economically, and ecological. Among other projects, each club plants trees in their school court yards. These clubs are promoting the emergence of new environmental habits and motivating and creating drive in the youth of Guinea to meet the massive environmental challenges they face each day. The young Guineans will make this initiative sustainable in the long term.





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*Friends of Guinea is an 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](mailto:newsletter@friendsofguinea.org)



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