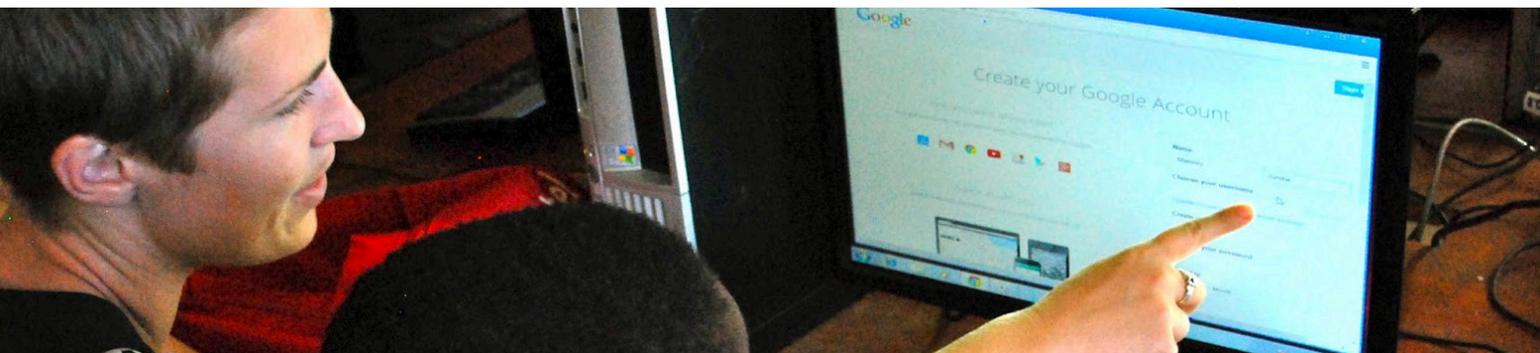
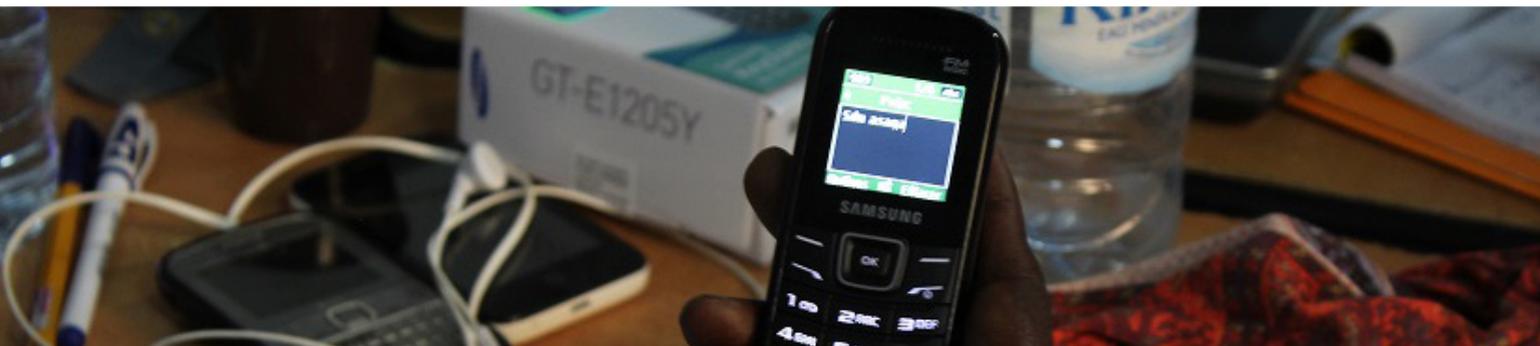


# ICT4D

Information and Communication  
Technologies for Development



Today's Peace Corps Volunteers are helping people in developing countries take part in the digital and technological revolution that many in the western world take for granted.

They are bridging the digital divide by teaching students and teachers to effectively use computers and the Internet for education, helping local entrepreneurs to create web sites to market their goods around the world, helping extend the reach of healthcare services, and training counterparts to use data for decision-making.

Peace Corps Volunteers have long been on the cutting edge of finding ways for their communities and counterparts to leverage technology for as long as Peace Corps has been around—through the decades that span everything from ham radio and television to telecenters to computers labs now to mobile phones and open data.

This Digital Peace Corps Reader is an effort to compile just a sampling of this effort by Volunteers over the years.

In looking at Volunteer ICT activities through the lens of news clippings, press releases, magazines, and through Volunteer blogs themselves, we gain a sense of how digital technologies play a critical and sweeping role in carrying out Peace Corps mission around the world.

In turn, by appreciating the effort to date, we will also be able to move confidently into the future when it comes to effectively embracing new ideas, innovations, knowledge, and technologies.

-Gabriel Krieschok, ICT4D Program Specialist

March 23, 2017

Among other things, they have taught us that much of what a Volunteer must know overseas can only be learned overseas, on the job. Technology does not travel well. Technology is the product of a tradition and an environment. Transplanted, there is no guarantee it will take root. More often than not, it must be adapted to suit a different soil.

Peace Corps Annual Report 1967

# Contents

Peace Corps Times and History	5
Blogs	37
News	64
WorldView Magazine	89
Partners	120
Volunteers	132
Alumni	214
FY 2016	238
FY 2017	289

## *A note on the contents of the Digital Peace Corps Reader*

The contents for this collection are compiled from a variety of sources—all publicly accessible at the time of publication.

Peace Corps historical records and Peace Corps Times are in the public domain. Worldview Magazine is produced by the National Peace Corps Association. Blogs and online contents included here (including photographs) are assumed to reserve the rights to their contents. This compilation is for educational purposes within the Peace Corps only.

*“When I arrived... I met this distinguished young woman who greeted me as a representative of the Peace Corps who has been here in Las Taranas for one and a half years dedicated to teaching English and computers... with this extraordinary school that we have here with representatives of the United States, with computers, with Internet, with access to knowledge, I imagine that the next ministers and presidents of the Republic will come out of Las Taranas.”*

**President Leonel Fernández  
Dominican Republic**

# Peace Corps Times and History

Peace Corps Times is the in-house publication that Peace Corps sends out to Volunteers and staff in the field. Over the years, it has also been called 'Peace Corps News' and 'The Volunteer.'

Peace Corps launched its IT Sector in 2000, but as you will see, the efforts of Volunteers thinking creatively and critically about how to leverage Information and Communication Technologies in their work goes back to the very roots of the agency.



"They are the native citizens of the electronic environment." Here trainees study language

After the campus the Peace Corps is going to bear the first big brunt of the electric generation. Most of its members are still *down there*, in front of the TV tubes. But very shortly they will be weaned from the tubes and they will be *up here*. The Peace Corps isn't ready for them.

A glance around the halls finds the Peace Corps staff lined up for Xerox machines, reading case histories in an expanding library, writing memorandums, repairing typewriters, composing thesis-length evaluations, shuffling cables, dummyming a proposed *Peace Corps Journal* and answering letters. A census of Peace Corps headquarters reveals only two television sets in the house, neither in operation.

All this is "hot" activity and everything in, on and around it indicates that the Peace Corps staff is still very turned on and super sincere about the depression babies, who put the show on the road, and the war babies, who are currently making it run.

## Peace Corps Times 1967 - The Media Missionaries

But just over the literary horizon, beyond the mountains of memos and books and circulars and brochures and magazines, lies the next generation of Volunteers, who will be post-literate. Their emergence is heralded by Marshall McLuhan. Though socio-cultural theorist McLuhan has not directly catalogued the Peace Corps in his delineations of the new age, his message is easily and appropriately applicable to the volunteer movement. He is full of words like Participation, Roles, Involvement, Discovery—character members of the Peace Corps lexicon. Insofar as it is possible to read McLuhan's philosophy in context, an important message develops. It is that the generation nurtured on electronic media will force the Peace Corps to accelerate its motions toward mass culture and the global village inspired by electronic circuitry. A corollary message is that the Peace Corps has been "cool" in the past and to stay that way it is going to have to become cooler to accommodate its future legions.

This speculation that Marshall McLuhan has chronicled the Second Coming of the Peace Corps Act is predicated on two suspicions. One is that McLuhan is right about the future. The other is that the Peace Corps is perched precariously between

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By **STUART AWBREY**  
and **PAUL REED**

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the "hot" culture of the past and the "cool" culture of the future.

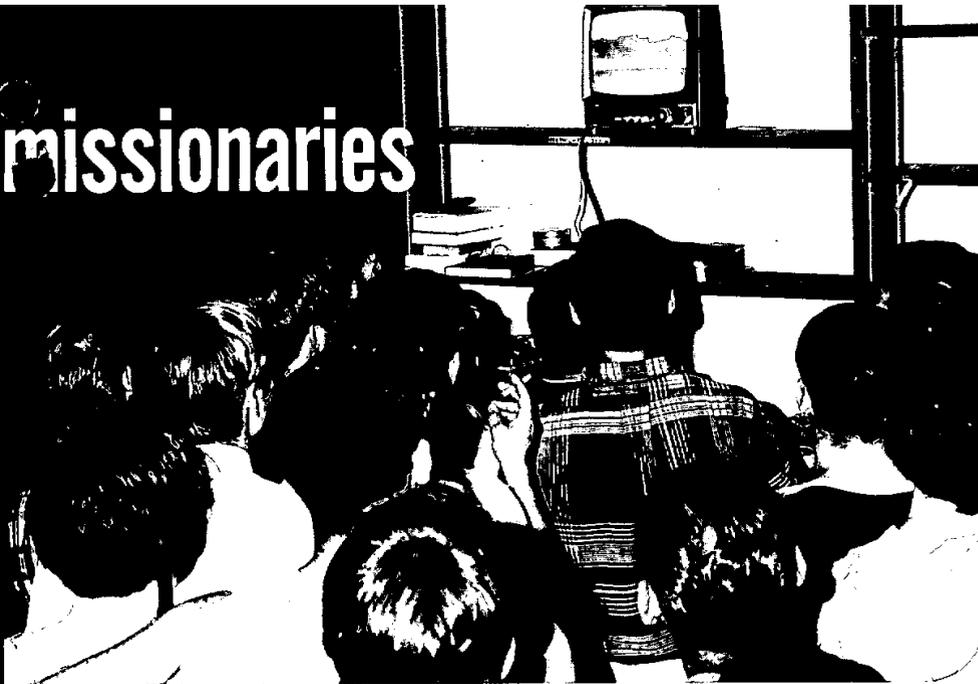
McLuhan contends that societies have been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication, and that the media themselves are extensions of some human faculty, psychic or physical. The wheel, for example, is an extension of the foot; the book of the eye; clothing of the skin; electric circuitry, of the central nervous system.

### A 'cool' Peace Corps

Until today, the dominant medium has been print, logical and linear—a "hot" culture of movable type. But a "cool" world of mass communication has challenged modern man and the resulting conflict, says McLuhan, has produced the "Age of Anxiety," alienation, apathy.

The antidote lies in awareness that electronic media are constantly altering man's perceptual senses. The serial logic of print is giving way to the intuitive "mosaic" patterns of

# missionaries



...a videotape at Dartmouth. In the global village, they will be "agents of communication."

instant, enveloping, communication. Books "contain," television "involves." The new vision is mythic, tribal, decentralized. Man lives in a global village and is returned to the values and perceptions of a preliterate culture.

Media are hot or cool. Movies, for example, are hot, television is cool; radio is hot, the telephone is cool. Why? A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition," that is, the state of being well filled with data. Both the television and the telephone are low definition, because so little information is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener, whereas the movie and the radio project images and messages that do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience.

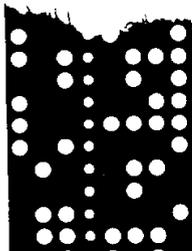
The Peace Corps under these criteria is essentially cool. Some might challenge the old saw about it being a "24-hour-a-day" job but few will deny its continued evidence of high participation (Volunteers demand it), or its continued defiance of definition, especially on the part of individual Volunteers. Even the Peace Corps Act defies explicit definition ("big enough to drive a truck through," chief programmer Sol Chafkin used to say) and this has left Volunteers, administrators and programmers plenty of operating room. On these terms,

then, the Peace Corps is a cool medium.

Yet the dilemma of the Peace Corps is that it has always been on the fence between the old, print-oriented culture, the hot one, and the new, electronic-saturated culture, the cool one. One of the more obvious illustrations of this dilemma is seen in the perennial "image" problem faced by Volunteers.

### Shriver's high definition

In its early years the Peace Corps demonstrated huge inclinations toward print. Sargent Shriver stacked the agency with newspapermen, lawyers and social scientists, who in turn applied their not inconsiderable talents with prose to a mountain of descriptive material about what the Peace Corps was and what it was doing. (It is interesting that agency radio and television directors have always been writers; the educational television director is a lawyer.) To win appropriations from Congress, kudos from editorial writers, recruits



for the cause and permissions from the mothers of America to let those recruits go overseas, the Peace Corps required a definition. The people who put it together did such an effective job that the Peace Corps developed what an annual report later referred to as "an engaging folklore of attractive young Americans piping the wayward masses of the underdeveloped world to the paths of progress and enlightenment."

In retrospect, the print-catering founders (assisted by a willing public) put out a hot message about a cool program. Their Peace Corps was high definition. Yet, even as they wrote, the Volunteers were establishing something completely remote from definition, intensely personal and self-discovering, individually filling in their own definitions of that ultimately cool term consisting of "Peace" and "Corps." Inevitably, their personal definitions clashed with the definitions which showed up in the hometown newspapers, the letters from mother and the latest recruiting brochures. The staff, in effect, was heating up the Peace Corps. The Volunteers were cooling it off.

The Peace Corps has learned some lessons in this area, but the tensions of definition persist. David Elliott's search for the "real" Peace Corps touched off the latest series of high

definition responses which for the most part were reduced, characteristically, to paper and print. This was another sign that the high literacy Peace Corps has a latent tendency toward hot media.

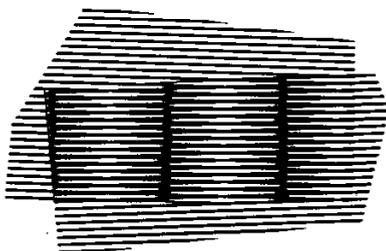
We must note that no value judgment can be rendered on the relative merits of hot or cool culture, or media. The judgments come into play over their applications. McLuhan suggests that it makes a great deal of difference whether a hot or cool medium is used in a hot or cool culture. Sample: "The hot radio medium used in cool or non-literate cultures has a violent effect, quite unlike its effect, say in England or America, where radio is felt as entertainment. A cool or low literacy culture cannot accept hot media like movies or radio as entertainment. They are, at least, as radically upsetting for them as the cool TV medium has proved to be for our high literacy world."

#### Agents of communication

More basic than these relative applications of hot and cool media is the fact that the United States has paved the way in the development of electronic media and the Peace Corps Volunteer, who is coming of age with the new technology, is able in varying degrees to understand and interpret it. As a medium itself the Peace Corps is an extension of the American ego ideal, or at least of its political expression in the Kennedy era.

The Peace Corps is very much on the front lines of the electronic age. Volunteers have speeded up the exchange of information and they have expanded the global village. We can anticipate an acceleration of their collective communicative influence once the electric television generation comes to dominate the Peace Corps. Where the Volunteer has in the past been referred to as an "agent of change," it may be more accurate to call him an "agent of communication." He is a carrier of the new media, a media missionary.

By the McLuhan text, instant, worldwide information has tribalized



Courtesy Look Magazine

*"... and then when I finally did talk my tribe into learning to read, they read Marshall McLuhan!"*

men wherever it has been received. Men are involved with one another. Electronic circuitry provides a mosaic pattern of information which gives instant vision of a complex process. This returns man to the tribal emotions from which he has been divorced by a few centuries of literacy, to the preliterate ability to have mythical instant vision of complex processes. The result is the electronic global village, a "simultaneous happening," non-national and interdependent.

In this process, the Peace Corps Volunteer as an agent of communication has often been a first resident in the global village. He renders such phrases as "cross-cultural experience" or "transculturation" obsolete, for the global village transcends culture. Everybody is in the same tribe, the same culture.

Of course there are variations on this theme. A most striking one is in preliterate Africa, where many people are leapfrogging earlier Western media into the electronic age. To the degree that they are still tribal, they have an advantage over the Westerner, who is only beginning to retribalize. This shortcut has proven somewhat confusing to Volunteers and programmers who are just emerging from the linear, print cycle. McLuhan notes

that "backward countries that have experienced little permeation with our own mechanical and specialist culture are much better able to confront and to understand electric technology." The Peace Corps has to keep that in mind in preliterate societies where it operates.

This is but one of many contradictions that keeps the Peace Corps sensitive to variable applications overseas. Internally, however, the most crucial contradiction lies in the fact that the Peace Corps remains a print-oriented society while it draws increasing sustenance from an electronic age. The senior staff belongs to the lost-in-the-library generation. The 1961-67 Volunteers matured under print-oriented, hot rote teaching in high definition surroundings. They learned how to read and write and reproduce (the Xerox machine users in headquarters are hardly confined to the over-30-year-old group). This Peace Corps has always been more attuned to the *Congressional Record* than to ABC, CBS, NBC and ETV put together.

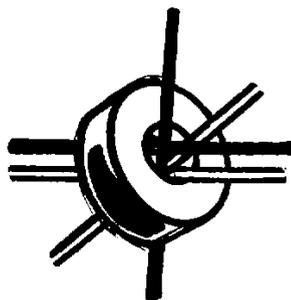
But by 1970 or thereabouts nobody but nobody at the A.B. generalist level will even know that the *Congressional Record* exists (extreme pessimists even wonder if the electromagnetic babies will be reading at all). Listen

to McLuhan: "The young people who have experienced a decade of TV have naturally imbibed an urge toward involvement in depth that makes all the remote visualized goals of usual culture seem not only unreal but irrelevant, and not only irrelevant but anemic." Total sound, total vision—participation, dialogue and depth. Is the Peace Corps ready? "The TV child expects involvement and doesn't want a specialist *job* in the future. He does want a *role* and a deep commitment to his society."

### Information rubbing

They will be the first Peace Corps generation to have grown up with television. As John S. Culkin, S.J., director of the Fordham University Center for Communications, has noted: "The TV set was waiting for them when they got home from the hospital and they liked it enough to clock 15,000 hours of viewing by high school graduation. Their psychological intake system is programmed for the moving image." Then he adds: "They are plugged into the 'now' and they want to experience it and be involved with it. They are the only people who are the native citizens of the new electronic environment."

There are signs that the Peace Corps sees the electric future and wants a slice of it. It has bought a computer, for example, which is



capable of storing memories for immediate and total recall. In an instant, it will tell how many 23-year-old men with degrees in agriculture are available for Uttar Pradesh. Again, we have instant vision of a complex process, a myth, or mode of simultaneous awareness of a complex group of causes and effects. The patterns are not detached.

Cables will be getting a similar treatment. The Peace Corps generates a fraction of the 15 million words that flow in and out of the Department of State each month. A new electronic system of computers and high speed printers will absorb messages at a rate of 1,200 lines a minute, 12 times faster than teletype.

Everywhere in the global village, Peace Corps people are picking up information. When they get together—at conferences, forums, councils—information is brushed against information, and the results are occasionally startling and often effective. This process is involving; the participants

love to fill in the huge gaps of information. The same rubbing of information against information operates similarly in senior staff meetings, in the Peace Corps Forum, in training programs—something is usually created out of the friction. It never happens in a lecture, but lectures (hot) are alien to the Peace Corps. Volunteers and staff have always been at their worst lecturing or listening to lectures. Peace Corps people demand high participation, fill-in, "cool" seminars, discussion groups, sensitivity training. Even Harris Wofford, the most print-conscious character in Peace Corps history, thought of the agency in terms of a "Socratic seminar."

As an agent of communication, Volunteer information carries two ways—one message about the new mass culture goes to the world in which he operates, the other message about what he sees and feels and lives gets back to the United States. Hence, there is feedback from the communicator at the frontiers of the global village. Though not alone in his potential for such feedback (every citizen of the age is feeding back something), the Volunteer's unique contribution to this process is in his geographical location, which few Americans can match.

Predictably, one popular form of feedback among Volunteers is electronic tape, recorded on site with a portable recorder and forwarded to

Peace Corps people hate lectures, prefer high participation discussion groups—information brushing against information, as in the Tunisia council meeting below.



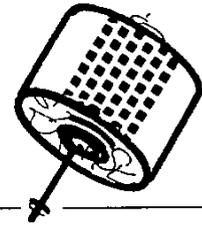
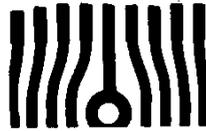


parents and friends. It is still one-way communication, heard instead of read. But, like the cool telephone, it allows a different kind of fill-in.

As Bill Boast of the India staff has said, Peace Corps people are non-national. This means that they are involved in the centralized village which cuts through archaic concepts of culture and national states. Volunteer articulation of that involvement, though occasionally inhibited and somewhat uncertain to date, may be what the third goal of the Peace Corps Act was all about. The returned Volunteers seem to be trying to say something about the global village, most recently in political expression. One reason they have not been too effective may be because they have chosen to carry their message in the arena of print, by position papers, petitions and letters to *The New York Times*. McLuhan says nationalism as an image still depends upon the press, but the electronic media is against nationalism as an image. Non-nationalists, harbingers of the global village, will

never make it through letters to *The Times*.

The five-year limitation on staff appointments will probably preserve a good segment of the "cool" Peace Corps until the television generation gets its hands on it. In anticipating that day, the Peace Corps will have to keep in mind that its greatest threat is a hobgoblin called experience, namely its own experience. The tendency among the older types everywhere is to march backwards into the future, to look at that future through the rear-view mirror. As McLuhan notes, official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old. That is telling a Peace Corps Volunteer to use a specialized job to teach people to read, by rote, so they can exercise individual will on the nation-state. Alas, the Volunteer knows better. The new environment requires new tools— involvement, discovery, roles (not goals) and participation. Keeping the shop tooled for the television crowd and its global village is now the most challenging task before the post-Shriver, pre-McLuhan Peace Corps.



Someday there will be a television set in every booklocker and the agency will communicate living memorandums via its own communications satellite. This will put THE VOLUNTEER, The Handbook, Staff Minutes, *The Journal*, PECTO and TOPEC (agency cable codes) and letters to *The Times* out of business.

Before that happens, and while we are still lingering in the twilight of a logical, linear and literate print-oriented Peace Corps, THE VOLUNTEER would welcome further thoughts on the coming of the electronic age and the Peace Corps role in it. The above article represents but several applications of the visionary concepts of Marshall McLuhan. There are many more.

A basic primer on McLuhanism is now becoming available free of charge to Peace Corps members. *Understanding Media*, one of McLuhan's more popular books, is contained in the new booklockers being distributed around the Peace Corps village.

"There are signs that the Peace Corps sees the electric future and wants a slice of it." Below, Volunteers in Colombia ETV studio.



## High Tech/Peace Corps

I was assigned to the Cooperative Rural Bank (CRB) of Iloilo. The manager there, as well as the manager of the affiliated Federation of Area Marketing Cooperatives, had heard of the computer miracle taking hold in the world that was beginning to sweep the Philippines and decided to look into it, hoping to use my experience. I did several months' research on their needs, on the facilities in Iloilo and its feasibility. Iloilo, as it turned out, was an excellent place to install a system. Almost every college and university taught classes, plus there were several private training schools, consultants and sales outlets. And, there was affordable hardware and software available.

The biggest obstacle we faced was that computerization was a new concept. After we convinced ourselves, we had to convince the Central Bank and in some ways I had to convince other Peace Corps Volunteers, that computers were not dehumanizing, in fact, liberating, affordable and doable. After all this was done I looked into getting the program financed from the outside. That also



Larry Farmer of Texas and co-worker

was a success as Agricultural Cooperative Development International, Washington, D.C., voted us a grant at the annual general assembly through the efforts of the Asia/Pacific Regional Director, Mark Van Stuyk, to purchase an IBM PC compatible system.

With this system we should hopefully reassign some of our employees. As the CRB grew through the years it continually had to hire more and more people to accomplish very simple tasks, just to handle all the new accounts. This was not only expensive, it limited our ability to hire staff we needed for supervising our farmers, for collection of loans, for agriculturists in our provincial system and for technicians to train in simplified bookkeeping, credit awareness and diversified income projects. Also, our new computer system should help in managerial decision-making by making more data available quickly. (Once in Midsayap, I was asked by the Board of Directors to get a history of our loans for the last five years. This should have been one of the easiest and necessary tasks that a manager has. Instead, it took six months to get all the data. With this data, I made tables, graphs and financial ratios. This should have been the norm, instead it was a project. Hopefully, at last, it will indeed become the norm. We also hope to apply agricultural data to our system, keeping track of trends, rainfalls, market prices, inputs, production, etc. The Area Marketing Cooperatives hope to use it to keep up with their inventory, a very tedious and inexact task so far. We are a complete system—credit, production and marketing. I am proud of the direction we have decided to take.

Larry Farmer

(Larry Farmer of Mathis, Texas did his undergraduate work in business management at Texas A & M, where he also received a masters in agriculture economics. His post was in Iloilo City on the island of Panay.)

Peace Corps Times 1987 -  
*High Tech Peace Corps*



Peace Corps Times

## Peace Corps Times 1989 - Networking



INTERNATIONAL  
1331 H Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.  
USA 20005

ATI is a well-known organization in the U.S. promoting appropriate technology for developing countries. It was created in 1976 in response to a mandate from Congress to provide Third World countries access to tools and machines that are suited to labor-intensive production methods and fit small farms, small businesses and small incomes. Until 1987, ATI's program was totally financed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) through its Bureau of Science and Technology. To AID core support, ATI now has added other funding—from AID Missions, governments and bilateral and multilateral development agencies.

ATI has always seen its role as encouraging the use of appropriate technology to develop income-generating enterprises that create employment and can be replicated. "ATI's interest is less in research and design and more in demonstrating commercial viability," says Carlos R. Lola, a member of ATI's Technical Resources Group and a civil engineer.

For most of its history, ATI has worked with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private institutions to assist



A Guatemalan couple display a woolen blanket they produced through the support of ATI's project to improve wool and sheep production.

rural communities in establishing micro-businesses. Gradually its scope of work has expanded to include small-scale enterprises, often employing up to 25 people, in market towns and semiurban areas.

Over the past two years, ATI's focus has broadened still further. From financing individual projects, ATI now supports technology-based, small-enterprise programs that involve an entire sector or geographical region and attempts to help governments establish policies to foster the growth of these small-scale enterprises. In its 1987 Annual Report, ATI's president, Ton de Wilde, gave the rationale for this new approach:

*If, as at present, ATI has assisted a local NGO to establish only one small enterprise in a particular region, attempts to overcome political and institutional biases to appropriate technology and its small enterprise development mostly will be ignored. . . . But if ATI helps to establish 15 or 20 small-scale productive enterprises in an area, the government, banks, and training institutions, if any, will be more receptive to suggestions for change.*

ATI has also added a macro-policy component to its work. ATI has been organizing high-level, regional conferences to consider the implications of technology on economic development and has commissioned policy studies on the same subject.

Reflecting its more aggressive approach, ATI is now putting greater emphasis on technical rather than on financial assistance. ATI sends its experienced teams of engineers and financial analysts to work with project partners to identify and assess technologies appropriate to local resources and to design projects and provide the technical, managerial and administrative assistance that fledgling small-scale enterprises require. These teams and the ATI Project Officers also provide training to local organizations and assist in monitoring and evaluating project operations. ATI's expertise extends particularly to businesses related to agricultural products, animal husbandry, small-farm support and equipment, and building materials and mineral resources.

ATI also documents and communicates its lessons learned and makes available a wide range of written materials, including its own *how-to* manuals: "Whenever we see a big demand for a particular technology," says Communications Manager Arlene Richman, "we either publish a *Bulletin* to let the development community and the world at large know about the technology or arrange for the writing of a manual to put the technology into the hands of the people."

Projects ATI has financed range from \$25,000 to \$500,000, with most projects in the portfolio averaging approximately \$80,000. Four years ago in Asia, ATI began experimenting with venture capital companies as another method of financing

small-scale enterprises and providing them with the necessary technical and management assistance. These are being established jointly with organizations in developing countries.

The following examples suggest the breadth of ATI's activities:

- ATI engineer Carl Bielenberg developed a manually operated ram press to produce oil from sunflower seeds, which was successfully demonstrated in Tanzania, where 40 small oil extraction businesses now operate. The ram press is being replicated in an ATI project in Zimbabwe and through a regional project in other areas of eastern and southern Africa. An ATI manual, with blueprints and drawings of the ram press, is being prepared.
  - In Costa Rica, ATI and a local technological institute cofunded the development of a traditional lime kiln. The research and development phase included defining kiln modifications, constructing and operating an improved kiln prototype and conducting a lime market study and a commercial analysis of lime processing. Entrepreneurs are now beginning to use the new kiln.
  - ATI established a venture capital company with an Indonesian development organization, which is now concentrating on improving business for farmers who raise shrimps in small ponds along the coast. A hatchery has been created to produce shrimp fry and feed, and farmers are receiving financial and technical assistance to raise and market the shrimp.
  - An ATI project in Kenya improved the production of metal stoves by introducing the addition of ceramic liners, which reduce the fuel consumption of the traditional metal stove by 25–30 percent. An ATI staff member designed a motor-driven mold to make the ceramic liners. Together with CARE, ATI is preparing a manual describing this innovation.
  - As part of its evaluation of a hydro-powered milling project in eastern Zaire, ATI assessed the economic value of the labor-saving mills on women's lives. Responses from women who have been using the mechanized mill that grinds cassava into flour indicate that the mill has been so productive that women now have more flour to sell in the market; they also have had to buy additional dried cassava from growers in remote areas, who make a profit as well.
- ATI's work in four countries suggests the direction it plans to take in the future. ATI has established its first branch office in Manila. In Costa Rica, ATI has supported the Ministry of Science and Technology in the preliminary design of a plan to make the best use of that country's resources. The Netherlands government is expected to fi-

nance the potential countrywide program.

A project in Sri Lanka is ATI's first attempt to test the effectiveness of microcomputers as a tool for development. In trying to help rural villagers increase their incomes from backyard spice production, ATI is teaching them how to cultivate, harvest and dry spice through a program that combines video tapes and computerized lessons. If successful, ATI will support the development of similar programs to train people in other appropriate technologies.

ATI's project in Guatemala marks the organization's first attempt at a sectoral approach. Monitored by ATI with the help of a Peace Corps Volunteer, this AID/ATI-funded project is improving the country's wool and sheep production. Taking the process from start to finish, ATI has become involved in such activities as crossbreeding the native sheep with imported Corriedale rams to improve the quality of the wool; providing grass seed to give the sheep better pasture; introducing different fodder to balance the animals' diet and different methods for shearing and washing their fleece. At the other end, ATI also is introducing technology to improve the processing and marketing of the wool, including training workers in spinning, weaving, knitting and design. A store operated by the Artisans Cooperative supplies artisans with the materials they need. The Peace Corps Volunteer has been especially helpful in guiding farmers day-by-day, helping select the best animals for breeding and making farmers conscious that their sheep are properly fed, especially during the mating period. The Guatemalan wool project has become the model for an alpaca production and processing project in Bolivia, which ATI expects to implement for the UN Capital Development Fund.

ATI favors cooperation with Peace Corps. ATI staff members, many of whom are RPCVs, regularly keep in touch with Peace Corps field offices to identify potential ATI initiatives.

Discussions were held with Peace Corps/Honduras about improving the country's agricultural production by using ground limestone to reduce the acidity of the soil. A Peace Corps Volunteer, a geologist, is assessing the quality of the local limestone to determine what technology to propose for a possible agricultural lime project.

After attending the first ATI training workshop on the manufacture of the ATI-Hotchkiss wheelchair, PCV Paul Silva has established a shop to fabricate this device in Paraguay. ATI has a detailed wheelchair-production guide available to anyone interested in following his lead, as well as other publications on various policy and technical issues. ATI uses Peace Corps publications in demonstrating new technology and is interested in collaborating with Peace Corps on several manuals.

How do Volunteers in Technical Assis-



PCV Paul Silva demonstrates an ATI-Hotchkiss wheelchair manufactured by the workshop he established in Paraguay.



**VOLUNTEERS IN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

1815 N. Lynn St., Suite 200, Arlington, Va. 22209

tance differ from Peace Corps Volunteers? We posed this question to VITA's president, Henry Norman, who knows both groups well. He was Peace Corps Director in Guinea in 1963-1967 and again in 1969-1970.

As Norman explains, in contrast to PCVs, the majority of VITA volunteers do not serve full-time but have other highly skilled jobs. They offer their help as volunteers normally do—on evenings and weekends. Most are professionally trained in some technical field. Out of more than 5,000 VITA volunteers, about 1,400 are graduate engineers; some 1,200 hold doctorates; and 650 serve on college faculties. They are from 100 different countries, often becoming a part of VITA's pool of volunteers in response to a request coming from their own countries.

Normally, VITA does not actively recruit volunteers. People apply to the organization because they have heard about its work and want to offer their assistance. A recent article about VITA's activities in China, for ex-

ample, which appeared in the journal of the American Association of Retired Persons, produced 2,000 letters addressed to VITA, asking for information. Out of the 2,000 letter writers, 200 applied to VITA to serve as volunteers.

Many hear about the organization through its weekly, five-minute radio broadcasts over Voice of America. Communication is one of VITA's principal activities, so these broadcasts are vital to its work. Each elicits with some technical subject and elicits from 1,000 to 1,500 letters each month from listeners requesting information. These are examples that Brij Mathur, Director of VITA's Information Service, describes:

- A businessman from India requested technical assistance to improve the quality of solid fuels he was supplying to the hotel industry in India.
- A resident of Brazil requested information on building a water treatment system.
- A company in Nigeria requested information on growing and processing mushrooms to cater to the hotel industry in Lagos.
- A technology center in Botswana requested advice on a method to accurately measure and control the temperature in ovens used by their clients' bakeries.

In contrast to some other technology information centers in the U.S., VITA answers all inquiries, regardless of what person, organization, or country originates them. Analyzing these inquiries, Mathur has selected about 100 subjects that most often interest people writing to VITA and has asked knowledgeable volunteers to prepare monographs in response. Last year, VITA mailed out 6,000 copies free of charge. The series of monographs are of two types: One profiles potential industries for underdeveloped countries, describing the production and plant requirements and the necessary market and resources; the other describes in brief, simple terms specific technology in the areas that concern VITA—communications, small enterprises, agriculture and food processing, water resources and renewable energy. VITA has a list available to order its publications.

When inquiries require follow-up, Mathur will put the individual or group in touch with a volunteer who can provide the needed information. This may produce a long-term correspondence or possibly a short-term visit. VITA's most recent newsletter, for example, contains an account of a volunteer, a retired mechanical engineer from New Mexico, who is now in Morocco helping a French physicist produce photovoltaic panels to provide cheap, solar energy for African countries.

Focusing on communications, VITA has been experimenting with several programs. Together with England's University of Surrey Research Unit, VITA has developed



Volunteers and their counterparts attend a VITA training session in Belize.

packet radio ground networks, which connect computers via radio and link up globally through a satellite system, PACSAT. Stations can operate on batteries or solar cells, making them especially useful in remote areas. VITA has demonstrated the technology in the Philippines, to transmit information among health centers throughout the islands; in Tanzania, to provide a countrywide newspaper network; and in Ethiopia, to help field staff coordinate famine relief efforts.

Disaster relief in general has been a concern of VITA, which recently began operating a computerized Disaster Information Center financed by AID. The Center proved its effectiveness almost immediately, matching needs with resources in response to the hurricane that struck Jamaica and the earthquake that devastated Soviet Armenia.

From providing information, VITA has turned to training people in developing countries to manage their own communication networks. At its Washington-area headquarters, VITA has trained almost 200 persons from organizations in 42 countries that are developing computerized information systems. VITA representatives also traveled to the Philippines to train some 50 librarians in computerized storage and retrieval systems and to Kenya to help staff

from vocational training centers with their computer needs.

Providing information has led VITA on occasion to engage in long-term projects. These projects have included providing technical assistance and credit support for small businesses in Chad; promoting energy conservation in Djibouti; helping to produce and distribute a cheap and easy-to-make, metal cookstove in Mali; and assisting in an AID-financed rural development project in Sudan, encouraging women and private organizations to participate.

Projects such as these are staffed by permanent VITA employees, by volunteers, or by a combination of the two. Volunteers' expenses are paid, and some also receive a salary.



Assisting the VITA project, PCV Karen Brody works alongside Belizean farmers.

Some VITA projects have involved Peace Corps Volunteers. An agribusiness project in the southernmost region of Belize, described in the April 1989 issue of *VITA News*, relied on a PCV who had completed his Peace Corps service there to familiarize the VITA team with local conditions. His experience and rapport with the farmers enabled him to act as a VITA short-term Extension Management Consultant and prepare a crop production calendar showing when crops are planted and harvested to help the team devise work plans. Currently, three PCVs are involved in the project. One of them is a woman with a background in sociology, who is working directly with Belizean women to encourage their participation.

A post-harvest project in the Central African Republic to improve farmers' productivity has had two successive pairs of PCVs assigned to it. They work side by side with VITA staff and host-country nationals, serving as extension workers. VITA asked for Volunteers with some related experience and knowledge of French, and assisted in their Stateside Training.

VITA's projects are not all nonprofit. Some can involve acting as a broker for potential business ventures in the Third World. One of its activities, for example, is securing used factory equipment and making it available to developing countries. VITA then earns a commission as the go-between.

Having started as a group of GE engineers volunteering their technical assistance, VITA is generally willing to try different approaches. "The only thing doctrinaire about VITA," says President Norman in summing up his organization, "is that we want to bring about development. Our ultimate goal has to be the development of new wealth in Third World countries."

## Workshop Promotes Environmental Education in Africa

The Meru Hotel, in beautiful downtown Arusha, Tanzania, was the site of an environmental education workshop, held May 14 to May 20, 1989, for Volunteers and their counterparts working in conservation education, or parks, wildlife or other natural resources programs in Africa. Representing some 15 African countries, over 65 people participated.

OTAPS' Natural Resources Sector and the Tanzanian Ministry of Lands, Natural Resources and Tourism sponsored the workshop with several objectives in mind:

1. to increase participants' effectiveness in getting local communities concerned about the environment;

Peace Corps Times 1990 -  
*Letter to the Editor*

**Dear Peace Corps Times,**

Recently I listened to an interesting VOA broadcast. The program was called Mac Joins the Peace Corps. Apple has donated personal computers, hardware and software to the Peace Corps. The intent is to make volunteers more effective. Volunteers can maintain extensive records and perform sophisticated tasks. Subsequent volunteers can benefit from the work begun and records kept by prior volunteers.

Having begun the battle with a Fortune 500 mainframe data processing unit to put PCs in the hands of technicians, clerks and secretaries and then make mainframe data available to PC users, I've long recognized the benefits afforded by PCs. Since beginning training in October I've experienced PC withdrawal. It's the first time in 10 years I've not had access to a PC. My effectiveness has been diminished, simple tasks require more time and I'm inclined to accept less than professional results.

Next week I leave for my permanent site where I will serve as a small business advisor. I'd like two things. First, more information on the Mac program. Second, and most important, I'd like an opportunity to participate in this program. A PC would really increase my effectiveness as a development extension worker.

**PCV Terry Ferguson  
Kenya**

Peace Corps Times 1990 -  
PCVs use computers various  
ways

## PCVs use computers various ways

A number of letters were received from Peace Corps Volunteers in response to our request in the September/October 1989 issue of ICE ALMANAC for descriptions of how PCVs use computers in their work. ICE will print selections from these responses in this and future issues of the ALMANAC with the hope that Volunteers will see ideas they can use in their own work and projects.

The responses show a variety of ways that computers are being used and various levels of acceptance in the communities where they are available. Volunteers' projects will naturally involve additional uses for computers as developing countries themselves become increasingly involved with computers as a means for processing information and enhancing access to information.

All of those who responded were enthusiastic about the value of computers in their locations.

Several Volunteers teach computer studies in secondary schools. One Volunteer working in the Department of Lands and Valuation in Malawi keeps track of all land records, managing land leases and providing data for the settlement of land disputes.

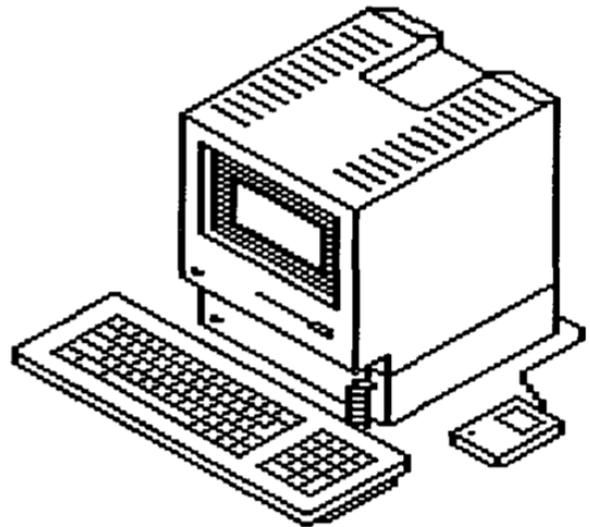
A Volunteer in Tonga is teaching host country nationals how to use computers to produce newspapers; a Volunteer in Paraguay manages and analyzes data on environmental conservation projects; a Volunteer in Jamaica tracks pharmaceuticals in a community hospital.

The fact is that Volunteers are using computers in their assignments in as wide a variety of applications as they're being used in more developed countries. One Volunteer on the island of Dominica in the Eastern Caribbean, Susan Anne Buehl, has developed computer databases to support farmer organizations.

Here's her story:

"I started as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Dominica in December 1989," she writes. "My agency is the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and we have four people in the office and three computers! As you can guess, most of my work involves the use of a computer.

"The project I am assigned to is 'Strengthening Farmer Organizations in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.' I am developing databases for farmer groups. This includes the actual programming, writing the manuals for collecting data and using the program (on a word processor, of course) and training local personnel. Most of the



farmer organizations don't have their own computers, but use one at a local agency or training center.

"As the world continually places greater emphasis on information, using computers helps underdeveloped nations 'catch up.' Teaching local employees how to run a computer contributes to the development of Dominica. It assists farmer groups in organizing vital information for decision-making purposes. And it gives everyone that learns how to use the machine valuable job skills.

"On a related topic, the Apple Macintosh our Peace Corps office received is always in use! Many Volunteers didn't have access to a word processor and were quite grateful when it arrived. The local people that work in the office have been very eager to learn how to use it as well."

What has your own experience been like? If you are using a computer in your work, we want to hear from you. Either short descriptions of your work or full article-sized pieces are welcome. We are interested in knowing not only the technical details of your project but how it affects and involves the local community. Photographs and illustrations are also invited.

Send your submission to ICE ALMANAC, U.S. Peace Corps/ICE, 1990 K Street, N.W., Room 8684, Washington, D.C. 20526.

## COMPUTER UPDATE

### *Books On Data Base*

*As a follow-up to our article on how PCVs use computers, which appeared in the summer 1990 issue of the ALMANAC, we received a note from PCV Marc Lippman, who is serving in Malawi. Our article had mentioned a fellow Volunteer working in the Malawi Department of Lands and Valuation. Lippman tells us about his experience working for the Ministry of Health, as its Library and Documentation Officer:*

"The Ministry of Health Library and Documentation Centre was uncatalogued, unclassified and unarranged when I arrived. For some time there has been talk in Malawi of establishing a National Documentation Centre (NDC) with a computerized database containing records of all the libraries within the country. It would seem a waste of time manually cataloguing the collection only to have to redo the work on computer. Consequently I became part of the team creating the format of the proposed database for the NDC. It was decided to use CDS/ISIS database, a system specifically designed for bibliographic databases by UNESCO and distributed free in developing countries. Though not prominent in the USA, CDS/ISIS is used widely throughout the world."

"Using the Common Communication Format (CCF), I am cataloguing the Ministry of Health documents and publications, some 4,000 of them. ... WHO will be distributing their database on diskettes using an abridged CCF format so I will be able to directly download catalogued records from WHO into my database for the items we have in the Ministry of Health Library — thereby saving lots of time with document processing and cataloguing."

Lippman also mentions that he will be doing indexing and abstracting of journal articles and documents to send copies of the database to WHO AFRO region headquarters

in Brazzaville, Congo for distribution or referral. At a conference of medical librarians from African countries it was agreed to share information by means of such a database. In Lippman's words, "This is an important project because though much research is done and is published in Africa, little of it (less than 1%) is indexed and therefore made known to people who are looking for it."

Besides cataloguing and documenting material, Lippman says he also does desk-top publishing. As an example, he sent us a copy of the "Malawi Drug Bulletin," which goes to just about all health workers in Malawi.

In addition, he has found spreadsheets and word processing essential in running the library: "I inherited 24 secondary projects to supply a core collection of medical books to each of the 24 district hospitals and their associated health centers, and without the computer and Lotus 1-2-3 it would be nearly impossible to figure out the status of any individual project or do any of the book ordering. It also helps to have a word processor to send out the scores of thank you letters and reports to the donors and Peace Corps offices involved in the projects."

Whenever he has spare time, Lippman reports he gives computer lessons to Ministry of Health and WHO personnel "who all want to know about computers. Because of my involvement with CDS/ISIS, I often get requests from other ministries to help them with their work as well."

What has your own experience been like? Tell us how you are using a computer in your work. We are interested in knowing the technical details of your project, as well as how it affects and involves the local community. Please send your material, photographs and illustrations included, to ICE, 8th floor, Peace Corps, 1990 K St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20526.

## SPECIAL FROM HEADQUARTERS

## Information Resources Management



## A Chronicle of Accomplishment

Peace Corps is not only people helping people. Today it is technology and information helping Peace Corps Volunteers do the "...toughest job they'll ever love." The Peace Corps database is crucial to the management and support of staff and Volunteers.

Countries project their need for Volunteers two to three years in advance. They indicate the type and number of Volunteers needed. These needs are collected by the database and used for long range program and recruiting plans. Our database management system also allows a variety of offices the ability to access many types of information. Overseas Operations, Recruitment and Placement, Medical, Payroll and Personnel, Travel, Returned Volunteer Services and World Wise Schools comprise an interdependent network that makes up the Volunteer Database System. This system can provide information ranging from the entire history of a Volunteer, from application to close of service, to rosters of Volunteers sorted by country assignments, projecting each Volunteer's readjustment allowance, and matching Volunteers to World Wise Schools participants.

Information Resources includes all computer and communications technologies in use by Peace Corps staff worldwide, including telephone and telegraph services, mainframe computers, facsimile machines, microcomputers and local area networks. In

the near future, Information Resources at Peace Corps will include a global computer network, improving the ability of Peace Corps staff to work together in support of Volunteers.

The last five years have seen exponential growth in the use of information resources to support the recruitment, nomination, selection and placement of Peace Corps Volunteers.

Here are some of the Office of Resources Management's activities since 1988 that have significantly improved Peace Corps' support of Volunteers:

## 1988

The Agency begins to search for a desktop computer that is easy to learn and use by non-computer professionals, yet is powerful enough to produce analysis, reports and charts of high quality for Congress, the White House, and other important audiences. In May, The Peace Corps adopts the Apple Macintosh as its standard personal computer, the first Federal Agency to standardize its business on the Macintosh system.

## 1989

Construction of the Peace Corps Database Management System (PCDBMS) begins with the merging of three existing databases. Today there are over 1,000,000 records in the PCDBMS including information on: inquiries by prospective Volunteers, nominees at various stages of screening and selection, current Volunteers and programs, and RPCVs who are

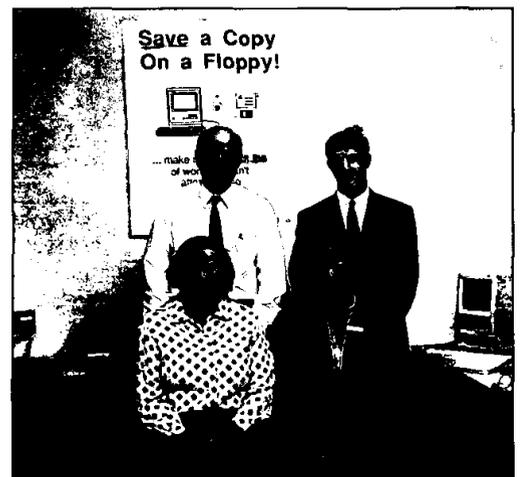
participating in the Peace Corps Fellows/USA or WorldWide Schools programs.

The PCDBMS is now the core information database for Peace Corps. Its continuing development has shortened selection processing time and improved the quality of Volunteer placements.

## 1990

IRM establishes an in-house microcomputer and mainframe training program for Peace Corps staff. By 1992 IRM provided over 1,500 training opportunities, saving the Agency approximately \$150,000 in commercial computer training fees.

IRM implements the Programming and Training System/Quarterly Trainee Review System (PATS/QTRS) to assist the agency in deciding the programs, numbers, and skill requirements for Volunteer trainee recruitment efforts. This system helps recruiters to rapidly identify and nominate Volunteer prospects with critical skills and talents, and promotes high-quality Volunteer placements



Members of the Washington D.C. IRM staff.

to maximize the value of the Peace Corps experience for both the Volunteer and the host country.

An agency-wide Information Systems Advisory Board (ISAB) is chartered to assist IRM with agency technology. ISAB gives all offices a voice in IRM's activities, and promotes a Total Quality Management approach to decision-making that ensures technology resources are properly deployed to support the priorities of Peace Corps.

**1991**

Peace Corps Director Coverdell approves an ISAB recommendation to develop a Peace Corps computer network, permitting Peace Corps offices worldwide to communicate and exchange data easily. The first phase of the network will link Peace Corps operations domestically.

The agency completes a three-year program of acquisition that results in a minimum of two Macintosh computers and one laser printer in every overseas post.

The installation of a new Peace Corps Financial Management System (FMS) begins. PCFMS meets GAO audit requirements and related federal standards. One year later, October 1992, the PCFMS imple-

mentation is completed and the new system becomes operational.

**1992**

The Peace Corps Data Center, home to the agency's mainframe computer operations, moves from the Department of Transportation to the Peace Corps headquarters building. In the transition the computer system is upgraded with a faster central processor and improved disk and tape storage peripherals. These improvements ensure good mainframe response times for years to come, despite the exponential growth of agency databases and the resource requirements to connect to the computer network.

Several headquarters offices begin a pilot test of the Internet, a computer network which provides data exchange and electronic mail services to over three million people worldwide. Electronic mail was recently exchanged between Peace Corps headquarters and Saratov, Russia using the Internet. These trials are very important to the agency's global communications future.

**The Future**

A future Peace Corps is emerging that relies heavily on information technology to collapse the distances between people who need to work together. Within three years, Peace Corps staff worldwide could use the Peace Corps network to conduct regional (or global) conferences without gathering the participants in one place. Volunteers could access the knowledge of experts worldwide to solve agricultural or ecological problems. Small business development centers anywhere could tap business networks such as Disclosure, Dialog, and Lexis/Nexis.

However, no technology will be exploited that does not further the mission, vision and goals of the Peace Corps, but every technology will be exploited that enhances the quality of the Volunteer experience.



*Stephen L. Rose,  
Acting Director  
Information Resources  
Management*

*(OIG Continued from page 37)*

**How do we investigate wrongdoing overseas?**

Investigating allegations of wrongdoing overseas presents unique challenges to the OIG. The OIG may conduct investigations of certain criminal acts as well as violations of administrative regulations.

The Peace Corps OIG, formed first in 1988, stands ready to help the agency and all individuals attached to it in the proper fulfillment of our special mandate.

**Michael R. Hill,  
Inspector General**



*Office of the Inspector General, Peace Corps headquarters, Washington D.C.*

### Peace Corps Volunteers and the Intern

If you have been reading your *Newsweek* magazines regularly, or have other sources of information on current topics, you may be aware that people increasingly are making use of something called the Internet. It's a way of reaching a far greater number of people and organizations with shared interests and needs for information about issues and technical fields than would be possible through the mail or telephone systems. The Internet is used for communication among computer systems worldwide, and for transferring data and information among people with a need to communicate with each other.

The Internet doesn't really exist in a physical way — it's actually a protocol, or format and schedule, followed to transfer electronic data from one computer system to another. It began as a way for the academic community to share information, but it has since grown to include businesses, government agencies, non-profit organizations, research groups and almost any type of person or organization that has a need to share information with people who have similar interests.

"That's all well and good in the U.S., where you have computers and a great phone system, but what does this have to do with me?" you might reasonably ask. Today, most PCVs have access to a computer, if not on a daily basis through their jobs, at least occasionally through their Peace Corps office, and many people consider access to computerized information an essential part of development. ICE is constantly on the lookout for more efficient ways to help PCVs get all the information they need to be effective Volunteers. This type of access may not only be feasible, but essential.

People can access the Internet in a number of different ways. Basically, you need a computer, a working telephone line with a reasonably good connection and an account with an organization or company that serves as an Internet "node" or focal point for collecting and distributing communications. In addition to the colleges and universities, businesses, and organizations that serve as nodes for the Internet, groups have formed specifically to provide people with access to the Internet, including some that focus on international development or have special interests related to development. Organizations such as ECONET (focuses on the environment); DCGNET (agriculture); and DEVNET (development) have already established access points in many countries and have representatives of local organizations who communicate via the Internet through these organizations' access points.

In countries where telephone infrastructures are less developed than in the U.S. or western Europe, many different technologies are being tried for facilitating communication.

Among these technologies are direct radio transmission between two computers, and store and forward mail systems operating through low earth orbit satellites, such as those used by Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA) for tracking disaster relief needs, or Satellite, for sending medical information. Eventually, connections to the Internet will be expanded with linkages to the various types of communications systems to make it easier for people in less developed countries to communicate on the Internet, as well.

Some Peace Corps posts currently have access to the Internet and use it for some of their communication with Peace Corps/Washington. Many countries tightly control data communications,

so it's not practical for some Peace Corps posts to be connected at this time, but that situation is changing rapidly.

What can the Internet do for you? Through electronic mail, it can provide you with direct access to people with similar interests and concerns. Through various other facilities, it can provide you with direct access to many large libraries and databases of information around the world.

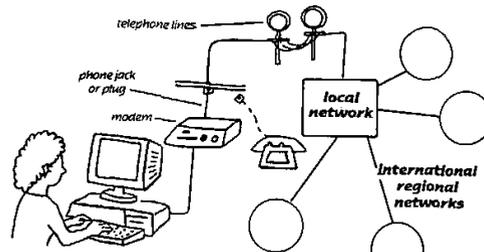
As the whole purpose of the Internet is to facilitate communication of information, ICE is particularly interested in the system. With Peace Corps' network of In-Country Resource Centers getting stronger and more essential to the support of PCVs, this type of communication, which allows sharing of information with many people or posts at the same time, takes on a new significance. Instead of talking about the various services and databases available, however, we'd like to hear from PCVs and staff about the experiences of those currently using the Internet or who have used it in former jobs or institutions, as well as to get ideas from others who see potential PCV uses for it.

Your input on this subject can help us determine how ICE will operate in the future. Particularly, we'd like to have your comments on the following:

For people experienced with the Internet, how have you used it? Has it been helpful in your Peace Corps assignment? What tips do you have for other people in developing countries who might wish to use the Internet? If you have never used the Internet, are you interested in knowing more about it and what it can do for you? Do you think you may use it in the future, and if so, how? In general, would information in electronic format be useful to you?

We'll publish information from your responses in TAPES-TRY. Write to ICE at the Peace Corps address, or if you're already using the Internet, contact us at:

ICE@ACCESS.DIGEX.NET ☐



Graphic courtesy of International Women's Tribune Centre, Inc.

# Logging On

*WorldWise Schools enters the information age*

BY BRIAN LONARDO

**E**VER WISH YOU COULD SHARE THE wonderful things about your Peace Corps country, its culture and its people with the rest of the

world? How would you like your description of a local custom, words from a poem, or village folk tale to be read by anyone in the world? Can you offer a student a unique view of your country of service that can't be found in any textbook or library?

Your knowledge can be valuable to WorldWise Schools as we launch Peace Corps into "cyberspace." We are looking for unique, descriptive, informative material about Peace Corps countries from PCVs, host country nationals, and staff to put on the Internet via our new on-line service.

We're setting up a computerized Bulletin Board Service (that's BBS in cyberspeak) that will allow anyone with a computer and modem access to a large database of information about Peace Corps and our host countries.

Here's an example: A college student interested in learning more about the Peace Corps can "log on" to our BBS and get application information, descriptions of programs, countries, and information about the type of degree and experience required for specific programs.

What does digging wells or farming



fish have to do with the "Information Superhighway?" Plenty! One of the goals of Peace Corps is to bring the overseas world back home to the people of the United States. This is the first time that such a wealth of information will be made available directly to the public at large.

Instead of copying information from an encyclopedia, a student doing a research project will get insight and knowledge he or she can get nowhere else.

What kind of material is useful? Think of it this way: there are vast amounts of information about each and every Peace Corps country. The

material we want should therefore be unique or "first person." A good example would be a letter from you or a local child describing your village or country and the way of life there.

Or perhaps you can provide recipes of local dishes, descriptions of local customs, familial structures, or even the weather! Also, pictures and maps—clear enough that they can be scanned—of dwellings, local dress or animals will be appreciated.

Basically, avoid sending anything that can be found at a local library in the United States.

Important: we will not post anything that is political, illegal, controversial or offensive in nature.

All materials must have your full name, social security number and country of service on them. (Your SSN makes it easy for us to look up your name and address on our database so we can send you a thank-you note.)

Please make sure the handwriting is legible.

If you want your materials returned to you, include your Home of Record address.

If you have information on disk, make sure it's in a generic format, i.e., ASCII or saved as text. (That means no fancy stuff—boldface, underlines, italics, weird fonts, etc.) We can read both IBM compatible and Macintosh disks in Washington.

Mail everything to Brian Lonardo, WorldWise Schools, 1990 K St., NW, Washington, DC 20526.

For PCVs already on the Internet (that's right, some are) send your information to Brian using the following address: [blonardo@usa.peace.gov](mailto:blonardo@usa.peace.gov).

We look forward to hearing from you! ☐

*Brian Lonardo, a former Volunteer in Benin, is information program manager for World Wise Schools.*

## **Building the Technology Bridge**

SOON AFTER HIS ARRIVAL IN the northwest Ghanaian city of Wa, PCV Tod Bruning realized that what local entrepreneurs wanted to learn from him most was how to use computers. “In the business world,” he says, “my students’ co-workers will be coming to them for answers about computers, and I want to make sure that they are well-equipped.”

GHANA

So Tod set up computer training courses for the Weaver Women’s Guild of the Upper West Region and helped them get wired. The women are now better able to communicate with each other and share their marketing ideas across villages. By offering affordable computer education to local artisans, Tod is “making computer literacy available at a local level.” With the help of Peoplink, a marketing group founded by RPCV and former Country Director Dan Salcedo and RPCV Ted Johnson, Tod’s next plan is to set up an Internet web site for local artisans. “I want to use the site to market the women’s textiles and gradually bring in other local crafts.” By using the Internet to link buyers with sellers, Tod hopes his project will help boost the economy in what is the poorest region of Ghana.

Peace Corps Times 1998 -  
*Building the Technology Bridge*

# Peace Corps Gets Wired

## *Logging on to the 21st Century*

BY BURTON REIST

**I**MAGINE YOU'RE A SMALL BUSINESS Volunteer working with a loan program for pig farmers in the Dominican Republic. You've got some doubts about loan control

mechanisms, so you go to the Peace Corps office in town, log onto Internet, and post a message to the Peace Corps mailing list. You get a dozen or so responses over the next week from Volunteers and RPCVs who've already crossed that bridge and have some helpful advice.

To some Volunteers and staff, that scenario might sound like a pipe dream—either they don't have computer access or Internet has not yet been approved. Yet to others already hooked up and logged on, Internet is linking RPCVs, Peace Corps employees, and some Volunteers in user groups that allow them to exchange ideas and experiences. In addition, it's no pipe dream that Peace Corps is one of the first federal agencies to link its entire domestic staff in its own computer network, providing electronic mail (e-mail), software packages, and databases to Peace Corps employees nationwide.

"Internet and e-mail have created a tremendous increase in the transfer of information beyond the use of word processing," says Rick Lauderdale, Deputy Director for the Network Support Unit in Information Resources Management (IRM), Peace Corps' computer department. Consequently,



IRM has been working hard to get everyone hooked up and online. For the past few years they have focused primarily on developing the network, pulling nearly 20 miles of cable through the Peace Corps Washington building, and another five miles in the area recruitment offices. This alone took a year and a half, but staff in Washington are now all connected to a nation-wide net that lets them communicate instantly with their colleagues in Dallas, San Francisco, and anywhere else Peace Corps has an office. When e-mail goes down and people are suddenly cut off from one another, IRM's phones go crazy.

"It's instant communication," says one staff member handling Asia-Pacific region matters back in Washington, "even if that means overnight." He and others whose jobs involve daily communication find that Internet and e-mail keep them in the loop with what's going on. "It cuts down greatly on the need to DHL/Express Mail documents on computer disks, and we use the fax a lot less. I love it because I don't have to play telephone tag with people for minor questions. I send a message and they respond when they have a chance."

Peace Corps may never be able to build a world-wide network along the same lines of the national system now in place. "It would be very complex," says Jonathan McHugh, the IRM staffer who coordinated the nationwide effort. "The biggest obstacle is that we would have to adapt our network to the technologies available in each of the countries we serve—they each have different systems at varying levels of development, so connecting each of our overseas posts in a global network would be an enormous task."

But left to their own devices, many Volunteers and overseas staff are linking up to the system that everyone with Internet access uses. Several of the Eastern and Central European posts have access due to the more advanced telecommunication infrastructures of those countries. Ted Bongiovanni, a new TEFL trainee in Lithuania, is excited: "It is my understanding that most of the Small Enterprise Development Volunteers in Lithuania will be online, so e-mail should be a handy way to communicate. I've also heard that there are excellent TEFL resources online, though I haven't found them yet." In Africa, only one post (Ethiopia) is online, and there are a few in Inter-America. David Wolfe relates a story that reveals the possibil-

*Continued on page 36*

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# "To the many computer literate Volunteers of today line to hook a computer to the vast amount of

Recent studies by the United Nations Development Program and vocal support by prominent movers and shakers like Hillary Rodham Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have helped bring international attention to a fact of which most Peace Corps Volunteers have long been aware, that investing in women is the surest way to economic growth and overall development.

The new Peace Corps program in Jordan was designed to target women. Volunteers were specifically recruited for their skills and interests in working with women entrepreneurs in rural settings. The focus of many in the group is helping women's cooperatives gain access to credit and improve their marketing skills.

Michelle Lefebvre, a member of the

Jordanian women, I hope to help them raise the quality of life for their children, their families, and their communities."

## Bringing the World Back Home

Michelle Lefebvre, having pledged to all three goals of the Peace Corps, will also have a role within her community back home in Colorado when she returns. Like most Peace Corps Volunteers, the first thing she'll probably do on the ride home from the airport is launch into a long, detailed story about the amazing sights and sounds of her Jordanian village.

Sharing wisdom and tales from the Peace Corps road has always been a by-product of service. These days, the Peace

Corps is formalizing ways to harness the worldly skills of Volunteers so they can carry their unique experiences into their post-Peace Corps lives. Of late, the agency is seeking to better institutionalize third goal activities by integrating them into the real time of Peace Corps service. Rather than waiting until Volunteers return home after two years, the Peace Corps is looking at

ways for Volunteers to share their knowledge and educate Americans while sitting in their yurts, huts, and 10-story walk-ups. Many are already doing this through pen-pal correspondence

with classrooms in the United States. All of this is a testament to what Sargent Shriver, the first Director of the Peace Corps, once said:

"the greatest impact of the Peace Corps will be felt not overseas, but here at home."

Peace Corps encourages RPCVs to continue working in their American communities, as teachers, and volunteers. Steve Betzner, who served in Nepal from 1988-90 works for the Tibetan Refugee Committee in Chicago, where he started as an interpreter. He assists refugees to complete their taxes, go grocery shopping, and adjust to life in the United States.

## Tradition and Technology: Bridging the Gaps

Computer technology may turn out to be the best way to bring the world home and vice versa. It's unlikely the Peace Corps Volunteers of the 21st Century will be arriving with hardware, software, and cables—people will always be the primary resource provided. However, the people signing up for service these days are already arriving better equipped to help their counterparts gain access to the online universe.

The classic notion of a Peace Corps Volunteer is an eager college graduate hunkered down in a remote village with a good education and miles of goodwill. To the many computer literate Volunteers of today, the word "remote" only means there's no phone line to hook a computer to the vast amount of information available on the World Wide Web. From



Education Volunteer Betty Rosentrater teaching a science lesson to primary school students in Honduras.

first group of Volunteers to Jordan, defined one of the trends at Peace Corps when she spoke of her goals at a White House send-off event hosted by Hillary Rodham Clinton. "By working with



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, the word 'remote' only means there is no phone information available on the World Wide Web."



what Volunteers say, this is changing quickly. Thirty-nine percent of the Volunteers who responded to last spring's survey said they have access to a computer at their work site, and forty-two percent have access to a phone. One Volunteer nailed the trend plainly when he wrote, "Spreading peace through development needs an electrical outlet."

As developing nations leap-frog into the computer age, local communities are able to log on and forge ahead. In the past, a typical Volunteer may have helped fund, build, and stock the first community library in some hard-to-reach outpost. Today, communities can get access to every on-line library of the international university library system.

"The majority of Peace Corps

"Few could have forecasted that PCVs would one day share ideas and meals with Russian, Chinese, and South African colleagues and friends."

Volunteers are recent college grads who are computer literate. "For the first time in the history of the agency, we have a group of people arriving with expertise that doesn't exist at this level in most parts of the world," says Bill Piatt, the Peace Corps' Chief Information Officer.

"We can help close the gap in the flow of information."

Ghana is a nation that has embraced technology wholeheartedly. By the end of 1998, 130 schools will be on-line. Peace Corps Volunteers are already teaching in many of those schools. As Piatt explains, "The Peace Corps Volunteers serving in those schools can bring their computer

know-how to get teachers and students in touch with the rest of the world."

"When a Volunteer working in an NGO helps a counterpart access a university-based American professor of agriculture via the Internet, the Volunteer is fostering development and helping the professor get a better understanding of people in other countries," Piatt says.

Twenty-six year old Nathaniel Halsey of Wellesley, Massachusetts, is training Senegalese women credit union members in the village of Nganda. Once a week he creates a computer lab at the nearest electrical outlet. The Peace Corps office in Dakar has lent him a Powerbook, a Dutch development organization provides a place to plug in, and Nathaniel provides his computer spreadsheet know-how.

Nathaniel's credit union project targets women and is funded by the non-governmental organization, Catholic Relief Services. By helping the women manage their books on computer instead of by hand, he is helping them free up time to educate



Senegal PCV Nathaniel Halsey creates a computer lab once a week at the nearest electrical outlet.

other Senegalese women about obtaining small-business loans.

Nathaniel completes his tour in June 1998, but he's proof that the Peace Corps Volunteer of the new millennium may already be here. It's safe to say that the Peace Corps has been doing it right by remaining as flexible an organization as it expects its Volunteers to be. As needs change, Peace Corps changes. And Peace Corps Volunteers, with goodwill, skills to share, and a desire to go remote remain the core of the Corps.

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*A. Emmet Leadman worked as Publications Manager in the Office of Communications. She was a Volunteer in Botswana from 1987-89.*

## MOLDOVA

### Internet access opens possibilities for future

In Moldova, an innovative project will soon connect the Cahul region to important educational and business opportunities found on the Internet.

Organized by Volunteers Mark and Chrissie Goldberg, the Connect Cahul project brings affordable internet access to more than 35 community centers in the southern region of Moldova. The project raised money to purchase and ship 400 computers from the U.S. to Moldova. Funding came from Peace Corps' Partnership Program, the U.S. Embassy, and private donors.

Through the project, several Volunteers helped set up Internet cafes in their communities. These cafes will benefit schoolchildren and small businesses. Young people interested in job opportunities abroad can use the Internet to research their prospects and hopefully discover opportunities that will prevent delinquent behavior.

Volunteers worked closely with their Moldovan counterparts and with the local and national government to complete the project. The last shipment of computers is on its way to Moldova, and soon, all the Internet cafes will be up and running.

Peace Corps Times 2006  
- Moldova - Internet access  
opens possibilities for future

# Peace Corps' First IT Volunteers Head to Belize

Country Director Costas Christ Works  
With Prime Minister Said Musa to  
Launch National Computer Literacy Project

Leaders in Peace Corps countries are asking Volunteers now more than ever to share computer and Internet skills with their communities. The agency is responding to these requests with a new project assignment specifically for computer specialists who can teach computer literacy, Internet usage, and Web site development.

"The Peace Corps is taking a proactive stance on globalization by getting out in the forefront and launching its own 21st century e-initiative," said Director Mark Schneider. While Volunteers in all project sectors continue to incorporate information technology projects into their primary assignments, the Peace Corps sent the first nine technology trainers into the field in June to Belize.

Belize has always participated in traditional Peace Corps project areas, but Country Director Costas Christ said the new information technology project addresses a burning need in the country to bring computer literacy training in the primary and secondary schools. "We are



Prime Minister Said Musa (back row, left), preparing for the Peace Corps' new technology program in Belize, distributes computers at the Mary Hill Roman Catholic School.

## TECHNOLOGY, from page 1

addressing an important issue for Belize's successful development as a country in a world changed by the information technology revolution," he said.

Belize has a growing tourism industry, good infrastructure, including telephones and electricity, and interest from investors in establishing businesses, including data processing centers. So the country is well-suited to take advantage of information technology. The Belizean government has announced its commitment to implementing a national computer literacy campaign in partnership with the Peace Corps and it has begun distributing donated computers to primary and secondary schools.

The new Volunteer project aims to help Belize address the urgent problems of unemployment and

youth at risk. The first group of Volunteers will work in district education offices to train teachers in basic computer literacy and teach them how to integrate computers into their curriculums. "By the end of 2001, more than half of all Volunteers in Belize will be working in the IT program," Christ said. "For a small country like Belize, this initiative is big, and we are all enthusiastic about it." Volunteers will also use information technology in Belize to develop an environmental resources data base for the Ministry of Natural Resources, bring vocational training in computer repairs to disadvantaged youth, help citrus growers create business plans for marketing their products, and market community-based ecotourism enterprises.

## Leaving One Foot at Home

The artifact lays abandoned in a large plastic box, a memory from the days of yore. Once used regularly, Shan Shi no longer has need of it. The relic? A cellphone.

Shan, 23, and a Volunteer serving in Turkmenistan, stowed away the technological burden in favor of a more intimate form of communication: letters. "Especially ones with stickers on the front," she adds. But Shan presents just one side of the onslaught of new communication technology preferences among Peace Corps Volunteers looking to stay in touch with family and friends back home.

Matthew Meyer, on the other hand, is a fan of the cellphone. "Service in my area is impeccable," says the 23-year-old Volunteer in Tanzania. To Matthew, phone conversations are more personal because they provide an easier way to tell stories and "be caught up in life." The case is different for Shan, who feels closest to home when she's able to touch the message that friends and family will receive. It is the closest she can come to human contact with them.

Writing letters also gives Shan freedom to communicate where and when she wants. Whether in an open field or relaxing in her bedroom, the world is her computer, allowing communication without the hassle of finding an Internet café. But sometimes circumstances force Volunteers to choose

one form of communication technology over another.

Both Matthew and Shan just graduated from college, leading Shan to use more economical means of communication. "My friends from home don't call because they are all recent graduates and poor like me," she claims. However, with communication

technology evolving, there are more options than the conventional phone call or letter.

Technology Volunteer Lorena Hinojosa, 24, who serves in Peru, has seen tremendous growth in the use of podcasting and blogging as new forms of communication. Both are unilaterally transmitted

online: podcasts let Volunteers receive video information, such as news and sports clips, while blogs offer information for others to view. According to Lorena, "It's possible for Volunteers who live in extremely rural sites to come into town where there is Internet access, download hours of podcasts and then return to their sites to listen to the programs."

Blogs allow Volunteers to "create a more intimate connection with readers back home and is often considered therapeutic for some," says Lorena. This is especially true for 65-year-old Volunteer Katrina Meredith, whose blog is a gateway to her opinions and

*Continued on page 7*

*"Volunteers from the sixties and seventies just shake their heads and roll their eyes when we compare their communication experiences to mine."*

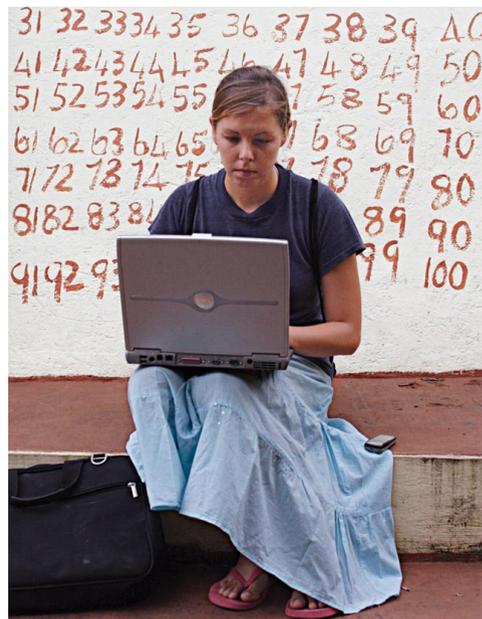


PHOTO BY RYAN BROOKS

Volunteer Nicole Voorhees stays connected in St. Vincent.

THEN  NOW

## Bringing Back the World

The experiences of Peace Corps Volunteers have changed dramatically over the past 45 years, but one of the most noticeable changes has been in the area of technology and communications. From "snail mail" to e-mail, the communications options available to Volunteers have advanced greatly.

For the Head family of Wenatchee, Wash., these changes are especially obvious. When parents Doug and Lyn served in the Peace Corps in the 1960s, their only viable option to update friends and family was through letters mailed home, a process that could take weeks. Now that twin daughters Lauren and Connie are serving in Nicaragua and Honduras, respectively, they are able to keep in touch with weekly cellphone calls and e-mails.

"Each time we get an e-mail or talk with them on their cell-

phones, I marvel at the difference in accessibility Volunteers have now," says Lyn. "With instant communications, Volunteers today can have one foot at home and one foot in their host country."

Although the twins' father, Doug, who served in Afghanistan from 1967-70, worries that too much of the new technology will take away from Connie and Lauren's Peace Corps experiences, he is also grateful that this "new world offers cellphones, Internet cafés and e-mail," for continuous communication between home and abroad. Lyn, a Volunteer in Malawi from 1969-71, shares her husband's concerns, calling "the accessibility both a blessing and a burden in some ways." Despite easing her worries as a parent, she wonders if it can distract her daughters and other Volunteers from completely immersing.

*Continued on page 7*

### COMMUNICATION

## Volunteer to Volunteer

"Sometimes it's worth sharing a 'Peace Corps moment' with a friend," Ken Loomis says. For that, the 24-year-old Volunteer in Cameroon uses a cellphone. It is his preferred device of communication with fellow Volunteers, beating out Internet, satellite phones, and land-lines. "The call or text message is comforting at the end of a stressful day."

Ken, and others like him, use phones to set up meetings or give directions to friends traveling through new territory. With the advancement of technology, Volunteers are not just able to stay closer with friends and family, but also with each other.

"All major cities [in Cameroon] have

reception and the coverage is continuously expanding to more isolated areas," says Ken. That is good news for writing-inclined Volunteers who prefer text messaging to its more expensive sibling: the spoken word.

Text messaging in Cameroon is roughly equivalent to 9 cents (USD) per message. Compare that to the 36 cents per minute it costs for a call, and you can see why Volunteers often prefer texting over lengthy conversations.

"If I'm writing a text message, I can write an entire letter," Deborah Aparicio, 24, says. "Sometimes my text messages are so long that I don't have room to type

*Continued on page 7*

## BEHIND THE VOLUNTEER

# IT Specialists: The Challenges of Keeping Connected

With the “Geek Squad” or that college roommate who seemed to know everything about computers only a call away, it is easy to keep computers up and running in the U.S. But what do you do thousands of miles away when computer know-how is much harder to come by?

Information technology specialists are responsible for maintaining all Peace Corps-supplied systems and staff computers at their posts. In addition, for every 25 Volunteers in a Peace Corps country, there is one computer workstation that these technicians must also support. This creates a tremendous workload for one lone IT specialist.

In Paraguay, IT Specialist Gustavo Draugelis describes his typical day as, well, busy. After arriving at the office at about 8:30 a.m., Gustavo begins his daily routine of checking server logs, testing remote connections and cleaning out junk e-mail. Throughout the day, his office phone, cellphone and e-mail boxes will continually remind him that others need help. The biggest part of his job is assisting other staff in the office, training center or out in the field as they support Volunteers.

“Assistance is a big part of my job,” he says. “And it is quite gratifying.”

The majority of Gustavo’s work in the office is focused on training staff members on specific tasks, such as how to use a certain program or find information for reports. Examples include VIDA, or Volunteer Information Database Application, a complex program vital to Peace Corps’ operations in a post. The IT specialists must not only train staff members how to use this software, but maintain and support the program as well. Without VIDA, staff members would not have access to important information about Volunteers’ whereabouts and activities.

Another function of IT specialists is to constantly research Internet connectivity options in the country. When a faster or cheaper choice becomes available, the IT specialist can suggest a switch to a new provider.

Connectivity is best in countries like Mexico, South Africa and others in Central America and Eastern Europe. However, in other Peace Corps countries like those in the Pacific or western Asia, Internet connectivity is often poor and unable to sustain the activities of the post. In these situations, Peace Corps sets up satellite connections with generators to keep a post in contact with headquarters and the world.

Besides these responsibilities, Gustavo says he is often involved with Volunteers’ technical problems as well, usually individual projects using technology. Because the cost of Internet connectivity in Paraguay is gradually decreasing, more Volunteers have access to technology, creating more work for Gustavo.

To save time, “we now have a Volunteer IT coordinator/leader who spends more time directly involved with IT projects,” Gustavo says. “These can include computer learning centers, radio shows, and all the gamut of digital info such as tutorials, jingles, and more.”

In Panama, IT Specialist Erubey Calvo sometimes finds it challenging to keep up with creative Volunteers. “Some come to me with ideas on how to do a brochure or fix a computer in their communities without any technical computer skills,” he says. “I try my best to help them.”

When Volunteers have problems with their personal computers, oftentimes Gustavo reviews their complaint and recommends they go to the nearest computer shop. As Volunteers arrive in-country with more and more gear,



Keeping IT systems up and running in developing countries is a challenge IT specialists like Erubey Calvo (center in red) know is a necessity for success.

it takes more and more time to fix everything that goes wrong.

“Every minute spent on Volunteer equipment is time taken away from my job, and I certainly do not have any idle time, ever,” Gustavo says. “If it was slower around here, I could certainly help more.”

Gustavo says his working relationship with the local shops is excellent and they are relatively inexpensive, so he likes to send them business anyway.

Kathy Arle, Chief of International Technical Support at Peace Corps headquarters, says maintaining these relationships is an important part of the job description for IT support staff at Peace Corps posts. Without other IT specialists to rely on in-country, it is necessary for the technicians to know local vendors and specialists.

In Vanatu, IT Specialist Henry Vutinamoli spends more time solving problems involving communication

devices than he does working with Peace Corps-related computer issues. “With a little research and knowledge we always manage to sort things out,” he says.

Henry says working with staff to solve technical issues relating to computers, applications, communication devices and other similar problems requires patience, “but I definitely try my best to get things done in time.”

IT Specialists work at every post to keep technology running smoothly. Improvements and training keep them busy, but they also understand the need to be a resource and to be creative in countries where few others often have technology know-how.

Kathy describes the role of a post IT specialist as “one of the toughest jobs at the post. They are acting alone and often the only person at the post with any IT knowledge. These IT specialists are pivotal to keeping posts running on a day-to-day basis.”

## Computers & Your Community: What You Need to Know

With constant and rapid changes in technology happening all the time, Volunteers can sometimes find it difficult to bring their sites up to speed. Computers are an important part of this process, but finding the means to bring the technology to a Peace Corps site can often be challenging.

This is where the Office of Private Sector Initiatives (OPSI) steps in to help secure donations for computers and software. With their Partnership Program, OPSI provides funding for community-initiated projects being overseen by Volunteers serving around the world.

Once a Volunteer writes the office with a proposal for Partnership funding, the proposal goes through an approval process before being posted to the Peace Corps Web site. On the Web site, donors can make cash contributions to the fund, many of which are tax-deductible, or agree to an in-kind donation, meaning an organization donates products as opposed to cash.

Many donations for computers, software and other project materials come from the Volunteer’s friends, family or hometown groups. Other organizations that support efforts in a particular country may also contribute

and donors involved in matching gift programs with their companies often make significant contributions.

Recently, Peace Corps/Ukraine received an in-kind gift of 15 laptop computers from the Scott County Government in Shakopee, Minn. A resident of the county is currently serving in Ukraine. The computers were transported to Ukraine by the Volunteer’s parents where they will be used in a local school.

In the past year, 12 computer lab project proposals have been approved by OPSI. Of those, eight have already been fully funded. Fundraising for the

remaining four projects continues on the Web site.

Unfortunately, Peace Corps can not pay the shipping fees for in-kind donations, so Volunteers or organizations must raise the funds by soliciting charitable groups or by finding other means, such as the Volunteer in Ukraine who had his parents bring the computers when they visited him.

The Office of Private Sector Initiatives will be releasing a handbook in the near future to help Volunteers draft effective proposals for computers and other projects.

[www.peacecorps.gov/contribute](http://www.peacecorps.gov/contribute)

## One Foot at Home, Cont'd.

experiences, through which approximately 175 family, friends, and former colleagues can travel. She even posts links to Macedonian media for others to gain a better understanding of the world in which she lives.

Katrina admits that communication technology has had a significant impact on the Peace Corps experience. She is in the unique position to have had friends who served when the Peace Corps was in its earliest stages and didn't have access to e-mail, blogs, or Skype. "My peers who were Volunteers in the sixties and seventies just shake their heads and roll their eyes when we compare their communication experiences to mine," she says.

For Shan, who grew up with all of the technologies she has been forced to relinquish, limited access to e-mail and phone service almost entirely isolates her from the outside world. But if you think she would have it another way, then you are getting the wrong message.

"Coming into the city to use Internet and hanging out with other Volunteers is great and sometimes an absolute necessity," she says, "but this is still time away from site and it takes away from the full [cultural] immersion." Shan has learned to live with infrequent conversation back to the

States because she wants to stay more involved in her community. "Most things can wait for two years," she adds in the hopes of cutting down on e-mail checking.

Others, like Lorena, believe that communication technology "has helped Volunteers become better and more dedicated because they have family and friends at home encouraging them and giving them ideas to serve their communities in the best way possible."

"The addition of communication technology is really only another way to isolate or integrate," in Katrina's opinion. By no means should staying in touch with home equate to distancing oneself from the Volunteer's site. Anything, from family photos to a Red Sox recap, could draw one's attention away from their present situation.

Matthew agrees that the level of cultural immersion depends on the Volunteer, not technology. He lives comfortably in a three-bedroom house with views of the Indian Ocean and cellphone service that surpasses his parents' service in Vermont. He doesn't communicate back to the States regularly because, as he says, "My home is Lindi, Tanzania."

Unlike his father, who served in The Gambia from 1967-69, Matthew has had more than two phone calls from home. Lorena speaks to her mother us-

ing Skype and will occasionally borrow a webcam to see familiar faces while she talks. Katrina has a television in her room and communicates back to the States on a daily basis by Yahoo

phone, e-mails, or blogs. And for Shan, well, she'll have to wait a little longer to dig out her "old" cellphone, but that does not stop her from going to the city to use the Internet once a week.



**Tech Savvy:** While challenges exist, Volunteers find a way to stay connected

Above: Volunteer Nicole Voorhees intrigues students in St. Vincent with her laptop. Photo by Ryan Brooks



Left: Volunteer Joshua Wilcox, serving in Mozambique, demonstrates just how connected some Volunteers really are. Photo by Bern Moorehead

## PCV to PCV, Cont'd.

anymore."

Deborah is easily annoyed by verbose conversationalists who use up all of her phone credit. In The Gambia, where she is serving, a text message costs 4 cents (USD). No wonder she chooses to text when every minute she spends talking subtracts up to three minutes from her phone card.

No matter how you price it, communication technology has changed the way Peace Corps Volunteers reach their goals. Cellphones and Internet allow collaboration among Volunteers on a multitude of projects, like sharing each other's expertise, which makes for more polished results.

"Cell phones and Internet connections have certainly improved our network of professional resources to work with," Ken adds. Using Yahoo and Google e-mail accounts, Peace Corps administration can effectively reach Volunteers within a reasonable amount of time. It isn't like the old

days when Volunteers could only be contacted by a well-timed land-line phone call or the sending of a Peace Corps vehicle.

Communication technology also has advantages on a number of other levels, including safety. Cellphone networks give Volunteers the ability to make a call in an emergency, to another Volunteer or even to request medical services. For, while the emotional support of a quick phone call is nice, the possibility of physical support is extremely comforting.

For the most part, Volunteer-to-Volunteer communication still revolves around sharing experiences, giving advice, or planning rendezvous. The cellphone dominates as the preferred means of communication, as Volunteers are privy to serve in an age when more and more remote sites are providing coverage. This gives almost everyone a chance to share frustrations and success stories or, as Deborah says, make "our lives away from home and loved ones more manageable."

## Then & Now, Cont'd.

Lauren and Connie agree that the new technologies help them, both with their service and with communicating with friends and family in the U.S. Connie says she feels lucky to have Internet and cellphone access in her site to maintain constant communication.

Lauren notes that, "it has been great to be able to call Connie so easily, but it's also pretty expensive. Buying phone cards has definitely done some damage to my stipend!"

Although Lauren's site does not have the same level of access as Connie's site, both feel fortunate that they are able to communicate often, either through letters, e-mail, or cellphone calls.

"We make it work when we can," says Connie.

## Peace Corps Times

A publication for Peace Corps Volunteers serving worldwide

Nathan Arnold Editor

Courtney Romain Writer  
Craig Schattner Writer/Designer

Do you have something to share with us?

We welcome all Volunteer submissions or suggestions. Inquiries may be made to:

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AUGUST 1966

From the Peace Corps Times: A Peace Corps computer has a crush on trainee Patricia Gallagher. It got stuck on her name and recorded it 350 times on the tape. As a result, her father in Philadelphia was our favorite subscriber (and his mailman our least sympathetic one) during May, when he received 350 copies of "The Volunteer." He graciously returned 349 copies. "I worry about all those people who didn't receive their magazines," he said.

# In Peru, Podcasting and Googling Bring Answers



## VOLUNTEER LIFE

By Lorena Hinojosa

I work in Cajamarca, Peru. It is a city with a population of 80,000. My time here has been occupied with trying to find both new and traditional ways of introducing Peru to the technological advances of the 21st century.

The surrounding districts here have about double the population. In the most remote areas of Cajamarca, you might find a satellite dish that connects a small village to the Internet. Practical Solutions, a UK-based non-governmental organization through which I work, has the goal to assist certain rural areas to create "InfoCenters." In Cajamarca, an InfoCenter is described as a location that provides information, by means of telephone services, technology and Internet services. My work requires that I help in training the people that staff these InfoCenters located all around the province of Cajamarca.

As an example of the impact of this type of training, another local NGO in cooperation with my NGO provided young mothers with a two-month training course on what the Internet is and how to use e-mail, Word, and Excel. We also helped these women and girls learn how to use Google as a tool for finding information that could help in their everyday lives. These bits

of knowledge, for them, were very important. Many of them had health questions concerning themselves and their children. With the Internet, those questions were answered through access of official health Web sites.

By helping these women and girls, I was able to make a small difference. I had shown them how they could learn more, on their own, and how they could apply this technology to answer other questions they might have.

Also this past year my NGO asked me to assist with a podcasting project. It was a pilot project to see whether podcasting was a viable means of communication to rural areas. The project lasted six months. I was in charge of investigating free software to create the audio podcasts, software to upload the podcast, and finally methods of downloading and playing the finished product.

A common misconception that should be pointed out is this: that to listen to podcasts one needs an ipod. This is not true. Podcasts are just audio mp3 files that can be downloaded and disseminated in various forms. The mp3 files can be copied to CDs and distributed as such, or local radio stations can broadcast the mp3 files, turning them into a radio program.

I have investigated and learned about the freeware necessary to create a show. I assisted in creating a manual in Spanish that covers the use of these programs. I taught my counterparts and later the administrators from three InfoCenters.

The administrators learned the basics of how to create a podcast. However we did have problems uploading the audio mp3 files. Therefore, we had

to send each file normally via e-mail to our network administrator to load the files and create a web addresses from which they could be downloaded. The project was a test, and ended with positive results and hopefully they will continue to test the ability in other countries.

A technology Volunteer can do

many types of training, and there is great impact when you give knowledge. Training diffuses down to the lowest levels, and after a while a lot of people have some knowledge.

Being an technology Volunteer plays a small role in development as a whole, but it also plays a very powerful role.



Lorena works with a group of students in her community.

# In Bulgaria, Introducing Internet Presents Challenges



## VOLUNTEER LIFE

By Sarah Braddock

Technology, while serving as a Volunteer in Bulgaria, is practically a necessity.

I live in a small, beautiful village of 250 people in the Rhodope Mountains, where I work in a boarding school for truants. The school draws children ages 7-18 from all over Bulgaria, many of whom are minorities. The school is equipped with a wonderful new computer lab. However when I arrived in October 2005, there was absolutely no internet access in the town. At

first, my director was convinced that there was no way of getting Internet into the small village due to problems with the cable lines. I figured she was right, and left the issue alone for a few months. The lack of internet access was a nice distraction from the outside world. However, soon the teachers and I agreed, there had to be a way to bring Internet into this community, as the kids could truly benefit from this access.

To provide some background, the town where I serve is situated seven kilometers from one of the largest and most popular ski resorts in Bulgaria: Pamporovo. Due to the proximity of this resort, hotels and guesthouses in my host community have been expanding along with the tourism industry in general. Internet access is vital for this area to become a tourist destina-

tion in Bulgaria. The tourism center, the municipality, and local business have all agreed that Internet would greatly benefit their small community. Therefore, technology plays a very important role. With this in mind, I began my search.

We found a local satellite company that installs internet for a fairly reasonable price. After waiting a month to get an appointment, they came to the school and offered to put in a satellite for free, but not until the snow melted. So, we waited until May for the snow to melt. However, when the company finally came, instead of installing the satellite on the school, they put it up on the mayor's office, which services one computer, inaccessible to the community and the kids.

After daily phone calls to the satellite company, my counterpart and I

realized we needed to do something to get the people to come back and install Internet in the school. We traveled to their office and confronted them face-to-face. Currently, they have a tentative date to put it in, but as I write this, there is no Internet access for the public in the community.

Implementing this type of project into our community, especially a small mountain village, has been difficult, but not impossible. Patience is key with any project, but I have found that persistence with people—and more important the Internet company—have proven to be helpful.

Keep a smile on your face and make sure your community sees your enthusiasm, because it will keep their spirits high, and one day soon, I am sure we will have full Internet coverage even here.

# Globalization, Information Technology, and the Peace Corps in the 21st Century

June 7, 2000

*Remarks by Mark Schneider*

*Director, Peace Corps Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*

*Mark Schneider has served as director of the Peace Corps since the end of 1999. He has already been to many of the countries being served by Peace Corps volunteers and has given the organization several new priorities, including and especially dealing with the AIDS epidemic in Africa and bringing information technology to the poorest nations.*

*Mr. Schneider was himself a Peace Corps volunteer from 1966 to 1968, assigned to work on community development projects in San Salvador.*

I am delighted to be here to give you an update on the Peace Corps and how the men and women who serve as Peace Corps volunteers are helping people meet the 21st century development challenges.

When President Kennedy established the Peace Corps by Executive Order on March 1, 1961, he said, "We have, in this country, an immense reservoir of . . . men and women anxious to sacrifice their energies and time and toil to the cause of world peace and human progress."

Today, nearly forty years later, the Peace Corps has nearly 7,000 volunteers who maintain that same spirit of service and idealism working in seventy-seven countries around the world. Peace Corps volunteers are serving as teachers in Africa, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Pacific Islands. They are helping farmers in Latin America learn about – and benefit from – sustainable agricultural practices. Peace Corps volunteers are working with women to obtain small loans from village banks to start their

own businesses. And they are helping local health care workers promote health and nutrition in their communities.

At the same time, Peace Corps volunteers are making an enormous contribution to how the people of many developing nations see and think about America. I think the former American ambassador to Guinea put it best when he wrote the following cable to the State Department two years ago. "When I presented my credentials to President Conte," Ambassador Tibor Nagy wrote, "my prepared remarks included a brief mention of all USG activities in Guinea. In his extemporaneous response, Conte launched into spirited and effusive praise for Peace Corps volunteers and their work in Guinea." The ambassador said that for many people in Africa, "Peace Corps volunteers are the real American ambassadors, not whoever runs the embassy in the capital . . . The fact is that most people on this continent form their opinions about America and Americans from their exposure to volunteers."

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Source: <http://peacecorpsonline.org/messages/messages/2629/4150.html>

I have had similar experiences. On my recent trip to West Africa, I was somewhat taken aback by the frequency with which prime ministers, cabinet ministers, and even the Vice President of Ghana asked me if I knew a particular volunteer who had taught them English or math or had lived in their village one or two decades earlier. The success of the Peace Corps in conveying who we are as a people was expressed in the comments of these leaders and of the local teachers, farmers, and micro-entrepreneurs I met.

Indeed, the best part of my job is the opportunity I have to visit with volunteers and their counterparts and neighbors at their sites. And believe me, it is an inspiration to see the ingenuity, creativity, and innovation that today's volunteers are bringing to their jobs, as well as the lasting impact they have on the lives of other people.

Since January, I have visited volunteers in nine countries in Central America, Central Asia, West Africa, and Eastern Europe. I have to admit that the first trip to Central America also permitted me to visit the barrio in El Salvador, where my wife, Susan, and I served together as Peace Corps volunteers. Volunteers now are helping El Salvador turn an eight-year-old peace accord into a new national future. It was a very moving experience to go back to that community and see some of the people who had influenced our lives. Much had changed in our barrio over the last thirty-two years, but the small bridge that we helped the community build across a ravine was still there, and a new generation of children now cross it every day to reach their school. As the Peace Corps approaches its fortieth anniversary, our volunteers are finding solutions to contemporary problems that can accelerate the pace of development.

For instance, volunteers are serving in the new republics of the former Soviet Union, where they are teaching business principles and helping entrepreneurs and small businesses make

the difficult transition from state-run economies to those based on free market principles. And they are working with local governments, which are so crucial to the democratic experience. Peace Corps volunteers are working with communities in dozens of countries to protect biodiversity at the local level so that future generations can experience sustainable economic growth. In Honduras, they are helping local governments and communities develop plans and systems to mitigate the tragic effects that natural disasters, such as Hurricane Mitch, have on the country's development. And in Africa, they are collaborating with USAID, international agencies, grassroots organizations, schools, and health groups to help eradicate polio and prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, which is not only undermining national development, but is also, in my view, the dominant humanitarian challenge confronting the world today.

These are some of the areas we are targeting today as ways to accelerate development. But as we enter the 21st century, there is an even broader challenge that developing countries face, and one that Peace Corps volunteers are uniquely positioned to help them address. The challenge is globalization, an issue that is now at the center of the debate about how the "new economy" affects people in the poorest countries.

The expansion in international trade, the unnerving instantaneous, 24-hour movement of capital, and the never-ending news day are realities. The test is whether globalization also can be harnessed to foster greater international solidarity and a greater sense of community among all peoples, whether all people will share in the benefits. I believe Peace Corps volunteers can play a role in answering that question. I believe we can help make globalization "personal" and "local" by bringing the benefits of the information revolution into the hands of the students, the health workers, the campesinos, the women's groups, the indigenous artisans cooperatives,

and the teachers with whom volunteers live and work.

Moises Naim, the editor of *Foreign Policy*, recently wrote, "The 1990s began in Berlin and ended in Seattle" where a crowd sought "to rebuild walls that might shield them from the ills unleashed by 'globalization.'" On the one hand, to explain the attack on globalization, Naim pointed to some of the ways that economic reforms had failed to achieve all of their objectives. He cited the ten emerging economies that endured financial crises in the 1990s, the flight of capital and jobs, and the evidence of increasing inequity and unremitting poverty that force three billion people to live on two dollars per day.

On the other hand, Naim also noted the progress that has occurred in parallel with the increasing integration and globalization of the world's economies, such as the expansion of world trade, a sharp reduction in the hyper-inflation that plagued many countries in the 1980s, a booming U.S. economy, lower tariffs on industrial goods, and the ability of those same emerging economies to recover more quickly from financial crises than ever before.

But while we can debate the pros and cons of globalization, I believe that there is a consensus on one key point. Virtually every current international development expert, from the most conservative member of the IMF to the most liberal NGO, agrees that current levels of inequity and poverty in the developing world are unacceptable.

The World Bank Development Report this year found that the richest third of countries achieved about a 50 percent increase in their per capita GDP from 1970 to 1995; but the per capita GDP of those in the poorest third showed virtually no increase. Even though we can point to important gains in social conditions, too many people in too many countries still live in extreme poverty.

There is now broad agreement that

more and better human capital investment, such as devoting more resources to quality education for girls as well as boys and improving access to primary health care, are vital to achieve sustainable levels of economic growth.

Experts on both sides of the debate, I am pleased to note, increasingly are calling on governments to be more accountable and democratic, to manage natural resources in ways that protect our children's economic future, and to give the poor greater access to credit for micro and small businesses, infrastructure, title to property, and legal protection.

One reflection of the new policy consensus are the conclusions of the 2000 World Development Report that after fifty years of development experience, the four key lessons learned are: "First, macroeconomic stability is an essential prerequisite for achieving the growth needed for development. Second, growth does not trickle down; development must address human needs directly." Here, let me add that this is a fundamental and crucial change from the diagnosis at the outset of the 90's. "Third, no one policy will trigger development. Fourth, institutions matter; sustained development should be rooted in processes that are socially inclusive and responsive to changing circumstances." Again, this recognition of the key role of government particularly with respect to local government and the rule of law, constitute welcome additions to the previous prescriptions for economic development.

Moreover, it is not just the experts who are concerned about the effects of globalization on the world's poorest people. The Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland just released a study on how ordinary Americans view the complexities of globalization, and it contains some very interesting conclusions. Let me quote just one point. "Most Americans," the study said, "perceive poor countries as not getting a net benefit from international trade, and they

support giving preferential trade treatment to poor countries. Very strong majorities believe that the U.S. has a moral obligation to promote development in poor countries and that doing so ultimately would serve US economic interests."

Recognizing the importance of poverty reduction and enhancing equity, however, is one thing, changing policies, offering incentives, transferring resources and knowledge is another.

The growing consensus of the need for those changes is a major step forward. That consensus plays to Peace Corps' strengths. Peace Corps traditionally has worked at the local level helping communities satisfy human needs, strengthening grassroots institutions, and transferring the skills and knowledge for sustainable development.

In the 21st century, I am convinced that Peace Corps is even better prepared and better positioned than virtually any other agency or institution to bring information technology to the task of poverty reduction. To be sure, technology is no panacea – it will not solve all of the problems that confront people in the developing world. Yet if the poor are unable to participate in the information technology revolution that we now take for granted, the equity gap will widen even further.

It is within this context of coping with the reality of globalization that Peace Corps is launching its own 21st century e-initiative. The World Bank, USAID, the UN, and others are teaming up with the information giants in an ambitious effort to create the information technology portals through which connections can be made to the world of e-commerce, e-knowledge, and e-systems. I believe that Peace Corps volunteers can carry the information revolution right through those portals and far beyond. Let me explain how.

Virtually every Peace Corps volunteer sworn in today is adept at using computers, integrating information technology, and accessing the

Internet. In many respects, they are comparative experts when they arrive in their overseas communities. There may be 50 million Web sites, but most of the people in the developing world have never made a telephone call, much less sat in front of a computer and surfed the Internet.

Volunteers can change that. They can turn the traditional pattern of the poor getting technology last, upside down.

Let me give some examples of what our volunteers are doing right now. In Ghana, I met a young man from Seattle, who thought he was going to teach math at a high school in the capital city of Accra. The school director, however, asked him if he knew what could be done with fifteen computers that had arrived but seemed not to work. He suddenly became the director of the school's computer literacy program. For a year, he was the only teacher who taught computer operations to 1,500 students and their teachers.

In Bulgaria, I met one volunteer who helped her counterpart grassroots group acquire three computers, a modem, and a printer. Today, they are operating the computer-learning center for a host of non-governmental organizations, cooperatives and small businesses.

In Central America, I met an outstanding senior volunteer, who had spent 40 years as a marketing executive at the Goodyear tire company. He served two years as a business volunteer in Ukraine. Today, he is in his second tour and serving as a business volunteer in Guatemala, where he is working with a small company that helps Mayan women's cooperatives, in the former conflict zone, expand their markets and improve their products. He taught them how to create a Web page that now is advertising their traditional fabrics in the e-commerce marketplace.

And in the remote reaches of Kenya, a Peace Corps volunteer who is serving as a science teacher had a laptop but

no electricity. So, in a classic example of Peace Corps ingenuity, he rigged some discarded solar panels to power his laptop. He was able to connect to the Internet and draw down the information he needed to improve the work plans for his fellow teachers.

These are just several examples of how volunteers are using technology to help their communities develop and prosper. These volunteers are smarter and certainly more computer savvy than I was when I was a volunteer. But we can do even more to assist Peace Corps volunteers in transferring the extraordinary skills they possess in information technology. The transfer of knowledge must be sustainable. It must be part of a project owned by the local community. And it must be a tool that does not separate the volunteer from the community but, instead, offers the community a window to the world's bounty of knowledge. We have launched the Peace Corps e-initiative to expand the role that our volunteers play in bringing the power of information technology to the task of poverty reduction. The key elements are the following:

1. We will build upon Peace Corps' traditional strengths of local community presence, intimate knowledge of local customs and language, and demonstrated success at grassroots project development and execution. We will enable technology projects that are financed by other organizations to become accessible to students and businesses that are not in the main square of capital cities, but beyond the end of the road in distant villages. We also are proposing to harness IT to

help resource-poor communities advance their development goals in education, health, environmental protection, agriculture production and small business enterprises, and municipal development. We want volunteers to prepare projects to do just that.

2. To recruit Peace Corps volunteers with IT skills, a month ago we created a new category for Information Technology generalists and specialists. It will give computer whizzes a place to identify their skills for the first time. This also helps our overseas offices more clearly identify where and how PCVs with these skills can work in the myriad of projects out there, and specifically request them. For instance, Belize now is requesting thirty IT volunteers to lead their effort to bring computers into every primary school by 2005. The first ten volunteers arrived yesterday and twenty more are being recruited.
3. We are undertaking a massive "training of trainers" process for volunteers who are comparative experts in using information technology but not necessarily in teaching others how to use it. We also want to expand the training programs to ensure that volunteers and their counterparts become proficient in information technology teaching techniques.
4. We want to see community computer literacy centers, micro and small business web page design centers; school-based learning centers expanded by volunteers around the world. We

can point to dozens of innovative uses by volunteers who have done it without support. Now we want to find ways to offer support and believe the numbers of those projects will be multiplied ten-fold. Today, I would like to challenge America's information giants to join the Peace Corps' e-initiative by contributing funds, hardware, software, and teaching modules to a Peace Corps e-Partnership Fund. The Fund will permit us to support hundreds of new volunteer information technology projects developed at the grassroots with community, NGO, small business, and local government partners.

5. Thirty years ago, my wife and I worked with our neighbors to build a bridge across a gully so that students could reach school safely. Today, this new Peace Corps e-initiative will enable volunteers to help build bridges across the digital divide to connect people in the poorest communities to the world of learning and, hopefully, to more promising futures.

In that way, we can make globalization "personal" and "local" and begin to give those who traditionally have been left on the margins of technology a link to the center of the information revolution.

Woodrow Wilson once said, "There is no cause half so sacred as the cause of a people, there is no idea so uplifting as the idea of service to humanity." The Peace Corps continues to embody those values, and I am very proud and honored to be leading the agency at this time in its history.

# White House launches technological Peace Corps

March 6, 2003

**V**olunteers from U.S. companies and the federal government will soon head to the African nation of Senegal to help the country improve its technology industry and its economy, according to the White House.

On Tuesday, the White House and the U.S. Department of Commerce announced the creation of the Digital Freedom Initiative, a program designed to help developing nations grow their technology industries. Senegal, a mostly Muslim nation in West Africa, will be the first participating country in a three-year pilot program, and if the Senegalese experience is successful, the U.S. government would send volunteers to 20 countries in the following five years.

Senegal was chosen because its political leaders understand the importance of technology, and the country also has some technology infrastructure in place, said Connie Correll, senior advisor to the undersecretary of commerce for technology. The country has about 10,000 telephone centers, where residents can place phone calls, and about 200 of the centers are Internet capable, Correll said.

It also doesn't hurt that Senegal's population is mostly Muslim, as President George W. Bush faces public relations challenges with the Muslim world over his threatened war with Iraq.

"It's good foreign policy, and it's good economic policy," Correll said of Senegal as the choice. "The country is enthusiastic about the program."

Bush has budgeted US\$2 million for the program in his proposed 2004 federal budget, Correll said, but organizers expect Senegal will get another \$4.5 million worth of volunteer work and computer equipment during the year. The program would send volunteers from technology and financial services companies, as well as members of the U.S. Peace Corps and other agencies, to Senegal to work with small businesses on technology issues. The program will also promote "pro-growth regulatory and legal structures."

Representatives of Hewlett-Packard Co. and Cisco Systems Inc. attended the White House program kick-off ceremony Tuesday. IBM Corp. has also expressed interest in the program, Correll said. The U.S. Department of Commerce hopes to recruit more companies to get involved. Other federal agencies involved include the U.S. Agency for International Development and the USA Freedom Corps.

The groups involved participated in the first organizational meeting Tuesday, and another meeting should happen within a couple of months, Correll said. Details about how the program will operate are still being worked out.

One of the program's missions is to help developing nations "bring people out of poverty," Correll said. "The overall goal is technology-based economic development," she added. "We're sending our human capital over to Senegal to help them develop their economy."

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**Source:** <http://www.itworld.com/article/2806066/data-center/white-house-launches-technological-peace-corps.html>

# Blogs

Peace Corps Volunteers serve at the 'last mile' of service to counterparts and communities around the world. This unique immersion has served as a source of inspiration for many thinkers and writers all thinking of the various ways in which Volunteers could help facilitate crossing the 'digital divide' in their communities.

Volunteers can use ICT to change the world around them, and these are just a few of the stories and articles that show how that's been theorized, carried out, and ought to be approached in the future.

# Electronic Peace Corps

February 7, 1994

By David H. Rothman

**A**n Electronic Peace Corps? Back in '84 after I proposed the idea in the Washington Post and elsewhere, the planet was not quite ready— despite the enthusiasm of people ranging from William F. Buckley Jr. and Arthur C. Clarke to a former worldwide training director for the existing Peace Corps. Now, however, when U.S. policymakers at last can tell potato chips apart from the silicon variety, the time may have come.

In most writings on the EPC I've described a variety of applications, ranging from business to engineering. Still, medical uses are my favorite. Below I'm reproducing an article from the November 1987 issue of International Health News (published by the National Council for International Health). Feel free to spread around the material online *without* my permission. At the end of this posting, I'll include an update.

Lest someone point out the obvious, I'll emphasize that many, many fine groups in the U.S. and elsewhere—for example, the Association for Progressive Communications—are already doing EPC- style work. Quite apparent! But so much more needs to be done and the proposed organization could greatly expand existing efforts, working either within the Peace Corps or USAID, or separately. Too, lest I come across as US centric, I'll also emphasize I'm gung-ho on EPC equivalents. The more money the U.S. spends on high tech for LDCs, the greater will be interest elsewhere.

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It's time to consider an electronic

## Peace Corps

A deadly, unknown disease is killing hundreds of people in a steamy jungle in the year 2000.

The illness baffles the local public health officials. They can't determine whether the disease is spread through food water, sex, insects, or some other means. Fear grows. The sickness might even become another AIDS, a menace not just to Third World countries but also to developed countries like the United States.

Now, however, in the year 2000, leading scientists often know of mystery diseases within days of the first local reports. So they enjoy a head start in fighting this one.

The reason? An American agency called the Electronic Peace Corps (EPC).

Supervised by a cadre of experienced professionals, Peace Corps- style volunteers are revolutionizing Third World communications. They use computers, radios, and other electronic means to boost health and general living standards in developing countries and perhaps even save lives in developed ones.

Some EPC volunteers work in the field. Others, however, don't leave their regular jobs in their home towns. They share their medical and technical knowledge via global computer networks.

Third World officials can dial up computerized lists to select the right EPC volunteers for their needs of the moment. And time zones don't matter. Computer messages remain in electronic mailboxes thousands of miles away, ready to be picked up at the recipients' leisure.

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Source: [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/comparticles/electronicpeace\\*16108.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/comparticles/electronicpeace*16108.html)

A real EPC does not exist. But it could. Already the basic plan has won support from such people as Roger Nicholson, former worldwide training director of the Peace Corps; Arthur C. Clarke, father of the communications satellite; and conservative columnist William F. Buckley Jr., who was keen on the idea as far back as 1984 (“a concrete proposal available to anyone running for president of the United States—or for re-election”).

The EPC concept is simple:

Use cellular radio technology, computers, and other electronics to speed up the flow of technical and medical information from country to country and within countries. The EPC could be part of the existing Peace Corps or else be an independent agency. Other nations, moreover, might want to start their own.

Here is how the EPC could help fight the hypothetical epidemic and otherwise aid the Third World.

## Way No. 1: Improve Telephone Service

No, we aren’t talking about wiring up every tropical village or placing a Princess phone in every shelter. Nor need we string cables across every river and mountain range.

Rather, an EPC would aid public health efforts and other development-related activities through the same cellular radio technology that real estate salesmen and doctors employ to stay in touch with their offices from their BMWs. Faced with a possible epidemic, regional health workers could consult with the most knowledgeable professionals in their countries and even abroad.

Public health would be just one beneficiary of better phone service. Agricultural organizations, for instance, could more easily keep track of crop prices, and merchants or government officials could better coordinate food distribution.

## Way No. 2: Promote Use of Computerized Databases, Expert Systems, and Electronic Spreadsheets

Learning of the strange symptoms, doctors in the affected country’s capital could consult a computer database—to confirm that the malady was indeed a new one and to compare it with known illnesses. Computer also could help keep them abreast of new medical trends. A single CD ROM disk, for instance, similar to the kind that stores music, might offer the equivalent of hundreds of issues of medical journals. Imagine the boon to doctors and medical libraries unable to afford normal subscriptions. CD ROMs would be one way to reduce the expense of international computer connections when making massive data searches.

Guided by CD ROMs and expert systems—computers that respond to queries and offer advice the way a human expert might—the Third World doctors could develop some preliminary responses to the epidemic.

As in the United States, computers also could streamline the keeping of records and perform other tasks ranging from the analysis of laboratory results to the monitoring of patients under anesthesia to the streamlining of hospitals’ finances. If nothing else, consider the African nation that, aided by electronic spreadsheets, got its budget done on schedule for the first time in years.

## Way No. 3: Improve International Communications— Especially the Computer Kind

The gadgetry exists to “mail” computer messages even to Third World capitals with noisy phone lines.

As far back as 1982, Jerome Glenn, a leading U.S. pioneer in computer

communications with poorer countries, was sending messages out of Haiti via a suitcase-sized computer terminal. He later institutionalized what he was doing. Thanks to the network he created— called CARINET— an African potter can get information within a day on how to build electrical insulators. Similarly, Jamaican farmers may receive advice to plant peppers, not pumpkins, if they want good prices in the U.S.

What’s more, since Glenn’s pioneer days, international computer communications have been growing steadily cheaper.

For \$1, I can send 1,000-word computer letters to a friend in Southeast Asia. He pays more. Just the same, “E-Mail” costs are steadily declining, and an Electronic Peace Corps could allow even the most impecunious public health organizations in the Third World to communicate with major ones in the West.

Computers, of course, wouldn’t be the only medium. The EPC might also transmit detailed technical information at times via facsimile. What’s more, phone conversations on occasion might be most efficient and add a personal touch. Even television might be used when appropriate; for instance, to show surgical procedures.

No matter what the media, a far-reaching network of public health officials would help save lives by:

- Quickly alerting researchers and decision makers of developing epidemics, not just of their existence but of important details. AIDS, of course, is the classical example here. Serious research in the U.S. might have started earlier if better global communications had helped Westerners grasp one of the more important details: that AIDS could threaten general populations, not just “high-risk” groups such as intravenous drug users and homosexuals. Granted, technology alone isn’t the answer.

Computer nets cannot substitute for improved cooperation between countries; all they can do is make it easier. In this case, epidemiologists with organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control might routinely track even minor anomalies (involving relative few victims) lest they become AIDS-sized threats that leapt across oceans in an era of jet travel.

- Speeding up research. How frustrating that epidemiologists, cancer researchers and others are at the mercy of post offices. Medical journals and letters between researchers may arrive weeks late or not at all. And telex is often too expensive. With funding from Apple Computer and McDonnell-Douglas Tymnet network, Baylor University Medical Center and the Pan American Health Organization started a cancer net with connections to five Latin countries. U.S. institutions should be doing more of the same. The benefits can be two-way. The more countries and scientists involved, the more likely it is that researchers can gain fresh insights based on unusual cases. This isn't even to mention the possibility of the spread of new diseases to the U.S.
- Sending Third World doctors the very latest information to use on individual patients. Would that the physicians be able to do this routinely. Usually there won't be time or money. But in special cases, a diagnosis from afar might save or prolong life.

Along with the EPC proposal, I'll offer caveats.

First off, the organization ideally will emphasize basics such as health and agriculture and not wander off into, say, cultural exchanges. The EPC mustn't be a glorified pen pal service.

**Second**, let's not spawn a giant bureaucracy overnight. The agency

could start as a series of small, closely monitored pilot projects. Not all should be "in house." Why not have some run by private organizations used to operating on tight budgets? And why not tap the technical expertise of sophisticated amateur radio operators and computer hackers, many of whom still harbor the old barn-raiser spirit?

**Third**, the EPC should build on existing efforts rather than duplicate them. Perhaps it could help fund experiments such as a low-cost communications satellite project started by Volunteers in Technical Assistance to improve communications in remote parts of the world without telephone service. Also, the EPC should work hand in hand with international groups, such as the World Health Organization.

**Fourth**, computer and electronic experts should not run the EPC. Health professionals, agricultural administrators, economic development experts—they are the ones who should set the tone. The techies should serve the "end users," not the other way around.

**Fifth**, an American EPC should not only provide U.S. technical expertise, but also help Third World countries share information they develop on their own. The EPC should be a clearing house, not a Great White Father. Ideally, an American EPC would include Third World advisers or directors.

**Sixth**, the EPC should heed Roger Nicholson's warning: "Without training and spare parts, micro computers will be like the bulldozers that we send overseas, only to see them rust." The EPC should include enough volunteers in the field to reduce such possibilities.

**Seventh** and last, don't expect the EPC to replace the regular Peace Corps. Tapping out advice on his [or her] personal computer, a public health expert isn't exactly going to be able to give Asian villagers a step-by-step demonstration of water purification. For that you need a Peace Corps volunteer—plain Peace Corps,

not electronic—on the scene. The EPC might be a life-saver at times, but never a global panacea. Rather it should be considered just one of many tools with which imaginative health professionals and others in international development can chip away at the problems of the Third World.

## Update, 1994

Not long ago I heard from Naren Chitty, a former diplomat who helped me refine the EPC idea, and with whom I helped pave the way for Kaypro to donate ten computers to Sri Lanka's schools in the mid-'80s. He noted the many messages speeding over the Internet between his homeland and the United States. "It was serendipitous," he said, "to discover through E-mail a thriving plant where one once planted a seed."

*That* has been the biggest change—the spread of the nets and technology in general, along with the new opportunities. The Internet is but one example. Via BBS networks, for instance, American schoolchildren can learn geography and other subjects from direct contacts with students and others abroad. And with communications costs lower than in the '80s, high-tech is a perfect medium for cultural exchanges at a mass level. Electronic libraries, moreover, are no longer quite so novel. In an era of Gopher and similar tools, people in developing countries can track down information on their own without quite so much help from the States. Most of all, computers are no longer such novelties to the elites of Sri Lanka and other developing countries. I can't cite a cyber-census of the island; but I'd suspect that the number of microcomputers at universities there is in the hundreds and perhaps the thousands, a far cry from the Kaypro era.

Sri Lanka is but one example of the proliferation of high-tech. The February issue of *Wired* magazine tells how, in some circles in China, 286-class computers are enshrined along with the wok and bicycle in a "pantheon of

simple, ubiquitous technology.”

And yet, if anything, the need is even greater today for an Electronic Peace Corps than in the 1980s. Epidemics can spread more rapidly. And the fates of Americans are more intertwined than ever with people in the Third World, some of whom have come to our shores to escape wars and find new opportunities here. Indeed, it has been suggested, quite correctly, that some of the best participants in an EPC might be our recent immigrants and their children.

There are other changes in the idea I'd make today. Just as the existing Peace Corps is doing already, an electronic version could help Eastern Europe, not only Asia, Africa and Latin America. William Buckley speculated in 1990: “What would happen if a half-million Kaypros—I speak of the Volkswagen of personal computers—were given away—yes, given away—to Eastern Europe and to the Soviet Union? The worriers will ask whether we are playing the role of sorcerer's apprentice, giving away rudimentary instruments that can turn into monsters (with a Kaypro, Stalin might have managed to find and kill even more people). But no: the universalization of the resources of the computer can accelerate that which most needs acceleration: economic relief for 350 million people, Eastern Europeans and Russians, bankrupted by 70 years of socialism.” Also, an EPC could reflect our existing Peace Corps' interest in the environment—in forestry, for example. Certainly the EPC could play an important role in monitoring and coping with pollution and other threats. In this same vein, an

Electronic Peace Corps could promote Third World telecommuting. The idea, proposed years ago by a Tennessee researcher, makes infinite sense; telecommuting could reduce smog in the great cities of developing countries, lessen the threat to the ozone layer, and also encourage greater social stability. The idea wouldn't be to turn every villager into a computer-era clerk. Rather the EPC could encourage Third World societies to create new opportunities in rural areas to help staunch the flow of population into already-crowded cities. Just a small number of white-collar people in rural regions could generate service jobs for many others. The EPC could encourage developing countries to train the children of farmers for jobs they would normally find only in New Delhi, say, or Mexico City. And it could help city-based companies reach out to this new labor force through rural work centers. Moreover, it could assist rural people in establishing their own companies to provide some local employment of the white-collar variety.

What's more, in updating the Electronic Peace Corps concept, I can see a connection with the TeleRead program that I have proposed for America. TeleRead would create an affordable National Library online and drive down the costs of computers optimized for reading, writing and other serious endeavors. And the same technology could travel to the Third World, where we eventually could help countries set up libraries of their own. When I push the TeleRead concept on the Internet (available via e-mail from me—as `teleread.txt`, 180K), I receive inquiries not just from the States and

Europe, but from remote areas of the planet. Ironically, in helping others with an EPC and TeleRead programs, we would help ourselves—by creating a new appetite for American intellectual property abroad, while benefiting from the works of people everywhere. At same time such efforts would be a wonderful carrot to encourage developing countries to respect intellectual property rights.

Another issue that arises nowadays is whether the Electronic Peace Corps should be an international agency. I've already suggested that different countries could start their own EPCs. And someday, yes, there might an international electronic peace corps, as some have proposed. But first things, first. The U.S. and other major powers would actually do the world more of a favor by starting with their own agencies and seeing which ideas worked the best. International agencies can be like ocean liners—ponderous and hard to turn around; at this stage a fleet of speedboats would do better.

Of course, even early on, the EPCs of different countries could create ad hoc bodies to coordinate major projects in different regions of the world. And international organizations could still participate in the setting of technical standards, just as they do now.

Whatever form an American EPC takes, the 1987 headline has held up: “It's Time to Consider an Electronic Peace Corps.” The term National Information Infrastructure just is not enough. As shown by the success of the Internet, we should also be thinking of a GII, a Global Information Infrastructure.

# Raising Standards on the Web

January 1, 2000

**J**ohn Shores is the kind of practical guru who has used both cyberspace and grassroots forums to discuss and question and develop practical forms of ecotourism, environmental conservation and community work.

The Challenge of Ecotourism written by John Shores was one of the first features in the print version of Planeta, the journal that preceded the Planeta.com website. John now has his own Ecotourism Home Page. Having corresponded with John for a number of years, it was with great pleasure that I was able to meet him in the fall of 1999 in West Virginia. and at a conference at Stanford University in 2002. Here is the transcript of our online December 2000 conversation about the Web, ecotourism, the Peace Corps and other topics.

## What kind of work have you done in Latin America?

My love affair with Latin America began in 1972. With a Bachelor's degree in park planning in my hand, I joined the Peace Corps in response to a small poster on a bulletin board at the University of Michigan that said Peace Corps/Colombia needed park planners. For the next six years, I worked in first Colombia and second the Dominican Republic as an interpreter, park manager, trainer, and system planner. Both countries were initiating projects to expand their national park systems. My job

was to help recruit and train staff, and advise the directors on adding new properties to the park estate. It was a fantastic opportunity.

In 1978 I returned to the US and went back to school. By this time Dr. Kenton Miller, considered by many to be the father of national parks in Latin America, was teaching at Michigan, so I returned to my alma mater and worked with him. After graduation, with a Master's degree in "Resource Policy, Economics, and Management" this time, I returned to Washington DC and worked for RARE, WWF, TNC, and as an independent consultant.

In 1989 I joined Peace Corps again as a natural resources specialist, but this time I was on the staff at headquarters in Washington. The job was much broader than anything I had hoped for. My boss agreed that I would not be used as just a Latin America specialist, so in the first 12 months of the new job, I made 18 country visits all over the world. Peace Corps was starting new programs in Central and Eastern Europe, and they wanted to have an environmental component. The Pacific Island programs were starting to warm to the idea of environmental education, so we ran a few workshops for teachers, education heads, and volunteers. And I even made a few programming and evaluation trips to Latin America and the Caribbean. Fortunately I didn't have to maintain that pace for too long. It was an exciting but an exhausting pace.

My academic training and my primary interest

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**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20130213213259/http://www.somaliawatch.org/archive/991207101.htm>

is still parks and biodiversity. Latin America gave me the opportunity to cut my teeth on park planning and system design. Peace Corps provided that grounding in community process and participation. Work with RARE, WWF, and TNC gave me a nice look at the NGO side of the coin. And most of my independent consulting work has been for the bi-lateral and multi-lateral development agencies (USAID, IDB, World Bank, etc.), which gave me some experience with official development assistance.

I see my experience as gradually filling a toolbox with useful tools. To the academic tools for parks and biodiversity, I added community development, NGO development, participation, gender, finance, environmental education, computers, the internet, and maybe a few other tools.

## How did you begin to use the Web?

I have always been fascinated with tools and machinery. As a small child, I wanted to know how everything worked. So I took things apart... and usually got them back together, too. When personal computers hit the scene in the early 1980s, I was at Michigan and managed to get involved with the initiative to bring personal computers into the School of Natural Resources.

At some moment, everyone has probably complained about training manuals, but I happen to enjoy reading them. I want to know everything a computer can do, what all the applications can do, and how to use them. So reading training manuals was a no-brainer. With the manuals under my belt, I was beginning to help people purchase computers, install new hardware, and learn to use the software.

We actually had email before the Net. Many research universities were tied together by services such as the Merit Network. But you had to have an account at one of the participating

universities.

Web use really blossomed in the early 1990s. The Peace Corps is just a tiny government agency, so it wasn't one of the early innovators. I set up my own private account on a local non-profit ISP in Washington DC, but was using it mostly to communicate with staff and consultants around the world who had their own private accounts. We kept agitating for email for all staff, but it took several years before Peace Corps was able to do this. In the meantime, I got more of my colleagues in the office on line through private accounts, and we built quite a network of the specialists in DC linked with volunteers in the field. Volunteers were setting up their own accounts, mostly with free services like Yahoo and Hotmail. Often I would know about something that had happened overseas before the higher-up staff in the country or in the United States knew about it, because a volunteer somewhere would email me.

Email totally changed the way we communicated. I could now have a sequential conversation with a number of colleagues scattered all over the world. We could plan trips, design workshops, develop training materials, and draft and revise documents – all without ever seeing each other or incurring long-distance phone charges. So we increased the level and cycles of consultation and participation because the transaction cost was zero. More people, more iterations, more interchange. This added a richness to the process and to the products that we simply could not have achieved otherwise.

## How did the Peace Corps use – or not use – computers and Internet technology?

Peace Corps was using a mini-computer/terminal system for word processing of reports in Washington DC when I came back from overseas

in 1978. There might be four terminals on a floor, and people had to sign up for a time-slot to use the machines. At least it was better than typing and retyping with a typewriter. There were a few Compaq portables around. This was the model where the keyboard snapped in place to cover the 6-inch screen. Luggable, but hardly portable. Since the office where I did some consulting work needed transportable computers, they ordered a few IBM-compatible desktops and a few heavy laptops. Then Peace Corps chose Macintosh as their standard computer. That must have been in the mid-1980s. My office continued to use legacy Leading Edge Model D desktops for a few more years after I joined them in 1989, but eventually we got Macs too.

Recognizing that most volunteers come straight out of college, and that most college students have Internet access, Peace Corps started its external web page – <http://www.peacecorps.gov> – primarily as a recruiting tool. I was chomping at the bit to get an intranet site set up to supply information to staff and volunteers in the field and promote broader exchanges, but the agency was very reluctant to put up an intranet. In fact, only recently did it finally come on line, after many years and several earlier attempts and frantic late-night shutdowns. The largest stumbling blocks seemed to be the office of communications and the office of general counsel. Finally their fears were assuaged and the intranet is up and running. At least that's what I'm told. Earlier in 2000 it was still limited to people inside the building in DC. I hope that by now it has become a global intranet for staff and volunteers wherever they may be. In the medium-term I could see it being open to all sustainable development practitioners. But that's many more years away.

The World Wise School program, which links schools in the US with volunteers serving overseas, has used web, video, CD, ICQ, and different live-video-over-Internet systems

to increase the exchanges between volunteer in one country and a teacher and classroom somewhere in the US.

One area where we never succeeded very much was the idea of email discussion lists for topics such as agroforestry, environmental education, ecotourism, parks and biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, youth and environment, and any other topic in which volunteers are working. I envisioned this as a way for volunteers in different countries to exchange ideas and experiences, and for staff to monitor and advise as needed. These would be different from the public global lists on these topics, because many of the challenges of projects in Peace Corps are unique to Peace Corps.

For example, a volunteer is only on the site for two years. So we'd need to link them in, warm them up, and support them in internet time – and that might be different from the normal pace of life in a rural community.

Volunteers usually do not have internet access in the towns where they work. They have to travel to a regional city, or wait until they get to the capital before they read their email. That creates a delay in their correspondence, but it's still usually a smaller delay than international snail mail to

these towns.

Some volunteers with better computer skills have been asked by the agencies where they work to help set up web pages or email. And many of the volunteers are asked to teach English and computer skills, especially word processing. These are seen as basic skills that will be needed for the economies developing in these countries.

## Is there a difference in reaction to people reading your essays, say *The Challenge of Ecotourism* online as opposed to in print?

I have received hundreds of email requests for the full text of the ecotourism paper via email and only a handful of requests via the snail-mail route. So electronic distribution made a world of difference in distributing the paper. It has been published now in a handful of print-format journals and newsletters, and that has prompted a few more email messages from readers. I don't think anyone has ever written a snail-mail letter in response to the paper (although usually only the email address is given), so the mere fact of electronic publication may have

automatically moved correspondence into the electronic forum.

Planeta was instrumental in publishing that article and giving it coverage. I submitted it for discussion at the workshop on ecotourism that we held as part of the IVth World Parks Congress in Caracas in 1992, but it became clear that the coordinator was going to write and publish his own work, rather than compile or even summarize the deliberations and submissions from the workshops. So I announced the paper on a few travel lists and then you kindly summarized it on Planeta. That really launched it to the wider audience, worldwide.

## Do you have any suggestions of how people can make better use of the internet in terms of promoting ecotourism and conservation in Latin America?

I would think that there is still plenty of potential for sustainable development activities on the internet. The important element is to get on the internet. It doesn't have to be expensive or require a vanity domain name. Just get a presence started.



# Plugged-In Planet: The Peace Corps' digital reinvention

MULTIMEDIA IS A WONDERFUL CATALYST TO GET STUDENTS INTERESTED IN COMPUTER LITERACY.

October 1, 2001

*By Lisa Hickey*

**A** decade ago, a typical Peace Corps experience might consist of building outdoor toilets in rural villages lacking public sanitation. Toilets might be made of basic hand-mixed concrete poured over a banana-leaf-lined pit, and plumbing, a bucket of water poured into the bowl.

That was before last year, when former Peace Corps director Mark Schneider unveiled the Peace Corps' Global Technology Initiative. Now, a staff of about 70 volunteers, schooled by an IT trainer, is dedicated specifically to helping launch technology projects in developing nations. Meanwhile, Peace Corps

volunteers are now expected to use computers (as well as banana leaves) in their fight against poverty.

For this newly created "e-Peace Corps," the timing couldn't have been better. With the tech sector shedding jobs, the organization is poised to receive even more Internet-attuned volunteers than ever.

"Historically, whenever there is a down-turn in the economy, more people enter the Peace Corps. And applicants these days definitely tend to be more 'tech savvy,'" says Gini Wilderson, who as the Peace Corps' information

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Source: [https://www.globalcrafts.org/news\\*3.html](https://www.globalcrafts.org/news*3.html)

and communications technologies specialist is responsible for overseeing this sweeping transformation. “They are coming in with Web development, computer-training skills, and distance-education skills.”

Connecticut native Andrew Cunningham, one of these Alley-era recruits, was doing tech support for Macintosh when he left after three years to join the Peace Corps. As a “natural resources” volunteer in the village of Concepcion de Maria in Nicaragua, near the Honduras border, Cunningham supervised the planting and growing of trees. But in time, he realized his computer skills could be his most significant legacy.

Backed by the community’s leaders, Cunningham built a website so that international institutions could learn more about development projects occurring in the area; it allowed a local cooperative to drum up enough funds to purchase an ambulance to transport sick residents. Cunningham has also been training high school students in Word and PowerPoint, and helping them learn basic e-mail skills.

“One story that will always stick in my mind is the first computer class of a seventh-grade girl,” he says. “She was from a nearby village that does not have electricity. It was obviously her first time to even see a computer. The little girl picked up the mouse and began to touch the monitor with it. The beautiful thing is that less than 30 minutes later, she was double-clicking, opening menus, and drawing pictures.”

Kenya-based volunteer and former computer programmer Renice Jones

agrees. “It’s definitely not your father’s Peace Corps anymore,” Jones says. After working for Electronic Data Systems for 17 years, Jones decided it was time to escape corporate America. After arriving in Kenya, she encountered a women’s group called Teenage Mothers Association of Kenya (TEMAK), whose primary function is to teach teenage mothers job skills and to provide primary education to their kids. To help the group raise extra money, Jones launched the website [www.globalcrafts.co.uk](http://www.globalcrafts.co.uk) to sell and distribute local crafts over the Internet, including TEMAK-manufactured items.

Corporate America has stood up and taken notice. Earlier this year, Hewlett-Packard and AOL Times Warner jointly awarded Jones something called a “Peace Pack,” which is an up to \$10,000 grant earmarked specifically for computers, printers, modems, digital cameras, and Internet services. The aid has also helped Jones’ Kenyan village to purchase the domain name [www.womenofafrica.com](http://www.womenofafrica.com), so as to host other websites for African women and youth groups.

The Honduran town of Yuscaran is seeing some benefits of the tech initiative as well. There, Susan Stolpe and other volunteers received a Peace Pack earlier this year to help build a public library. With a population of 13,500 residents, most of whom don’t have computer experience, Yuscaran is struggling to find sustainable economic opportunities. Local leaders believe that wiring the new library could also help promote the area outside of Nicaragua as a tourist destination, touting its colonial architecture, gold and silver mines,

rainforests, and park-protected mountain ranges.

Critics say that these acts of corporate charity are often thinly veiled attempts to grab first-mover advantage in emerging markets. And, in many of these underserved towns, there may be more fundamental infrastructure issues to address. “We’re still having problems sharing the analog dial-up telephone lines with multiple other computers,” Jones says.

Further, language barriers can complicate the ramping up of IT skills, even for those in areas with existing high-end jobs. Volunteer Blair DeWeese, based in El Paraiso, Honduras, teaches computer skills to accountants who maintain volumes of handwritten records. “Much of this could be automated by using Excel, but the workers don’t know how to use it,” DeWeese says, since all of the software manuals are still written in English.

Still, despite the hurdles, applicants keep coming. Douglas Miller, a Peace Corps recruiter in New York City, says the selection process is similar to Silicon Alley’s in its heyday. “You don’t necessarily have to have a degree in computer science [to do the work], but you do need to have some applicable work experience,” he says.

And Miller has a knowledgeable perspective on the changes that have taken place in this 40-plus-year-old institution, having been a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand himself 10 years ago. “None of this would have been relevant then,” he explains. “There weren’t even computers in the town.”



WITH SO FEW COMPUTERS  
IN WEST AFRICA, THE DFI'S  
EFFORTS MAY NOT HAVE MUCH  
OF AN IMPACT.

# Every City is a Village - Recommendations for the Digital Freedom Initiative

April 6, 2003

*By Trevor Harmon*

Since 1961, the Peace Corps has been sending volunteers to Ghana, West Africa, to work in education, business development, and environmental protection projects. Most of these volunteers work in remote areas where poverty is extreme and the small rural communities have the greatest need for teachers, engineers, and other skilled professionals. I was surprised, then, when I learned that the Peace Corps had placed a volunteer in Accra, the largest and wealthiest city in Ghana, to teach computer literacy at an upscale high school. I asked a Ghanaian friend why Accra should get computer experts when the villages up north must surely have the greater need for computer skills and information technology.

“When you’re talking about computers in Africa,” he said, “every city is a village.”

This simple statement explains the motivation behind the Digital Freedom Initiative (DFI), an ambitious new project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Beginning with a three-year, \$6.5 million pilot program in Senegal, its long-term goal is to bring the benefits of computer technology and Internet access to developing countries. Several government agencies are participating, including the Peace Corps, USAID, and the USA Freedom Corps. Private companies are also welcome to join

the project. Hewlett-Packard and Cisco, two of the largest computer technology companies in the world, have already signed on.

As a pilot project, DFI is still quite new, and the details of its implementation have not been made public. Several documents are available on the DFI website (1), but because the project is in its early stages, these documents are short on specifics. Instead, they offer plenty of nebulous phrases such as “enable innovation”, “leverage leadership”, and “enhance business competitiveness”. Likewise, the press releases from Hewlett-Packard and Cisco claim that they will “co-invent locally relevant IT solutions” and “fuel technical education”. Exactly how these organizations will accomplish such monumental tasks is unclear.

The dot-com boom and bust proved that computers and Internet access are not goals in themselves; they are merely tools. The directors of DFI should be careful not to fall into the trap of providing web browsers and disk drives to developing countries and simply hoping that economic prosperity will follow. Still, if every city in the developing world is a technological village, then even a little bit of progress can have a big impact. With the right planning, DFI can provide a foundation for growth in countries like Senegal and Ghana while helping to satisfy the global need for computer

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Source: <http://vocaro.com/trevor/dfi/>

technology.

In the paragraphs that follow, I'll explain the current state of computer technology in West Africa and how it could change as a result of DFI. I'll also dissect the DFI's stated goals and speculate on their potential for success. Finally, I'll highlight a few possible shortcomings and offer some recommendations for future projects.

## Computer Access in West Africa

Today, access to computers in West Africa is at about the same level that it was in the United States during the mid-1980s. Large banks in the region use computers for processing transactions, government agencies track documents and records with computer databases, and many high schools have at least one computer on campus for administrative tasks or the science lab (see Figure 1). In the home, however, computers are still a luxury available only to the wealthy. The concept of a "personal" or "family" computer does not exist, or at least is a very new phenomenon, just as it was in 1984 when the first Apple Macintosh went on sale in the U.S.

The perception of computers by the general public is also similar to that of the American public fifteen years ago. Many West Africans understand the need for computer technology in business, science, and education, but most aren't sure how computers can help them in their daily lives. Clearly, this perception comes from simple economics. When a computer can cost as much as the average annual salary in West Africa, the benefits of owning one are hard to justify.

But if there are indeed true benefits in bringing computer technology to the region, then the solution is not just a matter of overcoming poverty. As the creators of DFI have recognized, developing countries lack the skilled workers that are needed to grow and sustain a computer industry. The

schools, too, lag far behind the developed world in teaching basic computer literacy. Knowledge of computers is rare among young people in West Africa, and many schoolchildren have never even seen a computer.

Despite this shortage of computer know-how, or perhaps because of it, I discovered a genuine hunger for computers in both children and adults during my two-year stay in West Africa. The Peace Corps had placed me in a high school in a small rural town of Ghana, and I occasionally found time to teach basic computer classes for my students in the evening. By chance, I was able to assemble an ad-hoc computer lab using the six computers provided to the school by Ghana's Ministry of Education. (None of the local faculty knew how to operate the computers, so they were just collecting dust when I found them.)

The very first lesson remains clear in my mind: I gave no lecture; I simply allowed the students to play Solitaire on the computers. The idea was to give the students some practice with the mouse and reduce any apprehension they might have about technology—some were afraid to touch the computer for fear of breaking such an expensive machine. I also wanted to prove to them that a computer can be a tool for recreation, not just for business or learning.

To my surprise, the students needed little encouragement. Some of them brought cameras and posed for each other in front of the computers, smiling, hands hovering over the keyboard to give the impression that they knew how to type. Later, when I showed them how the computer can record and playback sounds, several of the girls began singing their favorite gospel tunes into the microphone, turning the class into an impromptu recording studio (see Figure 2). The computer classes became so popular that I later got requests from faculty members for private lessons.

If this experience is any guide, the Digital Freedom Initiative should have

no trouble convincing the public of the benefits of computer technology. It shows that the scarcity of computers in Ghana, as well as Senegal and other developing countries, is clearly not a lack of motivation but a problem of economics and education. Computers are simply too expensive for these countries, and not enough people know how to harness the technology even when it is available.

## Time to catch up

Naturally, developed countries are not immune to these very same issues. In the United States, for example, there is concern over the "digital divide" between the suburbs and the inner-city. This gap, however, is much narrower than it was a decade ago. (2) Today, a basic home computer is affordable even for low-income American families—Wal-Mart sells them for \$300—and virtually every high school in the country now has a computer lab of some kind. A more fundamental change is that computers have become nearly universal in American life, so there is a general appreciation of the benefits of computer technology and, perhaps more importantly, its limitations. This emergence of computers in business, education, and the home has occurred largely over the last fifteen years or so, which leaves developing countries about fifteen years behind.

Fortunately, such countries do not need fifteen years to catch up. They can leapfrog obsolete inventions and dead-end ideas, focusing only on technology that is known to work and is still relevant today. For instance, a Ghanaian acquaintance once told me that he was teaching himself MS-DOS, the Microsoft Disk Operating System, an unfriendly command-line environment. He said that people in developed countries had studied this system first before moving to its successor, Microsoft Windows, and he had therefore decided to study MS-DOS, as well. He didn't realize that it had since become extinct and is useful today only in a

few arcane situations.

In a similar vein, dial-up Internet access over telephone lines is fast becoming out-of-date. Huge investments in upgrading to faster modems and increasing the number of dial-up access points are now going to waste. These days, the new standard is broadband Internet access through cable modem, satellite, or Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), and many homes and businesses are ditching their old analog modems. West Africa, on the other hand, has relatively little investment in dial-up networks, so it faces the unique opportunity of skipping the entire upgrade cycle and jumping directly to a broadband infrastructure.

So, in a certain sense, this lack of computer technology and infrastructure in West Africa could actually make development projects such as DFI a little bit easier to implement. The entire region is fertile ground for well-planned projects that avoid the mistakes and missteps of the past. With keen hindsight, plus a little help from developed countries, West Africa could slingshot itself into the digital age.

## Communication centers are the key

If West Africa is years behind in computer technology, then the obvious goal of any development initiative is to close the gap. The DFI could be the kind of project that helps reach this goal. According to information in press releases and other public documents, it offers several new and fundamentally different strategies that set it apart from previous attempts at bridging the digital divide. One DFI objective in particular looks very promising: “Leverage existing information and communications infrastructure to promote economic growth.”(3)

This idea, vague though it may be, makes a lot of sense. Past initiatives (4) have attempted to copy ideas and business models from North America

and Europe and apply them to West Africa, but these models are not always viable given the unique situation of developing countries. For example, the mantra of a certain U.S. software company is: “A computer on every desk and in every home”.(5) Although this business model has worked well in the affluent United States, where many families earn enough income to purchase a home computer, trying to provide a computer for the majority of families in a developing country would almost certainly be a non-sustainable effort.

Instead, the DFI should look to an existing model that has already been proven to work for another kind of expensive technology: the telephone. A residential telephone line is a luxury item in West Africa, and as a result, the so-called “communication center” has flourished even in the smallest of towns. These centers are nothing more than small shops that include at least one telephone (usually a fax machine, as well) and offer pay-per-minute telephone service to many who could not otherwise afford it. More than just payphones, these centers are private businesses that generate profit for their owners while sharing among the whole community the high cost of telecommunication.

With so many of these businesses already in place, the DFI could “leverage existing infrastructure” by promoting the use of computers at communication centers. Indeed, some centers located in the cities have already installed a computer or two, but the smaller centers, especially those in more rural areas, are still struggling to upgrade their services with computer technology. DFI could play a role here by providing computer training, installation support, and perhaps some type of financing to help local entrepreneurs overcome the steep cost of computer hardware. It could also promote open-source software (6), such as Linux (7) and OpenOffice (8), as a cheaper alternative to commercial software packages costing hundreds of dollars each (9).

The demand for these shared computers should grow as more people in the region become computer literate and discover the value of information technology. For example, a Peace Corps volunteer working in central Ghana discovered that funerals, a cornerstone of West African life, can be an unlikely source of income for entrepreneurs armed with a computer and a printer. She helped start a small but profitable business in her community that produced full-color funeral invitations for the recently bereaved. Similar business opportunities (but hopefully not quite so morbid) should appear in West Africa’s computer industry over time and help accelerate the growth of its economy.

## Internet for the masses

Computers, printers, and a few solid business plans will surely help this economy, but they will not be enough to make it competitive in the global marketplace. If West Africa is to reach that kind of goal, it will also require better access to the Internet. Luckily, the Internet seems to be exploding all over the region. Senegal, for instance, became the proud new recipient last year of a fiber-optic Internet backbone. This undersea cable, which joins Senegal to fifteen other countries in Africa, Europe, and Asia, provides enough high-speed Internet service for the entire population (10).

The DFI has appeared at the perfect time for Senegal to take advantage of this new Internet backbone. DFI volunteers could apply their networking skills in helping local Internet service providers extend the backbone throughout the interior of Senegal. Laying fiber-optic lines to every town and city would be too expensive, of course, so a hybrid approach would be the best alternative. For example, the government could provide the funding for high-capacity data lines running only between the largest cities, and private businesses could then step in to provide cheaper, slower connections linking sites within

those cities to central access points.

A possible medium for these intra-city links is Wireless Fidelity, or Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi is an umbrella term that refers to any type of wireless networking equipment operating in the 2.4 GHz or 5 GHz radio frequencies.(11) Because these frequencies don't require licenses, the equipment is very inexpensive, and as a result, the popularity of Wi-Fi has risen while prices continue to drop. Today, wireless Internet access can be delivered to remote sites up to twenty miles away for about \$200, making Wi-Fi an excellent match for West Africa. (12) Senegal could, with help from the DFI, build inexpensive Wi-Fi networks that mesh together dozens of communication centers throughout a city. Sharing a single high-capacity access point in this manner would boost Internet connections to broadband speeds while avoiding the high cost of dial-up.

## No technology without deregulation

A convenient side-effect of fast, always-on Internet access is the possibility of VoIP, or "Voice over the Internet Protocol". Simply put, it allows telephone conversations to take place over the Internet rather than over traditional copper lines. Although the sound quality of VoIP is worse than standard telephone service, it costs far less. Net2Phone (13), for instance, provides Internet software that allows computer users in Senegal to call anyone in the United States for just ten cents per minute. If both parties have a computer, then calls can be made completely free using software such as PC-Telephone (14). VoIP service is already popular in some Internet cafés in West Africa.

The shift from standard phone service to VoIP has hit a few regulatory speed bumps. Many West African countries, in an attempt to protect their government-owned telephone monopolies, have imposed strict controls over any company offering voice

communication, in effect making VoIP illegal. In Ghana, an Internet service provider was jailed for providing VoIP service (15).

These draconian policies have made the second goal of DFI, to "promote pro-growth regulatory structures", my favorite. It is a reminder that technology alone cannot solve the problems faced by developing countries. For the DFI to work, it will also need to begin tearing down long-standing ivory towers in the governments of those countries: high import tariffs, large bureaucracies, and a resistance to privatization of public industries. Such hurdles can prevent technology from entering West Africa and allowing it to thrive. Imported computer equipment, for example, even when donated to a non-profit organization, can be held up in customs for months while waiting for the proper documents to work their way through the system. (16) By helping to eliminate obstacles like these, the DFI will make its work, as well as all future initiatives, easier and more effective.

## Not the final answer

The Digital Freedom Initiative is a noble step in the right direction. It should help bring about an evolutionary change in the way developing countries use computer technology, but it still lacks a few vital components.

Most notably, it offers no plans for education. Computer literacy among the public is absolutely necessary if the initiative is to remain sustainable and have an effect over the long term. Until the level of computer literacy in a developing country reaches critical mass, any large-scale benefits promised by DFI may not appear. This does not mean that the initiative needs to produce computer scientists and electrical engineers, but it should at least strive to increase basic knowledge of computers, especially among younger people. (17) In this new generation is where the real technology revolution is taking place in West Africa, and it is where the DFI should focus its efforts.

For example, a development agency called ActionAid, known for its strong presence in West Africa, sponsors after-school clubs to promote AIDS education and prevention. The idea is to help students grow more comfortable with complicated subjects, expose them to basic facts, and simply make learning a little more fun. In the same manner, the DFI could sponsor high school computer clubs, set up computer labs on campus, and train faculty in computer literacy so that local teachers can run the labs, thus making the project sustainable. (18) Unfortunately, the DFI appears to have neglected the importance of general computer literacy in the communities where it will operate.

Another strangely absent component of the DFI is funding for computer hardware. The initiative's goal is to bring computer skills to developing countries, but such skills may have little value with so few computers available to those countries (see Figure 3). While the initiative should be applauded for not donating computers blindly and without regard to providing skills (19), it seems to have gone to the opposite extreme by providing training alone and overlooking the difficulty of purchasing a computer in a developing country.

# Technologies of Peace

May 2, 2007

Slavery was once called “the peculiar institution”, but a better candidate for this title may be the Peace Corps. Current geopolitics make this a good time to probe the Corps’ peculiarity, as prelude to a long overdue reconceptualization of what is arguably the most underused federal entity. An imaginatively reinvented Peace Corps could powerfully promote US interests in a period when perceptions of American motives are increasingly relevant to global realignment. It could also capitalize on an unprecedented opportunity to avail US soft power of a resource historically associated with initiatives of war rather than peace: high technology.

This article draws on three significant bodies of government experience: those of former US President Jimmy Carter; of a former Vice Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral (Ret.) William A. Owens; and of Ambassador JR Bullington, Director of the US Peace Corps in Niger since 2000. All three generously discussed their thoughts on the role and future of the Peace Corps with me and thanks are due to all three for their cooperation.

## “The Peace Corps is in the forefront of opportunity.”

In a personal interview filmed at the Carter Center in Atlanta in September I asked the former president how much could be reasonably expected from the Peace Corps by way of altering the world’s perception of the US, especially in Islamic areas. He told me America’s image “certainly can be affected in areas of the world that now look upon the US

unfavorably.” Just two days before our interview, Carter said, he had returned from visits to Mali, Nigeria and Ethiopia (90%, 50% and 45%-50% Muslim respectively), and there were some regions of those countries “where the US had a very unfavorable image”. The Peace Corps had volunteers in all three countries, he said, “and I think they could be a good avenue towards putting forward the best possible image of America”. This image would associate the US with justice, peace, humility, service and compassion. “To me those are the characteristics that historically have made our nation a great one. But in recent years we have seen that that list of characteristics, at least among some people, has become very doubtful. I think that the Peace Corps can correct that misconception of the basic motivations of most citizens of my country.”

Carter noted that he may be the only person in the world whose mother and grandson had both served in the Corps: “The Peace Corps means an awful lot to me personally.” He is in favor of expanding the Corps because he and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter “go to some countries that are desperately in need, and the leaders of those countries appeal to me as a former president.” He would like to see “a greater allocation of funds for the Peace Corps” because in national security terms — “that is, reducing the animosity of poverty-stricken people around the world toward America” — the Corps is “in the forefront of that opportunity”.

Carter’s perspective on the Corps is arguably unique because of the extent to which the agency’s work complements that of the Atlanta-based Carter Center, a non-profit founded in 1982 by the former president and his wife.

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Source: <http://hir.harvard.edu/the-technologies-of-peace/>

In partnership with Emory University the center promotes human rights and projects that combat poverty, disease and “unnecessary human suffering” around the world. One of the ways he would like to see the Corps expanded is via increased cooperation with the center. “We really would like to have fifty Peace Corps volunteers here to help us with programs. The Carter Center has active programs in sixty-five nations on earth. Thirty-five of them are in Africa. They are the poorest, most forgotten, destitute people in the world. And we work side by side with Peace Corps volunteers. Sometimes they are our direct representative in some of the most remote areas ... and we depend on them to represent the Carter Center.”

Carter sees several ways to beef up the Corps, starting with a greater effort to recruit senior citizens. “I have, maybe, a biased point of view because my mother didn’t go into the Peace Corps until she was about 70 years old and it transformed her life. And there are many people who have retired from very successful careers who I think could be specifically recruited to the Peace Corps.” He’d also like to see the Corps given greater freedom to aid countries whose leaders don’t happen to be popular with the White House. It “troubles” him, he explains, that “sometimes there are nations whose leaders might be alienated from the White House or from Washington who are deprived of the services of the Peace Corps.” Carter would like to see a policy of greater inclusiveness whereby the Corps does not have to “judge a country by whether we like their leaders, who quite often are subject to change”, but “only on how much their people need Peace Corps services.”

On the subject of the position that the Peace Corps occupies in America’s top-of-the-mind awareness, I asked Carter whether it would be helpful to appoint a high-profile director. “Well, I think so,” he replied, qualifying this by pointing to the example of UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund),

which has a long record of appointing movie stars and other celebrities as public spokespeople and ambassadors. “The Director may be a tough, hard-nosed, very competent, proven manager of large and complex organizations and big budgets,” Carter commented, “and quite often the recipient countries have no idea who the Director is, but, but we could adopt the policy of UNICEF to have a representative, for public relations, for raising funds, for raising awareness, someone who’s well-known, maybe a famous sports figure or famous actor or actress or famous musician. I think that’s something that could be done.” He added: “If that request was made to someone who is famous I think they would respond favorably.”

I asked Carter if he believed the Peace Corps could be improved by being made more technologically sophisticated. His reply: “I think the utilization of modern technology, particularly in the communication field, is something that ought to be introduced into the Peace Corps very aggressively. My grandson, who returned recently from the Peace Corps after two and a half years, took with him his computer and he had to ride about 20 miles before he could find a place that had electric power and a telephone circuit into which he could connect.” With modern generators, solar cells, small, very efficient computers and satellite networks, Carter said, “I don’t see why, within the bounds of reason, every single Peace Corps person ... shouldn’t have instantaneous communication with the outside world. I think that would enhance not only their own spirit and self-respect and security, but it would also let them have a more effective way to deal with the people around them, if the Peace Corps volunteer, instead of being isolated for three or four weeks or months at a time, had a daily awareness of world events, and what could be happening that reflected the particular nation in which they serve, or the US.” He added: “I think that technology is available and with a minimum contribution to each Peace Corps volunteer

those standardized mechanisms could be utilized.”

Carter’s comments, especially the idea of transforming the Peace Corps through technology, converge interestingly with Owens’ interpretation of the Revolution in Military Affairs: the former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs advises intensive conversion of the military into an information technology apparatus integrated into the world’s most advanced telecommunications society, which he has urged the US rapidly to become. Without these changes, Owens has argued, the US cannot sustain competitive edge in national security, intelligence or economic performance in the next twenty years. He supports the re-envisioning of the Peace Corps in five linked areas: (1) reinventing America’s international profile via a new use of soft power; (2) moving from a war-defined, non-technological, reactive theory of peace to a proactive theory of peace as a normal component of technologically advanced democracy; (3) reappraising the Corps as a national strategic asset whose value remains largely untapped; (4) the Corps as a model for the technological reinvention of government agencies for the 21st century; and (5) redefining civil society as information technology society.

## Reinventing the US’s international profile

In re-evaluating the role of the Peace Corps along the lines explored in my discussion with President Carter, two facts must be confronted: (a) America’s global image is in crisis; and (b) receding US prestige involves cultural as much as military factors. A 2004 report of the Pew Global Attitudes Project (chair: former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright) found anti-Americanism “deeper and broader” than in any modern period, with negative perceptions widespread in European and Muslim nations. Publics in surveyed countries expressed considerable skepticism

of US motives. Majorities in France, Germany, Pakistan, Jordan, Morocco and Turkey believed the war on terror reflected US desires to control Mideast oil and the world.

Two recent books bring these attitudes into focus. In *Beyond the Age of Innocence: Rebuilding Trust Between America and the World*, Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's former ambassador to the United Nations, sees ebbing US prestige as not merely due to Bush Administration policies but as a "tectonic shift" in world opinion. Even when US commerce and culture are embraced, Mahbubani notes, their perceived one-sidedness causes suspicion and resentment. America's soft power is seen as extended hard power, an "increasingly frayed velvet glove that covers a mailed fist." The US needs to invite participation in its culture instead of heavy-handedly imposing it.

In *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Soft Power and American Empire*, Canadian journalist Matthew Fraser describes how movies, television, pop music and the fast food industry make US culture ubiquitous. But while these industries are economically potent, they fail to transmit the most culturally valuable contents of US society. More overtly, they reveal America's talent for shooting itself in the foot vis a vis global public relations. Hollywood blockbusters and fast food franchising machineries are genuine accomplishments, but it is unrealistic to expect them to represent high philosophical values. Foreigners seeking national values in these artifacts can be forgiven for perceiving the US as materialistic and shallow. With astonishing irony, the society preeminent in modern advertising has abysmally failed to market its greatest cultural goods.

The US's core national values differ markedly from those which its detractors identify with it. Its positive values include reverence for human rights, liberty, opportunity conferred without prejudice, moral responsibility, the free play and optimal development

of intelligence, individual dignity, the desire to learn from all traditions and incorporate their wisdom into the complex multicultural fabric that is America. The values, in short, of the Peace Corps since its inception in 1961. Yet in Niger, which is unlikely to be unique in this regard, many Europeans see the Corps as an intelligence organization. French and German volunteers do not associate with Peace Corps volunteers, even in the same small, remote town, according to the Peace Corps Country Director for Niger, Jim Bullington. At a 2004 reception the anti-Americanism of DED (a German volunteer organization) personnel was palpable, says Bullington, who has served as a former US ambassador, a career US State Department diplomat for 27 years, Director of the Center for Global Business at Old Dominion University and Senior Fellow at the US Armed Forces Staff College. "In decades of diplomatic work with Europeans in Asia and Africa, I had never felt such hostility," he recalls. Clearly, US soft power, though immense, projects an inadequate message; this message handicaps even the Peace Corps, arguably the purest institutional expression of American idealism. To project its values more effectively may be impossible without re-conceptualizing and strengthening the Corps.

## Peace as war-defined and non-technological... or as a normal component of technologically advanced democracy?

According to novelist-essayist Gore Vidal, he suggested the idea of the Peace Corps to John F. Kennedy during the latter's presidential candidacy. Whether or not any such communication triggered the Corps' origin, Vidal's account usefully indicates two sensibilities on which the agency was founded. This history, and the paradigms that underlie it, must be taken into account in any attempt

to appraise or re-imagine the Corps. Kennedy embodied American imperial presence, Caesar as global benefactor. Vidal represented an ambivalent intelligentsia captivated by the political establishment's mystique, yet suspicious of it, and deeply respectful of the idea that writers should serve a counterculture. The Peace Corps thus reflected a 1960s climate of conflict: geopolitically, the Cold War, and culturally, the anguished national divisions ranging from civil rights and race to Vietnam and sexual customs, awkwardly intruding social idealism into a government enmeshed in Vietnam. Congressman James A. Leach (R-Iowa) has observed: "President Nixon was clearly embarrassed by inheritance of this Kennedy/Shriver treasure and frankly apprehensive that America's best youth would come home committed to a non-realpolitik internationalism that might not suit his party's banner. But he didn't have the political capital to bury the institution, so he chose to hide it, by reducing its size and institutionally downgrading its status and putting it under a newly created umbrella agency called ACTION." (It was President Carter who declared the Corps a fully autonomous agency in a 1979 executive order.)

This conflictual origin underlying the Peace Corps' peculiarity within government is not unique. It continues a tradition of pacifist enterprises defined by war. For centuries peace initiatives expressed deliberative aftermaths of war, climates of fear or moral concern preceding possible war, or dissent during war. Peace has been seen as the absence of violence or as the mitigation of legitimate or illegitimate force. So pervasive is this paradigm that we call police officers, who labor amid actual and / or potential violence, peace officers. Peace initiatives are encumbered with the political baggage and vocabulary of violence. This often conspicuously impedes stated objectives, as with the League of Nations. A feature of this custom of talking peace in the language of war has been the conceptualization

of peace pursuits as non-technological. Military pursuits, it is assumed, demand budgets for sophisticated technologies; peace pursuits, if supported by well-equipped militaries, require only the non-technological arts of power brokers –the world of Machiavelli's 16-century treatise *The Prince*.

"Many of the diplomatic techniques on which we rely are archaic," Kennedy's US Ambassador to India J.K. Galbraith wrote in his 1969 essay "The American Ambassador". After 35 years this remains so, engendering budgets that favor soldiers over diplomats. The identification of peace pursuits with ancient, non-technological skills is reinforced by anti-technological philosophies associating advanced technology with war and such undesirable effects as environmental despoliation. This bias underpins the concept of the military-industrial complex and the undervaluation of links between peaceful socio-economic structures and technological development (see economic historian John U. Nef's 1950 study "War and Human Progress").

In a high-technology world, then, the Peace Corps operates anomalously in a climate in which peace is seen in terms of war and of a history of ideas associating advanced technology with war. However, far from advanced technology being a military preserve, Admiral Owens, the former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, believes the US military is dangerously underserved in advanced technologies (which for practical purposes means information technologies). And not only the military but government generally. This view is given added credence by the fact that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has arisen expressly because of intelligence-processing agency failures, due partly to internal politics but significantly to inadequate technology. Clearly, high technology is not just the business of war. It is very much the business of peace: of building information-processing structures for a peaceful, secure, efficient, competitive America

able to maintain global leadership, effectively export a peace that is not only an absence of war but a positive global model of economic growth, and share information infrastructure and knowledge with other nations. In this context a re-budgeted Peace Corps with state-of-the-art technologies is a peace-exporting instrument of incalculably great advantage to US interests.

## A national strategic asset whose value remains largely untapped

In discussion for this article Owens told me: "Technology means the end of the era of the lonely Peace Corps worker cut off from his support base. A Peace Corps volunteer can now be set down in a desert or on a remote plain without any modern amenity, and have with him or her a compact computer or array of computers, powered by solar cells, making available to local residents a library of hundreds of volumes under Corps supervision. Via satellite, Corps officers and their beneficiaries can connect virtually

constantly with Washington and a Corps telecommunity worldwide." Unknowingly echoing President Carter's words, he added: "The technology is available now." For Peace Corps personnel used to missions in areas without electricity, let alone resources even distantly approaching those Owens describes, technological empowerment offers an extraordinarily exciting prospect, as is the Peace Corps expansion scenario that this implies. But does the political will exist to mobilize a Corps using the most sophisticated technology available to share America's skills, values and knowledge with other nations via electronic access to US libraries, teachers and knowledge pools, and staffing consistent with international peace promotion? This question exposes how we define the pursuit of peace.

If we see the pursuit of peace as primarily a function of military and

consular actions, it would not be inappropriate to see the Corps as at best a benign but essentially peripheral function whose federal purpose is analogous to that of a marginal public relations outpost of a large corporation. This role matches the Corps' current resources: a fiscus of \$319.5 million, 7700 volunteers. The hope is for 11 250 personnel by 2008 "at a rate consistent with funding levels and infrastructure support", Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez has stated. But President Bush's 2001 inaugural support of Peace Corps growth has not translated into appropriations. A telling example is a 2004 Peace Corps request for USAID funds for use in poverty-stricken Niger. This request was to assign Corps volunteers to help fledgling democratically elected local governments in Niger to engage their unaccustomed economic and social development responsibilities.

The new mayors and council members have no experience at all in local government. Many are illiterate. They very much want Peace Corps help, reports Director Bullington. Such a project offers the US an opportunity to implement a conspicuous, innovative expression of American idealism and commitment to promote democracy, accomplishments which have special geopolitical importance in an Islamic country (which Niger is). But the request was declined. The annual amount that could not be found for it: about \$200,000. It is thought-provoking to consider this alongside the 2005 profiles of the Department of Defense (2.3 million military personnel; almost 700,000 civilian personnel; discretionary budget authority of \$401.7 billion) and State Department (30 266 personnel; discretionary budget authority of \$10.3 billion).

In 1996, Peace Corps Director Loret Miller Ruppe reported: "This agency's budget has less in purchasing power than when Sargent (Shriver) left it in the '60s. In 1981 it was listed in the 150 Account under 'miscellaneous' ... Its budget was less than the military marching band." For an

agency exporting peace, signaling the US's highest values to the world, and disseminating US democracy, literacy, health practices and other desired national characteristics, these circumstances are egregious. Much consular, ambassadorial and attaché work is not proactive peace promotion in the same sense that Peace Corps work is. It is, indeed, unfair to expect conventional diplomats to provide the services that idealistically motivated Corps volunteers are uniquely positioned to supply. Budgets should reflect this fact, and the growing significance to US interests of the Corps' mission.

Director Ruppe said in 1996: "The Peace Corps is needed now more than ever. It is our nation's greatest peace-building machine." She asked: "Is peace simply the absence of war? Or is it the absence of the conditions that bring on war, the conditions of hunger, disease, poverty, illiteracy and despair?" It would be unrealistic to expect the Corps to solve such problems. But it is surely among the most effective tools available to export the values, motivations and knowledge without which they cannot be solved. The power of example and passionately impelled personal instruction by idealistic young civilians can scarcely be equaled as a global communication medium for the US. These are the assets the Corps offers America in its urgent quest for foreign remediation. They are potent for any policy that is seriously predicated on President Bush's second inaugural address. "There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom," the President said, adding: "The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." This exporting-freedom doctrine continued President Reagan's 1982 call, in Britain's House of Commons, for "a crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation". But as Iraq shows,

democratic culture is less exportable than consumer goods. Waging peace is unlike waging war. Pursuing peace through healthy societies is analogous to a hygiene policy focused primarily not on curing or preventing illness but on realizing wellness potential. Such a hygiene policy incidentally discourages illness. A similar foreign policy discourages violent conflict. But chiefly each aims to unlock energies of optimal development. President Bush's second inaugural address ostensibly recognizes this. Bullington concurs: "As an American credo, it is as significant as President Kennedy's 1961 call to 'bear any burden' and Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech". Indeed, careful study of the president's address shows that it articulates a new foreign policy paradigm. But paradigms must be applied to be translated into leadership that affects history. For this one to be felt, the Peace Corps must be expanded.

There are several routes by which such an expansion could be meaningfully initiated:

- A formal presidential policy statement recognizing the Corps as a key example and instrument of the second inaugural's message, and as an under-used engine of peace promotion that should be reinvigorated and expanded.
- The appointment of a new and imaginatively selected Corps director to implement this vision, drawn from the ranks of individuals with sufficient public stature to signify a fresh beginning (someone with the profile of former Secretary of State Colin Powell or Governor Jeb Bush, whose son served as a Corps volunteer).
- Budget support necessary for growth at the rate of at least 1000 Volunteers per year over the next decade (this is probably the most the organization could currently digest without system overload).
- Diversion of USAID funds to the

Corps, in the amount of, at the very least, \$100 000 to \$500 000 per year for each post (depending on volunteer numbers), to be used as a flexible and easily accessible source of funding for smaller Corps projects (something similar existed in the past but was terminated).

- Creative experiments with new approaches to Corps service, such as a one-year term designed to re-enlist Corps veterans from the 1960s and 1970s who are now facing retirement and have added a lifetime of experience to their youthful idealism.

To these modifications of existing Corps structures a new technological dimension should be added, not only to empower the agency in a fitting way for its 21st-century mission but to enable it to serve as a prototype for other federal agencies in need of similar technological transformation. Indeed, this may be among the most fertile benefits of an aggressive technological transformation of the Corps.

## The Peace Corps as a model for reinventing government agencies for the 21st century.

Critics may paint the Corps as a federal tributary too remote from mainstream national priorities to warrant greater funding. This characterization is strongly counterable. The Corps is at least as crucial as many other agencies. Geopolitical relations cannot progress effectively until other nations better appreciate US purposes, a desideratum the Corps can uniquely promote. Additionally, strong domestic reasons support the Corps' development as a prototypical 21st-century government structure indicated by efficiency, global competitiveness and technological opportunity: the federal telecommunity. This benefit will surprise those who see the Corps as isolated from mundane federal machineries, as

well as federal managers who remain aloof from the fact that unless agency telecommunications sophistication is revolutionized, the US risks major strategic vulnerabilities. These include information management failures of the kind that prompted the crisis establishment of DHS; government inability to mesh productively with private entities to develop national infrastructures competitive with other advanced nations; archaic federal human resource deployment; exposure to terrorist disruption.

Federal obliviousness to telework opportunities is serious. Under 3% of eligible DHS staff telework, reports Chuck Wilsker, president of the Telework Coalition, a Washington, DC-based research group. Figures published in February showed that almost two thirds of federal employees are not allowed to telecommute, despite Congressional penalties for agencies not allowing telework options. A CDW Government Inc. survey found 87% of employees would telecommute if permitted to. Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA), has told the House's oversight hearing on federal telework: "The war on terror makes the ability to work at off-site locations more than an attractive option for employees and employers; it's now an imperative." In 1996 House Democratic Whip Rep. Steny Hoyer (MD) briefed then Vice President Gore on the research of technology trend analyst Jay John Hellman, who forecasts an era of technologically induced "virtual adjacency" government. Hoyer recommended Hellman's "economically and environmentally efficient ways to reinvent government".

Hellman believes traditional government structures are obsolete and that national interest requires switching to federal telecommunities: teams of dispersed workers linked around the clock by secure, state-of-the-art fiber optic telecommunications, including videoconferencing and information

managed for maximum immunity to disruption. DHS is currently considering Hellman's ideas for its National Capital Region headquarters. This confluence of strategic, commercial infrastructure and technological transitions recalls President Eisenhower's 1956 initiation of the US interstate highway network (the "National Defense Highway System") to facilitate commercial traffic, nuclear-attack evacuations and rapid military transport. William M. Mularie, a former national defense intelligence administrator now heading the Virginia-based Telework Consortium, a government-funded research entity, comments: "In tele-technology the US is a third-world country, around 13th or lower globally. New technology must be integrated into all government agencies. All processes of government must change to use that technology properly. Not just military and intelligence processes."

Owens, Hellman and Mularie agree that the Peace Corps' strategic significance, soft-power global dispersal and high potential for public visibility offer an excellent federal telecommunity model. Hellman adds: "It's hard to think of a better choice to demonstrate how a federal team distributed over the widest possible geographical area can use the most advanced telecommunications technology as a benign social tool — sharing American strengths and knowledge with other peoples, building peace, showing the world America's best face. The face of efficiency. Of technology and government at their most humane. Of freedom."

## Redefining civil society as information technology society.

It is a truism that ideas are the hinges of history. The idea that will necessarily underlie any concerted technological empowerment of the Peace Corps is the idea that advanced technology is

integral to effective civil society. While this broader philosophical thesis exceeds the scope of this article, its salient point is that transforming the Corps entails not simply a fiscal decision but a revised technology policy. I noted above the historical confusion of advanced technology with militarism. In Marxism technology came to be seen as a tool of economic exploitation, demonized by philosophers like Herbert Marcuse as a dehumanizing force caricatured by Orwellian dystopias. These stereotypes contrast starkly with diversity-promoting, democratically empowering information technologies. Marx's inspiration, the German idealist philosopher Hegel, was ignorant of the developmental stimuli required by science and technology. The social Darwinism that shaped 19th-century US society believed science unfolded spontaneously within the mythic historical processes imagined by Hegel. This supposition carried through into John Dewey's pragmatism, influencing historian Thomas Kuhn's "normal science" concept of scientific establishments passively explicating paradigms. Francis Fukuyama's 1992 study *The End of History and the Last Man* made this Hegelianism explicit in a doctrine of linear political progress assuming inevitable scientific advance under adroit political administrators rather than proactive technological innovators. Fukuyama's subordination of technological innovation to political administration continued in *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (2002), espousing technology regulation. *Military Organization in the Information Age: Lessons from the World of Business* (1999, Fukuyama and Abram Shulsky) elevated political-administrative over technological processes (with the Wehrmacht as a case study), emphasizing information control rather than dissemination. This outlook pervades current federal failure proactively to nurture either governmental or private telecommunications development.



# The Great ICT4D Peace Corps Volunteer debate

August 10, 2011

*By Lindsay Poirier*

**M**ost people that I have met in the international development field have had strong opinions for or against involvement in the ICT field of the Peace Corps. I've toyed back and forth over whether to pursue this path after graduation for personal reasons. Most notably, I have questioned whether I'm willing to miss out on two and a half years of life with friends and family to live in a third world country where I know no one.

As I've taken on new, independent challenges, this has become less of the issue. Instead, through discussion with my network of new ICT4D friends, I have found that there are some career and sustainability factors that I should be taking into consideration.

Let's start out with the benefits of volunteering

with the Peace Corps:

1. To be successful in a career in international development, you have to have international experience. Sustainability is greatly jeopardized when individuals with no experience living in a particular culture attempt to create solutions for their problems. Cultural understanding is absolutely vital for designing sustainable solutions. The Peace Corps provides volunteers experience in developing solutions for a unique living style, emphasizing the importance of ethnography in design.
2. The Peace Corps offers training for tackling development issues. Whichever field Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) decide to pursue, they are given three months

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Source: <http://www.ictworks.org/2011/08/10/great-peace-corps-debate/>

of training on the culture of the area they will be entering and on how to successfully implement projects in their field. This is essentially free education.

3. Your extended period of time living in one community allows you to create a real attachment with the people of that community and allows for a complete cultural immersion.
4. The Peace Corps offers the best benefit package of any volunteer corps. With a monthly living stipend, non-competitive government job placement, and partial student loan coverage upon completion of a Peace Corps tour, it is easy to see why most individuals interested in global development choose this route over others. It is difficult to even get loan deferrals for volunteer abroad trips, let alone loan repayment. While I'm sure these are not the main reasons any individual decides to devote a minimum of two and a half years of his/her time to life in a third world country, they are benefits that are weighed when choosing the best route.
5. The Peace Corps is a great opportunity for students right out of college to get a good amount of travel and life experience before settling into a stable career.

Taking all of this into consideration, the Peace Corps seems like a perfect way to get involved in international development. However, there are some vital points to take into consideration if the prospective volunteer's main goal is creating sustainable results. The mission of a PCV is divided into three main goals (taken directly from <https://www.peacecorps.gov/about/#mission>):

1. Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.
3. Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Note how only one of these goals deals with development. While cultural understanding both internationally and domestically is greatly beneficial and necessary for maintaining peace and sharing ways of life, individuals who have the main goal of seeing results in economic development are likely are not looking to devote 2/3 of their efforts to spreading culture. This may be the goal for some, and that is great. I, personally, want to see results and efficiency.

Even more importantly, sending one individual with no experience with a particular region and culture and only

three months of training is unquestionably not the most efficient way to tackle development issues. It's great that individuals are willing to donate their time to the noble cause of training men and women for economic growth, but without a strong foundation of knowledge on a particular region, a great deal of time is wasted on projects that do not sustain.

This is particularly true in the ICT field where projects need to take into consideration all sorts of community aspects, from cultural dilemmas, such as language barriers, to physical barriers, such as broadband or electrical issues. A better approach would be to send interested volunteers to areas where grassroots organizations and NGOs have already established projects and have people in the field that know a great deal about the culture of the region. This way volunteers and field workers can bounce ideas off each other to create the best solution.

Please note that I have great respect for all PCVs and the work that they have devoted to development. I am simply questioning whether this is the best model for my goals and vision.

I am an undergraduate student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute studying Information Technology and Science, Technology, and Society. The focus of my studies is on International Development. I have a particular interest in incorporating ICTs in primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa.



LYLA FUJIWARA AT HER COMPUTER.

# How I Used My Computer-Science Degree in the Peace Corps While Serving in Rural Africa

April 25, 2014

*By Lyla Fujiwara*

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Rwanda

**L**yla Fujiwara, 25, completed two years of Peace Corps service in Rwanda in December 2013. As an information-and communication-technology educator, she worked with local community members at the Gashora Girls Academy of Science and Technology in Gashora and with entrepreneurs in Kigali, Rwanda, to improve their computer skills. She also led a camp for young women called Camp TechKobwa.

Fujiwara is part of the 22 percent of Peace Corps volunteers who report that they are members of a racial or ethnic minority. The Peace Corps recently announced plans to intensify efforts to recruit in underrepresented communities so that the agency's volunteer force reflects the diversity that increasingly defines the American people. Fujiwara shared her experience with The Next America.

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**Source:** <http://www.nationaljournal.com/next-america/newsdesk/how-i-used-my-computer-science-degree-peace-corps-while-serving-rural-africa>

In May 2010 I graduated from an Ivy League school with a bachelor's degree in computer science. All around me, classmates were securing entry-level jobs at the Googles and Microsoft of the world.

Compelled by the masses, one day during my senior year I found myself at an interview across from a very nice man who worked on printer-interfacing software. I sat there smiling and asking questions while a small voice in the back of my head screamed: "What am I doing here?"

I wasn't familiar with all the technical jargon my interviewer used, but more damning was the fact that I didn't care. I didn't get the job.

Nontraditional paths after university weren't readily discussed in the computer-science department. So I felt like a complete heretic when I began to consider the Peace Corps. As I went through the application process, I fretted about what this unconventional decision meant with respect to having a "normal" technology career. I wondered if what I had learned at Brown would become outdated after two years. Everyone was excited about hiring new computer-science graduates, but was there an expiration date on this enthusiasm? And in communities struggling to meet their basic needs, would my technical skills even be useful?

Still, something felt instinctively right about my decision to apply to the Peace Corps. After being in school for most of my life, I wanted a job with purpose and variety where I could see my skills impacting lives. In September 2011, I left home to serve in Rwanda as an education volunteer.

My initial fears about whether my skill set would be relevant in Rwanda were quickly assuaged. In short order, I was running two computer labs for my 270-student high school, administering the campus's technical equipment, and writing and teaching a computer literacy curriculum for the

freshman class. I was also teaching the 20 girls who were focusing their studies on computer science and C++ programming.

It turns out the need for information-technology training in schools and other places where computers are used is huge.

When most people are asked about the major challenges surrounding technology in developing countries, their first thought is a lack of equipment. This is definitely a problem, but what's more frustrating is the lack of IT know-how to effectively use the equipment that's available. The primary school five minutes away from the high school where I worked had literally hundreds of donated laptops sitting in boxes because the IT teacher only had one week of training on how to use them. This was just the sort of unfortunate story I heard repeated by many of my fellow volunteers. The upside, though, is that one person with IT skills — like myself — can make a huge difference and put hundreds of dollars of existing equipment to good use.

Combining technology with education can have an even greater impact. Learning with technology fosters a culture of problem-solving and experimentation, which are skills that education systems around the world struggle to reinforce. Many students in my class subscribed to the philosophy that all problems had a single answer, and that the teacher was responsible for telling them this answer so they could memorize it for the test. I had little love for this methodology, so I focused on pushing my students to solve the problems themselves. For the first few assignments, I simply asked them to find errors in programs or fill in blanks. The computer would correct them when they were wrong and they could try again. By the end of the course, the students were independently programming a text-based version of tic-tac-toe.

I was not the only one using technology

to reinforce critical thinking; local entrepreneurs have started holding high school technology competitions, and there are two burgeoning technology hubs in Kigali that organize events, lectures, and classes. Rwanda also recently hosted Transform Africa, a technology summit that included a youth component.

Furthermore, Peace Corps volunteers are especially well positioned to bridge an important gap: the divide between where most of the IT is happening (in cities) and where most of the population lives (in rural communities). This challenge of reaching the rural population was the idea behind my largest Peace Corps project, TechKobwa. TechKobwa is a girl's computer camp where students from disadvantaged backgrounds are exposed to and, hopefully, inspired by technology. Participants programmed games, created their own blogs, and attended panel discussions. Most classes were taught by local IT professionals.

Organizing the TechKobwa project was one of the defining parts of my Peace Corps experience and was made possible by the sheer excitement both Rwandans and the Peace Corps community had for technology projects.

The week before I returned to the United States, I contemplated how the Peace Corps affected me, and if it was worth it. I had been away from home for 30 months. From the start, Peace Corps trainers tout the invaluable soft skills learned during service, including adaptability, independence, cross-cultural communication, and a drastic lowering of standards as to what qualifies as a toilet.

They were right. As promised, I had to pull from all of these skills during my time in Rwanda. Thinking about my friends and coworkers, I realized that I also have a burgeoning networking of worldwide contacts that will come in handy if I decide to work in technology and development.



PEACE CORPS LOGO ON  
INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION.

# 5 ways Peace Corps service is like ‘Star Trek’

April 17, 2015

*By Elizabeth Riley*

**A**s any Peace Corps Volunteer knows, there can be a lot of downtime during your service. Meetings are late, people don’t show up to events they said they would, no one comes to school on a rainy day, time is just... slower.

My site mate Stacey and I have taken advantage of the downtime by watching “Star Trek.” Sure, there are some good, science-fiction-y plot devices, but the heart and soul of the various series are the themes of exploration, humanity (and what exactly that means) and a demonstration of the greatness of Patrick Stewart. (Just kidding. Sort of.)

Through my viewing of “Star Trek,” I’ve found five themes that relate to my Peace Corps service.

## 1. The Prime Directive

This is the overall governing policy of the United Federation of Planets. Basically, Starfleet officers are not supposed to get involved in the natural progression of a civilization or culture. Things get weird when we involve time travel so there is, of course, a Temporal Prime Directive: don’t interfere in the natural progression of a timeline.

Introducing warp or time travel technology to civilizations that aren’t there is a serious offense. Watching a culture get conquered by a vicious dictator isn’t easy. But imagine the implications if the Federation got involved in every single dispute or introduced advanced technology to the human equivalent of cave men. If a group or civilization asks for help, on the other hand, it is typically given.

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/5-ways-peace-corps-service-is-like-star-trek/>

Of course, Peace Corps is kind of the opposite of the Prime Directive. We are *supposed* to get involved in the local culture. We're supposed to integrate and make friends and, ultimately, "change behaviors."

That's what I like about the Peace Corps: We live in a community, involve community members, identify needs and use a community's *strengths* to solve a problem.

## 2. Cultivating family

"Star Trek" takes place in the 24th century. At this point we've developed warp technology and are exploring different planets, sectors and galaxies. Different species and civilizations can join the Federation and become Starfleet officers, leading to a rich diversity of officers and citizens. Naturally, some of these species have historical conflicts and not everyone gets along.

The definition of family comes up frequently in each iteration of the series, both the family we choose and the family we don't.

My happiness during my Peace Corps service is so inextricably linked with the family I have cultivated here. Like "Deep Space Nine," we are a rag-tag bunch of Volunteers from all over the place, having a huge variety of experiences and backgrounds. But now we share this one thing — Peace Corps service in Jamaica — and it feels like we'll be in this secret little club that no one else *really* understands. The

family that we choose and the one that we cultivate are often different, but both are essential to our (well, at least my) happiness.

## 3. The Federation is bureaucratic

The United Federation of Planets is the huge governing organization that oversees all of the goings-on in the universe. If that sounds like a big job, it is.

Well, guess what? The Peace Corps is a government organization. There are going to be rules that sometimes, on the surface at least, don't make sense. There is going to be *paperwork*, endless pages of forms to fill out.

## 4. What does culture mean?

At its core, "Star Trek" is about the exchange of cultures. During the 24th century, Earth has one unified government and is a member of the United Federation of Planets. Individuals still maintain their respective cultural identities, but borders, hunger and poverty have been "solved," which is why the Federation explores new planets and invites new species to join in the fun (and what fun it is!).

Before coming to the Peace Corps, I had a very rudimentary understanding of what culture was. I thought it extended to language, food, greetings, music and architecture. Now I realize it is *so much* more than that.

It encompasses everything from the way people walk on the street to the etiquette they use in a business setting and how they clean their homes. Being cognizant of these differences and not getting frustrated when they impede our work is incredibly important to our mental health as PCVs.

## 5. Being an outsider

In each series, there is usually one or more "outsider" character: Spock, Worf, Data and Odo all serve this role in a variety of ways. They each have several episodes that focus on this status and how they wrestle with their identity. How can they really fit in with the Federation? Each of these outsider characters have to wrestle with their identities, relate to their fellow crewmembers and still do their jobs.

Obviously, being an outsider is a fundamental part of the Peace Corps experience. We are dispatched to foreign countries to perform a job. We are by definition outsiders. Never really fitting in is part of the job description. No matter how much we integrate, how many dead yards we attend or how much the kids love us, a little part of us will still be an outsider.

But going back home, it's hard to relate to the friends we left behind. We've just been through this huge experience that they can't begin to understand. It's hard to describe the Peace Corps experience, and even more difficult for family and friends back home to understand. This will define me from now on.

# News

Volunteers have been known to make headlines through their commitment to serve, by working on sustainable projects with their communities, and by bringing fresh ideas to long-standing challenges.

Stories of Volunteers using ICTs and digital technologies to make a difference in their communities capture the imagination and interest of the media as well, helping to bring recognition to the hard work of Volunteers and their counterparts, students, and communities, and to also inspire others to do the same.

## Join the Peace Corps, go online, send a fax

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Peace Corps volunteers often live in rural dwellings without a phone or TV, but a big majority — 72 percent — have access to computers.

That's more than have running water in their generally humble living quarters — 67 percent — and about the same percentage as those with electricity, according to a survey filled out by three-fourths of the 6,700 overseas volunteers.

The survey, sent out last year and compiled this

week, shows that in addition to widespread computer access, 60 percent of volunteers have easy access to a fax machine, 53 percent have e-mail and 38 percent use the Internet.

Despite that, two-thirds of volunteers still live in small towns or rural areas or on outer islands and only 34 percent have a telephone and 32 percent a television.

Volunteers who do not have their own computers often have access to Internet cafes, which are popping up in unexpected places across the Third World.

# Join the Peace Corps, Go Online

May 1, 1999

By David Briscoe

The Associated Press

**W**ASHINGTON — Peace Corps volunteers often live in rural dwellings without a phone or TV, but a big majority — 72 percent — now have easy access to a computer.

That is more than have running water in their generally humble living quarters — 67 percent — and about the same percentage as those with electricity, according to a survey filled out by three-fourths of the 6,700 overseas volunteers.

“The world is changing, and the Peace Corps is changing with it,” Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan said in an interview. But he acknowledged the results were surprising.

The survey, sent out last year and compiled this week, shows in addition to widespread computer access, 60 percent of volunteers have easy access to a fax machine, 53 percent have e-mail and 38 percent use the Internet.

Despite that, two-thirds of volunteers still live in small towns, villages or rural areas or on outer islands, and only 34 percent have a telephone and 32 percent a television. Volunteers receive a minimal living allowance and a readjustment allowance after they return from the normal two-year stint.

It isn't yet on the new volunteer's list of recommended gear, but Patrick Gamman from Tillamook, Ore., took a solar-powered laptop computer with him to a remote village in the Philippines.

“He rides a horse to work. He lives in a former chicken coop on stilts. He has no electricity and no running water. But he's writing on a computer,” said Gearan, who recently visited Gamman in his village.

“The potential for developing countries to literally leapfrog and gain all the benefits of information is enormous,” Gearan said.

Source: [http://cjonline.com/stories/050199/new\\*peacecorps.shtml#.whk3erykrt](http://cjonline.com/stories/050199/new*peacecorps.shtml#.whk3erykrt)

# Techies opt for simplicity / Former dot-comers joining Peace Corps

May 30, 2001

**T**he Bay Area's dot-com bust has been a boon for the Peace Corps, with a stampede of high-tech refugees ditching their start-ups to sign up.

As the organization celebrates its 40th anniversary, applications at the San Francisco office have jumped 55 percent this year, and Peace Corps recruiters find themselves making pitches in rooms packed with potential applicants.

The sudden surge comes after several lean years for the Peace Corps. With the Bay Area's economy humming along in top gear, the corps simply could not compete with the high-tech industry's fat salaries and spectacular stock options.

"It was awfully hard for people not to jump on that bandwagon," said Dennis McMahon, spokesman for the corps' San Francisco office.

Now that unemployment lines are teeming with former dot-comers and the Bay Area economy is sputtering, the "toughest job you'll ever love" is looking more attractive.

The San Francisco regional office, which serves Northern California, Hawaii and Nevada, saw 184 applications in March and April alone, McMahon said. That's up from 119 during the same period last year.

Nationwide, the Peace Corps has seen its largest number of volunteers – 7,300 stationed in

76 nations since October – in 26 years.

McMahon said a good many of those coming through the door are former dot-comers fleeing sinking ships or simply looking for a change.

"They're starting to wonder if they really want to spend the rest of their lives staring at a computer screen," said Jessica Hsu, a former dot-comer bound for a two-year stint in Haiti. "The Peace Corps allows them to dedicate themselves to something that helps people and something they can feel passionate about."

Hsu, 25, left the online advertising firm i-traffic.com in January. She and other dot-com drop-outs said the simplicity of life in the corps is an attractive alternative to the long hours and grueling workloads of the high-tech fast lane.

"When you work with a startup, you put in a lot of hours," said Nicole, a 30-year-old systems analyst who declined to give her last name because her boss doesn't know she's bailing out. "I worked really hard for a really long time. Not that Peace Corps isn't hard, but I want to do something different."

Nicole survived two rounds of layoffs at the Cupertino firm where she has spent the past nine months – but doesn't want to be there when the bottom falls out at the cash-starved company. She briefly considered looking for another job but decided it was time to slow

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Source: <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/techies-opt-for-simplicity-former-dot-comers-2915614.php>

down.

“I know I have the skills to get another job that would pay me a six-figure salary like I was getting,” she said. “But I want to focus on basics and not worry about what kind of car I drive and how much money I have in the bank. I’m disillusioned by all of that.”

Computer whizzes will find themselves right at home in the Peace Corps, which is becoming more and more high-tech and business-oriented.

As the world grows increasingly dependent upon computer technology and the instantaneous dissemination of information, underdeveloped nations are scrambling to keep pace. The growing global marketplace places further strains on the emerging economies of Latin America, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Peace Corps is only too happy to

help.

Thirteen percent of the corps’ service is now in the business sector, helping launch small businesses, farmer and artisan cooperatives and the like. And a growing segment of the organization is dedicated to information technology and computer literacy.

The corps sent its first team of information technology volunteers to Belize last June. And it joined forces with AOL Time Warner and Hewlett-Packard in October to provide volunteers with computers, modems, printers and digital cameras.

“The stereotypical image of the Peace Corps is going into rural, undeveloped countries,” McMahon said. “But as the world has changed, Peace Corps assignments have changed.”

Many dot-comers said the Peace Corps shares many similarities with

the high-tech world. Both encourage individualism while emphasizing teamwork. Both favor people who can “think outside the box.” And some say both appeal to an underlying altruism.

“Most people who work with computers are really pretty idealistic,” said Therese Lung, a 39-year-old computer engineer who left the high-tech world about a year ago and is considering the Peace Corps. “A lot of people I’ve worked with really yearn for that sense of doing something meaningful.”

Lung said she’s simply grown weary of computers after 17 years in the business and wants to use her skills to help others improve their lives.

“A lot of people have felt that urge but haven’t found it in their work,” she said. “You just work on your one piece of code in your little cubicle and you lose your sense of the world.”

# IT Volunteers Recharged by Peace Corps

September 1, 2001

*By Melissa Solomon*

**A**s vice president of operations at Neuberger Berman Inc., Mirella Shannon helped lead the New York-based financial services firm. Since leaving her post last year, she's been helping to rebuild a nation.

Shannon is one of 25 volunteers assigned to the Peace Corps' IT initiative in Belize launched in July last year. She's built computer labs, trained teachers and is now teaching in a new bachelor's degree program at the University of Belize.

"It's hard work, in that you have to be a creative problem-solver," Shannon says. "I had a large staff. I had secretaries. I had copiers. I had just about everything at my disposal. And here, I have my head and my two hands."

It was Shannon's daughter who started researching the Peace Corps last year, but it got Shannon thinking. "I was a '60s child," she says. "I wanted to do it then but couldn't."

As they say, better late than never.

For young volunteers, "I think this is a wonderful training ground," Shannon says. "You're going to do problem-solving you're never going to see [elsewhere]." For more experienced workers, she says, "it is a method to re-energize yourself, to get your hands into it again."

Bob and Jo Link also had dreams of joining the Peace Corps after college. But when Bob was drafted into the Vietnam War, those dreams faded. Like Shannon's, his dreams resurfaced through his daughter, Jenna, who now serves as a teacher in the Philippines.

At first, the Links thought it was a crazy idea. They had good jobs in Hawaii: Jo was a teacher, and Bob was a network/systems manager at Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope Corp.

"Then we said, 'Why not? Life is short. Let's go for one more adventure,'" recalls Bob Link, who teaches an introductory computer class to primary school teachers with his wife in Belize's capital city, Belmopan.

"Some of these people have never seen a computer before," he says. "In a small country like this, you can have a big impact. So it feels good."

The Links aren't sure what they'll do when their service ends next summer, but they say they'd like to continue to serve others. "It kind of opens your world up a little bit," Bob Link says.

When asked what she'll do after her service ends next August, Shannon pauses.

"I don't know," she says. "Isn't that a wonderful answer?"

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**Source:** <http://www.computerworld.com/article/2583573/it-skills-training/it-volunteers-recharged-by-peace-corps.html>

# A Technology Corps - Efforts to find Peace Corps-like roles for technologists gain momentum

November 1, 2001

It was 2:00 a.m. on October 14, 1960. Ten thousand students were waiting in front of the student union building at the University of Michigan. As the weary candidate climbed the steps, the audience began chanting his name.

Senator John F. Kennedy had just flown in from New York, straight from a television debate with Vice President Richard Nixon. He spoke to the students off the cuff, delivering a speech that in just a few sentences would launch the Peace Corps. “How many of you who are going to be doctors are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world?”

Nobody knows why Kennedy picked that moment, in the middle of the night on a college campus in the Midwest, to float the idea of the Peace Corps. But the effect was electric. The vision was that by learning to serve, a new generation would learn to lead. They would return from the field as stronger people, better not just from learning how to apply their talents, but from having learned much more about themselves and their place in the world. “There is not enough money in all America to relieve the misery of the underdeveloped world in a giant and endless soup kitchen,” Kennedy later declared. “But there is enough know-how and knowledgeable people to help those nations help themselves.”

In August of 1961, the first Peace Corps volunteers stepped onto the tarmac in Accra, Ghana. By the end of 1963, 7,300 volunteers were working in more than 40 countries; by 1966, the ranks had swelled to more than 15,000 in about 60 countries. And that, alas, was the peak. Under the pall of the war in Vietnam, the movement shrank.

The good news is that President Clinton “expanded” the Peace Corps to 10,000. The bad news is that pitifully few Peace Corps workers have the kind of training that enables them to transfer the best ideas from Western labs into developing countries. Most volunteers have backgrounds in business, education, health care or ecology. A thin slice of the pie, about four percent, falls into the category of “other.” And in that sliver you find technologists. It’s a hugely disappointing minority.

Why so few computer scientists and engineers join the Peace Corps is unclear. Perhaps it’s because most technologists are trained in environments that require a lot of infrastructure and support in order to push through to the next discovery. It’s hard to break new technological ground in a subsistence village. Another factor could be that there’s a very well-oiled path from the university into the high-tech job sector. Most people who start down that path stay on it.

There are, however, rays of hope. One fledgling approach that directly addresses the

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Source: <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/401245/a-technology-corps/>

“four percent problem” is Geekcorps ([www.geekcorps.org](http://www.geekcorps.org)). Launched by Ethan Zuckerman, who cofounded the successful Web service company Tripod, Geekcorps sends SWAT teams of technologists into the field to give the world’s poorest people access to the Internet. The Geekcorps folk work with local communities to build the infrastructure needed to bootstrap local businesses. In an interesting echo of the Peace Corps, this outfit too began in Ghana. In fact, that’s where the idea first came to Zuckerman: he went there on a Fulbright scholarship in 1993.

Geekcorps volunteers spend four months on the ground in developing nations, working to help partner businesses on a technical level. This corps of people and backers is largely drawn from the pool of successful U.S. technocrats. One volunteer, for example, came from the management and technology consulting firm Accenture, where she became an advocate for more corporate involvement in developing-world efforts. The firm now has several initiatives looking at how developing nations can embrace information technology to achieve economic growth. Getting a taste of the reality in Ghana, through one of its employees, translated into boundless energy and fresh leadership for Accenture—and that energy is what keeps these companies thriving.

Often, through these experiences, new opportunities arise for both volunteers and their partners in developing nations. Armenia Nercessian de Oliveira was a United Nations official for 16 years. Working in hardship countries, she saw many beautiful local handcrafts and was struck by what happened to them en route to the world market. In Africa, she saw handcrafted masks being sold for \$15; back in the States, Bloomingdale’s would sell the same mask for \$300. Enter Novica United, founded by Nercessian with her daughter and son-in-law. Novica applies an Amazon-like approach to the marketing and

distribution of local handcrafts from around the world. By connecting local offices in dozens of countries to the Internet, Novica has organized a vast online catalogue of goods created by thousands of regional artists. These items can then be sold directly to consumers at far below Bloomingdale’s prices, returning a much greater profit to the artists.

For the recipient, each little gift, each product Novica ships, is a key that opens a doorway to another part of the world—a tangible, evocative connection to a living artisan, a person with a name, face and life story. Novica profits because its networked approach eliminates legions of middlemen. At the same time, the company is promoting a new kind of savvy eco-consumerism. This is a “good karma” company par excellence.

Novica’s business, if it succeeds, could help conserve indigenous crafts and cultures. Like Geekcorps, it is pursuing a path that heightens public awareness, enriches communities, elevates tastes and deepens sensibilities. As technology evolves, it is important, and I would argue critical, to be able to hold in one hand an ingenious handmade toy from Ghana and in the other some sort of beeping, blinking, battery-powered, computer-infused techno-toy. Pondering the difference between the two will help us come to grips with what sorts of artifacts we want to surround ourselves with and why.

In my last column, I argued how vital it is for scientists and technologists to get into the field and immerse themselves in reality, up to their eyeballs in different ecologies, different cultures, different ways of thinking and doing. Now more than ever, the world is our laboratory. We are connected to each other through a fresh matrix of instant communication and easy travel. Burgeoning masses of people are constantly transforming the world. Humans have changed the climate, reshaped the land, harnessed rivers and extinguished species. Science

gives us tools to change the world in incredible ways and at a frightening pace. But it can also help us restore some of what has been lost; it is also our compass for navigating the future. The question is: Who knows how to wield that compass?

The answer cannot come solely from scientists who have lived their lives in a lab. It must come from a new generation of technologists who have an active, firsthand sense of the world: scientists who know what the spirit of service means because they have served; engineers who have not just a textbook understanding of a problem, but who have had liberating experiences in settings that range from inner cities to outer wildernesses; inventors who know not only how to invent things, but how the processes of invention can help nourish a healthy, sustainable community.

The idea of dispatching volunteers with technological expertise to different parts of the world is gaining momentum. The MIT Media Laboratory, in collaboration with Harvard University’s Center for International Development, recently launched a consortium called “Digital Nations.” The consortium aims at bringing a broad set of next-generation technology projects, from e-commerce to health technology, to people in developing regions. The U.S. Department of State formed the Global Technology Corps, which enlists volunteers to share their skills in a number of areas, such as Web development or information science, with people around the globe. The leaders of the G8 (major industrialized countries) formed the Digital Opportunity Task Force to work on bridging the digital divide. Venture groups from Softbank to the World Bank are actively spurring new economic activity in developing regions.

This is encouraging news, but there’s a long way to go. Right now, only seven graduates of MIT and four from Caltech are enrolled in the Peace Corps. And that just won’t do.



an accurate basemap and manage its small but growing database of information.

Before long, she was in touch with Geosistec (Guatemala City), the local Esri distributor, and had acquired ArcView for use by the planning office. A search of potential data sources put her in contact with the Guatemalan office of the National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA), which is part of the U.S. Embassy mission in Guatemala. NIMA has ARC Digitized Raster Graphics (ADRG) on CD for all of Guatemala. Using the ADRG maps as her base and talking with knowledgeable locals, O'Callaghan was able to create the first accurate basemap of Joyabaj.

Once an accurate basemap was created, the planning office began using ArcView to create simple maps displaying basic demographic and social information such as population, education, and crop distribution. One of the first maps created displayed which communities had potable water, electricity, latrines, schools, and a health center. This map showed very quickly the degree of poverty faced by most of the municipalities' 117 communities. While many of the communities have some structure that serves as a school, most do not have a potable water system or adequate access to a health center. This map was distributed to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental organizations (GOs) working in Joyabaj to help them understand the distribution of poverty in the municipality.

Another map displayed the communities where the 12 NGOs and GOs were working. This latter map revealed that many of these organizations were duplicating efforts by working in the same communities while other

communities received no support. This information is being used to help coordinate the future work programs of these organizations.

The mayor of Joyabaj, Raul Perez, used these maps at several regional meetings as an introduction to his municipality. Perez's profiling of these maps generated tremendous interest in GIS among Peace Corps volunteers, other municipalities, and NGOs. They began contacting O'Callaghan asking for similar maps of their municipalities. Realizing that there was the potential for many rural municipalities to begin using GIS if they had access to training, she requested a change in work focus from the Peace Corps so she could begin working with other municipalities. She also contacted Geosistec, Esri, and NIMA, requesting help to bring GIS capabilities to these rural planning offices.

In the spring of 2002 O'Callaghan began her first three training sessions in the departments of Alta Verapaz and Baja Verapaz in central Guatemala. These municipalities were chosen because of the level of computer skills of the planning staff and the quality of their computers. The five Guatemalans and two Peace Corps volunteers who attended proclaimed the first three training sessions a success.

O'Callaghan spent a week in each of the municipalities. She installed ArcView, several useful scripts and extensions, ADRG maps for the municipality, and area-specific data she had compiled. By using data specific to the municipality for training, the trainees could quickly realize the benefits of the system and visualize direct applications of the software. One trainee in Fray Bartolom de las Casas who was familiar with GPS realized he could now add the GPS points he had of forest fires and quickly plot

the areas, print maps, and provide statistics to the Guatemalan forest service (the Instituto Nacional de Bosques).

Formal training took only two days, and after that trainees began creating basemaps of their respective municipalities. By the end of the week each municipality had created a draft basemap and joined up and displayed some basic demographic data.

With the success of the first three municipalities, the program was expanded to include nine additional municipalities, bringing the total of rural municipalities using ArcView in Guatemala to 12. Overall, 28 Guatemalans and 12 Peace Corps volunteers received basic GIS training from O'Callaghan during the spring and summer of 2002. All municipalities have created basemaps and are currently using the program to display their demographic and social information. In learning to use ArcView, these rural municipalities are laying a foundation for more advanced applications such as cadastral mapping, forestry surveys, and urban planning.

In August 2002 O'Callaghan completed her two-year commitment to the Peace Corps. She turned over the GIS training program to another Peace Corps volunteer who will continue to work with Geosistec, Esri, and NIMA and provide training to additional municipalities.

The municipalities that received training are Cahabon, Alta Verapaz; Chisec, Alta Verapaz; Fray Bartolom de las Casas, Alta Verapaz; San Cristobal, Alta Verapaz; San Juan Chamelco, Alta Verapaz; Salama, Baja Verapaz; Chiche, El Quich; San Antonio Ilotenango, El Quich; San Juan Cotzal, El Quich; Santa Cruz del Quich, El Quich; Ro Hondo, Zacapa; and Esquipulas, Chiquimula.



(FROM LEFT) PEACE CORPS  
VOLUNTEER LUKE GRIFFITH,  
AGRONOMIST GERSON AGUIRE,  
AND PROMOTER MARIELA  
LEMUS RECEIVING TRAINING  
IN FRAY BARTOLOME DE  
LAS CASAS, ALTA VERAPAZ,  
GUATEMALA.

EIGHTH-GRADERS FROM BELLEVUE'S TYEE MIDDLE SCHOOL ARE TRAVELING TO JAMAICA NEXT WEEK TO INSTALL COMPUTERS AT A POOR PUBLIC SCHOOL.



# U.S. to Help Poor Countries Access Information Technology

March 4, 2003

**T**he United States launched an initiative to bring the benefits of information and communications technology (ICT) to entrepreneurs and small businesses in developing countries.

The Digital Freedom Initiative (DFI) – a joint program of the departments of Commerce and State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Peace Corps and USA Freedom Corps, and business partners Hewlett Packard and Cisco Systems – will place volunteers in small businesses to share business knowledge and technology expertise. The program will be piloted in Senegal, according to a USAID press release.

At a White House meeting announcing the initiative, Commerce Secretary Don Evans called DFI “an exciting new model of how different parts of the federal government, the

development community, the private sector and developing nations can join forces for progress.”

The DFI reflects President Bush’s commitment to encouraging innovative foreign aid policies that “encourage wealth creation, economic and political freedom, the rule of law and human rights,” Evans said. The initiative “builds an environment for technology-led economic development,” he said.

Senegal was chosen as the first DFI country because “it is one of the best-run countries in the developing world,” Andrew Natsios, USAID administrator, said at the meeting. Planners expect the program to eventually help more than 360,000 small businesses in Senegal, he said.

“There is no better tool for Africa’s great leap

**Source:** <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2003/03/20030305102102kmconne@pd.state.gov0.0325281.xml#axzz4vg12qkrj>

forward than ICT,” Senegal’s president Abdoulaye Wade said by video at the meeting.

Volunteers will come from both partner companies and Peace Corps.

“Peace Corps has a long history of information and communication technology-based projects, Gaddi Vasquez, the agency’s director, said at the conference. The Peace Corps currently has more than 1,500 volunteers working on ICT and many more involved with information technology through education programs, he said.

DFI will focus on promoting productivity and business process innovation, creating a financial infrastructure for entrepreneurs, building a foundation for growth and ownership, and developing a framework for policy and regulatory reform, according to a

Peace Corps press release.

“Technology can help unlock the potential of individuals, communities and countries,” said Carley Fiorina, chairman and chief executive officer of Hewlett Packard. She also appeared at the meeting. She said the company has learned that to be effective helping poor communities it must donate talent as well as money and equipment.

Fiorina said only 10 percent of the world’s population can afford to buy the computer company’s products. By making technology more accessible, the company is also hoping to develop future markets, she said.

Types of DFI projects Hewlett-Packard envisions include helping communities develop publicly owned “cyber cafes” and partnering with local

entrepreneurs to develop “local relevant [Internet] content.”

Vasquez highlighted another example of the project’s possibilities. He described a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa who helped a group of artisans develop a Web site that they use to market their products worldwide.

Cisco Systems Chairman John Morgridge at the meeting talked about another possibility. He said it can further his company’s program of providing classes over the Internet to developing countries on how to use information technology.

“Information technology is changing the world,” Hernando de Soto, president of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy in Lima, Peru, said at the meeting.

# High-tech help for Jamaican schools

June 16, 2007

 Region: IAP

 Post: Jamaica By Rachel Tuinstra

**A**s a Peace Corps volunteer digging latrines in the West African nation of Mali, James Burke began thinking about computers and how they could help the world.

He decided that when he got home, he wanted to be a teacher.

And as a teacher, he wanted to find a way to help people in Third World countries through technology.

Fast-forward more than a decade, and Burke is an advanced computer-skills teacher at Tye Middle School in Bellevue. Boxes of desktop computers and laptops sit at the front of his classroom, waiting to be packed into suitcases.

On Wednesday, Burke and 12 students will take the computers to Jamaica, where they will install the hardware in a poor public school in Negril.

The Sheffield All Ages School doesn't have any computers, and the teachers there have little knowledge of how to use them, Burke said. Burke and his students will spend 12 days training them on the basics: how to turn a computer on, use a mouse, save a file, write in a Word document.

"My students know far more than the teachers there," Burke said. "They'll be helping to answer questions while I go through the training."

Burke isn't the only teacher who is working to share technology with the rest of the world. Other schools around the Eastside and Seattle have similar programs, including Seattle's Garfield High School, which has been doing it the longest. In 10 years, the school's Global Technology Academy has made 25 trips abroad to install computer labs in countries from the Philippines to Guatemala to Turkey.

"When we started doing this 10 years ago, people had never heard of a school doing this before," said Kjell Rye, the academy's president and a technology-education teacher at Garfield. "Before, people thought we were nuts. Now it's like the jazz band; the program has become part of the fabric of the school."

As a student teacher, Burke visited Rye's class, and what he saw helped motivate him to press forward with his own plan. He spent the last four years getting his program up and running, establishing contacts and raising about \$18,000 through grants.

The goal, Burke said, is twofold: for the Bellevue students to gain a broader world perspective, and to give the Sheffield students access to computers and skills they wouldn't have otherwise. Burke hopes that the Sheffield girls especially will take advantage of the training, giving them a chance to move beyond employment as maids at hotels or resorts.

He plans a five-year commitment to keep the computer lab running, taking students to

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Source: <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/high-tech-help-for-jamaican-school/>

Jamaica each year.

The inaugural group includes 10 eighth-graders from Tyee, and two students from Newport High School who previously had Burke as a teacher.

“I took Mr. Burke’s class for two years, and I kept hearing him talk about this trip to Jamaica,” said Matt Eschbach,

a 10th-grader at Newport High School. “I’m interested in the whole Peace Corps thing, and I want to know what it feels like to help people who are in need and give them something they don’t have.”

Most of the Sheffield students share desks, chairs and school supplies,

and students here say they don’t really know what it will be like to meet kids their age who have never been around a computer.

“I don’t know how, but I believe this trip will change me,” said Will Kirby, an eighth-grader at Tyee. “I know it’ll be a good experience.”



A VOLUNTEER ASSISTING  
STUDENTS IN A COMPUTER LAB  
IN TOGO.

# Baltimore Resident and Peace Corps Volunteer Builds Computer Lab in West Africa

December 1, 2009

- 📍 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Togo
- 📍 Project: Togo - Computer Lab

**Washington, D.C., May 6, 2015**—Peace Corps volunteer Amanda Walsh, of Baltimore, Md., is working with her community in Togo, West Africa to build a computer lab at a local middle school. A portion of the funds for the project were raised through the [Peace Corps Partnership Program \(PCPP\)](#), a program that helps support Peace Corps volunteer community projects worldwide.

“When I arrived in my community, it was instantly clear to me that the school lacked necessary resources and had no real way to access any new materials,” said Walsh, a

2008 graduate of Loch Raven High School, in Towson, Md., who has been living and working in Togo since June 2013.

The computer lab installation includes five new computers as well as a printer and internet access. To ensure sustainability of the project, Walsh, along with a Togolese counterpart, will also instruct the school’s staff on basic computer skills.

“If the teachers have access to the newest teaching techniques, information, and developments in their field, they will be more prepared to teach their students,” said Walsh.

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**Source:** <https://peacecorpssoutheast.wordpress.com/2015/05/06/baltimore-resident-and-peace-corps-volunteer-builds-computer-lab-in-west-africa/>

Walsh has worked closely with the school staff, including the Director, and all are eager to learn new computer skills. The school staff has already completed renovation on an existing space within the school to install the new computer lab.

In order to receive funding through the PCPP, Walsh's community made a 25 percent contribution to the total project cost and outlined success

indicators for the computer lab. This helps ensure community ownership and a greater chance of long-term sustainability. One hundred percent of each tax-deductible PCPP donation went toward Walsh's project and the computer lab.

Walsh graduated in 2010 with a B.A. in French and International Relations from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash. and is currently a Peace Corps

Master's International candidate at Gonzaga pursuing a master's degree in TOESL. She is one of the 195 Maryland residents currently serving in the Peace Corps. More than 5,836 Maryland residents have served in the Peace Corps since 1961. Those interested in supporting projects like Walsh's in Togo can visit: [www.peace-corps.gov/donate](http://www.peace-corps.gov/donate).



PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER  
SPEAKS ON THE RADIO IN PERU.

# Peace Corps Volunteers Teach Thousands of Peruvians about Health and Environment through Radio Shows

**August 26, 2011**

- 🌐 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Peru
- 👤 Project: Peru - Radio Shows

**WASHINGTON, D.C., Aug. 26, 2011** — More than a dozen Peace Corps volunteers across Peru host weekly radio programs to provide information on health, current events and the environment to remote communities

around the country. Volunteers often invite local community members and public officials to speak on topics ranging from HIV/AIDS prevention and care to healthy lifestyle tips and community service opportunities.

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**Source:** <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/library/peace-corps-volunteers-teach-thousands-of-peruvians-about-health-and-environment-through-radio-shows/>



# Peace Corps Volunteers in Armenia Use Text Messaging for HIV/AIDS Education and Prevention

PEACE CORPS/ARMENIA  
COUNTRY DIRECTOR DAVID  
LILLIE SPEAKS AT A PRESS  
CONFERENCE, ALONG WITH THE  
DIRECTOR OF THE ARMENIAN  
RED CROSS SOCIETY AND  
EXECUTIVES FROM ARMENIAN  
MOBILE COMPANIES, TO  
ANNOUNCE THE LAUNCH OF THE  
SMS INFORMATION HOTLINE.

November 4, 2011

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Armenia
- 👤 Project: Armenia - HIV/AIDS Education through SMS

**W**ashington, D.C., November 4, 2011 — Peace Corps volunteers Lisa Conder of Englewood, Fla., and Ashley Ottewell of Belleville, Mich., spearheaded the launch of the SMS Information Hotline, a nationwide program in Armenia that promotes HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention through mobile-phone-based SMS text messaging.

The SMS Information Hotline provides

potentially life-saving information that users may not be able to get otherwise, said Conder, who had the idea to start the Hotline in 2009 after learning about a similar Peace Corps project in Namibia. In Armenia, HIV/AIDS is sometimes referred to as a hidden epidemic. There is a general low awareness about HIV/AIDS and a lack of prevention programs and resources. People often avoid seeking testing, counseling, and treatment because of the stigma and social taboos associated with it.

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Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160101160855/http://www.peacecorps.gov/media/forpress/press/1894/>



AN ARMENIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY VOLUNTEER ANSWERS SMS QUESTIONS RELATED TO HIV/AIDS ON OCT. 21, THE FIRST DAY THE HOTLINE WAS AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC. THE HOTLINE RECEIVED MORE THAN 600 MESSAGES IN THE FIRST FIVE DAYS.



# Peace Corps Volunteers Initiate Mobile Computer Training in Jordan

June 6, 2012

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Jordan
- 🎯 Project: Jordan - Computer Training

**WASHINGTON, D.C., June 6, 2012** – Peace Corps volunteers Darius Bittle-Dockery of New Haven, Conn., and Jeanine Chiu of Oak Park, Calif., have developed a mobile internet station to train people in remote communities in Jordan basic computer and Internet skills.

More than 100 students and stay-at-home mothers have received two weeks of training each in basic computer navigation skills and word processing since the “mobile knowledge station” project was created a year ago.

“With more than 50 percent of the population

of Jordan residing in the capital of Amman, there is a significant disparity between the connectedness throughout the different governorates,” said Chiu, who has been working as an English teaching volunteer since October 2010.

The project is similar to traveling libraries, providing programming with a set of mobile equipment that moves according to the expressed need and on a set schedule between villages. This flexibility enables people in remote villages to access to training at a fraction of the cost.

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**Source:** <https://www.peacecorps.gov/news/library/peace-corps-volunteers-initiate-mobile-computer-training-in-jordan/>

# Keeping Peace Corps Volunteers Healthy, One Text at a Time

October 31, 2014

**T**oday, refilling your medicine cabinet with bandages and over the counter medicine from your local drugstore may seem like a trivial task, but for Peace Corps volunteers working in remote villages around the world, this task can be much more challenging. As we take steps to forge a 21st century Peace Corps, such as dramatically reducing the time it takes to complete a volunteer application from eight hours to less than one hour, we are also looking into ways to tap the ingenuity of volunteer developers to support our Peace Corps volunteers abroad.

One recent example of this was the development of Medlink, an SMS-based platform, allowing volunteers to text in requests for their medical kit refills to get supplies in a timely manner. An internal study showed that the overseas medical staff members spent up to eight hours a week responding to requests from Volunteers to resupply their medical kits that were being transmitted to medical units via emails, phone calls, and text messages. Peace Corps realized that a more efficient way to collect these requests and communicate with volunteers was needed. The health and safety of volunteers is our top priority, and we are always looking for new ways to improve internal processes.

At a recent convention in Atlanta, the Peace Corps' Director of Innovation met with several inspired developers to describe this global challenge. Excited, developers volunteered their time and skills to help improve the medical resupply process. The result is PC Medlink. As seen in the video, the application allows Volunteers to easily text in a request to refill supplies, allowing medical staff to focus on outreach, prevention, and treatment of volunteers, rather than administrative tasks.

This application followed many of the same steps outlined in the recently released [U.S. Digital Services Playbook](#). We will continue to leverage open source, crowd-based solutions to better serve volunteers in the field.

We are excited that the developer community has shown support for and developed PC Medlink and we invite you make a difference by plugging into Peace Corps' mission on GitHub: [www.github.com/PeaceCorps](http://www.github.com/PeaceCorps).

*Carrie Hessler-Radelet is the Director of the Peace Corps and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Western Samoa 1981-1983.*

*Brian Forde is the Senior Advisor for Mobile and Data Innovation, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Nicaragua 2003-2005.*

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Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/10/31/keeping-peace-corps-volunteers-healthy-one-text-time-0>



# Michigan Tech Adds New Peace Corps Master's International Programs in Computer Science, Electrical and Computer Engineering, GIS

November 20, 2014

PCMI COMPUTER SCIENCE GRADUATE STUDENT TIM WARD WITH MEMBERS OF HIS HOST COMMUNITY ON THE ISLAND NATION OF VANUATU.

**M**ichigan Technological University's award-winning Peace Corps Master's International (PCMI) program is offering new degree options for students in two departments: computer science and electrical and computer engineering (ECE). The School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science

is also expanding its PCMI programs to include a Master of Geographic Information Science.

The expanded programs will enable more students to take part in PCMI, in which students earn a master's degree while simultaneously serving in the Peace Corps. Students typically take two semesters of courses on

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**Source:** <http://www.mtu.edu/news/stories/2014/november/michigan-tech-adds-new-peace-corps-masters-international-programs-computer-science-electrical-computer-engineering-gis.html>

campus before volunteering for two years overseas and then returning to Michigan Tech to complete their degree.

“The new programs in computer science and ECE were pitched to the Peace Corps as an opportunity for our students to serve in math and science education or other sectors needing IT and technology expertise,” said Kari Henquinet, PCMI director at Tech. “Our new PCMI students will bring technical training together with the strong interdisciplinary training that all of our Tech PCMI students have.”

## Peace Corps at Michigan Tech

With the program’s new offerings, students can now earn their master’s through [ten different academic departments](#) at Michigan Tech.

“All PCMI students take classes about cross-cultural learning and working with communities no matter which program they’re in,” says Henquinet. “We have 68 students currently involved in PCMI and hope to grow that number as we recruit for our new offerings.”

Tim Ward, the first computer science PCMI student, says his experiences serving in the small island nation of Vanuatu have allowed him to use the STEM knowledge he gained through his undergraduate degree from Tech.

“This type of program lets you challenge yourself into overcoming obstacles that will make a first-world desk job seem like Easy Street once you get back,” says Ward. “I joined the computer science PCMI program at Tech because I knew what a powerful combination it would be.”

Since traveling overseas, Ward says his service projects have seen great

success.

## Computer Science Comes to Vanuatu

“We implemented an \$85,000 solar computer lab,” he says. “We brought in funding and collaborators from seven different places. Without a volunteer, there would have been no hope of coordinating and funding anything like it. Peace Corps placed me in the crux of it all, allowing me to use my skills to better the lives of hundreds of students.”

There is quite a bit of personalization and customization available through the program, says Associate Professor Jean Mayo, faculty coordinator for the computer science PCMI program.

“Master’s students in computer science have the option to do thesis-, coursework-, or project-based studies to earn their degree,” Mayo explains. “PCMI students in computer science take the project option and do work overseas to fulfill their requirements. Projects might be writing software that performs functions that current software doesn’t and provides a benefit to the community they’re serving in. Or, they could write software that allows an experiment to run using equipment that the community already has. It’s very versatile.”

Professor Leonard Bohmann, faculty coordinator for the ECE PCMI program, thinks the benefits his students can provide will be far-reaching.

## Electrical Power to the People

“ECE students would be well-versed in applying many technologies to help the communities in which they volunteer,” he says. “They might work

on wireless technology projects or remote, stand-alone power systems, like photovoltaic or hydro-energy. One of the problems in many remote locations is access to power, especially for medical clinics. ECE students can help power them and keep medicines cold that need to be cold.”

Mayo attributes PCMI’s success at Tech to the type of students who attend the University.

“We attract students who are practically oriented,” she says. “The kinds of students who can thrive in a difficult environment—the kinds who help others.”

The Peace Corps couldn’t be happier with the partnership.

“Michigan Tech has the most robust Peace Corps graduate program in the nation,” says Brad Merryman, Peace Corps Midwest regional manager. “It’s a remote school with a finger on the pulse of today’s most pressing global issues, like women’s education, food security, potable water, environmental conservation and natural disaster mitigation. These new programs offer new opportunities for students to pursue their personal and professional interests through Peace Corps and launch careers while they make a difference. We’re thrilled that our partnership with Tech continues to expand.”

*Michigan Technological University (www.mtu.edu) is a leading public research university developing new technologies and preparing students to create the future for a prosperous and sustainable world. Michigan Tech offers more than 120 undergraduate and graduate degree programs in engineering; forest resources; computing; technology; business; economics; natural, physical and environmental sciences; arts; humanities; and social sciences.*



MAPPING FOR DISASTER  
RESPONSE IN VANUATU FROM  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

# Mapping and the power of the crowd - Peace Corps' response to disaster in Vanuatu

April 3, 2015

By *Courtney Clark*

- 🌐 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Vanuatu
- 👤 Project: Vanuatu - Mapping Disaster Response

**T**he map's invaluable data about the world's geography is completely crowd-sourced, meaning that anyone, anywhere can contribute their local knowledge or mapping skills – and anyone, anywhere can use the data. OpenStreetMap truly is a map for and by “the people.”

If we surveyed Peace Corps Volunteers today, most would confirm that a digital map of their host community does not exist. This lack of digital maps in developing countries creates logistical [nightmares](#) when a crisis such as [Ebola](#) or [Cyclone Pam](#) strikes. [Since the 2010 Haiti earthquake](#), developing country

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**Source:** <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/mapping-and-the-power-of-the-crowd-peace-corps-response-to-disaster-in-vanuatu/>

governments and aid organizations have relied on OpenStreetMap in times of crisis to help them navigate to affected areas, identify shelters, plan supply shipments and prepare for future natural disasters or epidemics. It takes time, however, to enter all that geographic data about the world's roads, buildings and natural features – and that is where Peace Corps comes in.

Peace Corps' Office of Innovation has been hard at work training Peace Corps Volunteers, invitees, staff, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, friends of Peace Corps and students in OpenStreetMap. These groups map countries affected by disaster but also more stable areas where current Peace Corps programs have requested a digital map for use in a [Volunteer project](#). It is okay that

many contributors have never been to the countries they map. Thanks to OpenStreetMap's high-quality satellite imagery, mappers can use a simple web tool to trace over imagery of buildings and roads.

On March 23, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Washington (RPCV/W) and the Office of Innovation hosted a [two-hour mapping event](#) to respond to disaster caused by Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu and the South Pacific. Forty-Seven Peace Corps Volunteers, Trainees, Returned PCVs, staff and friends of Peace Corps mapped the entire nations of Tuvalu and Kiribati and made substantial contributions to a digital map of Vanuatu. RPCVs who served in Vanuatu shared their experiences as Volunteers and post-disaster updates that meant more than any news article could. They also joined

current Vanuatu Volunteers and Trainees, who connected via Google Hangout, in adding their local knowledge of Vanuatu to the map by identifying schools and other potential shelters and communication towers.

Americans typically support Volunteers in the field and Peace Corps countries through donations to grant funds or disaster relief funds. Donations remain a critically important resource, but OpenStreetMap opens up an entirely new way for Americans to play a direct role in both Peace Corps projects and disaster relief efforts. We hope that you'll join us in mapping the world by learning how to map with the [State Department's excellent tutorials](#) and contributing to [Peace Corps mapping projects](#).

# WorldView Magazine

Worldview Magazine is the National Peace Corps Association's (NPCA) quarterly publication that highlights Volunteer and Returned Volunteer stories, ideas, criticisms, and accomplishments.

It is a high-quality publication that reaches many readers—and the volume and quality of the stories of ICT over the years serves as another indication of the importance of strong and committed ICT perspectives and support.

## A PEACE CORPS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

*Peace Corps has never been satisfied with the status quo*

by Ronald A. Tschetter

Since 1961, over 190,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in more than 139 countries around the world. Most Volunteers, like my wife, Nancy, and I, had life-changing experiences and know they truly made a difference in the lives of the people they were serving.

We all have stories about our impact as Volunteers, and one that always comes to my mind is former President Alejandro Toledo’s of Peru. Toledo credits two Volunteers for guiding him from poverty to the presidency. Volunteer experiences and stories like this will be a rich part of the Peace Corps’ 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ([www.peacecorps.gov/50](http://www.peacecorps.gov/50)) in 2011.

This anniversary is a chance for us to celebrate the accomplishments of

the Peace Corps, but also to look at how this organization we all admire so much can do even more. I believe the Peace Corps is thriving today in part because we have kept true to the mission as set forth by President Kennedy back in 1961. After 47 years, the Peace Corps’ three goals still make it unique among organizations globally.

We can reach further to accomplish our mission and goals in the 21st century in three significant ways. *First, work to build our capacity in order to increase the number of Peace Corps Volunteers and the countries in which they serve.* Foreign leaders I’ve met throughout the world consistently ask for more Volunteers and applications are up 14 percent this year. These

factors indicate we have both the supply and the demand to grow the Peace Corps.

As the Peace Corps grows, we need to support Volunteers with high-quality training and programming, provide them with jobs that meet the needs of the communities where we serve, and do all of this with the partnership and will of the host-country governments. And while the majority of Peace Corps Volunteers will continue to bring “generalist” skills, many government leaders today are asking to augment current and new programs with Volunteers bringing specific technical skills for targeted project needs. We are working to meet this need by recruiting for specific skills, in particular with our mid-career and 50+ initiatives.

*Second, expand information technology.* While the Peace Corps experience has in many ways not changed since I was a Volunteer, the most significant difference is in information technology. Our challenge is to manage and expand technology while supporting Volunteer integration. Today, Volunteers’ can provide country information through websites and connect with others using blogs, e-mails, community chat rooms, websites, video streams, and phone calls.

Today, more families visit Volunteers, support their projects, and continue to be part of the experience electronically. This means Volunteers can start working on the third goal right after they arrive in country. Families, and even communities, can now share in a Volunteer’s service more than ever.



Peace Corps

*Third, expand partnerships.* I am amazed to see the type of work Volunteers are doing around the world today. Whether it's combating the current food crisis with permaculture and urban gardening in Africa; providing clean, reusable sources of energy for homes in Latin America; or providing opportunities to people with disabilities in eastern Europe and Asia. The level of work Volunteers are doing is incredible and is dependent on strong partnerships with local NGOs, counterpart organizations, and host governments.

Last year, our posts reported 376 international partner organization projects. With the United Nations (UN) alone, we have an agreement with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and eight different local partnerships. Globally, we work with Habitat for Humanity, CDC, CARE, the UN Volunteer Program (UNV), UNICEF, and others. We also partner with other organizations that provide volunteers, such as the Japanese development organization (JICA), our German counterpart DED, and British Volunteers (VSO).

In the most recent annual Volunteer survey, over half of the Volunteers said they received funding for at least one project, and each project traditionally requires a 25 percent community contribution. The primary sources are the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Small Project Assistance (SPA) program of USAID, the Ambassador's Self Help Funds, and the Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP).

PCPP is on track this year to raise nearly \$2 million in contributions, funding 620 projects in 60 countries that benefit 560,000 individuals. The majority of donors are individuals, but nearly 300 foundations, businesses, schools, religious organizations, nonprofits and other groups have contributed over one-third of all donations received.

We just launched a new "Country Funds" section of PCPP, which makes it easier for "Friends of" groups to contribute to their countries of service.

There is currently \$40,000 available for projects in 13 different countries. Visit [www.peacecorps.gov/contribute](http://www.peacecorps.gov/contribute) to see how you can help.

In the future, I would like to see the creation of a Peace Corps Foundation to support Third Goal activities through raising private funds. The foundation would be comprised of prominent individuals from a diverse background in the corporate, nonprofit, and government sectors. With more corporations recognizing the value of global responsibility, this could be a powerful tool for raising the agency's visibility and strengthening our third-goal initiatives.

I believe in continual improvement, and every time I visit the countries where we serve, I bring back ideas of how we can do things better. The Peace Corps has never been an organization satisfied with the status quo, and what I find is that it's an organization constantly striving to improve.

President Bush said a few months ago that the Peace Corps "is the best foreign policy America could possibly have." And both presidential candidates have called for an expansion of the Peace Corps. I couldn't agree more. I believe the Peace Corps represents America at its best and is needed now more than ever.

The Peace Corps' impact can certainly reach further into communities internationally and at home, and the 50th anniversary offers a three-year window for all of us to work toward expanding that impact. Let's work together to ensure that our fine tradition of making better tomorrows for the people we serve continues as we further accomplish our mission of promoting world peace and friendship.

*Ronald A. Tschetter is the Peace Corps Director. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in India from 1966-1968 and as the Chairman of the National Peace Corps Association from 1995-1998.*



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## PEACE CORPS MEXICO'S TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAM

*Model for a “more professional” Peace Corps?*

By Byron Battle

**P**ease Corps undertook a major new initiative when it signed the first-ever agreement with Mexico in 2003, introducing a ‘technical cooperation’ program between the two countries. Both countries were eager to promote citizen-to-citizen cooperation by inviting experienced American and Mexican professionals to work together to address many of Mexico’s pressing economic and environmental problems.

Since 2004, Peace Corps has been working with two Mexican institutions, its Environmental and Natural Resources Ministry (SEMARNAT), focusing on environmental conservation and education, and its National Council for

Science and Technology (CONACYT), focusing on transferring technologies to promote job growth for Mexicans in Mexico. Both institutions are focusing on critical needs for the country, affecting the poorest elements of Mexican society, rural and urban. Peace Corps’ agreements with these two entities permit committed American volunteers to contribute their professional experience and skills to these challenges as well as permitting them to understand the issues facing our closest and most important neighbor.

The Mexico program constitutes a focused effort by Peace Corps to attract older and very experienced volunteers in specific fields. For the CONACYT applied technology

centers, Peace Corps has been able, for example, to attract experienced water and civil engineers, as well as business and organizational experts, to help these centers assess how best to transfer technologies to promote job creation for Mexicans in Mexico and improve environmental conditions for urban and rural areas alike. With SEMARNAT, Peace Corps has recruited highly experienced experts in forestry, coastal, bio-diversity conservation, and natural resource management to address the alarming deterioration of Mexico’s physical environment.

Currently, Peace Corps has approximately 60 volunteers, half of whom are over the age of 50, including seven married couples. Volunteers have largely been concentrated in the central region of Mexico, although several are located in Chiapas, the southernmost state, and in Coahuila state in the north. Typically Peace Corps responds to requests by our Mexican counterparts for specific skills and experience. Peace Corps staff then works with the counterparts to define specific jobs for these individuals. Once this has been defined, Peace Corps recruitment offices tap into relatively new recruitment sources, such as professional associations as well as companies and government agencies where skilled professionals are retiring. Candidates are required to have a basic minimum of a master’s degree and at least five years professional experience in the field. Many of the Mexico Volunteers have 30 to 35 years experience. As a result, Peace Corps’ current “50+ initiative” meshes perfectly with the needs of this type of



Peace Corps/Mexico

**Peace Corps volunteer Cristina Vélez uses her scientific education and eight years of field experience to work with Mexican co-workers on technical projects such as the monitoring of water levels and endangered species in delicate wetlands of the Cuatro Ciénegas biosphere in the state of Coahuila.**



Peace Corps/Mexico

requests from these entities for skilled volunteers. Despite these limitations to where Peace Corps can assign volunteers, Peace Corps Mexico has vast opportunities to expand and diversify its technical activities in both the environmental and economic development areas.

*Byron Battle, Peace Corps Country Director for Mexico, was the Country Director in Mali when he was asked to set up the first ever Peace Corps program in Mexico in 2003.*

**Volunteer Walt Meyer, an environmental engineer from Oregon, developing testing techniques to treat wastewater discharged by lakeside communities in Guanajuato, Mexico.**

technical cooperation program being undertaken in Mexico and may well serve as a model for similar types of Peace Corps interventions in other countries.

The acceptance and satisfaction of host country agencies to Peace Corps' technical cooperation initiative has been extremely positive. In fact, Peace Corps Mexico is receiving far more requests than they can fill, and decisions are being made to concentrate and focus efforts on specific projects and geographical regions.

Peace Corps Mexico's headquarters are located in the city of Queretaro, three hours north of Mexico City. Since the Mexico volunteers are already highly experienced, the principal focus of training is intensive Spanish and cultural and organizational integration. Peace Corps Mexico has contracted its language-training program to a highly respected Spanish language school that provides host families to the trainees.

The longer-term strategy of Peace Corps is to obtain eventually a regular bilateral agreement with the Mexican government as exists with other Peace Corps countries through which we will have greater latitude in assigning volunteers to areas where we would like to work. As our reputation builds, we expect that ultimately the Mexican Congress will be disposed to approve a bilateral agreement. Currently, however, Peace Corps scope of operations is limited to these two agencies and, as a result, we respond to



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## CN U HLP ME? I HVE A ??

*A Peace Corps Volunteer harnesses the power of text messaging for good health*

by Shannon Cummings

**I**n a few short years, text messaging (also called “SMS” for Short Message Service), has seemingly replaced phone conversations, letter writing and the traditional two cans attached by a long string as the primary form of communication for young people worldwide. Imagine if young texters in the developing world could get quick and accurate answers to their most personal sexual health questions anonymously, by simply sending an SMS. In Namibia, Peace Corps Volunteer Rashid Khan has developed a program that does just that. Khan is harnessing the global texting trend to fight rampant sexual health misinformation that contributes to a towering HIV infection rate and many unwanted pregnancies.

When Khan arrived in country, he immediately became aware of the lack of knowledge and resources Namibian youth had regarding sexual health. “After talking to local youth, both formally and informally, it became very clear that there exist serious misconceptions about pregnancy, sex, circumcision and other important topics,” explained Khan. And he was right—in his region “lack of knowledge” was listed among the top factors driving the HIV infection rate by the 2008 National HIV Sentinel Survey. As a whole, the country of Namibia has an 18% HIV infection rate.

After discussing possible ways to address this problem, Khan learned of an automated, menu-based health information system started by two Volunteers in the Philippines. This program allows consumers to access an abundance of pre-written health information through text messages.



Rashid Khan

**Smart phone technology is revolutionizing communication throughout Africa.**

Khan recognized the potential to implement a similar system in Namibia, where cellular phone service is widespread and text messaging is the cheapest and most frequently used way to communicate. Together with Jennifer Moore, a fellow Namibian PC Volunteer, he developed the Health Education Response System (HER) in February of 2009.

Optimistic, but not content, Khan realized that “a fully automated system could only address the most basic of questions.” Searching for a more complete solution, he stumbled upon a North Carolina-based text line designed to answer sexual health questions from teenagers called the “Birds and the Bees Text Line.” Realizing that the demand in Namibia was present for such a service, Khan designed software so that by sending a question via SMS,

consumers receive a tailored answer from a trained health Volunteer that is both accurate and timely. Additionally, the program was expanded to deliver SMS in a round robin fashion to a pool of 10 Volunteers across the country. Consumers can still view the pre-written content by texting MENU, and then following the directional guide through a menu of choices. A directory of anti-retroviral (ARV) clinics with complete contact information can be accessed by texting “ARV TownName”.

In Namibia, HER has proved transformative. The system’s popularity was evidenced in June of 2009 when nearly 2400 SMSs were processed to and from 325 unique clients. One key feature of the system is the anonymity of the questioner.

“Our goal was to answer the questions people couldn’t ask anyone

else—to be a reputable, anonymous source of information,” said Khan. By filtering all SMSs through a central server so that both Volunteers and consumers are shielded from each other’s phone numbers, anonymity is preserved. This lends itself to frank and open questions that the asker may deem too private, embarrassing or demeaning to ask without the veil of anonymity.

Another powerful attribute of HER is its connection “to a complex monitoring and evaluation system that automatically tracks, compares and reports themes of conversations.” Without identifying the data source, the records can be used as a database to inform other health-related projects of frequently asked questions and common misconceptions. The hope is that this wealth of information will contribute to a more informed and effective fight against the spread of disease bred by ignorance.

On top of all of this, the program has been meticulously designed with sustainability in mind. “Sustainability and replication were goals from the beginning. I designed the software to be installable and maintainable by anyone with minimal training,” Khan said. Not only have Khan and his group been able to secure free service from MTC, Namibia’s largest mobile network, they have also partnered with Lifeline/Childline which provides counseling to clients in need. Lifeline/Childline is in talks to take over the program when Khan completes his service and leaves Namibia.

Khan’s success implementing HER serves as a model to others motivated to make a difference in their corner of the world. When asked for the advice he would offer someone with an idea to improve his or her community, Khan remarked, “Dive right in today. Take inspiration and help wherever you find it.”

*Shannon Cummings is Master’s candidate at the University of California, San Diego at the School of International Relations and Pacific Studies. She interned in the advocacy department of the National Peace Corps Association in the summer of 2009.*

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## AFRICAN TECH TALK

*A roving Gathering sparks ideas, connections*

by Molly Mattessich

On a recent crisp autumn Saturday in Washington, D.C., members of the African Diaspora—and those just passionate about Africa—came together for one day to hear ideas about projects on the ground by and for Africans. Started three years ago, it was in a sense, NPCA's Africa Rural Connect program come to life. Africa Gathering provides Africans with a unique and welcoming space to discuss technology, music, art, youth, and agriculture, and forge new connections and potential business acquaintances and partners. Typically there have been four to six Gatherings per year, mostly in Europe and Africa.

The convening of this Africa Gathering was co-hosted by the National Peace Corps Association's Manager of Online Initiatives, Molly Mattessich, along with Kathleen Bomani, event curator of TEDxDar, and Marieme Jamme, co-founder of Africa Gathering. Jamme was a judge of the Africa Rural Connect contests

for 2009 and 2010, and is a strong supporter of NPCA's efforts to maintain the relationships and dialogue between Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and people on her home continent.

The day was filled with articulate presenters sharing their passions, from Semhar Araia, founder of the Diaspora African Women Network ([www.dawners.org](http://www.dawners.org)) whose mission is to “develop and support talented women and girls of the African Diaspora focused on African affairs,” to Kambale Musavuli of the Friends Of the Congo organization ([www.friendsofthecongo.org](http://www.friendsofthecongo.org)) who shared his perspective on how the situation in the Congo is relevant to all African countries. One of the most moving parts of the program was when Sosena Soloman shared clips of her film, “Merkato,” filmed in the markets of the biggest open air market in Addis Ababa.

A prize winner of the 2009 Africa Rural Connect contest, Katherine Lucey, of Solar Sister ([www.solarsister.org](http://www.solarsister.org)), also presented on the successes her project has had in recent years.

Solar Sister uses the Avon sales model to empower rural women to sell solar lights in their communities and “light up Africa” while also earning a livable wage. Of note, the lights sold by the Solar Sister women are made by 2011 Sergeant Shriver Award winner Sam Goldman's company, d.light.

Wendy Lee (Cameroon 08-10) tweeted during the event, “So many amazing projects @africagathering. I keep getting ideas on how to advertise & promote these ideas to the world.” Cherrisse Gardner (Liberia 80-82) tweeted, “If the brilliant energy here is reflective of the people working for change in Africa, things are looking up!”

The emcee of the day, Jackson M'vunganyi of Voice of America's Upfront Africa ([www.upfrontafrica.com](http://www.upfrontafrica.com)), told everyone about his work on the radio youth show aimed at getting the youth in Africa engaged with their civic leaders. Khwezi Magwaza, formerly at the magazine Seventeen South Africa, spoke on how her former organization was able to research and implement the



Attendees at Africa Gathering came from all over the East Coast to attend the event held in Washington, D.C.



Kambale Musavuli, National Spokesperson for the Friends of the Congo, discusses his presentation with Jackson Muneza M'vunganyi, VOA Radio Host and event moderator.

most efficient way to communicate with adolescent girls. Dr. George Ayitteh, a Ghanaian economist, author and president of the Free Africa Foundation ([www.freeafrica.org](http://www.freeafrica.org)) in Washington, D.C., was the final speaker of the day, and he energised the audience after his powerful talk on, amongst other things, the “Cheetah” generation, which is what he calls young Africans in the Diaspora making their way back to the continent to invest in it.

Abou Kone, a Cote d’Ivoire native and technology programmer living in Washington, D.C., called it, “a refreshing, inspiring experience, really unlike anything I had been to before and reminded me that African people are achieving things worldwide.”

During the week following the event, attendees were so energized by the discussions and presenters that they announced on Twitter the start of weekly gatherings in Washington, D.C. called, “Thought Leader Thursdays,” when leaders in the African Diaspora will continue the “lively and thought-provoking discussions” following Africa Gathering. All are welcome to attend these events. Learn more on Twitter using hashtag #TLThursdays.

The Africa Rural Connect online platform is gearing up for another round of contests to share ideas in 2012. We hope that you will post your plans and collaborate with others to build the best ideas for Africa.

*More information on future events can be found on the Africa Gathering website at [www.AfricaGathering.org](http://www.AfricaGathering.org). To join Africa Rural Connect, visit [www.AfricaRuralConnect.org](http://www.AfricaRuralConnect.org).*

*Molly Mattesich is the Manager of Online Initiatives and leads the Africa Rural Connect project for NPCA.*



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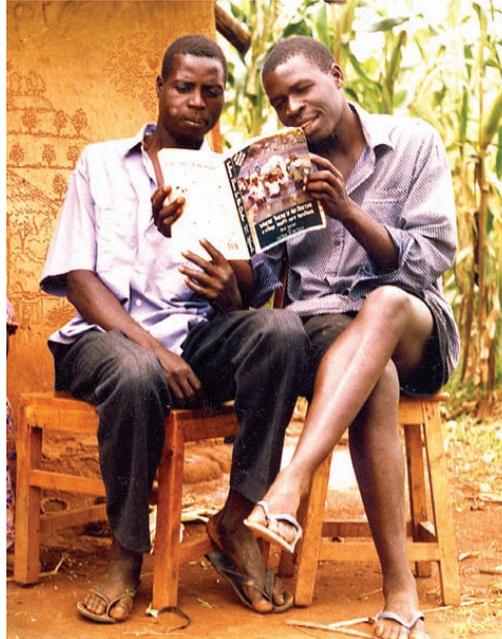
*A beloved Peace Corps resource increases its reach*

by Zena Herman

**L**ike many Peace Corps Volunteers, I was given a dog-eared copy of “Where There Is No Doctor” as I nervously headed to my site in Ghana after my introductory training. It didn’t take long to realize that this was the most valuable resource among the pile of books Peace Corps had provided me for my work and my own personal health. Without libraries or Internet readily available, access to trustworthy information was an hour-long bumpy and dusty tro-tro ride to the one Internet café in the regional capital. “Where There Is No Doctor” served as the core material for the health education talks I gave in my community, as the go-to guide whenever my neighbors or friends came to me with a health question, and as the lifesaving resource that helped me diagnose my own appendicitis.

When I started my service in 2003, only a handful of Ghanaians had mobile phones. By the end of my time in-country, almost every family in my village had one, despite the fact that the only place you could receive a signal was under one particular mango tree, and most homes lacked electricity to charge phones. The lone Internet café in my regional capital had multiplied into five during the two years I was there. The technology boom had started and the changes in communication and access to information were impressive.

After returning home, I began working for Hesperian Health Guides, the organization that publishes “Where There Is No Doctor” (available in 80+ languages), and other life-saving



Far from medical facilities, “Where There Is No Doctor” is an invaluable health resource.

community health materials including “Where Women Have No Doctor, Disabled Village Children,” and “A Community Guide to Environmental Health.” In these resources, I found the philosophy that drove me to join Peace Corps in the first place—a belief in people’s own capacity to improve their lives and health if the information was made available to them.

The influx of technology in the communities where Peace Corps Volunteers serve is changing the way information becomes available to both host-country nationals and Volunteers themselves. Technology alone, however, is not enough to make lasting change. People also need access to quality

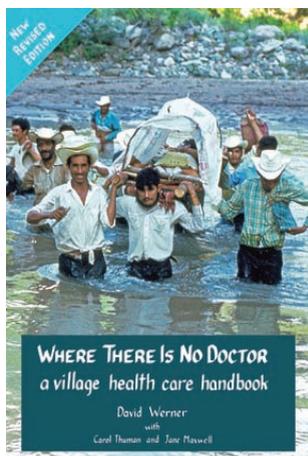
information, in their local language, that is empowering and user-friendly. Hesperian is now developing exciting new ways to take advantage of advances in technology to provide the accessible information that community health workers and Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have been relying on for over 30 years.

This fall, Hesperian launched a brand new set of digital tools to vastly expand and simplify access to resources online. In addition to making Hesperian books available in digital formats, the new Hesperian Digital Commons enables users to easily search health topics, navigate among languages, and adapt materials to fit their own context. With the same content available in 10 languages (and more on the way) and an adaptation tool, Volunteers seeking to create nutrition pamphlets in Spanish,

or maternal health posters in Chichewa, can easily adapt existing Hesperian content to fit their specific needs.

Despite the incredible growth in connectivity, most of the world lacks reliable Internet access. Recognizing this, Hesperian has made this easy-to-use adaptation tool available both on- and off-line.

The Digital Commons also features an image library of over 10,000 Hesperian illustrations that help explain complex health information. Users can search for images related to specific topics and download them to use or adapt in their own health materials. If PCVs are working in a low-literacy community similar to



the one I worked in, the image library is a treasure trove for their health education efforts.

Materials created using these tools can be saved in the online Health Materials Exchange, and shared for use with people around the world. For example, if a health promoter in Bolivia makes a flyer about sanitation and saves it in the Health Materials Exchange, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Peru can find it, adapt it to her context, and save it again for other volunteers to use. The Health Materials Exchange lets health workers doing similar work in different settings learn from each other, build capacity, save time, and avoid “reinventing the wheel.”

A Returned Peace Corps Volunteer who recently served in Namibia field-tested an early version of the Hesperian Digital Commons and commented on the usefulness to PCVs:

*“I did lots of redrawing of ‘Where There Is No Doctor’ pictures onto posters at the health center where I worked in Namibia, because the book had great drawings — on topics like dehydration and bilharzia. I would make posters for the waiting room with nice big images and a few bullet points that I’d have a friend translate. I would have loved to have something like [the adaptation tool] when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer.”*

*“It would be great to be able to build on experience of other volunteers. When I left I took photos of posters I’d made to give to new volunteers to put on their external hard drive. But it would be great to direct the new Peace Corps Volunteers to posters I’d made online!”*

In addition to these Web-based tools, Hesperian has developed a prototype iPhone and Android mobile

phone app on “Danger Signs during Pregnancy and Birth” that health providers can use to access basic health information and support outreach and training. While Internet access is needed to download the app, once it has been downloaded, the app can be used in the most remote communities. As more and more PCVs have smartphones, we’re excited to be able to expand the reach of Hesperian content through mobile devices.

As I think back to my beloved copy of *Where There Is No Doctor*—which I left in the village with my counterpart, and which had been used by others before me—I wonder how many lives that one copy has helped. Now, a new generation of Peace Corps Volunteers will be able to use the Hesperian Digital Commons to leave even more valuable knowledge behind to the communities they serve, and to other volunteers around the world, increasing their impact exponentially.

Please help spread the word about these exciting new resources. To learn more about Hesperian Health Guides’ work, to get involved, or to make sure these resources are available in the language of the community you served, please visit [www.hesperian.org/RPCV](http://www.hesperian.org/RPCV).

*Zena Herman served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana from 2003-2005. She is currently working on the major revision of Where There Is No Doctor and the digital distribution of Hesperian’s health guides.*



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## TEDxUlaanbaatar

*Ideas worth sharing in Mongolia...and beyond*

by Travis Hellstrom

If you've ever looked at TED.com online, I don't have to tell you how inspiring those videos there can be. Every year speakers come from around the world to the prestigious TED conference with a common mission: Ideas Worth Sharing. Topics range from human rights to scientific exploration, happiness to architecture. (TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design.)

On August 20, 2011 we brought this same spirit to the other side of the world in Mongolia and created the first TEDx conference in the land of blue sky. TEDx events are licensed by TED.com but independently organized so they can reflect the unique needs of their intended community. At TEDxUlaanbaatar our team, made up of Mongolians and Americans (including dozens of Peace Corps Volunteers and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers), decided that our TEDx conference would be organized around the theme Legacy: Honoring Tradition and Designing the Future. Hundreds of people came from Mongolia and around the world to attend the conference where more than 100 attendees, 50 speakers and performers, and 50 volunteers and organizers joined together. Our performers included traditional musicians and throat-singers, contortionists, and modern bands like Altan Urag, Tumen Ekh and hip hop artist Quiza. Our speakers included members of parliament like Oyun who created the Zorig Foundation, famous author Jack Weatherford who wrote "Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World," and head lamas from the Gandan Monastery who even read a letter written especially for us by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Several of our speakers talked about programs in Mongolia, like tele-medicine and



The TEDxUlaanbaatar team.

educational hotspots, that are really changing the country.

Technology played an incredibly important role in bringing the TEDxUB event to life. The TEDxUB website was crucial, allowing us to connect to many of the speakers, some of whom came from America, Australia, England and many other countries. The event was live streamed around the world, with participants watching online from over 4 continents. Mongolia Peace Corps Volunteers live blogged, facebooked and tweeted the event. The local live audience had dual language earpieces so they could hearing the speaker in both Mongolian and English, as about 80% of the speakers spoke in Mongolian and many attendees could only speak English and vice versa. (A team of volunteers live-translated the event.)

The conference took almost a year to organize, with the talented organizing team devoting every Saturday for months to work on the project. But it

was all worth it. We are humbled by the positive response we have received from the event and can't wait to host the conference again next year.

Creating TEDxUlaanbaatar as the first TEDx event in Mongolian history has given us a great start and, more importantly, has encouraged others to dream. The wife of one of the organizers heard a young Mongolian man in the audience say that he now dreams about speaking at TEDxUlaanbaatar in the future. By creating this event together, the volunteers, speakers, organizers and attendees encouraged each other to dream about what is possible.

On October 15, we led a TEDx Organizer's Workshop for which almost 100 people signed up to hear about how we can create more TEDx events around Mongolia. We are also working with Returned Peace Corps Volunteers like Chris DeBruyen and Kevin Johnstone to create TEDx events in Iraq. We aren't experts on how to start

Kate Berkowski



**Burnee Bataa shows the audience traditional Mongolian Buddhist relics.**

your own TEDx event, and we couldn't have done it without an incredibly talented team, but we certainly learned a lot of things over last few months that we think are worth sharing.

TEDxUlaanbaatar is just the beginning of many great things in Mongolia. As one of our youngest audience members, a teenager named Bolortuya, told us, "To believe in the heroic make heroes. Let's all become heroes."

*To see more please visit [TEDxUlaanbaatar.com](http://TEDxUlaanbaatar.com) and tell us what you think on YouTube, Flickr and Facebook.*

*Travis Hellstrom just finished serving three years with the Peace Corps in Mongolia where he was a Health Volunteer in Sukbbaatar province and a third year Volunteer Leader serving with the World Health Organization in national capital of Ulaanbaatar. He founded TEDxUlaanbaatar with Mend-Orshikh Amartaivan in 2011. Travis is also author of the Unofficial Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook ([www.peacecorps handbook.com](http://www.peacecorps handbook.com)) and writes for a small army of everyday humanitarians at [AdvanceHumanity.com](http://AdvanceHumanity.com).*

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33

## ANOU

*Using Peace Corps ingenuity to solve the artisan middleman dilemma once and for all*

by Dan Driscoll

**I**nnovation manifests in the most unexpected places. It is no surprise then that Peace Corps Volunteers, placed in foreign environments and equipped with minimal resources with the mandate to “do good,” are frequently innovating solutions to age-old problems. My service as a Peace Corps Volunteer was no different. Originally assigned to be an environment Volunteer in Ait Bougamez, a valley hidden away deep in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco, I found myself reinventing the artisan fair-trade model with a website called Anou.

### THE PROBLEM

The story behind Anou began in a woodcarving shop. The shop had filled a traditional and important role in the community by providing a space for people to carve utilitarian items such as bowls, spoons, and forks as well as the wooden doors that traditionally adorned the homes throughout the valley.

However, the history and the very existence of the woodshop came under siege as cheap plastic goods and lifeless metal doors flooded local markets. The carvers’ problems were compounded when a corrupt forest guard deemed the woodshop illegal and began soliciting crippling bribes from the woodshop. Over the years, the carvers scraped by with intermittent sales to middlemen and fair-trade organizations that paid little, yet turned around and sold the carvers’ products for exorbitantly high prices. What was once a vibrant small army of carvers was reduced to one full-time carver and a handful of apprentices by the time I arrived in 2008.

Eager to restore the woodshop and the cultural traditions it represented, I opened up negotiations on behalf of the woodshop with the Moroccan Ministry



RUG FROM TOUNFITE, MOROCCO



#### ABOUT THE ARTIST

##### FATIMA HADDU

Fatima was born in the small village of Taouat, just outside of Tounfite. When her husband passed away several years ago, she moved to Tounfite to stay closer with her family. Fatima has eight children of varying ages who live and work throughout Morocco. Two of her daughters, Ito and Fatima, whom she taught how to weave, remain in Tounfite and now work with her at the cooperative.



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of Water and Forests. Since the ministry was eager to find more community-led forest management initiatives, I quickly found common ground with the ministry when I proposed that the carvers would plant a tree for every item they sold. While such an agreement was promising, the carvers could not even afford to plant a \$1 sapling with the prices that fair-trade organizations were willing to pay for their products. Any agreement would be shelved until the carvers and I found a way to solve the artisan middleman dilemma once and for all.

### THE SOLUTION

Geographically isolated with limited technical and language capacity, the carvers, and many Moroccan artisans, seemed destined to always be dependent on others to sell their work. But things started changing in Ait Bougamez. Just before my arrival in 2008, roads and power lines connected the valley to the nearest town and cell phone coverage began to blanket the valley. The pace of change was as fast as it was comical: while my mud house still lacked running water, I did have Internet.

In order to meet the requirement of the agreement with the ministry, I did what Peace Corps Volunteers do best: innovate. I began teaching the carvers how to use computers, cameras and the

When an artisan posts a product, they can visit the product page to see what prospective customers think of their product, its pictures, and its price. Five stars is outstanding. With one star, they are advised to make some adjustments.



Yemna of Cooperative Tifoute poses for a picture with her newly woven carpet in order to post it on Anou.



Members of Association Nahda teach each other photography skills after a photography training led by Dan.

Internet to sell their products online even though they had never touched a computer before. I came up with a system that enabled the carvers to independently post and sell things on Etsy.com, an American e-commerce store, even though they did not share the same language as their customers.

By the end of my service, the carvers



**Dan leads a training with Association Nahda on how to post products on Anou.**



**Brahim Mansouri, Moroccan Director of Anou, works with a painter in Essaouria to post a painting online.**



**Dan teaches a group of Ait Bougamez carvers how to use a computer and the Internet for the first time.**

had sold over \$2,000 in products. And meeting the requirements of the ministry, they planted over 200 apple trees for the most underprivileged families in the valley. The project was an example of what Peace Corps embodies best — that through partnerships and a little bit of grit, even the most marginalized global citizens can always stand up on their own if given a chance.

### **SCALING UP AND CREATING A FUTURE BEYOND FAIR TRADE**

Despite the success the carvers and I had, artisans across Morocco and throughout the developing world still faced the same middleman dilemma. Focused on creating widespread social impact, I began developing a website called Anou.

I incorporated lessons gleaned from each painful experience teaching the carvers how to use Etsy.com. The goal? Enable all artisans, no matter how geographically isolated or computer illiterate they are, to be able to sell their work independently.

I addressed the critical problems first: language and confusing interfaces designed for the computer literate. I began by eliminating language from the

artisan's dashboard and exclusively used images. Now, instead of having to type in descriptions of the products, artisans would simply have to click on images that resembled the new product they were posting. Each selected image would generate product information in English on the official product page. Keeping things image-based and simple enabled me to drop the six months of training it took to get the carvers on Etsy down to just a day with the new artisans I trained.

Yet a language-free, simple interface wouldn't help artisans if they couldn't access it. The carvers, for example, were a three-hour walk from the nearest cybercafe and couldn't afford to have Internet in their home. Therefore, Anou is enhanced with a mobile platform that enables artisans to manage their online store through a simple cell phone. For example, if an item sells, they are notified by text which item sold and where to send it. Once the artisan sends the product, they simply reply to the text, and Anou's system will automatically send an email to the customer informing them that their product is on its way.

One of the biggest and most frequently overlooked problems facing the carvers and many other artisans was that they lacked insights into what potential customers thought about their work. The carvers only knew if an item was liked if it sold, but had no idea why something *didn't* sell. To address this, each product page on Anou features a rating system that enables artisans to get critical information from prospective customers. Such customers can rate whether the pictures the

artisan took were bad, if the item itself is undesirable, and if the listed price is unreasonable. Each rating is aggregated on the artisans' dashboards using simple, understandable images that not only provide artisans with the tools and information to grow their business and sales, but involve potential customers directly in the artisans' development.

### **THE FUTURE OF ANOU**

The exciting tools and features integrated into Anou described above represent just the beginning. Throughout 2012, the carvers and I have been working hard to refine Anou and develop key areas where the site can improve. With each training, we are discovering new and better ways to bring artisans and their customers closer together.

The process has been long and hard, but we're close to opening our beta in the fall of 2012. When Anou's beta closes, it will mark the beginning of its expansion to other promising countries through partnerships with local associations and cooperatives. As Anou grows, I hope not only that it represents the end of the middleman dilemma, but that it also serves as inspiration to current Peace Corps Volunteers looking to find innovative solutions for intractable problems of their own.

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*Dan Driscoll (Morocco 2008-10), founder and CEO of Anou, previously worked as a journalist and as a communication consultant on a USAID-sponsored project in Yemen. Dan graduated from University of California – Irvine and lives in, and works from, a small village outside Fez, Morocco.*

## FROM MUD HUTS TO STARTUPS

*Some things never change*

by Kelly Meeker

There's one thing that hasn't changed in five years: I still bike to work. But instead of dodging cows and the occasional snake on a dusty *brousse*-path, today I dodge cabs, hybrid drivers and the occasional runner in Portland's spacious and well-marked bike lanes.

A few years ago, I was a natural resource management Volunteer in Mali, where I spent more time killing scorpions than I did taking baths. Today I work for OpenSesame in a sleek startup office, with big screen TVs displaying real-time website metrics and a desk piled high with gadgets and cords. I develop marketing programs and work with partners and customers to design software solutions for their internal training programs. When you ask me how I got here, I'll tell you: "On a bike, starting in a dusty *brousse*-path."

I learned everything I needed to know to succeed in tech as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV)—resilience, problem-solving, project management, communications and, most importantly, kindness. Peace Corps is the greatest life training program I can imagine. When you have few resources but lots of need, you learn to cobble together finished work with duct tape.

Startup businesses are no different—there aren't enough people or resources to do everything you dream of doing, but you focus on the things you can do and you get them done. When resources are scarce, every rock becomes a tool and every stick becomes a lever. And though I'm sitting at a desk adorned with a 21st century tech menagerie, ultimately, a shiny new Macbook, to a PCV, is just another roll of duct tape.

Whether designing an infant nutrition program or building out software, it starts with an idea. Next comes building support and



Kelly Prieber

*Au village in Mali.*

commitment from your team and community. Then, together, you develop and execute. You evaluate your success, you make improvements, you try again. And each time you get better, learn more and become more confident. The central characteristic that drives success from mud huts to tech startups is persistence: the ability to embrace challenge and accept that failure is a transitory state.

Peace Corps is not merely an opportunity to serve; it's an opportunity to develop the skills employers appreciate: flexibility, responsiveness and a willingness to embrace the problems of others and attack them as your own.

Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer changes you in very obvious ways: You return home with stories of that one time a black mamba fell through

your roof a foot away from your mosquito net. But it takes time to understand the more profound and subtle changes: problem-solving skills, teamwork, leadership, and unwavering perseverance. When you approach your future with this foundation, tapping away at a keyboard and helping another customer is no different from ripping one more length of duct tape or hammering the pedals on that dusty *brousse*-path.



*Kelly Meeker is the Community Manager at OpenSesame, an online marketplace for training courses. She served as a natural resource management Volunteer in Mali from 2005 to 2007.*

## MAP IT!

*Let's engage Peace Corps Volunteers in open-source community mapping*

by Oliver Cunningham

**W**hile receiving my master's as a Paul D. Coverdell Fellow at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies, I've recently heard lectures by Rob Baker of Tech Change and Nathaniel Raymond of the Satellite Sentinel Project, who have shown the increasing need and appeal of open-source mapping software to provide critical initial assessment information in humanitarian crisis situations, and inspired students with the power and possibility of mapping technology. Although many larger, urban areas have decent maps, just as many rural, developing towns and even cities are not adequately mapped. That's where my idea comes in—have Peace Corps Volunteers do it.

One of the many roles of Peace Corps Volunteers is to serve as liaisons between their local host communities and their home communities. Often they serve in remote places outside the purview of modern commodities like electricity, running water and Internet—which means no maps either. In fact, I remember looking at a map of Guatemala, and not being able to find my community. Nonetheless, newly deployed Volunteers are tasked to do a needs assessment, including a community map, within their first three months at site. Imagine if that map were then translated, through technology like Walking Papers (<http://walking-papers.org>), Ushahidi (<http://ushahidi.com>) or Open Street Map ([www.openstreetmap.org](http://www.openstreetmap.org)) into usable and comprehensive maps. There would be many benefits to such a partnership.

Like what? First, Peace Corps Volunteers would better integrate with their communities by hashing out the details of the actual capabilities and resources available within their community and surrounding areas.

This would help to foster trust-based relationships between community members and new Volunteers, as well as use community input to make thorough and practical maps. It seems like community mapping would provide limitless possibilities for tourism, development, and other Peace Corps projects.

Second, it would benefit humanitarian workers and mappers alike, because having Peace Corps Volunteers map their communities would generate maps in remote, isolated, and probably unmapped (or at least not well-mapped) areas. For example, despite the fact that there have been Volunteers in Lanquin, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, for over 20 years, and Internet access for nearly 10 years, none of the aforementioned open-source technologies display accurate maps of the area. New Peace Corps-generated maps would help make open-source mapping more comprehensive, and could potentially improve the efficacy of humanitarian responses to emergencies or epidemics.

Third, it is a viable strategy—the Peace Corps currently has over 8,000 Volunteers working across the world in 75 countries. Volunteers have great potential to easily, effectively, and cheaply expand the capability of open-source mapping technologies. Volunteers are resourceful, know the local culture, area, and networks, and could provide verification for the mapping they do. In my view, Volunteers could take this idea as far as they, or their community, wanted. Ideally, they would map “nuts and bolts”—roads, rivers, and bridges as well as key community resources, like water sources, schools, health centers and markets. But these maps could also be used to track thematic information, such as malaria occurrences, deforestation, HIV/AIDS, etc. Not only that, but they

also easily serve as intermediaries between the local population, which may or may not speak English, and the English-based database systems of the open-source systems. Moreover, your average Peace Corps Volunteer is computer savvy, has a computer readily available (or can at least access one at the Peace Corps office or regional headquarters) and has the time to put into developing a mapping skillset, not to mention a practical deliverable for the Volunteer, local community, humanitarians, and mappers. The reason it's not happening already is more than likely because people don't know—getting the word out is the first step.

So, in practice, if you're reading this and you are a Volunteer, get out of your hammock, go on these websites and map your community! You will be contributing to your community, building confidence, trust and capacity with local counterparts, and doing something useful, even learning a new skill—all while contributing to both the first and third goals of Peace Corps. If you're Peace Corps staff, explore your Volunteers do this. It benefits the host country and could potentially be useful for security reasons for both host country nationals and Volunteers. Engaging Peace Corps to conduct and implement open-source community mapping projects builds community collaboration and trust networks, provides crucial information to open-source maps, and accentuates the importance of partnerships in the humanitarian realm. It seems to be a practical solution to under-mapped rural areas that would benefit all involved parties.

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*Oliver Cunningham (Guatemala 2009-11) is receiving his M.A. in International Studies with a certificate in Humanitarian Assistance at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver.*



## CORPS INNOVATION

# **The Smartphone REVOLUTION**

Technology is changing everything we do and how we do it, and the Peace Corps is no different. Two years ago, smartphones were uncommon at staging. Now, almost every trainee arrives at staging with a smartphone that will work in their country of service. In two years, the percentage of Volunteers with a smartphone went from almost zero to over 90.

### What's changed?

For those of us who have been off the grid, smartphone costs have plummeted and the majority of those over 12 in the U.S. have one.

Though not a sure bet, there's now a good chance your phone will work in your country of service. The two historical barriers to your phone working abroad are the cellphone technology (CDMA vs. GSM) and locked phones.

CDMA and GSM are two distinct (and incompatible) technologies used by cellular networks. CDMA technology is only used in a few countries, including the U.S. by Verizon and Sprint. GSM technology, used by nearly every country in the world and AT&T and T-Mobile in the States, uses a removable SIM card you can swap to change carriers. In the U.S., it's a 50-50 split between CDMA and GSM phones. Many CDMA phones now have a SIM, and many SIM slots are unlocked by default allowing you to use the SIM on networks abroad. This hasn't changed much in the past couple of years, but the other barrier, locked phones, has basically vanished.

A "locked" phone means that your phone will only work on your provider's network. So, an AT&T phone would only work with an AT&T SIM card. But if you have an "unlocked" phone, you can put any SIM card in and it will work.

Now, it's easy to get a phone unlocked. The catalyst was T-Mobile's move to offer exclusively unlocked phones, which pressured the other carriers to follow. If you forget to unlock your phone before you go, an eager cellphone dealer will unlock your phone for cheap.

Culturally, a barrier to PCVs using smartphones is that host community members don't have them: Volunteers can inadvertently separate themselves by using flashy technology the

community could never afford. But this barrier is also disappearing.

In 2013, global smartphone sales hit \$1 billion. With developed markets nearing saturation, the major increase is in the developing world. In fact, Latin America showed the greatest increase in smartphone sales in the world, increasing by 96 percent in the last three months of 2013.

The major reason is that costs are dropping. A third of the smartphones sold in 2013 cost than \$150; soon there will be options for \$25.

### What does this mean for you?

The latest smartphones are faster than ever, with processing speeds that allow you to download a full-length HD movie in 20 seconds. Battery life allows for 20 hours of talk time and 35 days on standby. They do better with dust and dirt, and some are even water-resistant up to one meter (so it will survive a drop in the latrine—if you are willing to go in after it).

The latest smartphones can include a 16 megapixel camera—eight times better than the original iPhone. This allows PCVs to share their experiences via blogs and videos and let Peace Corps headquarters use more Volunteer content in promotions and on [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov).

Unfortunately, Volunteers with this technology will meet connectivity barriers. Internet speeds in Peace Corps host countries are still slow: Making a movie might be easy, but uploading it to YouTube might mean waiting until you are back on WiFi. Google Translate? Better download the offline library.

Devices have already started to change how we serve: How we adapt, innovate, and solve with them will help our communities thrive even more in the future.

*The Office of Innovation works to enable more efficient operations and implement "smarter" government initiatives.*

# Community Mapping Just Got A Whole Lot Easier

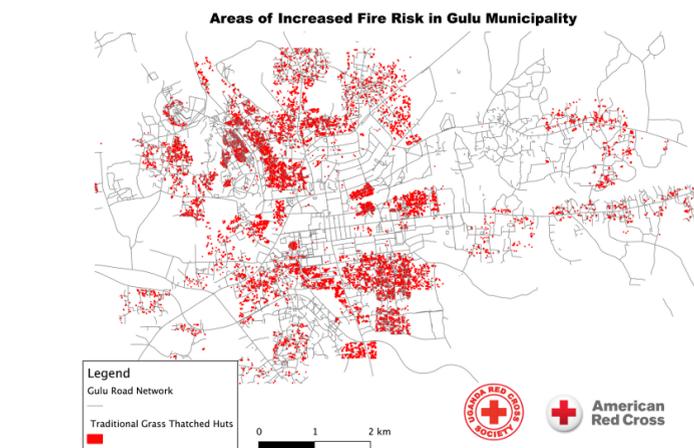
OpenStreetMap Launches New Map Editor at Peace Corps Headquarters

By Brooke Marchewka

Open-source mapping is here, and now it is easier than ever to do. Imagine yourself in your host community with your counterpart: viewing your community from satellite imagery, outlining the local clinic, primary school, homes, rivers, roads, and more with the click of a mouse. Imagine labeling your community's features and saving the changes you made to a global map- one that anyone can see, edit, and use. Imagine how this kind of mapping will revolutionize accessibility to rural geographic information, facilitate the transfer of computer skills to counterparts, and inform project planning for any organization that wants to make a difference in that community.

Recently, The Peace Corps Office of Innovation invited developers from OpenStreetMap, the forefront collaborative project to create an open-source free map of the world, to Headquarters to launch their new mapping editor. This user-friendly tool, called iD editor, makes it easier than ever before for anyone to contribute their knowledge to open-source mapping. According to Josh Campbell, GIS Architect at the U.S. Department of State, "this combination of widespread technology access and ease-of-use is an incredible achievement in the history of mapping."

Since OpenStreetMap was created in 2004, thousands of contributors have collectively enriched the world map by mapping their own communities. Using low-cost GPS data and satellite imagery, "a base level map of a town, a village, a neighborhood etc. can be established



Uganda and American Red Cross

A map created by the Uganda and American Red Cross using geo-locations of straw-roofed houses on OpenStreetMap.

surprisingly fast among single individuals or a small group of volunteers," explains Alex Barth, data lead at MapBox. Perhaps OpenStreetMap's most appealing feature is also what sets it apart from any other mapping platform- its data is free and open-source, meaning that anyone can use data from the map to create web and mobile applications, customized maps, data visualizations for things like disaster risk simulations, and more. With OpenStreetMap, "all possibilities are open, the data is as good as yours," says Barth. Thanks to contributions from people around the world and a free, open-source platform, OpenStreetMap has become a rich source of vital geographic data for both private and governmental organizations such as Foursquare, Craigslist, Wikipedia, Apple, The U.S. Department of State, The Red Cross, and the World Bank.

But why should Peace Corps Volunteers care about using OpenStreetMap? Put simply, it magnifies the impact of what they are already doing. Community mapping has long been considered a valuable exercise for Volunteers in the sense that it encourages them to explore their host community and provokes critical project planning discussions. Traditionally, maps have been sketched on paper or murals. These maps are useful, but they are limited in terms of who sees them, who can update them, and who has access to the valuable cultural and geographic data they provide. Imagine if the community maps created by Peace Corps Volunteers were online and open-source.

That's right. We are talking about Volunteers contributing to a digital map that anyone around the world can access, edit, and use. Not only would open-source mapping liberate the valuable

geo-cultural knowledge that Peace Corps Volunteers accumulate during their service, but it would also- quite literally- put rural communities on the map. According to Barth, maps depicting the most remote areas of the world are “often not available, inaccurate or just plain out of date.” Thus, Peace Corps Volunteers are in a unique position to provide detailed maps and to empower their communities to upkeep the map long after they have completed their service. “Peace Corps Volunteers build deep relationships in the communities they serve, and that is in fact the key to see change through technology. It takes more than exposure and capacity, but time for a community to absorb, discuss and discover the right applications and approaches.”

Mikel Maron, former Board Member at the OpenStreetMap Foundation and Director of GroundTruth Initiative, emphasizes how the adoption of open-source mapping reverberates far beyond the individual Peace Corps Volunteer’s service and how it can benefit the community itself. When a community takes ownership of their map, there is great potential for increasing community solidarity and making information available to everyone that can stimulate community economic development, support efforts to improve resource allocation, and support disaster relief efforts, among other things.

GroundTruth Initiative, a new media and technology consulting company specializing in community-based participatory technologies, has demonstrated the profound community impact of OpenStreetMap through their project Map Kibera. The project started with the goal of making Kibera, Kenya- one of the largest slums in the world- more than just a “blank spot” on the map. Three years later, it has produced a number of positive outcomes for the community. Residents of Kibera gained confidence in their new computer skills, increased familiarity with GPS technology, group solidarity, and pride.

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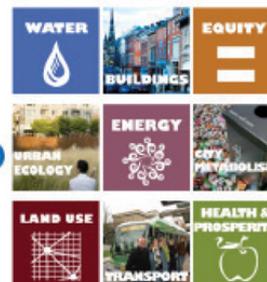


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## Buzz from the Field



Uganda and American Red Cross

The proximity of straw-roofed houses in Uganda poses an increased fire risk.

On the community level, Kibera gained more legitimacy as a neighborhood and residents felt less marginalized. Furthermore, groups focused on issues in health, gender-based violence, sanitation, mobile phone services, farm-to-market supply chain, large-scale conflict mapping, peace promotion, and others expressed interest in using the data from Map Kibera for their own projects. Maron attributes the success of Map Kibera to the sense of ownership that community members felt in mapping their community, but especially the “perseverance and growing trust over 3 years (and counting).” He says, “that potential in communities around the world is what so excites me about interest in OpenStreetMap at the Peace Corps.”

The Red Cross’ mapping initiative in Uganda is another example of how organizations are utilizing OpenStreetMap data in creative ways for their own projects. In 2012, the Uganda and American Red Cross partnered with the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team to create comprehensive maps of the cities of Gulu and Lira in northern Uganda. Using satellite images, volunteers and members of the Uganda Red Cross society traced the locations of straw-roofed houses in the Gulu and Lira municipalities on OpenStreetMap. Then, using the geographic density of these houses as an indicator of increased fire risk, the Red Cross gained a more comprehensive understanding of where to focus their efforts in fire risk reduction.

The U.S. Department of State’s

Humanitarian Information Unit supplied the satellite imagery for this project and continues to empower the OpenStreetMap community through their Imagery to the Crowd initiative, which shares commercial high resolution satellite imagery with the volunteer mapping community. Josh Campbell emphasizes how crucial maps are to implementing quick, effective emergency response programs. If a baseline map of an area already exists before a disaster occurs, the OpenStreetMap community “can focus on updating the map with areas affected by the disaster, and not on building the foundation of the map,” says Campbell.

Applications of OpenStreetMap such as this would not be possible without the mapping done by people on the local level. This is where Peace Corps Volunteers can make a big difference. Campbell explains, “Peace Corps Volunteers can provide the descriptive, cultural details about the places where they live and work that only comes from being in the community. No satellite image can tell you the name of a road, a business, or a school. It is these details that transform a collection of geographic data about roads and buildings into a real ‘place.’”

So why isn’t this happening on a grand scale already? Since the dawn of open-source mapping, perceived barriers such as lack of coding skills, computer and Internet access have stood in the way of Peace Corps Volunteers using and teaching open-source mapping. But these barriers are breaking down. With OpenStreetMap’s iD editor, Volunteers

do not need to know how to code or even have any experience with open-source mapping; in fact, the tool was designed with first-time users in mind. In regards to computer availability, the 2012 Annual Volunteer Survey reports that 80 percent of Volunteers have or regularly use a laptop or desktop computer in their community. While 51 percent of Volunteers report that they usually or always have Internet access at their residence, those for whom access is particularly limited can edit the map offline and upload their changes when they do have access. They can also take advantage of projects such as Walking Papers, which integrate paper maps into the data-collection process for OpenStreetMap. Furthermore, lack of awareness of open-source mapping has been a barrier to Volunteer adoption. If you recall Oliver Cunningham’s piece *Map It!* in *WorldView*’s winter edition, he says “the reason it’s not happening already is because people don’t know-getting the word out is the first step.”

Peace Corps Volunteers can truly contribute to tangible humanitarian applications of open-source mapping by making local knowledge universally accessible. More importantly, Peace Corps Volunteers can empower community members to maintain the map, thereby enriching a global reservoir of data that humanitarian organizations tap into to improve their understanding of local conditions, utilize their resources more efficiently, and ultimately magnify their impact.

**If you are interested in OpenStreetMap, visit [www.learnOSM.org](http://www.learnOSM.org) and get started. To learn more about this initiative, the Peace Corps Office of Innovation at [innovation@peacecorps.gov](mailto:innovation@peacecorps.gov).**

*Brooke Marchewka is a member of the Peace Corps Office of Innovation and an International Development student at The George Washington University. Learn more about The Office of Innovation’s work at <http://innovationchallenge.peacecorps.gov/>*

## HAND-HELD DEVICES LESSEN THE LOAD

Peace Corps begins to say goodbye to printed materials for some Volunteers

By Mark Huffman

**M**any Returned Peace Corps Volunteers share stories about hauling one or two boxes of books across country to begin two years of service. The anxiety of making transportation plans was often compounded by the weight of personal luggage and extra learning materials the Peace Corps provided during training.

Today, hand-held devices are replacing those boxes in many countries.

“There has been a high demand from our posts for e-learning tools and we’re always looking for ways to provide our Volunteers with the best resources in the quickest way possible,” says acting-Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet.

E-readers were distributed to Peace Corps/Liberia trainees in 2012 and to Armenia, Ethiopia, Lesotho, and Swaziland trainees in 2013. Meanwhile, Volunteers in many other countries are using smartphones and personal computers to enhance their Peace Corps service. Building upon this reality, the agency’s Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS) is overseeing the conversion of its publications for mobile device use.

By the end of 2014, approximately 50 Peace Corps publications will have been converted to e-book format for use in the field. All new and revised publications will be available in both .epub, which is standard for many mobile devices, and .mobi, which is a format unique to Kindle.

“Since no printing or shipping is involved, Volunteers will receive material

quicker. Revisions to existing material can also be done more easily,” says Sonia Stines-Derenoncourt, director of OPATS, which tested applications for mobile devices.

A 2013 Peace Corps survey concluded that 90 percent of Volunteers have access to the Internet at least once a week. Volunteers in Africa were among those least likely to have access. However, even that continent has experienced progress with connectivity and accessibility over the past five years and is now at the forefront of e-reader usage.

Vince Groh, chief of operations for the Africa region, implemented use of

the devices when he served as Liberia country director from March 2011 to August 2013. “During my first pre-service training in Liberia, we spent a ton of time and money on printing and we didn’t feel that was appropriate. I have been a Kindle enthusiast since they first rolled out and we decided to trust our Volunteers with equipment that could give them more access to resources,” he says.

Of the 100 Kindles provided to Volunteers, Groh says fewer than five had to be replaced during his time as country director. “The Volunteers loved the message it sent —It told them on the first day, ‘We’re investing in you.’”

Groh says buy-in from the Volunteers and staff came quickly. “We pre-loaded all of our Peace Corps documents and once the Volunteers registered, they could download all of their own books and personal items as well. The hook is that we have all of the training material right there with their own reading material so they are carrying all of their training documents wherever they travel.”



Chad Miller, a Peace Corps Volunteer leader in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, uses his e-reader.

RUTH GOODIE

At a country directors conference in September 2012, Groh spoke about the successful launch of e-readers and others adopted similar programs soon after.

In Swaziland, Country Director Steven Driehaus started a pilot program that distributed Kindles to 33 trainees in June 2013. While there have been challenges in formatting documents for conversion to Kindle, the benefits appear to have outweighed the struggles. “Despite the challenges, the Kindles have been well received by trainees and are now being used in the field. The number of manuals and printed materials transported to site with the new PCVs was greatly reduced,” he says.

Ethiopia and Lesotho have also had successful transitions to e-readers.

“They’re light, mobile, and easily tucked into a secure place when traveling,” Ethiopia Country Director Gregory Engle says, adding, “New Volunteers don’t have to bring a huge stack of documents to their sites. We also issue them thumb drives [with the files]; that way, if they see something on the Kindle that’s hard to view, they can open the same document on their laptop.”

Lesotho followed suit in October 2013 and Programming and Training Director Eric Goldman says response from the Volunteers has been positive, although large manuals and graphics have resulted in some formatting issues that are being resolved.

Such glitches are inevitable, according to Jack Merklein, who helped shepherd the transition to e-readers when he took over as chief of the OPATS Knowledge and Learning Unit in May 2012. “There are always obstacles to overcome, but we are working continually to ensure that the information can be easily accessed and read. New publications will be converted to an e-book format as they are produced.”

Groh stresses the importance of finding “local champions” in overseas offices to troubleshoot any problems with the devices. “My executive secretary helped crack the code on formatting. ... It’s a bit of

a learning curve, but like Microsoft Word, once you learn it you can build from there,” he says.

That secretary, Alfreda Stephens, still serves in that position today and is happy to see binders and photocopies being put to rest. “The Kindle is an easy device to carry, it does not cause storage problems, and it saves time and money on printing. The only disadvantage so far is the lack of electricity in rural areas,” she says.

However, Groh is quick to note that the latter point isn’t as glaring when the device is used exclusively for training.

“If you are just using your wireless device to read, it will last for weeks,” he says.

Noting that off-site conferences, training events, and camps that many Volunteers attend and/or facilitate will also benefit from e-book applications, Merklein says, “It’s a great way to have a variety of resources right at your fingertips.”

Groh says his team also loaded trainees’ e-readers with speeches by the Liberian president and articles about Liberian culture and news when he was country director. “It really enhanced participants’ cultural training and influenced an interaction with country politics,” he says, adding, “I would find Volunteers, during their breaks and at lunch, under a tree reading their Kindles.”

Looking forward to the day when host country nationals can be seen doing the same thing, Groh says, “Just think of the possibilities if community members had devices where they could search for their own material to fit their purposes. ... To put e-readers in the hands of students who have no access to traditional books would be amazing!” **WV**

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**Mark Huffman** serves as writer/editor for the Peace Corps Office of Overseas Programming and Training. He was a youth development Volunteer in Morocco (2005-2007) and has also served in the Office of Communications for the Peace Corps.



PEACE CORPS

## A NEW CHAPTER ... BUT NOT A COMPLETE DEPARTURE

Information Resource Center managers in Peace Corps countries will continue to coordinate distribution of both print and digital resources. Jack Merklein, who serves as chief of the Peace Corps Knowledge and Learning Unit in the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support, cautions against a complete phasing-out of printed material. “There are always those cases where printed material is more amenable to a Volunteer’s situation and, at a minimum, we will continue to provide our Information Resource Center managers with copies of our training resources since they serve as the first point of contact for Volunteers seeking information.”

Many posts prefer print because access to technology is expensive or unreliable. Other posts prefer digital formats due to space, portability, high printing costs, and for environmental reasons.

While a new chapter has begun, the simultaneous use of electronic and print material will endure as the Peace Corps continually looks for ways to improve the Volunteer experience.



Rachel Rose with a few of her Deaf students.

# THE SIGNS ARE THERE

Deaf education Volunteers develop an online sign language glossary, app for Kenya

By Amber Gomes

When I told people I was moving to Kenya with the Peace Corps I received reactions that I could group into three categories: supportive, less than supportive, and what I like to call “stereotypical.” It’s the responses that I received in this third group that surprised me the most; I was told to watch out for lions and crocodiles, asked if I would carry a spear or live in a hut, and warned against eating monkey brains. While it was easy for me to brush these comments off and arrive in Kenya feeling as though I didn’t possess such... “colorful” concepts of the country, I came to realize that I did have some preconceived notions of what a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Kenya could do.

Since 1964 Kenya has hosted Volunteers from the education, deaf education, public health, and community economic development (CED) sectors, and the Volunteers within these groups have worked hard. Many do so in the ways that I expected, by encouraging HIV/AIDS testing, helping coordinate vaccination campaigns, teaching, building resource centers, assisting village loans and savings associations, and by participating in so many other projects I could never name them all. While my peers continually impress me with their perseverance, ingenuity, and patience my biggest surprise in regards

to the work a PCV in Kenya can do came from two specific Volunteers.

Rachel Rose (2011-2013, Volunteer Leader 2014), and Kelly Rogel (2011-2013), collaborated with Deaf Kenyan native users of Kenyan Sign Language on a project I would never have guessed could be performed in Kenya. Sure, I’ve read *WorldView*, and I know PCVs in other countries have coordinated technological projects (maybe it’s my lack of technological savvy), but when I read about these projects I scoffed. I didn’t think that such projects could be implemented here in Kenya—but this project proved me wrong.

Rachel and Kelly were chosen to work in Kenya’s deaf education sector, an obvious choice when you know their backgrounds. Rachel, born into a Deaf family, was already fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) when she came to Kenya, and a graduate of the world’s leading university for the deaf, Gallaudet. Kelly, herself born profoundly deaf, was also already fluent in ASL and had personal experience of Deaf culture.

Unlike Rachel and Kelly there are Volunteers placed in the deaf education sector with little experience in deaf education or training in ASL, let alone Kenyan Sign Language (KSL). To address this, Volunteers in the deaf education sector go through the standard language training during PST that all trainees undergo; only for KSL rather than a spoken language. While PCVs do receive training in KSL, they cannot, understandably, learn all of the needed vocabulary for teaching two years of advanced math and science in a 10-week training. This leads to the temptation to create words during lectures when a teacher is trying to explain a phenomenon and

doesn't know a certain sign. In reality this isn't a temptation limited to PCVs either; many Kenyan teachers also fall into this trap potentially creating future confusion for their students. And while there are a number of schools for deaf education in Kenya, a majority of these programs aren't working in coordination. So while students at one school are taught the sign for "acid" is a quick tap, pull away and up by the middle finger of one hand on the other, other students are taught "acid" is a quick tap and pull away and out, by the middle finger of one hand on the cheek. This leads to some pretty obvious issues as students age and leave their home areas, where signs for things as basic as "rice" vary from region to region, and move to find work or continue their education.

In 2011, when Rachel and Kelly arrived in Kenya, Volunteers in the deaf education sector had already begun collecting data on KSL signs for Math and Science. When assigned to assist in the project the two quickly realized that the data collected would make great material for an online glossary of KSL; a glossary that would have the potential to address the above issues as they relate to PCVs. With this plan in mind they assembled a community workshop and established a team of Deaf Kenyan linguists and educators of the deaf to work on the project. Their task was manifold; they created a working glossary of KSL signs from physics, chemistry, math and biology vocabulary lists and they solicited for and received videos of the selected signs from four schools for the deaf across the country. The team then selected the vocabulary signs that they judged were the most conceptually accurate and grammatically appropriate given the parameters of KSL. Once the panel vetted the signs, KSL linguists Carol Aoko, Chris Kihia, Isabel Mugure were filmed reproducing each sign. These videos will become the three-dimensional glossary of KSL signs which is being formatted as a website now. But the project doesn't stop there. With an online video glossary of KSL, Rachel (who extended her service as a Peace Corps Volunteer Leader) hopes to continue

the project with Hudson Ila, a Deaf Kenyan and computer programmer, to format the glossary as a mobile phone app. Their vision is to create an interactive app that could teach hearing people basic KSL vocabulary using their handheld devices. (The KSL online glossary is online and functioning at <http://glossary.pck-lugha.com>.)

While the immediate benefit of the glossary and the phone app will be for PCVs in the deaf education sector that can use both to learn KSL during PST, and to teach in KSL as Volunteers, Kelly and Rachel hope that it will have long-lasting effects as well. After a test period within the PCV circle they hope that the app, and even the glossary, can be expanded for use by anyone with a smart phone or Internet access.

Even in a country where I personally thought technological projects would be

hopeless, Volunteers are thinking of and actually creating projects that can have a profound impact on the community, now and in the future. Kelly and Rachel have gone above and beyond to think outside of the box, and while PCVs are a generally impressive bunch, these women continue to amaze me. **WV**

**Amber Gomes (Kenya 2012-2014)** is a currently serving as a Public Health Volunteer in Kalawa, Kenya. She met both Rachel and Kelly at one of the country's Camp GLOWs attended by both hearing and deaf students from across Eastern and Coastal Kenya. Her primary projects include health education in six schools, educating Community Health Workers, working with PLWHA support groups, and the foundation of libraries in her Division's public schools.

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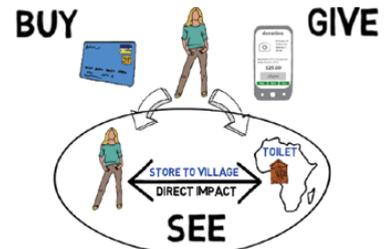
## VILLAGE X INC.

Facebook (a popular platform in Malawi). This experiment confirmed that mobile phones and Internet-based social media could be harnessed to connect donors and recipients through a powerful multimedia experience. Instead of a purely transactional exchange—evaluating applications, wiring money, logging post-project reports—the grantor-grantee

interaction could be much more fluid, relational and evocative. For example, FOM used the approach to fund a toilet block in Nkhata Bay, Malawi.

This experiment gave me an idea for a company. Here's the premise: people sincerely want to help others and participate in making their communities, and the world, a better place. Yet it's often hard to know how to help. When I give to a charity, where is my money going? Am I really helping anyone? We all ask these questions when writing a check or making an online donation to a charity. Likewise, we worry about the impacts of our shopping. In our interconnected world, with producers of goods and services often thousands of miles away from consumers, how can we know whether our purchases are helping or hurting?

I created Village X and its S2V System to answer to these questions. The company partners with socially conscious retailers that care about where their inputs come from and how sales of products/services affect others. It also partners



with handpicked underserved villages in developing countries (starting in Ghana and Malawi). By putting consumers directly in touch with great U.S. businesses and superstar villages, harnessing the horsepower of the U.S. economy and the magic of technology, Village X tries to ensure that each purchase and associated gift is actually helping someone. This approach is captured in Village X's motto: Buy. Give. See.

## Reward good development

By Michael L. Buckler

**R**eturned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) groups can serve many purposes, including the incubation of fledging innovations. Village X is a new social enterprise (a benefit corporation and associated nonprofit) based in Washington, D.C. Its patent-pending Store to Village (S2V) System grew out of an experiment conducted at Friends of Malawi (FOM), a nonprofit composed of RPCVs from Malawi.

The story, in a nutshell, is that FOM, where I serve as a board member, entertained my idea to increase the transparency of FOM's small-scale grants program for Malawian community-based organizations. Instead of providing the money and assuming that it would be used properly (which wasn't always the case), at my urging, FOM required recipients to post pictures of receipts and project milestones in real time to



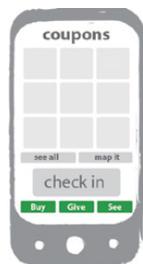
**BUY.** Consumers become Village X members by downloading and registering with the Village X smartphone app (free). Thereafter, they receive reward points every time they shop and give at a partner business, in store or online. Using the app, the points are redeemable for time and quantity-limited coupons for future purchases at those businesses. Members who buy and give more have access to better coupons.



**GIVE.** The app also allows members to customize tax-deductible donations by creating a "giving moment" in pictures, text or audio (e.g., in honor of @Mom for #Mother'sDay). Although members

can use the app to give at any time, they receive more reward points for giving while shopping.

Village X passes about 90% of each donation directly to an identified project. The money goes to actual steel sheets and bricks, not incidental expenses like salaries. Village X is able to do this because it employs a sustainable business model in the U.S. (partnering with socially conscious businesses) and is extremely frugal abroad. With no formal offices or vehicles overseas, Village X believes in a light footprint, including the use of local transport to visit villages and a small but dedicated local staff to check on projects. Although Village X is starting in Malawi and Ghana, it hopes to expand to other Peace Corps-friendly countries based on recommendations from RPCVs who have maintained strong relationships with their villages of service.



**SEE.** Immediately after members submit donations, they receive links to timeline pages of the projects receiving their funds. Using the app, they can follow their projects (live mobile updates from recipients) and share

their impacts via social media.

Village X applies Peace Corps lessons to project management. According to Village X co-founder Lauren Corke (Ghana 2011-2013), villages chose their own community projects because “local people know what they need.” The villages cover 20% of project costs, including 5% in cash. In the words of Village X co-founder Ryan Dunn (Niger 2010-2011, Ghana 2011-2013), “[t]hey must have skin in the game.” Projects are proposed, planned, implemented and documented by and for the community. Village X doesn’t participate in politics, favor certain groups over others, or pick individual winners and losers. If a project benefits the entire community, Village X funds.

Village X fancies itself as a #MobileNGO. Members give to projects using smartphones, and recipients provide live updates of projects via their mobile phones. A used Internet-based phone in Malawi runs about \$30, and prices are dropping fast—about 30% per year. Every village in Ghana and Malawi recruited by Village X in early 2014 (42 and counting) had access to an Internet-capable phone and, in a few years, such phones will be commonplace wherever there is Internet coverage.

This year Village X has been hard at work. All the pieces of the Store to Village System are in place: village projects in Ghana and Malawi in need of funding; retail partners excited to participate; consumers hungry to buy, give and see their impact;

and a web design firm to build the System. But without the System, these symbiotic participants cannot start working together. Village X needs about \$150k to continue, \$65k for the System and the rest for operating expenses.

To raise the money, Village X has launched a campaign on Indiegogo, a popular crowd funding website ([www.indiegogo.com/at/villagexinc](http://www.indiegogo.com/at/villagexinc)) and is seeking grant funding from select foundations. It also hopes to attract funding from RPCVs who read this article, appreciate the potential of Village X, and make a contribution. For more information on how to help, visit Village X’s website ([www.villagexinc.com](http://www.villagexinc.com)). The company is also active @villagexinc on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.



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# WILL MOBILE COMMUNICATION BRING ABOUT ‘THE ULTIMATE DAY’?

By Jarret Cassaniti

**A**s a Peace Corps Volunteer in rural Zambia from 2003 to 2005, I relied on word of mouth, bush note or a bike ride to the district capital to try the unreliable landlines for communication. A year after returning home, I received news from the community that a cell tower was raised in the district capital and people had a new option for communicating. I also found out I had missed most of Web 2.0's opening act and rushed to set up accounts on Friendster and MySpace. I bought a feature phone and, as a grad student at Emory's Rollins School of Public Health, read about the Blackberry craze with great interest.

Fast-forward to 2010 when I delivered HIV capacity building assistance to community health centers in the US for HealthHIV, a non-profit. I traveled to rural parts of the U.S. in Mississippi, Louisiana and California. I was struck at the similarities these communities had with rural Zambia. Their isolation from areas offering health care was obvious but deep rooted cultures that knew little about HIV and AIDS was also a commonality. It was



Dr. Zipporah Kpamor shares what global mHealth means to her at the Knowledge for Health booth at the 2013 mHealth Summit.

in these communities that I learned a little about telemedicine as way to provide clinical support and improve health outcomes by overcoming geographical barriers.

At this point in my professional life, mHealth had not yet made a significant appearance. That changed when I joined the Knowledge for Health (K4Health)

Project at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs in 2012.

According to the mHealth Working Group that K4Health facilitates and supports, "mHealth is the use of mobile technologies in public health and health service settings. The mHealth Working Group builds capacity, encourages collaboration, and shares knowledge to frame mobile technology within a larger global health strategy."

I learned more on a work trip to Abuja, Nigeria, when I had the opportunity to test a mobile job aid with family planning providers. The Application for Contraceptive Eligibility (ACE) mobile phone app was developed by my K4Health colleagues in fall 2011 for Android phones and updated in May 2012.

The testers were given scenarios depicting fictional family planning clients and asked to determine eligibility for family planning methods. They had no prior experience with the app and I provided no instruction, so everything they did was through intuition. They valued that they could use it without the Internet or even phone service once the app was downloaded and saved to a smart

phone. They were also excited that the app could be used as an alternative to a heavy laptop or cumbersome books.

One tester suggested the app would enable providers to deliver counseling inconspicuously. Whereas non-electronic mobile job aids have just one function, the mobile phone, by nature of being a ubiquitous multipurpose tool, can help providers deliver counseling privately.

Three quarters of the world's population has access to mobile phones while only two thirds have access to toilets. More people also have access to mobile phones than electricity and clean drinking water. The opportunity to leverage mobile phones to tackle poverty in the developing world has never been greater since "more than 80% of the 660 million mobile subscriptions added in 2011 were in developing countries" according to the mHealth Summit.

The Mobile Solutions team at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is working to harness this technology to accelerate USAID's development goals. In an essay about John F. Kennedy's founding vision for USAID in 1962, Charley Johnson and Priya Jaisinghani discuss the "Ultimate Day"; the day "when all nations can be self-reliant and when foreign aid will no longer be needed." They discuss the transformative nature of roads, railways, and the Internet and compare these developments to mobile phones with mobile money (mMoney) at its center.

My undergraduate education in anthropology taught me that the development expert's definitive measure of success is the transfer of capacity leading to the elimination of assistance. In Peace Corps I saw how difficult this is to achieve so I was shocked at the assertion that the "ultimate day" could be close at hand. While Mr. Johnson and Ms. Jaisinghani acknowledge the need for healthy skepticism and cite the prediction of TV in 1964 as a panacea for the information

needs in resource limited countries, I am optimistic that mHealth and mMoney can bring about far-reaching change.

It's been almost ten years since I began my service in Zambia and, through my work at K4Health, I finally feel like I'm no longer a step behind the mobile revolution. Mobile communication devices have the potential to redefine global citizenship, superseding religion, music, science, consumer consumption or human rights, the things I usually identify with universal culture. More importantly mHealth has the potential to help end development assistance and alleviate poverty. **WV**

**Jarret Cassaniti** (Zambia 2003-2005) has 10 years of experience working in public health and international development in Zambia, the United States, Nigeria and East Africa. He has collaborated with community groups, health centers, government bodies and professional associations. His experience includes designing eLearning modules for CME and CPD credits for medical professionals. He earned a BA in anthropology from the University of Vermont and a MPH in global health from Emory University. He is currently a program officer at Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs. You can read his blog: [www.k4health.org/blog/authors/jarret-cassaniti](http://www.k4health.org/blog/authors/jarret-cassaniti).



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**Student Ayman Yassa conducting a survey in Kono district, Sierra Leone (Summer 2010)**  
Credit: Yolanda Barbera Lainez, International Rescue Committee



## Moldova Clean Water App Wins Global Girls' Tech Competition

*Peace Corps Volunteer Chip Moreland had two goals when he pitched the idea for Technovation, a mobile app competition for girls, at the Moldovan high school where he taught: more opportunities to practice English outside of the classroom and economic opportunity for his students. What he didn't bank on was that their idea—tracking safe well water in their community—and the app they developed would take the top prize out of more than 800 teams at the global competition.*

Safe drinking water is a huge problem in Moreland's village: 80 percent of the people don't have access to potable water. Last year, 67 students at the high school contracted hepatitis A from the water (22 percent), and the village has one of the highest rates of hepatitis A in Moldova.

Last spring, Moreland issued a call and assembled a team of four girls to work on the app competition. For three months last summer, they defined their problem, determined what the app would do, and developed the app itself. The app, aquamea, shows the location of the wells in the village, and allows users to rate the water according to appearance, taste, and smell. The team also tested the wells for chemicals, microorganisms, and heavy metals, and posted the results. In addition to helping villagers find safe water, the app has an education component

that helps them understand the effects of water contaminants and how to treat the water to mitigate future problems.

The girls won the European division of Technovation, and were one of 10 teams who went to San Francisco for the World Pitch 2014 last August. There, they took the top prize for the high school division.

Moreland said the competition was life-changing for the girls, and the youth in his village, who hadn't previously considered technology an accessible career—and who live in a post-Soviet country where entrepreneurship is still a new concept.

"Most of the kids I asked, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' had never been asked that question," he said. "And those who have been asked often don't shoot higher than bus driver or farmer. Basically, even for the brighter kids in the village, many of them feel limited as to what they can do professionally."

For those who have broader career aspirations, Moreland

said they often have to leave their village or country to follow them.

"For those who are motivated to improve their quality of life, most of them choose to emigrate to another country and send money back, which is difficult for a culture that values family so much, and bad in general for the country since the talented and motivated working population are not there to develop the country and create jobs," he said.

Compounding this, strict gender roles in Moldova pressure women and girls to stay close to home, limiting their career options.

"While Moldova is much better than some countries about women in the workforce," Moreland said, "strong cultural traditions with gender roles keep many of the women close to home since they are expected to do just about everything around the house."

The Technovation Challenge, Moreland said, enabled the girls and those in the community who saw their success to

### Water quest

Girls in PCV Chip Moreland's Moldovan community test wells to check drinking water last summer. The girls developed an app that tracked water quality, and subsequently won a global app competition.

## A well-earned honor

The Moldovan team, aquamea, took the top prize at the Technovation World Pitch 2014, out of 800+ teams of girls. Before heading to San Francisco last August, the girls determined what their village needed, decided what the app would do, brainstormed the interface, and tested local wells to compile data.



reassess their hopes and aspirations. "It was like a window that showed them a world where there is economic opportunity and hope to improve their quality of life without having to leave the country to do so," he said. "The IT industry in Moldova is growing rapidly and they can make dollars or euros without having to leave their families and their village. It was really a big wake-up call and an opportunity to re-create their vision of reality and what they could become."

Moreland said one of the girls, Maria, commented after they won the global competition: "I can't believe it: We won. We are just four girls from Moldova—nobody even knows where that is—and we won!" Another participant, Tatiana, had an epiphany after the win: "In a tone of voice that was between disbelief and joy she said, in English, 'Mr. Moreland, I am a businesswoman!'"

Once they returned from San Francisco, the girls were treated like local celebrities: They were whisked immediately from the airport to a talk show to discuss their project. Moreland noted that the competition improved the girls' optimism and sense of self-worth and spread the idea that enough hard work and good ideas can result in success.

The end results of the competition were twofold: first was the direct impact on the girls' lives, their career aspirations, and those of the youth in the village. Second was the impact of the app itself, and the focus it brought to water quality in the village. Some villagers have begun filtering their water. For the mayor of the town, the project reinforced his efforts to raise money for an aqueduct to bring the village good water, which he had about 85 percent funded.

For the girls, participating in the competition empowered them to conceive of new futures for themselves: Maria would like to go into the IT industry. Tatiana plans to go to business school. Mihaela has expressed interest in being a teacher. Corina will be putting this experience on her résumé.

For the app, three host country nationals—a software developer, a designer, and a business expert—are continuing work on the project, as Moreland has closed service. Next steps include getting a cleaner prototype of the app, creating a marketing campaign, and determining how to use the \$10,000 prize money the team received.

For Peace Corps/Moldova, at least one Volunteer planned to put together a team to compete in this year's Technovation competition.

# Partners

Successful Peace Corps Volunteers never work in a vacuum. The best projects are those done side-by-side with communities, counterparts, stakeholders, organizations, governments, and entrepreneurs.

These stories highlight the critical role that so many partners play in supporting the work of Volunteers during their service, but also critically in providing the resources necessary to make projects successful and sustainable.



PEACE CORPS AOL TIME  
WARNER PEACE PACKS  
PROGRAM

# Peace Corps-AOL Time Warner Peace Packs Program

December 1, 2001

In 2000, the Director of Peace Corps announced an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Initiative and called upon U.S. high-tech corporations to help Peace Corps extend the reach of information technology to their Volunteers and the rural communities in which they live. The idea was to build information and communications technology capacity in underdeveloped communities so they could benefit from the knowledge-sharing capabilities of information technology. The Peace Packs program was borne out of this e-Initiative with the objective to explore models of how information technology could be used in developing communities to meet local health, economic, education, and civic goals. The Peace Packs program awards cash grants to Peace Corps Volunteers who have proposed innovative ways to use information technology to improve the communities in which they serve. The Peace

Packs program is intended to:

- Expand the reach of development and ICT efforts into remote areas through the work of Volunteers.
- Integrate ICT into current Peace Corps projects.
- Spur innovation at the grassroots level.

## Who are Peace Corps' partners in this e-Initiative?

America Online (AOL), now AOLTime Warner, partnered with Peace Corps in October 2000, pledging \$1 million over two years to Peace Corps' e-Initiative through its philanthropic AOL Time Warner Foundation. AOL Time Warner is a U.S. media and entertainment company, whose businesses include interactive and e-services, cable systems, filmed

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Source: <https://www.scribd.com/document/53420516/peace-corps-peace-packs-aol-time-warner-foundation>

entertainment, television networks, music, and publishing. The AOL Time Warner Foundation is a nonprofit organization that seeks ways to use online technology to improve lives.

## What does the partnership hope to achieve?

Through “Peace Packs” grants provided by AOL, Peace Corps Volunteers in remote areas in countries such as Ghana (see photo, below) obtain basic computer equipment and services to advance health, education, small business, and other development priorities in their communities. According to Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez: “This generous grant from the AOL Time Warner Foundation will have a major impact during the next several years as increasing numbers of teachers, students, and community members are trained using this new equipment and new information technologies. Already, we are encouraged by the results we have seen from this program.”

## What are the responsibilities of the partners?

Peace Corps administers and manages the Peace Packs program, provides guidance on implementing proposal activities, and monitors reporting processes. Peace Corps Volunteers work with community groups, cooperatives, schools, and nongovernmental organizations in-country to develop proposals that integrate information technology into local health, education, micro-enterprise, and other community development projects. Since all computer equipment purchased under the Peace Packs program becomes community property, community members must include a plan for how their Peace Pack activity will be self-sustaining long after their Peace Corps Volunteers have left.

The AOL grant enables Peace Corps Volunteers and their community

partners to locally purchase the information technology devices needed for their proposed projects. A typical Peace Pack costs about \$8,000 and consists of three computers with modems; a printer, digital camera, or other computer peripherals; and up to two years of Internet connectivity in some areas. The \$1 million endorsed by AOL for the Peace Packs program has been matched to date by nearly \$972,000 from grant-recipient community organizations and third-party donors in the form of cash, labor, equipment, supplies, and facilities.

Grant recipients try to ensure the financial sustainability of their operations and continued use of technology. A school in Ghana, for example, plans to rent its Peace Packs computer facilities to neighboring schools and community groups. Other groups propose to institute small fees for use of systems and software, and for classes in computer use. How are the Peace Packs program communities chosen?

Volunteers send completed Peace Packs proposals for their communities to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, where they undergo competitive rounds of project assessments and reviews. Up to 60 project proposals are considered each year for funding consideration under the Peace Packs program. Proposals are judged by their potential to advance development goals, achieve sustainability, and engage the local community in which the Peace Pack would be administered.

Once a project has been approved, the Peace Corps Chief Administrative Officer for the Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research transfers funding authority to posts. Checks are then issued to community groups or the appropriate vendors to purchase needed equipment and supplies. Peace Pack coordinators at post report the progress of project activities – like this computer lab in Kazakhstan – to the program management team in Washington.

## How are Foundation monies accounted for at Peace Corps?

Peace Packs coordinators direct financial reporting procedures at Peace Corps offices overseas and report to the program management team in Washington. Peace Corps then prepares an annual report for the AOL Time Warner Foundation. The report explains how the funds are spent, reviews the progress being made toward accomplishing the proposal's goals, and evaluates the overall effectiveness of the Peace Packs project.

## Who oversees the technical logistics of the program?

Peace Corps provides most of the technical support to the program. In the fall of 2002, Peace Corps published two training manuals – the ICT Training Facilitator's Guide and Reference Manual and the ICT Training Participant Handbook – to assist Volunteers in transferring technology skills to their local communities. Peace Corps' new IT Specialists, hired at each post following migration from the Mac to PC platform, are often called upon to assist Peace Pack recipients with technical, logistical, or service related concerns, in addition to their regular duties. Additionally, computer skills training workshops for Volunteers were held at 40 Peace Corps offices overseas. Workshops covered everything from hardware/software troubleshooting to utilizing Internet resources for teaching English to innovative technologies for environmental projects.

AOL Time Warner Foundation also provides some support; it established an online meeting group for Peace Packs recipients to communicate electronically with AOL employees who are returned Peace Corps Volunteers. The online group is a means through which best practices and challenges to utilizing information

technology in developing communities can be shared and addressed in a mutually supportive way. Peace Pack recipients may also benefit from online technical support from AOL employees.

## What were the outcomes of the partnership?

Since the inception of the Peace Corps/AOL partnership, over 340 Peace Packs proposals have been received and processed. Of that total, 129 proposals in 45 different countries were recommended for funding. Examples of approved projects include setting up epidemiology databases, connecting women's craft cooperatives with electronic-commerce markets, and monitoring vaccine delivery programs. Volunteers also use the Peace Packs program to teach computer skills and to exchange advice or ideas with other Peace Corps e-communities.

In 2001, Peace Packs grants were issued to Peace Corp Volunteers and 24 community groups in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Belize, Haiti, the eastern Caribbean, Paraguay, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Moldova, Romania, Uzbekistan, Jordan, and Tonga. The Peace Corps Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research reported that by the end of the year over 50,000 members of local communities around the world benefited from improved access to information technology.

Peace Corps projected that at the end of 2002, the Peace Packs program would have benefited more than 200,000 host country citizens. At present, there are 75 ICT-trained Peace Corps Volunteers worldwide. Peace Corps headquarters has

received requests from posts for 103 ICT Volunteers for 2003.

The partnership with the AOL Time Warner Foundation proved invaluable to Peace Corps objectives to improve development efforts in poor communities and to bridge the digital divide. Peace Packs have been used to conduct research to improve agricultural productivity in Belize, to teach computer literacy to students and adults in Jordan, and to provide access to health information in the national language to youth in Romania.

## What challenges did Peace Corps and the AOL Time Warner Foundation encounter during their partnership?

Balancing the corporate vision of the AOL Time Warner Foundation with developing country limitations necessitated a shifting of program priorities in 2002. The Foundation wanted the maximum amount of Peace Packs communities to gain access to the Internet as quickly as possible. But, limited telecommunications infrastructure in many developing countries, coupled with the rural site placements of most Peace Corps Volunteers, made such a goal difficult to achieve.

Other problems encountered were mainly logistical. Most groups reported delays in receiving funding or equipment delivery. The remoteness of many Peace Corps posts made Internet connection a trying and costly task. In some countries, faulty hardware and computer viruses presented additional challenges to Volunteers.

## How did they resolve

## problems?

Peace Corps worked with the Foundation to ensure that the needs and expectations of the partners were met. Eligibility requirements for applying to the program were modified so that Peace Packs grants were awarded to those communities that could demonstrate an ability to connect to the Internet within three months of receiving the funding. As a result, the percentage of Peace Pack communities connected to the Internet nearly doubled and the focus of the Peace Packs program shifted to better value the ability to communicate and collaborate with a global community.

## Will this program continue in the future?

The close of 2002 marked the end of the AOL Time Warner Foundation \$1 million grant that serviced the Peace Packs program. Peace Corps is currently discussing the possible continuation of the program with the AOL Time Warner Foundation.

The Peace Packs program is expected to have a favorable cumulative effect in the near future as increasing numbers of Volunteers, host country community groups, nongovernmental organizations, and youth increase their knowledge of and skill in ICT use. Peace Corps plans to improve the program with the counsel of the AOL Time Warner Foundation by incorporating key lessons learned from past experiences into ongoing program development. Utilizing ICT for development efforts, and expanding the reach of those efforts into remote areas, remains a primary objective, as does encouraging sustainability of ICT use through education and training.



EACE PACK COMPUTER LAB IN KAZAKHSTAN.

A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER HELPS A MAURITANIAN WOMAN LEARN THE SOFTWARE PROGRAM MICROSOFT PAINT.



# Peace Corps Honduras Receives Donation from Teachers Without Borders

December 11, 2003

🌐 Region: IAP  
📍 Post: Honduras

**W**ASHINGTON, D.C. – Christmas came early this year for Peace Corps volunteers in Honduras who received 352 computers, equipment and software for schools, libraries and other educational facilities in their communities. The in-kind donation from Teachers Without Borders, totaling \$54,825, was geared to increase the scope of computer usage throughout communities and schools in Honduras.

A total of 35 schools, libraries, and other educational facilities in the 25 Honduran communities where Peace Corps volunteers work will benefit from this donation. The Teachers Without Borders organization received the computers from the Montgomery County Public School District in Rockville, Maryland, and then donated the equipment to the Peace Corps through the Peace Corps' Office of Private Sector Initiatives.

"Peace Corps Honduras greatly appreciates this extremely generous donation and all of the work that has gone into making it a reality. Peace Corps volunteers and staff are scheduling a series of workshops for these entities to ensure that the communities have the technical knowledge and abilities to receive these

computers and put them to good use," stated Jeff Cohen, the Program Training Officer in Honduras.

The donation grew out one volunteer's initial computer request for a Peace Corps Partnership sponsored library. The span of this tremendous donation will now not only benefit the one volunteer's community, but also equip the community's surrounding areas. Teachers Without Borders also provided the money needed to fund the shipping costs.

Fred Mednick, founder of Teachers Without Borders said, "It is an honor for Teachers Without Borders to work with the Peace Corps to help close the educational divide in Honduras."

The Peace Corps Partnership Program accepts donations for Peace Corps volunteer projects worldwide. All projects are community-initiated and include a 25 percent community contribution. The Peace Corps projects receive 100 percent of any donations. A list of Peace Corps projects in need of funding can be found on the Peace Corps Web site at [www.peacecorps.gov/contribute](http://www.peacecorps.gov/contribute), on the volunteer projects link. If you are interested in donating, you may reach the Office of Private Sector Initiatives at 1-800-424-8580, ext. 2170, or via e-mail at [pccpp@peacecorps.gov](mailto:pccpp@peacecorps.gov).

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**Source:** [https://web.archive.org/web/20081017175840/http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=re-sources.media.press.view&news\\*id=893](https://web.archive.org/web/20081017175840/http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=re-sources.media.press.view&news*id=893)

DIRECTOR VASQUEZ AND  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR JODY OLSEN  
ACCEPT THE STAROFFICE  
SOFTWARE DONATION FROM  
VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR  
OF THE SYSTEMS SERVICES  
CENTER AT AED, KURT MOSES,  
AS WELL AS THE PRESIDENT OF  
AED STEPHEN F. MOSELEY.



# Software Donation to Aid Volunteer Projects

July 2, 2004

**WASHINGTON, D.C., July 2, 2004** – Peace Corps volunteers working in the field of information technology, and the communities they serve, will soon benefit from a generous software donation.

The Academy for Educational Development (AED) recently donated 2,000 copies of Sun Microsystems' Star Office 6.0 software that will be distributed in 62 countries. The software, which is valued at over \$159,000, contains word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, graphics, and database programs. With this software, Peace Corps volunteers will have a new resource to train host country community members on basic computer skills, giving communities the computer skills they need to manage businesses and information.

"I would like to thank the Academy for Educational Development for the opportunity to take these tools into the field and make the

world a better place," said Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez. Director Vasquez also thanked AED on behalf of the citizens of the host countries who, he hopes, will "derive enormous benefit from this software."

The donation was made possible through collaboration between the Peace Corps' Office of Private Sector Initiatives (OPSI), the Peace Corps' Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research, and AED's Global Learning Portal.

AED's Global Learning Portal works to connect teachers across the globe by giving them the training and resources they need to more effectively teach and do their jobs. AED, which boasts 70 returned Peace Corps volunteers on their staff, is a nonprofit social change organization that seeks new ways to improve the quality of education across the world, including in Peace Corps programs. In addition to education, AED works in all the major areas of development of interest to the Peace Corps,

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**Source:** [https://web.archive.org/web/20041026120441/http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=re-sources.media.press.view&news\\*id=959](https://web.archive.org/web/20041026120441/http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=re-sources.media.press.view&news*id=959)



COMPUTER DONATION  
SHIPMENT FROM WORLD  
COMPUTER EXCHANGE TO  
SENEGAL.

# Shipment to Peace Corps in Senegal World Computer Exchange

January 19, 2010

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Senegal
- 👤 Project: Senegal - Computer Donations

**W**orld Computer Exchange has shipped computers to Peace Corps volunteers in Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Malawi, Moldova, Philippines, Senegal and Tanzania. This is just one of the many stories of how Peace Corps volunteers have helped connect WCE.

Watch the [YouTube video](#) by one of the Peace Corps volunteers about this project Senegal.

191 computers for schools in Senegal were shipped from WCE Chicago in October 2009 to help connect 10,436 youth in 17 schools and youth centers assisted by 9 Peace Corps Volunteers that were delivered by the [Peace Corps country office](#). For this shipment, the

Ambassador of the USA to Senegal was the consignee.

The Peace Corps country director, Christopher Hedrick arranged for safe space for the sorting of the computers into the amounts for each school and arranged for the delivery of the computers to each site as Peace Corps cars are making their regular rounds.

WCE works through a network of 570 vetted Partners in 71 developing countries. Partners in each country are assisted by one or two or our 230 volunteer Program Officers. Our lead Program Officer for Senegal is Lettie Heer of Louisville, Kentucky, USA was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Senegal from 2002 to 2004. She spends part of each year in Senegal. During

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Source: <http://www.worldcomputerexchange.org/node/108>

her last visit, she met with representatives of the Peace Corps country office and some Peace Corps Volunteers to discuss for the shipment that previously arrived and plan for a next shipment. This past shipment was a change in the way that WCE usually works with Peace Corps. When WCE has worked with Peace Corps in many other countries, there has only been one prior shipment (El Salvador) where the Peace Corps country office, headed by Mike Wise, acted as the consignee handling the details of the container's arrival from the port. WCE has made 20 shipments of computers to schools assisted by Peace Corps Volunteers in: Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Malawi, Moldova, Philippines, Senegal and Tanzania.

In Senegal, nine Peace Corps Volunteers found that the 16 schools that they assist were interested in receiving working used Pentium 3 and

Pentium 4 computers. They gathered funds from their communities and then also encouraged their friends and families to make tax-deductible donations to WCE. One of the PCVs recently posted the following: <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?topic=7306&uid=2224131220>

For this past shipment, Lettie led other WCE volunteers in the Sponsor Campaign to raise inside of the USA, 1/3 of the funds needed to cover the WCE sourcing and shipping costs. Volunteers from the WCE Baltimore/Washington Chapter assisted her in raising \$5,014. When WCE ran a "Friends and Family" online fund raiser in June 2009, eight of the 50 donors gave to support this shipment and their donations were generously matched by an anonymous donor. A big assist came from a team of volunteer from Booz Allen Hamilton who helped hold a fund raiser in a restaurant in Morgan Adams part of

Washington DC - that also donated to this Sponsor Campaign.

In her recent annual visit to Senegal in February of 2010, Lettie again met with Peace Corps representatives to begin to plan for WCE's third shared and Sponsored container of 200 computers to help connect more rural schools in Senegal.

A Peace Corps Volunteer about to receive 23 computers from this shipment for the schools she is assisting said "The opportunity to offer 2,000 children computer and Internet training is incredible, and I genuinely think it will offer them a better future. I can't really say in words how wonderful it would be for them to have this opportunity. Senegal is a poorly educated country; students who are still in school at the middle and high school level are committed to receiving an education. In today's world, that requires computers."



COMPUTERS DISTRIBUTED TO  
PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS IN  
HONDURAS.

# Computers Distributed to Peace Corps Volunteers in Honduras

September 2, 2011

- 🌐 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Honduras
- 👤 Project: Honduras - Computer Donations

**S**ix Peace Corps Volunteers in various parts of Honduras are helping local schools in the communities where they are based become oriented to the shipment of 200 used Pentium 3 (and some P4) computers to World Vision from World Computer Exchange with \$6,284 raised from Rotary Clubs and individuals in the USA.;

The six Peace Corps Volunteers arranged for World Vision to be the consignee receiving this shipment and seeing that it gets to the 22 schools and communities that have provided part of the financial donations. The communities: Mercedes, Las Vegas, Barracito, Banderias, Chaguities, Miraflores, El Coral,

Plan de Rosario, San Antonio, El Tular, Limoncito, Cruz Alta, San Jose Jocatán, Laguna Seca, Yuscaran, La Lima, El Playon, Planes de Playon, Pashapa, Yaruconte, and San Juan.

This was WCE's first shipment to Honduras ~ our 41st country! This was WCE's 122nd shipment.

The Chatham Rotary Club in Massachusetts and the Clayton Rotary Club in Missouri each donated funds toward this shipment.

18 of the 200 computers in this shipment went to the youth school in a prison in Danli run by Hope Fellowship Ministries of Mountain Movers Missions International.

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Source: <http://www.worldcomputerexchange.org/computers-distributed-peace-corps-volunteers-honduras>



# Peace Corps Volunteer Uses InterConnection Laptops in Mozambique

July 16, 2015

- 🌐 Region: [AF](#)
- 📍 Post: [Mozambique](#)
- 👤 Project: [Mozambique - Computer Donations](#)

**P**ease Corps volunteer Drew Capone recently received laptops from InterConnection for his high school students at a school in Mabalane, Mozambique. Previously the school only had two very old desktop computers. Drew a member of the Peace Corps since December, is teaching Chemistry and Information Technology to 10th, 11th and 12th graders. Prior to joining the [Peace Corps](#) Drew was an engineer in Hoboken, New Jersey. Drew generously used some of his personal savings to purchase the deeply discounted laptops for his school. To help minimize

costs even more one of InterConnection's board members was kind enough to bring the laptops with him, while on a trip to Mozambique to work with [VillageReach](#).

We recently wrote Drew to see how things were going in Mozambique.

How are the computers being used?

I currently give lessons to the 10th, 11th, and 12th graders interested in learning about computers. Many of my students have never used a computer before, so we are starting with the absolute fundamentals. Using typing games, my students are learning proper typing

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**Source:** <http://interconnection.org/news/peace-corps-volunteer-uses-interconnection-laptops-in-mozambique>

skills utilizing two hands, and we use some fun games such as “Cut the Rope” and “Angry Birds” to practice using a mouse. Eventually, I am going to move into Microsoft Office Basics. I have also been using the computers to assist with automation of school processes using Microsoft Excel. Currently, the school administration does most of its grades by hand. I am working with the Assistant Director to implement easy to use excel tables to automate this process.

After my service I will pass the laptops along to the volunteer who replaces me to continue using to teach computers in Mabalane.

There are about 600 students at the school. I have 10-20 students physically using the laptops each day, and 50 unique students who are interacting with the laptops every week.

Have you seen any immediate impact or benefits from people using the computers?

The energy in the town has been on and off for the last 48 hours, so the school’s two desktops have been unusable. This is common about one day every week. I can charge the laptops during the night in my house, and the students still have computers to use during my classes, whereas before we only had my personal

educational system of Mozambique caters to information retention for Provincial and Country Exams. Most lessons from my colleagues consist of wrote dictation, and applying learned concepts through practice is extremely rare. Therefore, allowing the students to play games to learn how to use a computer is a great tool to develop their problem-solving skills.

Do you have any feedback on the laptops? Did they work well?

The laptops are phenomenal. My students and colleagues are extremely impressed with them, and they can’t believe how cheap they were for the exceptional quality. Excluding my



MOZAMBIQUE SECONDARY SCHOOL.



MOZAMBIQUE STUDENTS.

How many students are at the school? How many students use the computers per day / week?

laptop to use.

Also, for the students who I have a lot of trust in, I let them borrow a laptop to use in the school library. Most of the students will never be able to afford a laptop, so there is something to be said about the encouragement and self-esteem boost a student receives when a teacher trusts them with such an expensive piece of technology.

personal laptop, they are probably the nicest laptops in my entire District.

I was personally impressed that the battery life is still great (4 hours on power saver mode).



MOZAMBIQUE STUDENTS.

Furthermore, the entire

MOZAMBIQUE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER.



# Volunteers

No voice is more important for understanding the perspective of Volunteers than the Volunteer themselves. Recent years have been an amazing diffusion of Volunteer personal blogs and platforms to capture their voice, their perspective, and their impact.

These stories highlight just a few of the stories gathered that show the range of projects carried out by Volunteers that highlight their use of ICT-related activities in their service.

# The Digital Divide in Morocco: Reflections of a Peace Corps volunteer

May 17, 2002

 Region: EMA  
 Post: Morocco

**B**etween 1997 and 2000, I served as a volunteer with the U.S. Peace Corps in Morocco. My assignment was in a university library, but I was able to visit with the staff of libraries and information centers throughout the country. The manifestation of the digital divide in Morocco was apparent in both formal and informal circumstances, rural and urban. While North African and Middle Eastern countries are each at a different stage in their development and use of technology, the situation in Morocco is in many ways representative of what is happening throughout the region.

The level of computer and Internet literacy in Morocco had been quite low throughout the early 1990's, but when the Internet came to Morocco in the form of the neighborhood cybercafé, the younger generation embraced the new technology. With cybercafés located in all of the major cities – and even smaller towns and villages – the general knowledge and recognition of the Internet has drastically increased. Among the older generations, along with the working poor, the Internet is something that is vaguely familiar but rarely seen or experienced. The most recent published estimates of Internet users in Morocco range from 40,000 to 80,000 users out of a population of

30.6 million. This is undoubtedly a low estimate because it does not always include cybercafé patrons.

The digital divide can occur at many levels, but in Morocco I experienced the divide from several perspectives, including the lack of availability of ICT materials and the level and depth of training.

## The Materials Divide

The basic challenge of accessing IT materials varies from community to community. The wealthy in Morocco have access to the latest computer hardware and Internet connectivity. Internet access costs are similar to what we pay in the U.S – dialup access starting at around USD \$15 per month. The growing Moroccan middle class, in the major cities at least, has access to the Internet at cybercafés for about one U.S. dollar an hour. The available machines come equipped with the latest hardware and software technologies. Yet while these materials are available for purchase, acquiring them is still limited to those who can afford them. The availability of computers in schools and public libraries is not yet widespread in Morocco.

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**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20030627064150/http://www.digitalopportunity.org/fulltext/werberg20020517.shtml>

Even though dial-up Internet access is available at rates comparable to U.S. prices, they require a greater portion of the average Moroccan's wages. Local dial-up Internet service providers are available in most cities and larger towns, but users must also pay for each minute on a local call, which can raise the overall cost of access significantly. Recently, some of the major Internet providers have begun offering special rates that will hopefully bring these costs down.

Even with ICT materials largely available, maintaining them is an entirely another dilemma. Cables, ribbons, cartridges, keyboard, mice – all of these things commonly break or need replacement throughout the life of one computer system. Having a ready supply, or a nearby store, is not always possible, especially in rural Moroccan communities. It is not uncommon for the budgets of public institutions to make money available for an initial computer purchase, but not supply funds for upgrades and maintenance.

In addition to hardware, software obviously needs to be purchased, updated and licensed; because of this, it's no more surprising to find cases of software piracy in Morocco as you would anywhere else. Perhaps a more serious issue is the availability of the right software in the right language. Many Moroccans are bilingual, even multilingual, especially among the well-educated. Many computers are equipped to toggle between the Arabic and the Roman alphabets. Some computers have an English operating system installed, with English-language software, but the physical keyboards are still in the French layout. But the majority of Moroccans prefer to converse in Moroccan Arabic or one of several

Amazigh (indigenous, pre-Arabic) dialects that are spoken by over half of the country. And in the far north, Spanish is often more common than French. This diversity of languages and languages skills adds an extra layer of complexity when it comes to providing appropriate software – as well as the training to go with it.

## Equitable Training and Education

ICT training is the driver of sustainable ICT access, requiring a combination of finding the right people, the right locations, the right times, and the right methodology. Without a structure in place to ensure that the new knowledge is dispersed equitably throughout society, any amount of physical material would be useless. This is why access to training resources in the languages of each community is crucial. The plethora of languages in Morocco poses a particular challenge when acquiring or creating training resources.

There are some very good schools and private courses throughout Morocco that turn out skilled computer programming graduates, as well as a variety of beginner courses at cybercafés. The dilemma is new graduates of the professional programs are often so attracted to entering the private sector directly that there is limited skilled personnel left for training the public at large. And despite the recent surge in cybercafés, their staff often lack the training or the patience to teach others.

## Solutions

While an answer to material needs

is for increased capital in the hands of everyday citizens, the Moroccan government and private entities can and should provide a foundation on which communities can build. To date, government support has come in the form of grants, direct investment in the educational infrastructure and state funding of a better Internet backbone. Additionally, the Moroccan Ministry of Culture has taken an active lead in promoting and supporting a public library system throughout the country, which hopefully can lead to broader access to computers for training.

Donations from business and foreign organizations are always welcome, but this material can sometimes pose a problem. It's hard when you've been brought up to "never look a gift horse in the mouth", but sometimes you just have to say no to that circa 1989 machine that can run Windows 3.1 and little more.

By setting up institutions such as public libraries and cooperative academic networks, a necessity for training is built into the system. At the same time, in the private sector, Internet use in offices and the widespread availability of cybercafés has created an upswell of eager learners, from novice to expert level. The ministries are beginning to strongly encourage the training of staff and parents are eager to have their children take what opportunities exist to learn the new technologies.

I found that Moroccan society was generally very accepting of the Internet and those who had access to the resources embraced the new technologies with ease. This is only a small portion of the population though and those who did not have ready access to the necessary resources were, and still are, left out.

# IT in the Dominican Republic

August 8, 2003

🌐 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Dominican Republic

## Background

The Information Technology (IT) project in the Education sector was new in the Dominican Republic in 2001. The original 15 volunteers of my training group, including myself, assigned to this project were the pioneers (read experimental) in this area. The 1996-2000 government, under President Leonel Fernandez, implemented an amazing plan to put computer labs in every high school in the country. Unfortunately no system was established for the training to use, nor the maintenance of, the computers. After coming into office in the summer, the new Secretary of Education, ordered a report from USAID in the fall of 2000 to evaluate the effectiveness of the Ten-Year Plan from 1992 and the state of education in the country. The report, which also evaluated the computer centers, was not very complimentary to the educational system and made some very difficult recommendations. At the same time, Peace Corps Dominican Republic received a new director who, in working with the head of the education sector within the office, saw the potential value to education of placing volunteers in communities with computer laboratories. In December of 2000 the director put in a request to Peace Corps Washington for IT volunteers and my group arrived in country the first week of February, 2001.

## Training

The difficulty in training our group came mainly from a lack of experience and a lack of expectations. It being a new project, and they being a new government, no one really knew what the role of the volunteers would or should be. Since our role was undefined it was extremely difficult for the trainers to anticipate the practical knowledge we would need. It was also hard for us to visualize where and how we were expected to work. By the end of the 12-week training period there was a general goal presented, apparently based on the recommendations of the USAID report and other sources. "Computers should first be used as aids to teachers in class preparation, didactic and pedagogic development and related applications."\* The first objective to obtaining this goal was to give basic computer training to the teachers.

The normal process of volunteer placement into sites begins with a private institution expressing interest in a volunteer for a particular locale. Instead, in this case, the requesting institution was the government and the locale was the entire country. Somewhere in the process it was decided to initialize the project along the border with Haiti, where statistically the Dominican population is more disadvantaged. Unfortunately, the site selection was then determined almost entirely geographically, instead of on the willingness and readiness of the community to work with the

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Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20050417235142/http://www.intothefog.com/peacecorps/project.html>

volunteer. This caused many working problems for the volunteers of this first group. (Subsequent site placements for ITVs were made with more community evaluation.)

## The First Year

With my limited Spanish and development concepts, I set out to Montecristi in May 2001 with the first objective on my mind; to teach teachers computers. By mid-June I had developed a curriculum for a basic course and was already in the school teaching. Over the following year I created three different levels and gave a total of 9 courses to anyone employed by the Secretary of Education. I found the work completely frustrating at times and very slow to develop.

The physical infrastructure of the Dominican Republic, in terms of electricity (and water), was not reliable enough to handle computer laboratories. Computers don't work when there is no energy, and are negatively affected by frequent power outages. While most computers were outfitted with a Universal Power System (UPS) to provide the necessary energy to shut down properly, the labs as wholes were not provided a source of power. I can't tell you how many hours I sat with my classes, just waiting for the electricity to come, or to come on stronger. So many cancelled classes. So much wasted time.

Another huge fundamental problem was the inability of the government to maintain these labs. On a more general level, any report on the state of education in the Dominican Republic at that time would have revealed that it was far too centralized. With reference to the computer laboratories, the problem of maintenance was even more exaggerated by centralization. All repairs had to be done by technicians in the capital city (5 hours from my site) and to receive any part out of storage, no matter how small, the requisition had to be signed by 24 people! The main laboratory I was working in had several non-working

computers and small things would break all the time. We had no support from the government which contributed to my frustration, and to that of the teachers as well.

By defining the goals of the project so narrowly, "to teach teachers computers," a couple fundamental development issues arose. The first problem, and probably most detrimental, was the loss of focus on the general development process and the idea of sustainability. By making the objective of the volunteer to "train teachers in the use of the computer," there was no reference to how exactly that would affect the quality of education or how the training would be sustained after the volunteer departed. I remember asking the Peace Corps Program Director for Education in my first month if the *normal* schools (teacher training schools) would be offering similar courses to the ones I was giving so that all new teachers would arrive pre-trained. The answer was very unclear, which in Dominican terms means no, not really. There existed no plan that I knew of for Dominicans to continue the training process begun by volunteers. Essentially the project was not going to grow over time and worse still, it was not sustainable by the local community.

The other development issue was that there was no system of use. For example, ask a typical teacher that attended and graduated from my course in the summer of 2001 how to save a Word document and they probably will not be able to tell you. It's not that they didn't learn how during that brief period, but that they have had no opportunity to practice their knowledge since then. The large majority of people in these communities do not have personal computers in their homes, the laboratory was their only source, but there was no system for use outside the few class hours the computer teacher was supposedly giving to the students. This caused me to question: Why should I, or any volunteer, continue to train the teachers, and why should the teachers

learn, if they will never be able to use their skills?

Despite all the above points, I continued with the objective to give basic computer training to the teachers of Montecristi in the constantly diminishing laboratory. We frequently had to cancel class due to the lack of electricity and/or broken equipment. Yet, I persevered for a year because it seemed to me I had been told that this was my work. The situation was worse in Manzanillo, where 10 new computers, a printer, and a satellite server sat in a room, **in boxes, for three years**, because the electricity was never connected into the laboratory. No action was ever taken, until I arrived, to try to install a transformer on a pole, buy a small generator, or obtain solar panels. No student or teacher had ever stepped foot into this laboratory, and I seemed unable to change that.

## The Second Year

In early May, 2002, Peace Corps Dominican Republic presented a new format for the Annual Work Plan that each volunteer is to fill out. It came with the goals and objectives for each sector already provided and I noticed that the IT project had changed slightly and broadened over the year. The old objective was still there, but there were now objectives referring to training "how to optimize and maintain IT hardware and software" for teachers and youth groups. While I did know various things about computers, I was not a computer technician and I didn't feel qualified to implement this type of training. The benefit of having to fill out an Annual Work plan though, was that I stopped to analyze the previous year. I realized everything that I just mentioned above and decided to reevaluate the given objectives in relation to the overarching goal. The project purpose was: "To improve the availability and quality of education in rural and marginal urban schools through training teachers, students and other community members in how to use information technology (IT) to

teach and learn more effectively, as well as eventually generate greater income for themselves.”

At the same time I was rethinking my objectives, Luis Rodriguez was advising the Secretary of Education (SEE) to decentralize the laboratories. He advocated community ownership of the labs so that maintenance could be local and a more productive system of use could be established. I think that this helped remind me what Peace Corps development work was really all about; helping the community help itself in a sustainable manner. The Dominican Republic is full of people who can adequately train teachers on the computer and has a growing private sector of computer technicians. This is not the type of training we as volunteers should have been giving. Instead we should have been empowering the community to take charge of their laboratory and look for local resources.

After I talked to several graduate students from the Kennedy School, and did a little research on the Web, I came to realize that developing community interest and commitment was the first step recommended by all organizations developing similar projects. Sometimes I wondered why it took us so long to come to a conclusion that was already widely known and accepted. If you are interested in development in regards to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), in particular reference to education, I would like to recommend the following websites: [World Links](#), [Schools Online](#), and [TechKnowLogia](#).

Feeling newly motivated, I cut my teacher training classes down to one (in Dajabon) and focused my energy on finding a solution for the lab of Manzanillo. I tried to get members of

the community, particularly the teachers, to form a committee to raise the funds to buy a small electric generator for the lab. Because computers in the community were so rare and usually used by young boys to check pornography, no one was too interested in dedicating their time or effort. They didn't understand the advantages to having a lab like this in their school and community. Plus, only about 1 of 10 teachers actually care about the education of their students and the quality of their own work. The rest are just there to collect their paycheck and are definitely not going to put in any more effort than is required.

Simultaneously, I tried to get a transformer installed at the school so we could harness the small amount of electricity in the street and use the computers sporadically. After a lot of noise making and networking, I got the SEE to bring me the transformer, but then I was left trying to get a pole in the ground to install it. Again I battled with members of the community, but was never successful.

My big break came when, in November 2002, a private company installed a town generator, providing stable electricity almost 24 hours a day. (It has since become a lot more erratic.) After the holidays, I managed to get a local electrician to donate his time to connect the classroom containing the computers directly to the circuit in the school. We then took the computers out of their boxes for the first time and set them up.

After a couple rough starts, we opened the lab the first week of February 2003. My counterpart (the computer teacher who had been collecting a paycheck for over three years but had not yet taught a single class in the school), opened the lab in the mornings, during

school hours, to students with a free hour. I opened the lab in the afternoons to anyone who wanted to pay RD\$5 (US\$0.20-\$0.25) for an hour of use. The afternoon sessions were an immediate success and we had to expand the schedule of open hours and limit users to two hours a day so that more people could have a turn.

I formed a Technology Club with some of the more interested students. I didn't really have enough time to reach my goals with them, but I had envisioned them as the keepers of the lab. The money that was collected in the afternoons was used to buy paper, ink, computer covers and a dry-erase board. It enabled the lab to be independent of the centralized government system of 24 signatures for a new mouse. Unfortunately, I only had three months to work with them and it was too soon for them to function alone. That is why I requested a replacement volunteer to continue my work. He hopefully will not only continue with the Technology Club and push towards independence and sustainability, but he will also teach the teachers how to use the computers to their advantage.

I am still not entirely convinced that using the computers in the classroom improves education. Has it improved education in this country? Having them as an available resource and assigning projects that utilize them are definitely beneficial actions, but I don't know if they should be used instead of traditional classroom time. In the DR, they have so little classroom time as it is and it could easily become a way for teachers to do even less work. And, as I have pointed out to many people, the Internet is an amazing thing, but you don't learn too much from it if you can't read. Basic education can never be skipped.



ELECTRICITY SO CLASS CAN START.



COMPUTERS ARE USED TO A LOCAL HARDWARE STORE.



THE LABORATORY IN MANZANILLO. THE COMPUTERS HAVE SPENT THREE YEARS SITTING IN BOXES.



ISABEL, THE DAUGHTER OF A COMPUTER TEACHER.

# GirlTech Uganda 2012

August 19, 2012

- Region: AF
- Post: Uganda
- Project: Uganda - GirlTech

**W**hat is GirlTech Uganda? GirlTech is a professional development program for early secondary girl students, encouraging them to pursue advanced education and careers in science, math, and technology. The week-long program had 79 participants, all girls from secondary 1-3 levels, from all parts of Uganda. As far as we know, it's the first program of its kind in Uganda. Another PCV, Stevie Bergman, and I have been somehow planning this program for about a year now, and it was truly amazing to see it happen!

Activities included daily computer sessions, life skills sessions (re-usable menstrual pads, HIV/AIDS, assertive communication), science sessions, and guest speakers: female Ugandans who work in science or technology fields. We were fortunate to have a forestry supervisor, a fisheries biologist, a doctor, an architect, and a forensic scientist come and share their experiences with the girls. Science sessions included bottle rockets/forces of flight, projectiles, disease detectives (my shameless push for epidemiology!), and volcanoes, where girls got to make their own baking soda volcanoes. Each day was started with a "mad science" session, demonstrating a cool science experiment, intended to "blow their minds!" We also did an awesome astronomy night and two tower of strength competitions, where girls had to create the tallest structure out of limited

materials. At the end of the week, we had a science fair where girls showcased science projects they worked on throughout the week.

Our "call to attention" for the week, which we used whenever we had to get the attention of 100+ people was:

**Call:** Pi **Response:** Pi **Call:** Pi **Response:** Pi  
**Call:** 3.14! **Response:** 159!

It worked really well, and was also quite entertaining!

Willysha and Sara wrote the amazing GirlTech song, to the tune of "My Favorite Things":

Girl Tech Anthem!

*Beakers and test tubes and Bunsen Burners  
Animal dissections and scientific learners.  
Chemical reactions and Goldberg Machines.  
These are a few of our favorite things.*

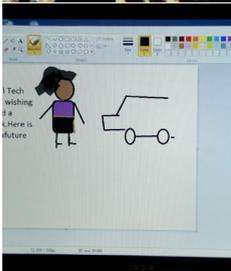
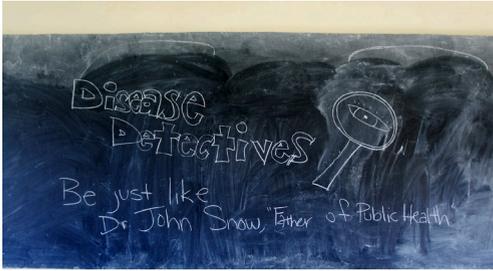
*Mercury and Neptune, Saturn and Venus Earth,  
Jupiter, Mars and Uranus. Planets and stars  
that shine like flames. These are a few of our  
favorite things.*

*When they tell us don't do science, cause  
you're simply girls. That's when we prove to  
them using our brains. We're Girl Tech girls!*

Thank you to everyone who made GirlTech possible! We had the most amazing staff members who made miracles happen throughout the week. What a great way to end my Peace Corps service :)

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Source: <http://rashidainuganda.blogspot.com/2012/08/girltech-uganda.html>



# ChatSalud - A Nicaraguan Revolution of a Different Kind

November 3, 2012

*By Lauren Spigel*

- 📍 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Nicaragua
- 👤 Project: Nicaragua - Chat Salud

**A**ccording to the International Telecommunication Union, approximately 8 out of 10 Nicaraguans have cell phones ([ITU 2011](#)). And according to the [Nicaraguan Dispatch](#), all 153 municipalities have cell phone coverage (17 Sept. 2012). This means that if you live in a city or out in the most rural of rural places, you have a cell phone. If your family is rich or if your family is poor, you have a cell phone. If you have running water or if you schlep buckets from the river every day, you have a cell phone. And despite a nominal texting fee, you use it daily. You use it to chat with your friends. You use it to chat with your relatives. You use it to forward cute little poems about Mother's Day, and birthdays, and friendship. And even when you don't have electricity, you walk to the nearest place where there is electricity and charge your cell phone there, so you can keep using it from home.

With a country as connected as Nicaragua, it's a wonder that we still hear statistics such as: 1 out of 3 adolescent girls will be pregnant by the time they reach the age of 19 ([INIDE 2005](#)); and nearly 3 out of 4 women between 15

and 49 have reported physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives—a level that is, according to the WHO, 57 times higher than what is considered an epidemic ([Nicaraguan Dispatch](#), 17 Oct. 2012). After a year and a half of talking about sexual and reproductive health with rural women during my Peace Corps service, I've learned that a major barrier to seeking sexual health information is the PERCEPTION that if a woman asks a medical professional for condoms, or for an HIV test, or simply for information regarding her sexual health, her community will find out and think her to be “unfaithful,” “a prostitute,” or “a bad woman.” The only way to access information from a trained professional is a face-to-face conversation, and many women can't bare the potential embarrassment.

Meanwhile, in several developing countries, a new revolution is taking hold. Mobile health, or mHealth, is a movement that harnesses mobile phones to promote positive social change. For instance, in Uganda, cell phones with cameras of at least two megapixels are being used to diagnose Malaria, simply by swabbing a drop of blood on the lens, snapping a picture, and

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Source: <http://frontlinesms.ning.com/profiles/blogs/chatsalud-a-nicaraguan-revolution-of-a-different-kind>

sending it directly to a lab ([Scientific America](#), 14 Dec 2011). According to Scientific America, the blood samples “were often so clear that specific stages of the malaria parasite could be identified.” Similarly, in Nairobi, Kenya and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, a project called m4RH (Mobile for Reproductive Health) has developed a series of interactive text messages about family planning, which the 13,000 users can access via text messaging from their cell phones (try out the system for free on the [m4RH website](#)! Click “m4RH Demo” on the right-hand side bar. It’s super cool!) Research has indicated that this simple technology is influencing behavior change with regards to family planning.

Similarly, for the past six months, I have been working with a couple other PCVs, the Nicaraguan Red Cross, the Ministry of Health, and other local partners to create ChatSalud, the first-ever sexual and reproductive health SMS-based hotline in Nicaragua. The goal is to use low-cost mobile phones to provide a 100% anonymous means for Nicaraguans to access sexual and reproductive health information. According to the m4RH study, users indicated that they like the privacy of text messaging. For instance, a woman could be lying next to her partner in bed and text ChatSalud, “how do I convince my partner to use a condom?” and he would be none the wiser. A user could be sitting in the middle of a crowded bus and text “how do I know if I am HIV positive?” And no one would know. It can eliminate barriers to accessing health information for the 4.8 million cell phone users in Nicaragua.

The way ChatSalud will work is much like how m4RH runs (seriously—check out the [demo](#)!) but with a larger scope. While m4RH only covers family

planning methods, ChatSalud will cover HIV/AIDS, STIs, Safer Sexual Practices, Family Planning, and Risk Factors during Pregnancy, Birth, and Postpartum. Like m4RH, part of the hotline will be automated. Simply by typing “info” or “1” (we haven’t decided yet) to ChatSalud, you’ll receive an automatic response with a menu list of options. The menu would say, for instance, type “2” for information regarding HIV; “3” for information regarding STIs; “4” for information regarding Safer Sex...etc. Check out this picture of my cell phone when we were testing out the system:

For questions that cannot be answered by our automatic system, we will train the Nicaraguan Red Cross’s existing core of volunteers on how to be hotline operators so that they can add an element of genuine human interaction to ChatSalud. We are also exploring the opportunity of merging interests with local universities such as UNAN’s [CIES](#)(Center for Investigations and Studies in Public Health) and local health centers to target specific populations for appointment reminders.

### So where are we at with the project?

- In early October, Nishant, Gabe, and I recruited four Health 58ers: Hannah, Chloe, Talia, and Jessica, to learn everything there is to know about ChatSalud before our group departs in March, because they’ll still have another year.
- Nishant and I presented ChatSalud to [CONISIDA](#), the Nicaraguan Commission on Aids on October 17 (my 25th birthday!) If they like the project, they will write a letter of support saying that the Nicaraguan Red Cross can officially partner with us.

- Afterwards, we need to re-approach [Claro](#), one of the two major phone companies in Nicaragua, (Nishant originally gave a presentation to them back in September), and see if they can, minimally, provide us with free text messaging.
- We need to find a **developer** with some Java know-how who can help us add some functions to [FrontlineSMS](#), the open-source software that we will use to run ChatSalud.
- We are also in the process of testing out the ChatSalud system on FrontlineSMS, which includes writing in all of the automated responses and working out any kinks that surface.
- Look for a funding source.
- And lastly, we’ll need to plan an intensive training session for the core of Red Cross Volunteers who will be the hotline operators.

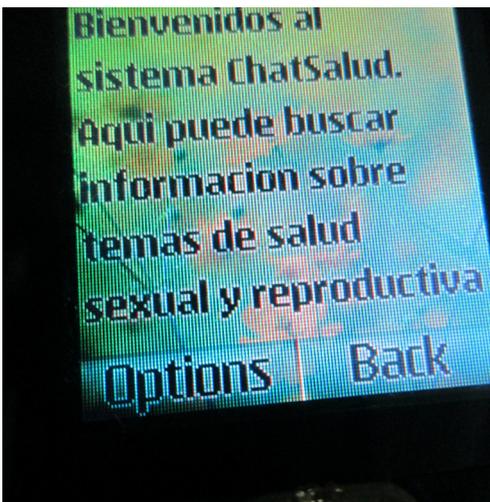
ChatSalud is the major project I am focusing on at this point in my Peace Corps service. I hope we get it off the ground before my departure in March— if not, I might consider extending for a few months. With each week that passes, ChatSalud is gaining more and more momentum. It’s hard to believe that this project started with Nishant, Gabe, and I sitting around a table in a coffee shop thinking that all we’d need was a cell phone and a couple PCVs to answer questions, when now it has the potential to become a major national-level project with functions that can serve at-risk populations, collect data for the Ministry of Health, and become an influential example of how mHealth can thrive in Nicaragua as well as Latin America at large. Thank you to Peace Corps staff for supporting us 100% of the time. Updates to come!



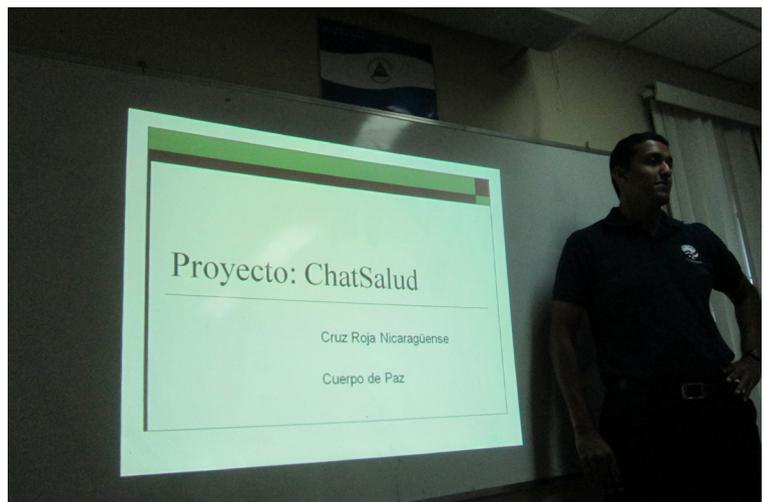
I GAVE MY SISTER ARI THIS PAINTING OF A NICARAGUAN WOMAN ON A LATRINE FOR HER BIRTHDAY. PLEASE NOTE THE CELL PHONE IN THE WOMAN'S HAND.



BJORN MINDE'S, OF BAM DESIGNS, MOST RECENT DRAFT OF THE CHATSALUD LOGO.



"WELCOME TO THE CHATSALUD SYSTEM. HERE YOU CAN SEARCH FOR INFORMATION ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH..."



NISHANT GIVING AN INTRODUCTION ON CHATSALUD TO CONSIDA AT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S HEADQUARTERS IN MANAGUA ON OCTOBER 17, 2012.

# Bugesera to Host ICT Camp for Rwandan Female Secondary School Students

May 8, 2013

 Region: AF  
 Post: Rwanda  
 Project: Rwanda - Camp TechKobwa

**T**he camp will run from the 5th to the 9th of August 2013 and will be held at Gashora Girls Academy of Science and Technology in Gashora Sector/ Bugasera District.

The camp will host 48 female students from different secondary schools in Rwanda.

The volunteers, led by Lyla Fujiwara, a Peace Corps volunteer and Computer Science Teacher at Gashora Girls Academy, were inspired by Rwanda's resilient and ever growing energy for information technology and communications.

The purpose of Camp TechKobwa is to provide the students with unhindered access to computers in order to develop skills and creativity in using technology as well as to inspire them as the next generation of Rwandan technology entrepreneurs.

The camp will encourage the young women to become active citizens by building their self-esteem and confidence, and empower

them to start computer and media clubs with their ICT teachers upon return to their schools.

In partnership between Girls in ICT Rwanda, kLab, and the Peace Corps, Camp TechKobwa is an ideal way to offer adolescent girls self-development opportunities in a fun and friendly atmosphere.

During the camp, different role models for students have been invited. On Wednesday there will be a Women in the Media panel and on Thursday there will be a Women in Tech panel. The camp is completely free of charge to every participant.

This was made possible through the work of the volunteers from as well as financial support from the Peace Corps and the Ministry of Youth & ICT.

Members of the press are invited to attend the closing ceremony of the camp that will take place at 13h00 on Friday the 9th of August 2013.

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Source: <http://en.igihe.com/news/bugesera-to-host-ict-camp-for-rwandan-female.html>

# Nicaraguans Turn to their Phones for Reproductive Health

June 19, 2013

By *Chloe Lew*

🌐 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Nicaragua

👤 Project: Nicaragua - Chat Salud

**A**ccess to the Internet is something often taken for granted in the Western world. For many of us it's a handy way to share our thoughts around lives over social media, or to keep in touch with friends, or to look up the latest sports scores. For many people in the developing world the Internet promises much more, if only they had access to it. In this installment of Digital Diversity, Chloe Lew, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nicaragua, shares details of a project which bypasses the need for the Internet and focuses on girls' empowerment and teen pregnancy prevention through widely accessible text messaging.

[Digital Diversity](#) is a series of blog posts from [kiwanja.net](#) featuring the many ways mobile phones and other appropriate technologies are being used throughout the world to improve, enrich, and empower billions of lives. This article was curated by Gabrielle Lepore, our Media and Research Assistant.

Yesterday I googled "safer sex."

You've possibly done it too. Most people have. Perhaps you wanted to double check

something that your friends were talking about or maybe you were simply curious about an aspect of your own health and didn't want to navigate a face-to-face discussion.

While sex permeates many aspects of our lives, including health, relationships, self-esteem and gender dynamics, it is still a sensitive and often uncomfortable subject. For topics such as sex, the Internet is particularly useful. One of its unappreciated beauties is that you don't need to endure the discomfort of an in-person conversation. Instead, you can investigate your concerns and questions in private. After all, your search engine can't judge you.

But how do you get the answers you need when you don't have Internet access?

In January 2012 I moved to Nicaragua to serve as a reproductive health educator with Peace Corps. During my training a fellow volunteer suggested that one of our roles as volunteers was to serve as Google for our communities. At first I found this idea slightly condescending – I don't have all of the answers. But then I understood his point. In more-developed countries people are used to finding answers

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**Source:** <http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/06/19/reach-for-your-pocket-nicaraguans-turn-to-their-phones-for-reproductive-health/>

to intimate questions independently. However, in a country like Nicaragua, where only 10.6% of the population have Internet access most people do not have the luxury of finding immediate answers to more embarrassing inquiries in an anonymous manner.

In smaller communities the reality is that the public health system is not easily accessible. This is due to a number of barriers, including geography, socioeconomic and culture. Additionally, generations of cultural beliefs have led to the perpetuation of false information. Getting correct answers to sensitive questions generally requires a face-to-face conversation, and in small communities this usually involves friends, family, or both – even in the medical center. Anonymity is rare and *pena*, meaning embarrassment, shame, or shyness, is abundant.

*Pena* is particularly extreme in Nicaragua where *machismo*, or macho culture, is rampant. *Machismo* helps to propagate the perception that a woman who enquires about her sexual reproductive health (SRH) or asks for condoms is promiscuous or unchaste. As such, *pena*, along with other barriers, is one of the greatest impediments to the dissemination of and access to scientifically correct SRH information, and the consequences are quite evident.

Nicaragua has the highest teen pregnancy rate in Central America. Approximately 1 out of 4 adolescent girls will become pregnant before they reach the age of 19. Another frightful statistic is that nearly 48% of women who are married or in a union are affected by gender-based violence, which, according to World Health Organization, is 57 times higher than what is considered an epidemic ([Nicaraguan Dispatch](#), 17 Oct. 2012). Although historically Nicaragua has had the lowest rate of HIV infections in Central America, the annual incidence of registered cases of HIV has tripled in the past six years.

Like everyone, Nicaraguans have

questions about their SRH and want to make informed decisions. While Google is not an accessible or familiar resource to those living without the Internet, Peace Corps volunteers have identified a different tool that can help Nicaraguans bypass the “*pena* barrier” that needs no cultural adoption – the cell phone.

Cell phones are one of the most ubiquitous and transformative agents of social change ever. The reality is that, in Nicaragua, more people have access to cell phones than to indoor plumbing or electricity. According to the International Telecommunications Union, in 2011 82% of the Nicaraguan population had a cell phone, with coverage in 151 out of the 153 municipalities – and these numbers have only been increasing. Nicaraguans rich and poor, from city centers and rural mountains, with and without access to running water, all have cell phones and use them daily.

If people can text “*amor*” to 3766 to discover who the love of their life will be, why can’t we also harness the power of cell phones to disseminate vital SRH information and resources to those who need and want it most? After months of discussing various strategies for using cell phones to deliver health messages, Peace Corps volunteers and their Nicaraguan colleagues settled on a platform: **ChatSalud**.

ChatSalud, an SMS-based sexual and reproductive health hotline, is the first of its kind in Nicaragua. The goal is to empower Nicaraguans to lead healthier, safer, and more productive lives by providing correct SRH information and connecting them to local resources in a free, confidential, reliable, and accessible manner, directly to their cell phones.

Using [FrontlineSMS](#), a free, open-source software, we have been able to leverage its auto-response function to create a platform that will deliver culturally sensitive and contextually correct information on five central themes – reproductive health, safer

sex, HIV/AIDS, STIs and domestic violence. The system is entirely demand-driven and interactive, with users able to select which theme to explore and from there select the information he or she wants to receive.

For example, a 16-year-old girl living in a rural community thinks she is ready to have sex with her boyfriend for the first time. She is too scared to ask her parents for advice and is uncomfortable broaching the subject with the doctor at the health center since he also lives in her community. She decides to text ChatSalud for information on safer sex and condom negotiation. She begins by texting “info” to ChatSalud and automatically receives a text in response that contains a menu of informational categories. The menu says “Text 1 for HIV”, “2 for STIs”, “3 for safer sex” and so on. She texts “3” and educates herself about how to protect her health and avoid an unwanted pregnancy. After receiving the interactive automated messages, she feels more confident about negotiating condom use with her boyfriend and about protecting herself from an unhealthy relationship.

From teenage girls approaching their first sexual relationships to men wanting more information on STIs after noticing a potential symptom, to women concerned about the cycle of violence who are looking for domestic violence resources in their communities, ChatSalud is a resource for all Nicaraguans.

Since its inception, ChatSalud has grown substantially both in scope and in support. The project has received tremendous interest from the public and private sectors in Nicaragua. Almost entirely funded by local in-kind contributions, the project is low-cost and will be free to Nicaraguan users. The Nicaraguan Red Cross serves as the main project partner with Peace Corps, keeping the focus on sustainability and cultural application. With chapters in every department across Nicaragua, the Red Cross will be particularly vital in the promotion and marketing of the hotline.



THE PEACE CORPS MEMBERS OF THE CHATSALUD TEAM FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: TALIA LANGMAN (PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER 2012-2014), DANNY MURPHY (2007-2010), JESSICA BIXBY (2012-2014), HANNAH GROW (2012-2014), LAUREN SPIGEL (2011-2013), GABE GOFFMAN (2011 -2013), NISHANT KISHORE (2011-2014) AND CHLOE LEW (2012-2014). PHOTO: CHATSALUD



A YOUNG BOY GETS CELL PHONE SERVICE OUT IN THE MOUNTAINOUS MUNICIPALITY OF FANCHO GRANDE, MATAGALPA, NICARAGUA. PHOTO: CHATSALUD



# Peace Corps Volunteer Promotes Computer Literacy in Cameroon

July 31, 2013

 Region: AF  
 Post: Cameroon  
 Project: Cameroon - Computer Literacy

**W**ashington— Peace Corps volunteer Christian Freymeyer of Ocean Pines, Maryland, is working with his community in Cameroon to refurbish a school computer lab and boost its energy supply so more students can participate in computer lessons.

“Technology breeds innovation; however, in this rural high school in Cameroon, students are unable to receive adequate instruction in computer science due to the lack of basic infrastructure,” said Freymeyer, according to a July 30 Peace Corps news release.

“While the school has more than 12 computers, only four are able to run at one time because the power voltage to the school is very low,” he said.

The planned improvements will increase the school’s electrical energy and install voltage regulators, surge protectors and new computer desks and chairs. Once the project is complete, the school’s 12 computers will be operable at the same time.

The school administration, teachers and community representatives have all pledged to contribute to the project as well as donate goods and labor. Freymeyer will also train a

committee to help maintain the new equipment.

“This community is forward-thinking and members understand that computer literacy is crucial to this generation’s success,” Freymeyer said. “This project aims to prepare students for their future, and computer literacy is becoming more and more essential.”

Freymeyer, a graduate of Christopher Newport University, has been working as a computer literacy teacher in Cameroon since June 2011. To fix up the lab, he will use funds raised through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, which helps support Peace Corps volunteer community projects worldwide.

To receive funding through the Partnership Program, a community must make a 25 percent contribution to the total cost of the project and outline success indicators for it. This helps to ensure community ownership and a greater chance of long-term sustainability.

Nearly 3,380 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Cameroon since the program was established in 1962, and 231 volunteers are now serving in the country. They work in the areas of education, environment, agriculture, health, business and information technology. They are trained and work in Pidgin English

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Source: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2013/07/20130731279875.html#axzz3utyirdqn>

# Computer Skills Enable Women To Support Families Communities

January 1, 2013

-  Region: IAP
-  Post: Vanuatu
-  Project: Vanuatu - Computer Training

**V**olunteer Willow Denker (2011–2013) is helping seven women from across Vanuatu gain access to computers and learn basic computer skills. After recognizing the need for public access to computers and basic skills training, Denker and seven interested women formed

Mamas' Computer Group. The group meets regularly to learn computer skills and hold fundraising events to buy more computer equipment and attend advanced classes. The group recently raised money to attend a 20-hour typing class.

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Source: [http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013\\*01.pdf](http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013*01.pdf)

# Actually, There is an App for This: PCVs and Tech Experts Create Mobile Apps for Development

January 1, 2013

 Region: AF  
 Post: Zambia  
 Project: Zambia - Bantu Babel

**M**obile technology, more than any other modern tool, may just have the biggest impact on a Peace Corps Volunteer's service today. In fact, according to the 2012 Annual Volunteer Survey, PCVs are more likely to have cellphone service than electricity or running water.

Moreover, three out of four people worldwide have access to a mobile phone, according to a 2012 World Bank study.

This rapidly closing digital divide presents new opportunities for Volunteers to engage their communities in ways unimaginable even just a few years ago.

Last September the agency launched the Innovation Challenge to engage the Peace Corps community in a global brainstorming session to create mobile-technology solutions for problems faced by Volunteers in the field.

On December 1–2, the Peace Corps collaborated with Random Hacks of Kindness—an organization that hosts semiannual coding events worldwide for developers to build

open-source technology solutions—for a 48-hour global hackathon, where 1,200 coders and subject matter experts in 32 cities tackled real-world problems—and produced hundreds of app prototypes.

As one Volunteer in rural Zambia, Tony Tseng (2010–2013), said, “It is in [Volunteers’] best interest to use technology to equip ourselves and others” to accomplish all three Peace Corps goals.

Inspired by his country director and the potential of the Innovation Challenge, Tseng and fellow Zambia Volunteers Melissa Stelter, Robert Kent, and Rasa Kent (2011–2013) identified and defined a major challenge faced in their communities: language barriers between development workers and Zambians. Armed with a clear understanding of the communication obstacle posed by multiple in-country languages, the four teamed up with Bongo Hive, a local technology and innovation hub in Lusaka, to design a solution. There, they joined Zambian tech experts for a pioneering week-end of collaboration.

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Source: [http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013\\*01.pdf](http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013*01.pdf)

Led by Bongo Hive developer Daryl Lukas, the team crafted Bantu Babel, an Android app that provides a Tonga/English digital pocket dictionary and key Bemba survival phrases.

Stelter, who is nearing the end of her service, is confident that Bantu Babel will make a difference for future Volunteers and other aid workers. She and her fellow Volunteers were so invigorated by their collaboration with the local innovation hub that they plan to continue to develop both the scope of the app and the relationship between Peace Corps/ Zambia Volunteers and Bongo Hive in future hackathons.

Tseng concurred, “With the success of the hackathon event and the relationship now established with Peace Corps, I look forward to having Volunteers bring forth unique problems and together with Bongo Hive provide a unique solution.”

Lukas also raved about working with

the Peace Corps Volunteers, saying it was a great opportunity to gain “insight about their work and this helped a lot even as we were defining problems and finding solutions [at the hackathon].”

Bantu Babel was not the only solution prototype to come out of Peace Corps Innovation Challenge and the RHoK global hackathon. From Germany to Georgia, coders created innovative mobile solutions to coordinate low-cost transportation in Ghana, sync sanitation data in Malawi, enhance citizen-government reporting in Ukraine, track financial accountability via text message for small NGOs and Volunteer projects, improve Volunteer safety tracking, find and rate NGOs working in-country via a searchable database with comment fields—the last three of which can be used globally—and more.

The excitement around the event has

been far-reaching. Heather Lee of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Sparkman Center for Global Health, who connected PCVs in Zambia with Bongo Hive, said, “I just wanted to personally convey how excited I am about the Innovation Challenge and the potential apps that will come out of [it].... President Obama’s emphasis on open access information initiatives and mobile technology in solving global health challenges is really exciting. I am a big believer in sharing information, especially since learning is a two-way street and there is a lot to be learned from folks in other countries.”

Volunteers, coders, and Peace Corps supporters around the world are now planning for the next RHoK Global hackathon, on June 1–2. Visit [innovationchallenge.peacecorps.gov](http://innovationchallenge.peacecorps.gov) to submit an idea to solve a local community issue or to host or attend a hackathon event.



PEACE CORPS/ZAMBIA  
VOLUNTEERS AND BONGOHIVE  
CODERS AT THE RANDOM HACKS  
OF  
KINDNESS EVENT DECEMBER  
1-2, 2012, IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA.

# Peace Corps Volunteers Create Mobile Language Application

January 1, 2013

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Zambia
- 👤 Project: Zambia - Bantu Babel

At [RHoK](#) in December 2012, we introduced “*featured problem sets*” in an effort to create stronger and more refined challenges. The first featured problem set was offered by the Peace Corps as part of its “*Innovation Challenge*.” The Peace Corps Innovation Challenge is a worldwide collaboration to develop innovative solutions for the real challenges faced by people throughout the developing world as identified and articulated by Peace Corps Volunteers. Today they announced that they will be doing a second Innovation Challenge and are seeking submissions of relevant problems through their [website](#).

The submitted problems statements will then

be reviewed and voted on by current and returned volunteers, Peace Corps staff, technology experts and entrepreneurs. The best problems will be offered at a hackathon in June 2013. Below is their press release, which describes one of the top solutions from the first Innovation Challenge – a Mobile Language Application developed by Zambian software developers that translates English words and phrases into one of seven languages spoken in Zambia. The app, Bantu Babel, is now available for Android compatible devices in the Google Play store. The NASA Open Innovation Program team worked closely with the Peace Corps

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Source: <https://open.nasa.gov/blog/peace-corps-volunteers-create-mobile-language-application/>

# ChatSalud Aims to Empower Rural Nicaraguans to Advocate for their Sexual and Reproductive Health

January 31, 2013

🌐 Region: IAP  
📍 Post: Nicaragua  
👤 Project: Nicaragua - Chat Salud

ChatSalud will work as a “ping-pong” system, which is designed to be interactive in nature so that the user can customize their experience with the platform, deciding which information to read and which to skip, based on a series of menus and coded themes. Our “ping-pong” system is modeled after [FHI 360’s Mobile for Reproductive Health project](#) in Kenya and Tanzania, though ChatSalud will differ in that it will cover a wider range of themes, ranging from HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health, and safer sexual practices.

The user will initiate the interaction with ChatSalud after viewing an advertisement such as a poster, radio spot, or television ad, or through talking with friends and family that have used the system. The user will send “info” to ChatSalud and will automatically receive an initial menu that will include the four umbrella themes: HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, reproductive health, and safer sexual practices. From there, the user can choose

which theme to learn about. All of the themes are coded by number in the ChatSalud system. The coded automatic responses will give rural Nicaraguans low-tech, text-based access to a plethora of information—essentially a sexual and reproductive health encyclopedia at their fingertips.

ChatSalud is quickly becoming a national-level mobile health platform. While we used a modem for initial tests with limited users, the modem began experiencing a lag time of upwards of 45 minutes. Since we are expecting a high volume of SMS traffic, the throughput required will be significantly more than could be provided by a modem.

Obviously a new system was needed.

While still in development, the new system, which will utilize FrontlineSMS Version 2 mounted on servers and remote browser-based access, will bring together resources provided by several local stakeholders. CIES, the Nicaraguan School of Public Health, will donate and maintain their servers, which will

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**Source:** <http://www.frontlinesms.com/blog/2013/01/31/chatsalud-aims-to-empower-rural-nicaraguans-to-advocate-for-their-sexual-and-reproductive-health>

house the FrontlineSMS version 2 software. Meanwhile, a local tech firm, [GüeGüe](#), will provide technical support and assistance to secure and maintain a VPN between the software housed at CIES and the local telecommunications network. The VPN will provide key links to both Claro and Movistar, the local telecommunications providers, and from there, connect to users nation-wide. While the old system could only send and receive six text messages per minute, this new system will have the ability to handle millions of text messages per day, ensuring a smooth and

instantaneous interaction between ChatSalud and its users.

In order to gain governmental support, one of the major barriers we had to overcome was to figure out how to make the system 100% anonymous. Normally, when a user communicates with ChatSalud, their personal phone number is displayed along with their message. While we cannot use cell phone numbers and maintain anonymity, an identifying feature was still necessary to allow us to analyze our user interactions. We were lucky to connect with developer [Alex](#)

[Galonsky](#), who generously donated his time to help us modify the program. Alex's solution was to hash the phone numbers of users as they come in to effectively create a "digital fingerprint" of each user without allowing system operators to view user phone numbers directly on the main interface. This allows us to provide basic anonymity to all users while still monitoring and evaluating the project's effectiveness. This will also ensure confidentiality if we use the platform to open up direct communication between users and health workers in the future.



# Peace Corps Volunteers Lead Tech Camp for Young Women in Rwanda

September 13, 2013

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Rwanda
- 👤 Project: Rwanda - Camp TechKobwa

**W**ashington — Peace Corps volunteers in Rwanda, led by Lyla Fujiwara of Rochester, New York, recently organized an information and communications technology camp to teach female secondary school students computer skills that will advance their confidence and economic opportunities.

Camp TechKobwa lasted four days and brought together nearly 50 young women from seven schools across Rwanda. The camp included 10 core lessons and two panel discussions, as well as sports, crafts and games. Classes

taught the students how to set up an email account and basic programming and blogging, and panel discussions featured Rwandan women who spoke about women in the media and women in technology.

“The purpose of Camp TechKobwa was to provide the students with unhindered access to computers to develop skills and creativity in using technology, as well as to inspire them as the next generation of Rwandan technology entrepreneurs,” said Fujiwara, a graduate of Brown University, in a September 12 Peace Corps news release.

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Source: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2013/09/20130913282834.html#axzz3ref8jg6m>

A U.S. Agency for International Development–Peace Corps Small Projects Assistance (SPA) grant allowed the volunteers to invite students to participate in the camp free of charge. The Rwandan Ministry of Youth and Information and Communications Technology also covered transportation costs for students, volunteers and participating panelists.

“Camp TechKobwa focused on empowerment for girls through gaining skills and confidence using computers and media technology,” Fujiwara said. “The camp encouraged young women to become active citizens by building their self-esteem and

confidence and empowered them to start computer and media clubs with their information and communication technology teachers upon returning to their schools.” Before the start of the camp, 14 Rwandan teachers and 13 Peace Corps volunteers went through training and were encouraged to share what they learned with co-workers and counterparts.

In addition to Fujiwara, these Peace Corps volunteers participated in Camp TechKobwa: Ginger Anderson of Durango, Colorado; Michael French, of Tumwater, Washington; Michael Goren of Baltimore; Shawn Grund of Savage, Minnesota; Meredith

LaFrance of Tillamook, Oregon; Todd Laudino of Piscataway, New Jersey; Judi Stalter of Fairbanks, Alaska; Elizabeth Stuhr of Ankeny, Iowa; Elisabeth Turner of Elk Grove, California; Zachary Wiberg of Grass Valley, California; Lauren Wright of Columbia, South Carolina; and Claudia Zeiler of San Francisco.

More than 395 Peace Corps volunteers have served in Rwanda since the program was established in 1975, and 161 volunteers are now serving in the country. They work in the areas of health and education. Volunteers are trained and work in Kinyarwanda.

# Peace Corps Volunteer Brings the First Bookmobile to Underserved Communities in Georgia

January 22, 2014

 Region: EMA  
 Post: Georgia  
 Project: Georgia - Bookmobile

**WASHINGTON, D.C., January 22, 2014** – Peace Corps volunteer Kristen Moses of North Potomac, Md., recently joined U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Richard Norland and local community members to celebrate the launch of the country’s first bookmobile, a traveling bus that brings educational programming and resources to underserved communities.

In collaboration with a local non-governmental organization and the U.S. Embassy, Moses worked to expand the embassy’s American Corners library project by using an old school bus donated from the United States to create the mobile learning center. The bookmobile has already reached more than 6,000 people across three settlements that are home to families displaced from South Ossetia following conflict in the region in 2008.

“In such isolated communities, any extra attention and after-school activities are a great opportunity for the young people,” said Moses, a graduate of Northwestern University. “This year, we hope to expand our reach and bring the bookmobile to more Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) settlements in

the region.”

The bookmobile spends five days in each community and focuses on youth engagement. The interior of the school bus was gutted and outfitted with bookshelves, beanbag chairs and folding tables to create the feel of a real library. Inside, the bus features books in English for all reading levels, DVDs, laptops with wireless Internet, and a projector and screen, among other resources. All are available free of charge to anyone in the community.

“Kids are able to practice their English skills and learn about American culture, while we also engage them on issues like environmental awareness, healthy lifestyle choices, job skills training, civic engagement and more,” Moses said.

The bookmobile project is funded by the U.S. Embassy through [American Corners](#) — a joint partnership project that promotes cooperation and understanding between the United States and Georgia by providing accurate information about the United States. American Corners are small, American-style libraries located within a local partner organization.

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**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20160101160855/http://www.peacecorps.gov/media/forpress/press/2321/>



HACKATHON PARTICIPANTS.

# Hacking Away for Fair Farm Prices

February 21, 2014

By *Jane Duncan*

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Kenya
- 👤 Project: Kenya - Farmer Hackathon

**B**ack in April I received an email requesting creative, humanitarian ideas to improve the everyday lives of Kenyans through technology. Well the Kenyans I hang with on a day-to-day basis are farmers. Not John Deer-ridin', irrigation-pipe-slingin' farmers, but plough-pushin', hand-pickin' folk. I watch these guys and gals work all year long on their seasonal cash crops of mangoes and oranges, which they then turn around and sell at dirt-cheap prices.

During the harvest season farmers typically get less than 5 cents a mango, which doesn't necessarily reflect the fair-market value of

the crops they work so hard to cultivate. The amount they get for the less exportable orange may be even less. Figuring out how farmers could get the crops' fair-market value is where "my" idea comes in...

Back in December another PCV told me about a cell phone service that would respond to texted queries about fair market produce prices. Pumped, I texted off several queries of my own but never received a reply. Disappointed, I forgot about the text service until I got the aforementioned email. I asked other PCVs and Kenyans, and not one of them had had any luck with the existing fair-price app.

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**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20151231173158/http://passport.peacecorps.gov/2014/02/21/hacking-away-for-fair-farm-prices/>

So I fired off an email proposing a text app that operates with any cell phone (no smart phones in the village my friend, but a surprising number of good old circa 2003 cell phones) that provides fair-price produce information based on the farmer's location. Oh and I didn't stop there. I proposed that it work in English and Kiswahili and be either free or very, very cheap. I sent that puppy off thinking; "that's that, maybe some well-meaning soul will read my 'white lady in the village' idea and make this thing happen." But then another email arrived and I was invited by the Random Hacks of Kindness team to a conference in Nyeri, Kenya.

### Day One

5:00 pm: Arrive, Nyeri. Meet Anthony, a Dedan Kimathi University student and the Hackathon organizer. Board yet another *matatu* to the campus, which turns out to be gorgeous and even boasts a view of Mount Kenya.

5:40 pm: Anthony shows me to my "quarters," aka his dorm room — he gave up his room for me. Can't say I banked on a college flashback quite this heavy-duty, but the lodging was nice enough.

7:30 pm: Off to the college food pin. Chow down on a plate of rice, lentils and beans, and kick it with some Computer Science Kimathi students.

9:00 pm: Early to bed, early to rise,

makes a Peace Corps Volunteer abstinent, boring, and wise.

### Day Two

6:00 am: Arise. Greet the day. Put on my conference pants and walk on down to the student union.

8:00 am: Conference is supposed to begin, but SURPRISE... you live in Kenya and things are not meant to start on time. So it goes.

9:00 am: Only white person/woman present. Student comes to sit with me and flirt shamelessly.

11:00 am: Conference begins. I am shocked when I realize that the Hackathon is a "lock-in" and we will be in the same room for the **NEXT 30 HOURS**. Must have missed *that* part of the email. Whoops.

12:00 pm: I manage to recruit a team eight fantastic "hackers"/"RHOK Stars"/cool Kenyans. We discuss my app idea over lunch. My initial shock and horror about the 30-hour lock-in and managing a tech team (can I just take a moment to mention I was a History Major?) starts to wear off. There are even two techy ladies on my team, which I love.

### 8 HOURS LATER

8:00 pm: We haven't even bothered to start hacking because we are so in the clear. We have a rock-solid plan — we will use Java (what?) to build a

database (yeah uh huh ok) to which farmers can query price info based on county (yeah, that's right) or even upload their own produce price info (awesome). This application will work with any cell phone. After drafting a plan of action we kick it for a bit. Why work when you can focus on new friends!?

10:00 pm: The ladies and I convene and christen ourselves team "*Lipwa Poa*," the cool way to check fair market prices. A legend is born.

### Day Three

2:00 am: Dehydration is setting in. Apparently Kenyans can survive solely on *ugali* (corn paste) and tea.

6:00 am: As the sun rises we work out all the kinks. Our logo is complete and looking fab. Our Prezi presentation is all animated and motion-sickness-inducing and perfect. The Java database (what?) is fully functional, both replying to queries and uploading information. Let the games begin.

11:00 am: We present the Lipwa Poa application, and in my mind we are clearly the best, most humanitarian, most awesome team. We take second in the Nyeri Hackathon to a smart phone application that helps Kenyan with cars find parking in Nairobi. I hide my disappointment poorly, but take comfort in the fact that I have eight new friends. Cheesy, but true.



# Ine? Aphunsitza? Aye... Course One

March 4, 2014

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Zambia
- 👤 Project: Zambia - Computer Course

**A** whole computer course has come and is now gone from my CITTC (Chiparamba Information Technology Training Center) experience...I figured now is probably a good time to re-hash what exactly it's been like...

First things first, I have zero experience teaching, and, in fact, I choose to serve in the Peace Corps over other programs like WorldTeach, precisely because I did not want to teach and (correctly) guessed that I probably wouldn't enjoy it much. Don't get me wrong, teaching is a noble profession—most of my family are teachers, but it's not an easy job. Especially when you're teaching students who are 1. Not fluent in English, 2. Completely technologically illiterate, and 3. Have only known Zambia's

prodigious education system (hint: sarcasm). I honestly don't know how RED (Rural Education Development) volunteers do it. Their job day in and day out is to teach in Zambia's derelict education system at schools that are usually lacking every resource imaginable (paper, pens, projectors, computers, food, you name it). I doubt I'd make it through 2 years of that... At least I have an excuse for when my headmaster asks me if I want to teach. ...“sorry, not in my job description.” I mean, yes, a part of my job is to teach skills to rural people—but not 8th grade biology or 9th grade computer science.

So, I started teaching the Introduction to Computers course for youths at CITTC in my second

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Source: <https://smeintsma.wordpress.com/2015/07/25/ine-aphunsitza-ayi-cittc-course-one/>

week of community entry (which is now over!). The final exam was this past Wednesday. I was so ready for the course to be over.... let me give you an example of a typical class....

Class starts at 16:00... There are usually 1 or 2 students here at that time and most of them arrive around 16:30—missing most of the lesson. I stand at the front of the classroom while the students sit at the computers or in benches near the laptops (often there is no power, so at least they are not distracted by the computer screens—small victory?) I give the lesson, which, to me, seems extremely simplistic and fairly logical/obvious (i.e. How to set up your computer: plug the monitor into the computer and the computer into the wall...). But even this is complex for my students. They're not stupid—they just have literally ZERO experience with computers—only recently has my community had access to any electrical power of any kind—what do you expect? But it's SO hard to properly digest this—I've been using computers since I was three years old, how do I check my assumptions with their lack of experience? Let me tell you—it's nearly impossible. Everything has to be simplified to an extent that I find to be nearly absurd. Thus is mostly due to the fact that their English vocab is limited, so when I say "your computer can be infected with a virus that will make it unable to operate correctly,"

I have to clarify if my students know what the words "infected," "virus," and "operate" mean. On top of this, when I ask them for feedback—"do you know what a virus is?" they stare blankly back at me, not even offering a response. What do I do with that? Will they think I'm belittling them if I define it? Or if I don't?

Further complicating the entry procedure is my students experience with learning. Now, I haven't personally experienced a Zambian school classroom, but from what I understand, there is little to no critical thinking. Teachers typically come to class, write notes on a board and leave the class while the students copy the notes (precisely) and then return at the end of class with little to no discussion taking place. So, when I ask for feedback, they simply don't understand what I'm asking for. And they are afraid to tell me they don't understand because they want me to feel good about my ability to teach. This, in fact, makes me feel worse.

So it got to the point where I would teach the material, off of the flip chart and they'd copy the notes but not understand any of the material because they weren't actually processing the information, but just copying it. So eventually I talked with the two men that run CITTC (Mr. Mutale and Mr. Mwenza) asking for help since clearly my understanding of learning is very different than theirs. Lucky for me, I was able to work with a University student on leave from

Lusaka for the past month or so who has experience both with computers and with teaching. So we ended up splitting the classes every other day and sitting in on one another's classes as well to learn from one another. Paul was very helpful and gave me some good pointers on how to approach the students. Mostly he affirmed that really my English isn't that hard to understand, it's just that they don't know enough English to understand it (even Mr. Mwenza and Mr. Mutale have said my accent is very clear and easy to understand). He basically just repeatedly told me (Zambians have a tendency to talk in circles) that these students need every detail described or explained to them and that I just need to repeat myself 3 or 4 times before moving from one subject to the next. And to make sure they understand what I mean by using this word...to try to relate it back to what they know. So that's what we did. I could tell near the end of the course that they were retaining more information—I'm not sure if this was because of me, Paul, them, or a combination, but...although I may be jumping the gun in saying this (as exam results are not in yet), all's well that ends well, right?

Really, it would work much better if I could just teach in ChiCiewa, *koma, yamvuto maningi*. The hardest part for me remains in attempting to simplify things that I find to be already extremely simplistic (e.g. plugging in your computer).



# Blogging Off the Grid

March 9, 2014

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Zambia
- 👤 Project: Zambia - Offline Blogging

I live in a mud hut in sub-Saharan Africa with no electricity or running water. So how do I blog from my site? With a smartphone, solar panels and thumbs destined for carpal tunnel syndrome, that's how.

The first and biggest obstacle to blogging in Zambia is finding electricity. The vast majority of Peace Corps Zambia Volunteers live in rural areas with little or no power infrastructure and I'm no exception, so to circumvent this problem I have a Joos Orange portable solar panel and two Greenlight Planet Sunking Pro solar lamps. The solar panels for the lamps are tied to the top of my hut and the cords are threaded through the thatched grass roof, powering the lights, which serve double duty as phone chargers. A full day of sunlight yields enough electricity to charge my phone, headlamp and e-book reader while also supplying me with light throughout the evening.

My smartphone is "smart" because it can access the internet and run programs. Using the Word-Press app, I can manage posts, edit drafts and respond to comments. I type using the phone's touchscreen keyboard and save notes for potential blog posts as drafts to access later whenever an idea strikes, whether I'm standing at the edge of a fish farmer's pond or wading through a crowded

market. At present, I have 42 draft posts in various stages of completion, including a handful that are ready to publish and which I keep on contingency in case I run low on ideas one week.

Once I finish writing a post, the next step is to add pictures. Most of the photographs I post on my blog are taken with the camera on my phone, but about once a month I travel to the Peace Corps provincial house 215 kilometers south of my site where I am able to retrieve pictures I've taken with my digital camera by transferring them to my laptop.

Last but not least is publishing the blog post. I purchase a monthly 3G data plan for my phone through a local Zambian cellular service provider, which allows me to access internet at my site. It works about 75 percent of the time, so I write and edit my posts offline and then publish them when I manage to catch the network at a good hour. There is intermittent Wi-Fi at the provincial house, but if it's not working when I visit – not an unlikely scenario, as it was on the fritz for six months earlier this year – then I use Bluetooth to transfer pictures from my laptop back to my phone. This Volunteer is happy to use any tools available in order to help promote Peace Corps' third goal.

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/blogging-off-the-grid/>

# Jordan Blekking - Zambia slowly joining technology boom

March 9, 2014

🌐 Region: AF

📍 Post: Zambia

👤 Project: Zambia - Various Technologies

**T**echnology is crazy. It's constantly improving, changing, shifting and doing things for us that we wouldn't have imagined 10 or 20 years ago — maybe even five years ago.

I'm constantly at a loss when trying to understand why things are getting smaller, what a hash tag is doing in front of a person's name or how people manage to keep up with any of this. It took me a week just to understand what a "selfie" was.

It doesn't matter what I can't keep up with, especially when I'm trying to keep up with it while living in a Zambian village, because even my village is changing.

With more than one billion people, Africa represents a large portion of the market available to technology manufacturers and companies like Samsung and General Electric.

It's in this area of cell phones that I notice the largest growth in technology adoption. Nearly every person has a cell phone and nearly every street corner is staffed with peddlers trying to sell a newer, better model.

These phones often provide villagers with

Internet access, and although the uptake of this crazy notion called the World Wide Web is slow, it is gaining. It's only a matter of time until my villagers start asking for my email address and we'll be able to stay in touch long after I've left for the U.S.

Though the phones here aren't as nice as those back home, some aid groups are trying to use phones to improve people's lives.

For instance, there's a texting service that rural, small-scale farmers can use to find the price of certain commodity crops like soybeans, corn and beans on the world market. The service will even identify companies that are buying these crops and provide the company's contact information.

The Peace Corps in Zambia is also getting into the technology game through its partnership with a local technology hub called the Bongo Hive.

Last year this partnership created a cell phone application called Bantu Babel, which helps translate many of the local languages into English.

Twice a year, volunteers team up with local

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**Source:** <http://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2014/03/09/jordan-blekking-zambia-slowly-joining-technology-boom/6242487/>

tech enthusiasts during a “hackathon” to brainstorm and create new development-focused applications and programs. Next up from the Bongo Hive group is a transportation-inspired application.

There has also been startling growth in the use of solar panels throughout my community’s villages. Where there were no lights nearly two years ago, and only the occasional candle, there are now families using solar panels to charge not only their cell phones but to power light bulbs in their huts.

As an American abroad, the growth of technology in Africa has been great. I have a cell phone that lets me text and call the United States — for a small fortune — check my email and Facebook accounts daily and I’ve even started a Twitter account from my hut based on all the things my favorite villager, Mr. Nshimbi, has said to me throughout my service. These

newspaper articles are products of Zambia’s growing connectivity.

A fellow volunteer, Caleb Rudow, has greatly surpassed my own use of technology to stay connected by creating something that I affectionately call the “war room” in his hut.

He has an entire solar system for his computer to use and through that he can Skype with his family in the United States — right from his hut. I always know when Caleb is in the war room because I’ll get email after email from him in regard to projects I’m connected to, projects that may interest me or just friendly emails to check in.

In the future I see technology’s use only growing throughout rural communities, especially in the area of public health.

Mobile health clinics are becoming more popular in the rural areas

because technology has allowed these clinics to feature smaller, more easily transportable machines for checking a person’s vital health (HIV status, blood tests, respiratory, etc.) in the less accessible areas of Zambia.

Text messaging services will play a greater role, for example a mother could receive a text reminder for when her child is due for a vaccination or what dietary needs the mother should meet while cooking dinner.

Ultimately, the spread of technology to villagers will only increase their connectivity and access to news, knowledge and information.

What slowed them before, inability to access information, is slowly being chipped away at, allowing those wanting the information to have access to the world’s databases — essentially connecting us all and making life a little easier.



# Camp Sky 2015 - A Click in the Computer Literacy Direction

April 8, 2014

By *Devyn Lee*

🌐 Region: AF

📍 Post: Malawi

👤 Project: Malawi - Camp Sky

**T**hink for a minute about how you operated your computer in order to read this blog: you turned it on, logged in, opened a browser, and typed in the web address. Along the way, you used the mouse or trackpad to point and click, and you successfully used the keyboard to type the characters of the URL. These are simple tasks for most computer users, and you probably went through the steps without a thought. Americans have been using computers for years, learning at a young

age (at least for my generation). We have performed thousands of typing and mouse actions, and these skills have become second nature to us.

This week at Camp Sky, I was given the job of teaching computer lessons to our student campers. Using a basic computer literacy lesson plan written by coordinator Madam Susan Stancampiano, fellow counselor Madam Alex Martin and I instructed one of the computer labs at Kamuzu Academy. Each student bird team received two computer

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Source: <http://campsnymw2015.blogspot.com/2015/04/a-click-in-computer-literacy-direction.html>

lessons, offering many their first opportunity ever to touch or to use a computer.

So, how exactly does one teach a group of teenagers how to use a computer for the first time? The answer: very slowly, with lots of patience, and with several other volunteers in the room to provide assistance. Our first lesson began explaining the parts of the computer: the monitor, the CPU, the mouse, the keyboard, etc. (We logged into the computers before the students arrived, figuring that the Ctrl + Alt + Delete command might be a little too complex for first-time users.) Next, we demonstrated how to use the mouse, discussed the different types of mouse clicks, and taught the students how to click and drag. I'm willing to bet that you have never seen a group of students so excited over opening and closing the recycling bin window and right clicking on an empty desktop.

After the students had some practice clicking, we had them open Microsoft Word and try their hand at typing. They practiced typing the alphabet in order, using the backspace key and space bar, and typing some numbers. We then showed the students how to change the font, size, and color of their text. That's where the real fun began – most campers chose to continue typing in 72 point, brightly colored

text. We divulged the correct number of spaces to use between words and after punctuation, and we also tried to distinguish the shift key from the caps lock key. By the end of the first lesson, most students had typed out a few sentences on their own, and they were all mystified to see their own words appear on the computer screen.

During the second lesson, the students were able to practice these new skills again, as they typed part of their English class compositions. We taught the basic format for a school paper: putting name and date in the upper right hand corner, making the title bold and aligning it in the center, and using the tab key to indent the first line of the paragraph. Students were also able to print one page of their work, to take home and to prove their new computer skills to friends and family. Needless to say, this cheap piece of paper is worth much more to them.

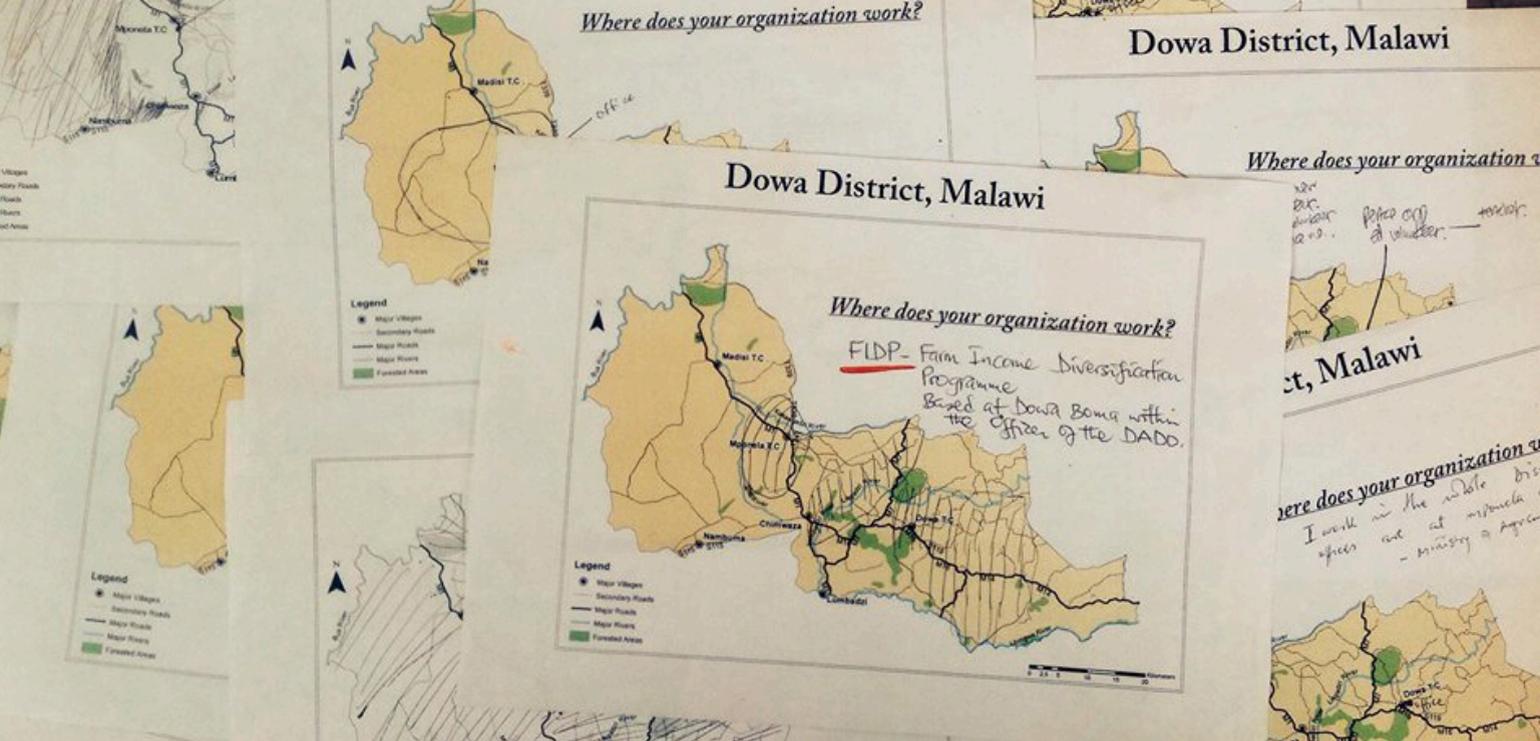
The students also briefly browsed the Internet and caught their first glimpse of the world wide web. They were tasked with entering the Camp Sky blog address in the address box and finding themselves in post pictures. Some savvy students were assisted in creating their first email accounts. We cannot wait to see how this new found computer interest will motivate students to seek further computer

training and technological information.

Teaching the computer lessons was both exhausting and incredibly rewarding. Though we were prepared with a lesson plan, teaching first-time users forces a lot of additions and changes on the fly. I was impressed by how quickly many of the students learned, and also surprised at the wide range of skills they displayed as computer amateurs. Some showed impressively quick typing skills, while others were typists of the hunt and peck variety. Regardless of skill level, all of the students cherished the lessons.

Our use of technology is something that we very often take for granted, especially in the United States or other developed nations. How many of our schools in the US now rely heavily on classroom laptops, smart podiums, and online homework assignments? For many of the CDSS students at Camp Sky, technology has thus far played a negligible role in their education. Their schools are lucky to have electricity, much less computers that are available for student use. The opportunity for students to have at least a small amount of computer training is just one of the ways that Camp Sky offers the students inspiration and extra preparation for them to continue their education after secondary school.





# Civil Society Organizations Meeting & Mapping Dowa District

April 8, 2014

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Malawi
- 👤 Project: Malawi - Mapping Project

Last month, The Kusamala Institute of Agriculture and Ecology hosted a workshop in Mponela, a trading center in Dowa District. As part of Kusamala's Climate Smart Agriculture Project, the workshop brought together leaders of civil society organizations and government agencies that are working in Dowa District. In recent decades, Dowa has been home to an abundance of development projects, aid organizations, charities, etc. However, the efforts of these groups are rarely coordinated, and new projects might even be

started without the knowledge of existing projects already working on the same issues in the same area. Not only is this trend a waste of resources, it is unfair to the population of Dowa, who are the recipients of poorly planned, disjointed projects and programs.

At Kusamala begins its two-year Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) project, whereby Kusamala aims to train 1500 Dowa farmers in CSA strategies and practices, the organization is committed to coordinating their efforts with others working on the ground in Dowa.

Source: <https://agalternativesmalawi.wordpress.com/2014/04/08/civil-society-organizations-meeting-mapping-dowa-district/>

Accordingly, Kusamala proposed this workshop, the first of several, to achieve a number of objectives:

Identify blocks and find common ground between representatives of civil society organizations working within the sectors of: - Food and nutrition security - Sustainable agriculture - Environmental resilience and climate change

Share tools and best practices with the goal of creating a shared measurement system on what is working and what is not.

Establish a living network of stakeholders in the relevant sectors with a clear commitment to improve communication, advocacy and large-scale impact.

We, the Kusamala Mapping Team, helped to facilitate the two-day meeting with... you guessed it... maps!

In effort to better understand who is working where, and on what, in Dowa, we distributed maps of Dowa to the workshop's participants and asked them to plot their catchment areas and describe their activities there. Our goal was to identify areas of overlap and potential collaboration, as well as the areas where projects are not reaching, which might indicate areas for future work. The participants, representing diverse stakeholders ranging from the Ministry of Agriculture to the U.S. Peace Corps to WorldVision, provided some enlightening results.

We presented our findings on the second day of the workshop and

discussed how GIS and maps could be used for monitoring and evaluating projects at a district level. Our presentation was well received, and the workshop collectively decided to pursue GIS as a tool to increase collaboration and understanding of development goals throughout Dowa District. We kept the ball rolling by digitizing each of the organizations' catchment areas and performing an overlap analysis in ArcGIS. Digital maps were distributed after the workshop and the feedback from the participants has been great.

Stay tuned as we continue to work with this network of civil society organizations and use GIS to further their missions to enhance environmental, economic, and social well-being in the Dowa District, Malawi.

# Peace Corps Helps Ghana Cashew Farmers Use Mobile Technology

May 20, 2014

 Region: AF  
 Post: Ghana  
 Project: Ghana - Cashew Initiative

**W**ashington — Peace Corps volunteer Michael Underwood of Pineville, Kentucky, is helping cashew farmers in his Ghana community use mobile technology to boost production and improve their business. Giving local farmers the tools to map their farms and better track sales of cashews enables them to identify operational efficiencies and ensure fair prices.

In his community in Ghana, Underwood walks with farmers along the perimeter of their land with a GPS device to calculate its acreage and develop a satellite image of the farm.

“Knowing the acreage is extremely important, as it is how farmers calculate how much pesticide and other chemicals they use,” Underwood said. “Most farmers I’ve worked with either don’t know or guess how many acres they own, which causes over spraying of harmful chemicals.”

Underwood has also collaborated with a German software company to develop and pilot mobile software that tracks the origin, quality and prices of cashews from various communities — benefitting both the farmers and cashew buyers. With greater transparency across the industry, farmers can charge more

for higher-quality cashews, and buyers can have greater confidence in the value of their purchase. Underwood’s work has included programming cellphones and training buyers to use them, as well as providing technical information about the cashew industry and testing the application.

To reduce food waste across the cashew industry, Underwood’s fellow Peace Corps volunteers are encouraging local community members to process the cashew apple from the cashew tree, which was previously discarded. Volunteers have formed women’s groups that are producing juice and jam from the apples and generating extra income for their families.

“By finding ways to use the cashew fruit, volunteers are cutting down on food waste and introducing an easily accessible and nutritious food,” Underwood said. “In addition, the increased income from the sale of the fruit products, the premiums from selling higher-quality cashew nuts, and money saved by working in farmer groups has aided in creating greater food security and allowing more people access to foods with higher nutrient values.”

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Source: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2014/05/20140522299557.html#axzz3lolw9f9i>



TARGET DEMOGRAPHIC FOR  
CHAT SALUD IN NICARAGUA.

# Peace Corps Volunteers Find Innovative Solutions to Global Health Challenges

June 28, 2014

- 🌐 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Nicaragua
- 👤 Project: Nicaragua - Chat Salud

**WASHINGTON, D.C., April 7, 2014** – In honor of World Health Day, the Peace Corps celebrates the work of volunteers around the world to improve global health in collaboration with the countries and communities they serve.

World Health Day is celebrated annually on April 7 to commemorate the establishment of the World Health Organization in 1948 and bring worldwide attention to public health issues.

To empower Nicaraguans to lead healthier, safer lives, returned Peace Corps volunteer Lauren Spigel and current Peace Corps volunteer Nishant Kishore, together with fellow volunteers and community members, have

created a text-message based health hotline called ChatSalud to anonymously share accurate health information and connect Nicaraguans to local health resources.

An unwillingness to talk openly about sexual and reproductive health in Nicaragua has led to a widespread lack of reliable information for young people and high rates of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. The topic is considered taboo, and as a result, about one in every four adolescent girls in Nicaragua will become pregnant before they turn 18, and only about 60 percent of the rural population engages in family planning.

“In the small community where I was living and working, youth often faced barriers when

Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160101160855/http://www.peacecorps.gov/media/forpress/press/2360/>

accessing sexual and reproductive health information,” said Spigel, of Baltimore, Md. “In doing our work as Peace Corps volunteers, we found that people want information about sexual and reproductive health, but they want a way to get it anonymously.”

Spigel and her colleagues found that while less than 10 percent of households in Nicaragua had access to the Internet, nearly 90 percent of the population had access to a cell phone. The volunteers’ mobile solution is filling an important gap by making sexual and reproductive health information accessible in a reliable and

confidential way that resonates with Nicaraguan youth.

The free text hotline will be the first of its kind in the country and will work to break down the stigma associated with talking about sexual and reproductive health in Nicaraguan culture. The ChatSalud team has brought together significant resources and local organizations, including the Nicaraguan government, to get the program off the ground. With the help of local telecommunications companies, the text message service will be completely free for users.

“ChatSalud is showing that Peace

Corps volunteers can mobilize coordinated efforts between partners at the grassroots and national levels,” Spigel said.

Youth from the program’s pilot community in rural Northern Nicaragua are already proving the impact of the project, and in the months ahead, ChatSalud hopes to expand across the country.

“Really, this is what the modern Peace Corps is all about,” Spigel said. “With ChatSalud, we identified a problem at the grassroots level and had the flexibility, perseverance and technological know-how to innovate a solution.”

# 200 Mile Bicycle Ride Fundraiser for Computer Lab

July 13, 2014

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Uganda
- 👤 Project: Uganda - Computer Lab Bike Ride

**H**ello Everyone,  
Just in time for the holiday season I am biking all the way from my village of Luteete near Luweero to Fort Portal over the course of a week starting on December 16, 2014. With my fellow PCV friend Ravi Sahai and my Ugandan neighbor Kato Godfrey we will bike to Fort Portal in the western region of Uganda in order to raise money **for the construction of a computer Lab** in my village school of Luteete PTC. The entire distance traveled will be 200 miles (321km).

I ask that you pledge anywhere from 5 cents to \$1 for every km traveled. Or maybe you would rather make a one-time donation to the cause. I ask that instead of a care package, Christmas gift, or Birthday gift that you support me in this cause that I so passionately believe in. Just go to:

<https://donate.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=donate.contribute.projDetail&projdesc=14-617-059>

or search Roxas at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/donate>

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Source: <https://mountainsbeyondmountainsuganda.wordpress.com/200-mile-bicycle-ride-fundraiser-for-computer-lab/>



AS A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER  
IN A REMOTE VILLAGE IN  
UGANDA, SARAH COWAN  
HELPED RESIDENTS BUILD A  
COMMUNITY CENTER THAT  
INCLUDES A LIBRARY AND  
COMPUTERS WITH INTERNET  
ACCESS.

# Illinois Wesleyan helps fund Ugandan computer lab

July 13, 2014

By *Teresa Sherman*

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Uganda
- 👤 Project: Uganda - Computer Lab

**O**n the day of her final farewell to the Ugandan village — and to the people who had become her family — Sarah Cowan paused in front of the inauspicious concrete building that stood as testament to more than two years of service. Behind the squat, gray-and-white walls and colorfully painted world map around the door sits a collection of more than 6,000 books, their glossy covers smudged by the fingerprints of dozens of children.

Before Cowan, a 2005 Illinois Wesleyan graduate in music education, came to the small village of Ssanje in April 2006, there wasn't a library in the entire Rakai district in south-central Uganda, an area covering almost 2,000 square miles.

In Ssanje, Cowan was assigned to a school funded by Children of Uganda, a non-profit group created to help some of the nearly 2.4 million children in the country who have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS, extreme poverty or civil conflict. Though the remote location does not have electricity or running water, Cowan soon learned that the teachers and leaders of Ssanje had a vision for their village's future.

"When they approached me with the idea for a community center, I jumped at the idea," says Cowan. "I had learned already that, for development to be maintained, it has to come from the people."

Cowan connected the Ssanje villagers with people from her life back home — family and

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Source: [https://www.iwu.edu/magazine/2009/winter/peace\\*corps.html](https://www.iwu.edu/magazine/2009/winter/peace*corps.html)

friends, fellow Illinois Wesleyan graduates and the Peace Corps support network — and raised \$12,000 needed to build the library.

When Cowan's time as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) came to a close in November 2008, Ssanje attained solar power, a few computers and Internet access, as well as a book catalogue in the thousands.

Cowan's sense of tangible accomplishment is the dream of thousands of Peace Corps volunteers and applicants who have responded to the call to serve since the program's creation in 1961. That call is being heard louder than ever: this year, the Peace Corps received its largest-ever recorded number of applicants. The majority of those are recent college graduates.

One of those applicants is Emily Franzen, an education major nominated to serve in French-speaking West Africa after her December 2009 graduation. As she anticipates the radical changes to which she will need to adapt as a PCV, Franzen is also trying to stay grounded in her expectations. "If I'm able to help just one classroom of students improve their English language skills," she says, "I know the two years away from home will be time well spent."

Still, Franzen doesn't pretend to know what her service might be like. Indeed, every volunteer experience is different, as Illinois Wesleyan's long list of alumni-PCVs can attest.

In the past 10 years alone, dozens of IWU graduates have gone on to serve in Peace Corps posts from Azerbaijan to Paraguay, from Northern to Sub-Saharan Africa. For some, the experience was everything they'd hoped for; others left with feelings of frustration at all that was left unaccomplished. For most, the experience has involved adjusting to the realization that change is often difficult, and can take far longer than the span of their two-year service.

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"Time is fluid here, which makes sense considering the 130-degree heat," observes 2007 alumna Marisa Van Osdale, a health-education volunteer in Senegal at the tail-end of her service.

Van Osdale remains enthusiastic about her time in Goudoude Diobe — a village of 500 that lies four miles from a paved road — and she enjoys its stark contrast with her former life in Illinois. "I take a horse cart in and out of the village once a week to go into the city for market and Internet access," says Van Osdale, who has no running water or electricity in her concrete house.

Van Osdale knows she is still very privileged in comparison to those she serves. "Life here is hard for the people not receiving care packages from friends and family." Hunger is a very real problem, she says, citing the skyrocketing price of rice and a particularly bad rainy season. Poor water sanitation and related diseases such as dysentery and malaria are threats year-round.

Prior to arriving in Senegal, the closest thing Van Osdale had seen to the level of poverty in Goudoude Diobe was during a May Term trip to South Africa. But, she admits, "By no means was I prepared."

Despite its austere way of life, Osdale describes her village as a place "filled with laughter, jokes, smiles and squeals of delight from children playing games."

Like Cowan, Van Osdale measures her success by keeping a number of short-term goals. Since her arrival, she has worked closely with teachers at the local primary school and at a middle school in the nearby village of Thilogne. Unlike Uganda, education is free in Senegal up to age 16. Government stipends go toward school supplies, clothing and even housing costs for children who live too far away for daily travel.

"Girls' education is at the forefront of every new development push," adds Van Osdale. In Senegal, only 15 percent of girls are able to go to secondary school. Yet those who have been educated tend to have fewer and healthier babies later in life, take more active roles in their communities and are better able to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

Each year, Peace Corps Senegal awards scholarships to female middle-school students to continue their studies. Last year, there was enough money to distribute two scholarships to a pair of children whom Van Osdale taught at the Thilogne middle school. "Both girls had radiant smiles when I gave them their scholarships," she says. The girls plan to continue their schooling through college at the University of Dakar in Senegal's capital.

In the few months that remain in Van Osdale's assignment, she says she looks forward to continuing her work with the girls at the middle school, teaching primary school children about basic sanitation, planting trees in the village and "letting people know a little bit about real American culture."

Though Van Osdale does miss her family and friends in the U.S., nothing can douse the spirit of adventure that she wakes up to every morning, even on days when she gets frustrated with the cows mooing at 5 a.m. "Interacting with the kids, talking about resting and eating right with pregnant mothers and drinking traditional tea with the villagers makes it all worthwhile," she says.

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Because of the length, difficulty and low financial reward for their service, the question "Will it be worth it?" often weighs heavily on the minds of potential Peace Corp volunteers.

Hearing about the successes of volunteers like Cowan and Van Osdale is reassuring to nominees like Franzen.

But nagging doubts remain.

“As excited as I am about what I can accomplish as a teaching volunteer, it’s daunting to think of how limited the resources are going to be,” says Franzen. “I’ve taught in classrooms with ‘Smart Board’ technology,” she adds, referring to a popular interactive, electronic whiteboard. “I know Peace Corps is going to be a major wake-up call.”

That wake-up call sounded loud and clear to Allison Bannerman ‘07. The political science major studied international issues while at IWU and planned to further her education in law and international studies after her Peace Corps tour.

“I had my life pretty well mapped out when I graduated, and Peace Corps was a natural fit — or at least that’s what I thought at the time,” says Bannerman.

In the fall of 2007, Bannerman started in-country training for the Peace Corps in the Central Asian country of Kazakhstan. Five months later, she was back in her hometown of Bainbridge Island, Wash.

Currently a law student at Washington University, she doesn’t regret her decision to terminate her Peace Corps service early.

“Every assignment is different, and I realized almost immediately that mine wouldn’t allow me to fulfill any of the reasons I wanted to join,” she says.

According to Bannerman, none of the programs she wanted to implement were possible and the ones in place had deficiencies too steep to overcome.

“The tools I had available to me were not the tools I needed to meet my goals,” she says. “I wasn’t the right person for the job and the job wasn’t the right one for me. That realization was the final straw that made me leave.”

Resigning in the winter of 2008, Bannerman became one of an estimated 30 percent of volunteers who choose not to complete their service each year. Still, Bannerman cites many reasons why her shortened experience was worthwhile. She still keeps in touch with friends she made through the Peace Corps and returned to Kazakhstan this summer to visit.

Most importantly, she says, “It taught me to be true to myself and the causes that I’m most passionate about. Peace Corps isn’t a feel-good vacation. As a volunteer, you have a responsibility to serve your community to the best of your abilities. If you can’t offer that, you owe it to them and to yourself to rethink your commitment.”

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Ryan Smith didn’t join the Peace Corps expecting to change the world.

“My service was a tiny, two year slice of a giant, 50-year development experiment,” says Smith, who worked in Gambia to promote sustainable community development and environmental conservation.

“When I lost sight of the big picture, I started feeling like I was just banging my head against a wall.”

Smith’s wife and fellow 2007 IWU graduate Leslie Coleman experienced similar feelings as a Peace Corps volunteer working with the ecotourism and research units of Gambia’s Department of Parks and Wildlife Management. Every day, she says, was a balancing act between succeeding on a “small-scale” and questioning her impact.

“Misuse of project funds was something that I was able to stop by speaking with my supervisors,” Coleman says. “But, now that I’m gone, I don’t really have any doubt that the corruption has resumed.”

Still, thanks to what Coleman describes as the passion, intelligence and dedication of several Gambian coworkers, most of her projects reached fruition — though her assignment was aborted early due to a medical condition Ryan suffered that could not be treated in Gambia.

Smith is healthy now, and he and Coleman are back to work as English teachers in Thailand.

Though proud of her PC service, Coleman admits that the experience made her less inclined to pursue a career in international development.

“Every day I was faced with cultural differences — a lack of environmental concern, non-democratic ideals and the inferior position of women — that seemed to me to run too deep to change,” she says. “As an outsider, I felt my capacity to address them was limited.”

Coleman says she was sometimes not taken as seriously at work as her husband, while their Western gender roles often drew sharp comments from their neighbors.

“Some people thought I wasn’t a good wife because my husband helped cook, clean and sweep the front porch. That’s something that the older generation will probably never understand,” she says. “But when we heard it from young men, we just joked with them about how they needed to learn to do the same, or else no young woman would want to marry them.”

Coleman also recalls the weekly club for students that she and Ryan hosted where conversations on social and environmental issues revealed how much Americans and Gambians shared core cultural values.

“I learned so much from my students, just seeing the challenges they face growing up as young Gambians,” says Coleman. “They made me think critically about many of the assumptions I

came here with.”

Looking back, Smith regards his initial reasons for joining the Peace Corps as fairly selfish. “I wanted the challenge,” he says. “I wanted to learn a new language. I wanted to see if I could go two years without the amenities we’re so used to. I wanted this experience to make me a better person.”

Ultimately, what changed Smith was a lesson in selflessness.

“Many of the Gambians we lived with seemed to be of the mindset that they’re all but ignored by the rest of the world,” he says. “But PCVs put their American lives to work side by side with them in the fields. They eat out of the same bowl as local families. I think that says to them, ‘You’re the ones who matter.’”

• • •

When the final countdown to Cowan’s departure from Uganda began, the

people of Ssanje held multiple parties and dances in her honor.

“They kept thanking me for everything I’d done for them,” she recalls, “but I couldn’t make them realize that I was the one who should be grateful for all they had done for me.”

In her role as a music teacher in elementary schools in the Chicago suburbs, Cowan presents pictures, stories and videos from her time in Uganda. Her stories inspire students and fellow teachers to send books, school supplies and encouraging letters to the children of Ssanje.

Likewise, Cowan says that fellow PCVs who have also returned home continue to offer friendship and support. “It’s really an experience that everyone involved carries with them for a lifetime.”

Illinois Wesleyan PCVs make it a special point to keep in touch, Coleman adds. “The class of 2007 is really active.” During her time in Gambia,

she and Smith met up with alumnae like Van Osdale and Jessica Scates in Senegal for a PCV softball tournament. “It was really enlightening to compare our experiences,” says Coleman.

According to Franzen, even those just considering joining are invited into the PC alumni community. “I’ve gotten to talk with so many volunteers, most of them IWU alums. They’ve all shared really great advice,” Nevertheless, Franzen has a difficult time imagining life as a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa. “I have this image of myself standing on the porch of a thatched hut, looking out into the jungle and thinking, ‘What the hell am I doing here?’” she says.

The idea is both terrifying and thrilling to Franzen, who looks forward to experiencing what she describes as the “Peace Corps dualities” — teaching and being taught, wrestling with prejudice and facing her own, failing miserably and succeeding wildly.

# Girls acquire ICT skills to Solve Community Problems

August 9, 2014

 Region: AF  
 Post: Rwanda  
 Project: Rwanda - Camp TechKobwa

**S**ixty female students from twelve secondary schools across the country have been trained in basic computer skills, photography, digital media, programming, and research methods.

The seven-day training that kicked off last week at the Northern Province's Groupe Scolaire Janja in Gakenke District was dubbed Camp TechKobwa, to reflect its focus on women as Kobwa means female in Kinyarwanda.

The course was sponsored by American Peace Corps, Michigan State University, and IBM with the support and technological expertise of local partners ELE Rwanda, Girls in ICT and K-lab.

Elizabeth Turner, the course Director, said that the girls acquired skills on how to solve problems in their communities using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

"They had the chance to experience building and utilizing robotics. We also encouraged them in regards to self-confidence, goal setting, and self-expression so that they can be role models and leaders in their communities," Turner explained.

ICT Teachers from selected schools underwent a four-day training of trainer's course.

"The teachers that attained the training will be able to pass on skills to more students in their

respective schools thus we are able to reach more students that were not able to come for the camp," Turner said.

Organizers of TechKobwa Camp said its aim was to expose Rwandan girls to technology that encourages them to explore, engage, and consider future careers in ICT.

Giselle Izerimana, 16, a senior- four student at Ecole Secondaire Mulindi in Northern Province's Gicumbi District said that she attained skills in internet security.

"My dream career is to become an Astronaut. It has been my dream from when I was 12 years old. And as a future Astronaut, this training was important. This training has equipped me with various skills and ICT became more and more interesting. Besides learning about internet security, I was able to get skills in public speaking," Izerimana said.

Just like Izerimana, the 19-year-old Marcelline Maniraguha who is a senior six student at Groupe Scolaire Murunda, enjoyed the course.

"Although I was able to learn about some ICT applications that can help in solving problems in our community, I learnt that if I have goals and dreams, I need to note them down, set objectives on how to achieve them and then I can work towards achieving them," Maniraguha said.



GHANA HACKATHON  
PARTICIPANTS.

# Ghana adds Modern Twist to Stomp Out Malaria

September 26, 2014

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Ghana
- 👤 Project: Ghana - Hackathon

**F**or Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs), the rate at which we are required to adapt to new situations with creativity and flexibility can at times be overwhelming.

The limited stay in our host countries, combined with the speed at which the international community is developing alongside our villages, builds pressure for action. Developments in technology and easier access to various mobile devices have set the stage for a dramatic shift in the way PCVs work with their host countries to disseminate valuable, life-saving information, and one of the greatest beneficiaries of these advances is the fight to end malaria.

With nearly 3.5 million reported cases annually, malaria remains the number one killer in Ghana. Roughly one-third of all reported

cases in Ghana are among children under the age of 5. This equates to nearly seven newly diagnosed cases of malaria every minute and almost 40 deaths of children under the age of 5 every day.

In an effort to optimize resources, Peace Corps Ghana's Standing with Africa to Terminate (SWAT) Malaria Initiative teamed up with Tech Think Tank and an impressive crew of nearly 27 computer programmers to address this burden. The result of this collaboration was a hackathon, with malaria as the sole focus.

With the support of Coders4Africa and space provided by Mobile Web Ghana, the event kicked off on the morning of July 12 in Madina with 23 host country nationals and four PVCs, including hackathon innovator Joshua Kim. After greetings, PCV and Masters International

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/ghana-adds-modern-twist-to-stomp-out-malaria/>

student Matthew Ward gave an introduction, which included the event's goals and some humbling statistics to aid participants in understanding the magnitude of the challenge before them. Patrick Choquette and Matthew McAllister of Peace Corps' Office of Innovation even took time from their weekend to Skype in during lunch and offer their support.

PCVs Matthew and Joshua laid out four different application concepts that focused on the problem of educating people about malaria. The four concepts were ones that the coders may not have been familiar with, including Jeopardy, Duck Hunter, Quiz bowl, and a virtual room "what's wrong with this picture" game. Each of the coders volunteered to work on the concept they thought they could best develop with malaria education as the goal.

The coders broke into groups and selected which ones they would like to work and wasted no time and began furiously coding, both adapting old ideas and constructing new solutions. Participants included representatives from Wikimedia, Google, Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology and Coders4Africa, to name a few. The first day wrapped up with devoted participants requesting permission to

work on their projects at home.

Cooperation and idea sharing continued to flow like Fanta as new faces, including a few curious PCVs, arrived on the second day. Selom Banybah, a representative of the Ghana chapter of Coders4Africa, shared his observation that PCVs "bring joy to all the work they do." This was the third hackathon Selom participated in with PCVs and definitely hopes it will not be his last.

After a few more concentrated hours it was time to display the finished products; presenters plugged into the projector and shared the work of the last two days.

The first mobile application, modeled off the game show Jeopardy, included four sections of malaria-related questions rated on level of difficulty. As players answered correctly, the questions became increasingly more difficult.

The [second mobile application](#) likened a modern version of duck hunter, wherein players swatted mosquitoes as they flew quickly across the screen. Players were awarded points for killing as many mosquitoes as possible, all the while being provided the option to make donations to malaria prevention efforts.

The [final mobile application](#) of the

day shared a quiz bowl type game that included a variety of informative malaria facts.

The applications were then judged on a number of criteria, including practical application, visual completeness and overall identification with the malaria mission. PCV Matthew O'Neill closed the event by presenting awards to each of the participants. Overall the event succeeded by bringing together local experts with PCVs and generating new tools in the age-old fight against malaria in Ghana.

In early August, four of the original HCN (host country national) coders gave presentations on three applications to a large contingent of the PC Ghana staff. When the presentations were complete, staff were encouraged to ask questions, play with the applications and give feedback. Coders will polish the applications to make them ready for posting on Android soon. Conversation also generated new ideas for expanding on a quiz bowl type application that could be used to test malaria knowledge and compete with other players internationally, charting progress on a live leader board. We hope to move forward with the concept and ideally be ready for large scale implementation on World Malaria Day 2015.



UGANDA GIRLS SCIENCE  
AND EDUCATION CAMP  
PARTICIPANTS.

# GirlTech 3.14159 – A Girl’s Science and Education Camp in Uganda

September 29, 2014

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Uganda
- 👤 Project: Uganda - GirlTech

A few weeks ago I got a very lovely email from Alaina Wayland, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Uganda working as a counselor at Girl-Tech 3.14159, a science and technology camp for Ugandan girls ages 12-20. I am very honored and extremely touched by this very passionate and inspiring message which I share below.

To Olvious, Eseza, Anitah, Innocent, Ivon, Lodah, Clothilda – Thank you! Congratulations and welcome to the club of amazing female scientists! Be confident, be courageous and be creative! Be encouraged to pursue your heart’s desire, work hard and study science and math, which are rewarding and extremely useful (and fun)!

Alaina wrote “My Team is Team Gondwe, and my campers have a message for you!

We are campers at Girl Tech 3.14159 and we are on Team Gondwe. For the week, we have been trying to be a woman of science, just like you! To educate the other campers on the importance of science communication, we created a poem about you and your work. Here is our poem:

*Gondwe, Gondwe, Gondwe, Ha! What a courageous woman she is! A science communicator, teaching and sharing knowledge about science.*

*Gondwe, Gondwe, Gondwe, Wow! Men, women, young, old, rich, poor, have come to shine in education.*

*Gondwe, Gondwe, Gondwe, Ya! What a role model in my life!*

*Gondwe, we wish you well and we shall continue remembering you for the work you are doing.*

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Source: <https://afrisciheroes.wordpress.com/2014/09/29/girltech-3-14159-a-girls-science-and-education-camp-in-uganda/>



PARTICIPANTS ON THEIR  
VARIOUS TEAMS.



# Celebrations and Lessons Learned from Technovation Challenge

December 8, 2014

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Moldova
- 👤 Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

I want to introduce you to four inspiring and creative girls that I have gotten to know over the past 3-4 months.

We had been meeting about once or twice a week to work through the Technovation Challenge curriculum. [Technovation Challenge](#) is a world-wide technology entrepreneurship program where girls from middle school or high school form teams from all over the world to work through a 12 week course learning about entrepreneurship and how to build a phone app. I worked with these girls as their mentor guiding them through the content and their ideas during this competition.

The theme this year was for teams to develop a phone app and business plan to address

a problem or issue in their community. Once teams determine an issue in their community, they must come up with a way to address this problem and create a business plan, pitch video, and phone app using the AppInventor program. Plus, this whole 12 week course is done in English and the project must be submitted in English as well. This is pretty challenging for teams whose second or third language is English... but my team was up for the challenge.

I have to say that this was one of the most challenging things that I have done so far... and also the most rewarding. These girls are hard-working, persistent, determined, smart, and very creative. They encouraged one another

THE GIRLS WORKING TOGETHER ON BUILDING THEIR APP DURING A HACK EVENT IN CHISINAU FOR TECHNOVATION CHALLENGE. THEY GOT TO MEET SOME OF THE OTHER TEAMS FROM MOLDOVA, GET SOME FEEDBACK ABOUT THEIR IDEA AND MEET SOME WOMEN WHO WORK IN THE IT FIELD IN MOLDOVA.

Source: <https://sarajoyhoy.wordpress.com/2015/05/12/celebrations-lessons-learned-from-technovation-challenge/>

through the whole process and I got to see their confidence grow and their English improve. We all learned a whole lot during this process...probably more than I can even begin to explain.

The girls presenting during the pitch event in Chisinau where they pitched their idea and presented to some of the other teams and tech professionals from Moldova. The documentary crew from the #girlsintech film were there filming that day as well.

Even with all the obstacles we faced leading up to the deadline, the girls submitted their project with 30 minutes to spare at 2:30 AM (since the deadline was at 5 pm PST which was 3 am here in Moldova).

We met up a week after they submitted their project to celebrate and I wanted to debrief what we had just went through over the past couple of months. I asked them a few questions to follow up on the impact Technovation Challenge had on them, and I am happy to share that the results were quite positive.

To give a brief synopsis of their responses... they were all glad they participated and agreed that they learned a lot of new things and had fun. When I asked them what they liked most about Technovation Challenge, two of the girls replied that they liked making their pitch video (which I will share next week), one girl liked

“building” the app part in Applinventor while another liked the new experience and things she learned and the support from their mentor (yay!). When I asked what they liked the least, one girl replied “there were times I wanted to sleep but I knew I had to go to Technovation” while another one said that the hardest part was choosing one community issue — which took them about 3-4 weeks to decide and agree upon.

*What went well with your Technovation Challenge project?* Cami: “All went well except for the ‘presenting’ the app part on pitch day” Alexandra: 2. “The ‘brainstorm’ part.” Catalina: “The business plan.” Olga: “Everything went well.”

*What was the biggest challenge for you personally?* Catalina: “Building the blocks part in the Applinventor for the making the mobile app part sometimes.” Alexandra & Cami: “Speaking English!” Olga: “The biggest challenge for me was the “design of the app” part and sending the whole information to the Technovation site.”

*What did you learn about yourself through this competition with your team?* Catalina: “I learned about myself that I can code.” Cami: “I learned that I can reach goals if I want to.” Alexandra: “I learned that I can improve my skills like speaking English.” Olga: “I learned about myself that I like to work in a team and that I

am capable to realize such a project.”

I asked them if they would do it again and they all agreed with a resounding YES! Then I asked them... now what? Now that they have learned some new skills, did they want to continue to learn more about IT and technology? ... and the girls told me they wanted to continue to work on building their app and work on this idea to see if they could make it a reality regardless if they won or not. They have exceeded my expectations and they should be proud of the things they have learned and accomplished thus far.

So here's some very exciting news... this past Saturday Technovation Challenge announced the semi-finalists for each region. Our team was one of 8 teams from Moldova that submitted complete projects in the Europe/Asia/Australia/New Zealand division... **and they were selected as one of the semi-finalists!!!**

So now we wait until this weekend when they will announce the finalists of this world-wide competition. The judges will select 10 finalists who will then present their business idea and app in the world pitch event in San Francisco, CA in June.

I am so proud of these girls and all the hard work they put into their project to make a difference in their community. I will share the results next week along with their app idea and videos they submitted. Stay tuned!



MOLDOVA TECHNOVATION TEAM  
MEMBERS.

# How do you get girls involved in global technology? Just ask.

December 8, 2014

*By Chip Moreland*

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Moldova
- 👤 Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

Last January, my girlfriend proposed that I organize and lead a group of girls from my school, in rural Moldova, to participate in an international coding and business competition for girls called Technovation Challenge.

At first, I laughed. The idea was kind of funny. Didn't she realize how busy I was with teaching English? Or that I knew very little about business, not to mention even less about software development? Plus, I really couldn't imagine any of my students being interested in something as out-there as computer coding.

Seeing my hesitancy to take on such a project, she presented an infographic that showed how the projected number of jobs in computer science was growing at a much faster rate

than the people expected to study computer science. By participating in this project, I could share economic opportunities with my students that they didn't know they had access to. This could mean a career path and better future, here in Moldova, and no green card or a work visa needed. Plus, she noted that the curriculum is in English, and it would be a great way to get some students to practice outside of class. My reluctance waned as I saw it as a way to nudge my students into extra English practice. Economic opportunity would be a tool to draw attention to the usefulness of the English language.

I was surprised how many students were interested in participating right off the bat.

There were about a dozen young women at

Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/how-do-you-get-girls-involved-in-global-technology-just-ask/>

the first meeting. The numbers didn't reduce much over the next few weeks, but for the sake of there not being enough hours in the day, we voted in the four hardest-working girls.

Technovation Challenge is a 12-week program during which the team has to create an Android application that solves a problem in their community. It sounds daunting at first, but Technovation provides a well-designed curriculum that covers idea development, how to develop a business and write a sound business plan. On the coding side, the girls learn basic coding logic with a fantastic program from MIT called, AppInventor, which uses color-coded blocks that fit together like puzzle pieces. It is fun and easy, kind of like training wheels for coding.

My passion for the project grew once the girls had decided on the problem that we would address: the poor quality of water in the villages of Moldova. After learning that 67 of the 300 students in my school suffered from Hepatitis A as a result of drinking the water from the wells, I knew that this problem was a righteous one to address and one that the American judges would consider a noble cause.

For the next three months, the girls and I worked tirelessly developing our idea and our application. It was not easy, but I grew even more motivated as I saw how the girls were growing

in the process. Their English was improving each week, they were learning new useful skills on a daily basis, and they were growing more confident in themselves as a result.

The result was Aquamea. When it came time to turn in our final work, I reassured the girls that we had a winning idea, and that we had worked hard enough to be recognized for it. The competition would be held in San Francisco, my hometown, and I thought about how excited I would be to show them around if we got invited. Which...

WE DID! Out of 844 teams globally, we were chosen as one of eight teams to go to San Francisco (all expenses paid) to pitch our application and a chance to win \$10,000 in seed money to start their business. I can't even begin to explain how exciting this was for the girls and me. For them, they had never been outside of Moldova, never been on a plane, never had Mexican food, never seen the ocean, in fact there were about 1,000 "nevers" that they would get to experience. For me, I was so excited to bring my Peace Corps experience home, a kind of show and tell to my friends and family in California. PC goals #2 and #3: CHECK!

Although the trip was covered, it wasn't easy to get there. We had three weeks to get all the documents needed and prepare the girls to eloquently present and answer questions in front of a

large crowd in a foreign language. This is where being a PCV was an invaluable resource. Upon our invitation, we instantly had a task force of Volunteers and PC staff with a variety of skills to help figure out the logistics of getting the girls to San Francisco on short notice, and organize in-depth tutoring sessions to improve presentation skills and general business knowledge. Needless to say, without this network of support from our amazing Peace Corps family, we would never have been able to obtain the travel documents, nor would we have been prepared enough to win. Which, is what they did! We took first place internationally, bringing \$10,000 home to a very proud country.

Winning for them was about more than just the money and the opportunity to start a business; it was proof that with enough hard work and determination, a group of girls from a small village in a country that most people have never heard of could win something big. It's not the knowledge they've gained, nor the skills learned that gives me the most fulfillment from this experience, but rather the transformation of their attitudes. They confidently display a newly instilled sense of hope and optimism that have replaced uncertainty and doubt. Although Moldova is poor and its people lack a great deal of opportunity, opportunity can be made with hard work and a good idea.



TEAM PANDICORN MEMBER  
TESTING THEIR APP.

# Meet Team Pandicorn

May 5, 2015

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Moldova
- 🔗 Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

**M**et Team Pandicorn: a group of four girls ages 15-16 that I mentored for the Technovation Challenge entrepreneurship and technology competition. They each brought a different element to their project and I had the great honor to see them improve their leadership skills, working as a group, and seeing improvement in their English by the end of the program. They showed up every week on time and eager to learn and push through all the challenges they faced.

These girls are incredibly creative as they created the logo, videos, and came up with the app design in addition to all the other pieces they needed to submit their project. The name of their app is Smart-Ed which is an app that “connects people for honest learning”.

As part of this world-wide competition, the theme for this year was to identify a community

issue and come up with a solution by creating a phone app and business plan. They created the pitch video below to share their idea. They came across some obstacles with filming their video and they figured out a solution, all on their own. I was very impressed.

An issue they identified in their community was that in some cases more emphasis is placed on some students paying to get better grades than actually focusing on learning the material and earning it. Their idea was to create an app that would be a platform where students (or anyone really) could find a “learning coach” in their community to help them with their studies or to learn something new, like cultural handicrafts. They would connect through the app and then setup a day/time to meet in person and the “learning coach” would make a little extra income through meeting with different students and helping with different subjects.

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**Source:** <https://sarajoyhoy.wordpress.com/2015/05/19/meet-team-pandicorn-latest-technovation-challenge-moldova-news/>

**I asked them to share with me how they felt after they found out about making it to the semi-final round...**

*"After we found out that we were in the semi-finals I felt great because we stayed up until 3 am (the time they announced the results) and waited... and after we found out that we were in the semi-finals, we started to send each other "funny faces" and we were like "Oh, I can't believe" grin emoticon... which is hard to explain." – Olga*

*"I felt good and very proud of the team and also, very thankful to our mentor." – Catalina*

**I asked them to share a fun or funny story from their experience with Technovation Challenge...**

*"I think the funniest part was when we had to film our pitch video and we spent about 7-9 hours for doing that because we laughed a lot. Like A LOT!!! (grin emoticon)" – Catalina*

*"The funniest story is when Alexandra and I stayed up late to find out what the results were. So we did everything to help one another to not fall asleep. Another funny story was when we all tried to film the pitch video because we spent 9 hours trying to film it and the result is a 4 min video, so that's just insane. (grin emoticon)" – Olga*

*They have expressed interest in continuing to create this phone app to make it a reality here in their community. I am looking forward to seeing what happens.*

*As for the latest news about the finals, we found out this past weekend that the girls did not make it to the final round. They have made such an incredible accomplishment by making it to the semi-finals which has added a boost for them to continue to work on this business-app idea to make it a reality. I am so proud of them.*

*Congratulations, Team Pandicorn! Well done, you have taught me so much and are such an encouragement to me as a Peace Corps volunteer, thank you! (grin emoticon) [click!]*

*A side note, to answer a common question: So... what is a pandicorn?*

*It is a panda bear and unicorn together of course!*



# Technovation Challenge - AFishInMoldova

TECHNOVATION CHALLENGE  
MEMBERS IN MOLDOVA.

May 12, 2015

- Region: EMA
- Post: Moldova
- Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

**D**uring the first part of this year, I had the opportunity to work with a group of three high school students and their English professor on a project called Technovation Challenge. The overall concept of the project was for the girls to create a mobile app for an android phone, a business plan and two videos (one pitching the business idea and the other walking through the app functionality) all of which was done in English. Last year a team from Moldova won the international competition and took home first place prize of \$10,000 to be used toward starting their business.

The project was not only a challenge for the girls but it was for me as well as I had to develop some lesson plans for each meeting (there were some provided but I had to change the layout and some of the ideas here and there) and I also had to sit down and learn the software myself. After learning the software I had to turn around and teach it! Thankfully their teacher (and my Romanian language teacher) was there to guide us when the language

barrier was most prevalent.

For the better part of two months, the team and I met 2 days a week for about an hour and a half or more each time, this was a challenge as everyone's schedules were demanding with other after school activities. We started the project from identifying a social problem and how we would be able to create sales and profit from solving that problem as well as developing an app.

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Source: <https://tfish812.wordpress.com/2015/05/05/technovation-challenge-technovation-ungheni/>

# Sensitivity

May 13, 2015

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Uganda
- 👤 Project: Uganda - Nakaseke IT Camp

I got over my slump during the remainder of IT Camp. It amazed me what Peter Balaba could do with his expertise in hooking up UTL (Uganda Telecom Lines) to a village PTC and allow students and tutors access to reasonably fast internet speeds. I performed the typical action of taking photos and videos of campers and the directors, since the long-term goal of the camp was to follow up the skill of the youth with another advanced IT Camp in August. I documented sessions regarding Microsoft Office, YouTube, Typing, and even some basic Python Programming. A lot of these students never had the opportunity to be exposed to a computer program, let alone a computer.

I also got to spend more time with some of the facilitators from the Centre for Creative and Capacity Development (CCCD). They shared with me part of the story concerning how they came together as artists, dancers, and musicians a few years ago through YEP (Youth Empowerment Project). A lot of the members of In-Movement and CCCD shape the typical Peace Corps Uganda camp experience through kinesthetic learning. The message propagated by these facilitators empowers Ugandan youth to feel special and witness their ideas being brought to life. In the United States, it could be argued that not every youth should be told that he or she is special, but in Uganda more often than not most youth are told on a daily basis that their ideas do not matter.

With this perspective in mind, a lot of the creative facilitation sessions at camps such as

IT Camp involve free and valued expression of self through skits, songs, dances, and group presentations. In many instances, these artful expressions evoke deeper emotions from the youth. During one River of Life session during a Peace Corps camp, the youth were asked to draw and write their life stories on a mural. One of the youth depicted herself being raped by her father, and shared this information with the group. The facilitator of the session shared that it was very probable that this was the first time in her life that she was asked to share her life experiences in a comfortable, safe, and non-judgmental manner.

It's during moments like this that the problems concerning logistics, arguments, and petty difficulties among PCV's take a backseat towards the larger issue that we are working to address. I feel like I'm making good use of my time exhausting myself through my participation in different camps in order to share the stories of these youth. By giving them a voice, they can be heard.

After a busy week at IT Camp, I spent the weekend in Kampala where I was able to simply chill and relax. On Saturday, I attended a TEDx Talk at the Serena Hotel where Ugandans shared their ideas concerning, healthy lifestyles, productivity, and smartphone apps. Not only was it cool to be at a TEDx talk, but it was amazing to hear Ugandans give short, succinct, and reasonably engaging presentations that delivered a message. One of the most interesting presentations came from a recently graduated Ugandan university student who developed a smartphone app that would easily relay the amount of produce that

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Source: <https://mountainsbeyondmountainsuganda.wordpress.com/2015/05/13/sensitivity/>

farmers could provide and transport to market day consumers.

Afterwards, I spent the rest of my time in Kampala watching YouTube videos and catching up on some news stories and pop culture over the past two years. I mean, I realized that within 7 months I will depart Uganda and head back to the developed world. In this sense, I am slowly easing myself back into what I used to be used to doing. I then went back to the village for two days where the money for the ICT Lab finally arrived in my supervisor's bank account. Funnily enough, as I enter the home stretch of my Peace Corps service I can see my projects and worth as a PCV coming together. Right now I am back at the NARO

agricultural center in Mukono where I am planning Community Integration sessions for the incoming Health and Agribusiness June 2015 group.

If the key point for the last training group was to be realistically positive about our experiences in Uganda, the modus operandi for this incoming group is to acknowledge sensitivity concerning pressing issues about gender, race, and poverty. Desensitization for older PCV's vs. hypersensitivity for newer trainees is the overarching theme that we as community integration trainers have to address. There have been some complaints about older PCV's that they don't care enough the issues in Uganda.

I hazard that so many people back in the US can take the moral high ground and have the opportunity to discuss thoughtful articles and responses to those articles articulating the idiosyncrasies of gender identities, gentrification, and double standards. Here I believe that PCV's have to choose their own battles to fight. Idealism only gets us so far and sometimes the haggard, pragmatic, and slightly jaded outlook of a PCV who just finished a male/female condom demonstration can bring about more positive change than someone gives a riveting speech in the village about the beauty of abstinence, family planning, and respecting your fellow person.

# 75 New SolarSPELLs Built!

May 19, 2015

*Laura Hosman*

- 🌐 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Vanuatu
- 👤 Project: Micronesia - SolarSPELL

**O**n Friday May 6, 2016, students at Cal Poly built 75 new SolarSPELL libraries! What's more, this feat—which included drilling, wire-stripping, soldering, gluing, taping, Velcro-ing, and much more, was accomplished in just a few hours.

The group did, in fact, get a jump-start on the build on Wednesday, May 4, having had the opportunity to set up all of the equipment, describe and train on what needed to be done in terms of assembly and building, and identify any potential bottlenecks for the assembly-line manufacture that would take place on Friday.

These SPELL libraries are destined for schools in Samoa, Tonga, and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). In all three locations, we are working in partnership with the US Peace Corps, to provide their Volunteers with this educational technology to assist them in being

able to carry out their mission of being teachers in remote, rural schools.

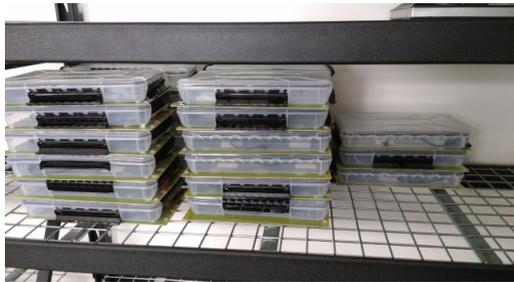
On the same evening of the build, the University hosted a gala evening for alumni, called the Evening of Green and Gold. SolarSPELL was invited to set up a display and speak to alumni about the project's accomplishments.

Even though the build was exciting and fostered a sense of accomplishment, there remains quite a bit more to be done besides building the hardware of the library. After the build, the students transitioned to working on gathering additional content for the library (especially content curated for our new partners Samoa and Tonga), testing out the new website, building a new-and-improved how-to-use guide.

We look forward to deploying the first batch of the new SPELLs in Samoa in June!

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Source: <https://ict4dviewsfromthefield.wordpress.com/2016/05/20/75-new-solarspells-built/>





GIRLSGOIT 'GIRLS IN ICT'  
PARTICIPANTS IN MOLDOVA.

# Let Girls Learn - Girls In ICT

May 20, 2015

🌐 Region: EMA  
📍 Post: Moldova

**H**ave you heard the First Lady talk about Peace Corps lately? No?! You're behind. Catch up.

Now that that's settled, aren't you excited about Let Girls Learn?! With this program, Michelle Obama is collaborating with Peace Corps in 11 countries - and Moldova is one of them. From the [Let Girls Learn](#) website about Moldova: "In Moldova, 25% of female youth believe that "wife-beating" can be justifiable. Education and empowerment are needed to combat dangerous social norms. There are 120 Peace Corps Volunteers in Moldova working with communities on projects in English education, health and community economic development." [source](#)

While ICT education is not education about domestic violence, it is something I find myself passionate about for girls, not only in Moldova, but all around the world. Men outnumber women in most STEM careers (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). And WHY? Why can't we be scientists and engineers too? (My

dad is reading this and thinking, *well then why were you an art major...? I told you to take Calc 2!*) But studies show that even girls who are passionate about technology don't choose to pursue careers in it! If girls in America don't think they can do this stuff than certainly girls here aren't sure either. So if I can empower them to learn skills in these areas, I feel that I should.

Girls In ICT is a global effort by the [International Telecommunication Union](#) to encourage girls to consider careers in technology. In Moldova, [GirlsGoIT](#) is a program with the support of UN Women, Novateca (the libraries program I work with), and a few other organizations. Last week, GirlsGoIT had an event for girls called Girls In ICT, so I took two of the girls I know from my English class to Chisinau so they could attend.

While the thought of being responsible for two 11-year-olds (who don't speak English) in the big city was slightly terrifying, it turned out to be okay. We got there early and walked around

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Source: <http://winingwhining.blogspot.com/2015/05/let-girls-learn-girls-in-ict.html>

the parks to see the monuments of Chisinau, which they hadn't seen before. Then we went to the event, and we were the youngest attendees. ("We" meaning "them" because I'm pretty sure I was actually the old lady there.)

There were two presenters - one woman talked about different presentation software to use online, and the other woman, a graphic designer, talked about how to make a good presentation. There was about an hour and a half for both of them, and then an hour to actually make a presentation using one of the programs they had discussed. It was a little tough for

the girls I brought, because it turns out they didn't quite know as much about using computers and the Internet as I had assumed, but one of the presenters was excellent about working with them and they were quick learners!

Each girl who attended the workshop made a presentation and sent them to the organizers of the event - voting is currently open (do it [here](#), if you'd like! Some of the presentations are in English) and I believe that the girl whose presentation gets the most votes will win an internship with e-Government Center Moldova!

Hopefully we can work on learning

more IT skills back in the village with more kids, girls AND boys! I'll just have to learn some more specific Romanian, perhaps...

Want to know more about GirlsGoIT? Sign the manifesto [here](#).

What about encouraging girls in Moldova to pursue STEM careers? Here's the gofundme page for a book called [Elena the Engineer](#) - they are fundraising to send it to 500 libraries in Moldova!

And about Let Girls Learn? Here's the [White House page](#) and here's the [LGL Peace Corps page](#).



TECHNOVATION CHALLENGE IN  
MOLDOVA.

# Changing a Nation with Technovation

June 17, 2015

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Moldova
- 👤 Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

**A**s we continue to celebrate Women's History Month, we are taking a look at innovative projects that encourage girls' interest in STEM activities. Created in California in 2009, Technovation Challenge has been inspiring and challenging girls around the world to solve real-life issues with technology.

Peace Corps Volunteer Chip Moreland first [wrote](#) about Peace Corps Moldova's involvement in the program in 2014 and it has been an increasingly popular secondary activity in the country ever since. In fact, the Technovation Challenge has been so successful in Moldova that girls and their communities are participating in multiple application creation workshops throughout the year.

**Technovation Challenge is the world's**

**largest and longest running tech competition for girls.** Teams of young women come together with mentors and coaches to identify a problem in their community, create an app to solve it, code the app, build a company to launch the app in the market, and pitch their plan to experts, all in three months! The program teaches girls important life skills such as how to identify a problem, design and test a solution, collaborate with a team, and communicate to different audiences. Teams pitch and submit their ideas (through video) and participate in regional competitions. Once all projects are submitted, 10 finalists are selected worldwide to compete in the final competition in California.

In Moldova, an organizing team composed of Peace Corps Volunteers and members of their host community, as well as a number of

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/changing-a-nation-with-technovation/>

international organizations, partner to implement meetings and workshops like United Nations Women. The team helps plan and disseminate information about the program throughout Moldova to encourage girls ages 10 to 18 to create teams with a local mentor or coach in order to learn the skills needed to complete deliverables needed to submit for the competition.

Right now there are 17 teams composed of around 60 girls and 25 mentors/coaches helping with curriculum implementation. The roles of the mentors and coaches are important as they are the ones to encourage and inspire the girls to keep going through the program as they learn and develop new skills, and oftentimes the mentors/coaches are also learning some of these new tech skills as well.

Many teams are mentored by Peace Corps Volunteers, especially in the rural communities. This is both beneficial for those communities and for girls who can envision opportunities that may only appear to be available in more urban areas.

Peace Corps Volunteer Sara Hoy has been mentoring a team of four high school girls in a community in northern Moldova over the past year. “These girls taught me a lot about working with youth – ways to encourage and

inspire them, even when you may think you’re not being effective. There were times I didn’t think they were interested anymore, or were getting the information. There were a couple of points during the program when we were working together that I saw them have “lightbulb” moments. It was incredible and those moments kept me going. I didn’t think they’d be able to submit all their information in order to make the competition deadline, but they did – they pulled it all together in the last minute, even with a couple of unexpected challenges that came up. They ended up making it into the semi-final round, in which I asked them if they were surprised about. They responded that “No, you told us we could do it, and look we did!” When they would hit [a] roadblock and want to give up, I told them they could do it, I knew they could figure it out... and eventually they did. I’ve watched their confidence grow and their English improve. I have even witnessed two of these girls become more involved in their community! The impact that working with these girls has had on all of us during those three months is beyond anything we could have expected. “There is a great deal of community support through local partnerships and sponsorships as they see the importance in providing

opportunities for young girls in learning tech skills. Long-term benefits include the possibility that these girls gain an interest in learning tech skills and may pursue a career within technology or something they may never have thought of but through this program they may see a different perspective or option as they learn about various opportunities that are available in this field. This year’s Technovation Challenge is off to a robust start. In January, Volunteers hosted a launch event called Girls Make Apps to kick off the 2016 season. More than 75 people participated, including girls and their mentors/coaches. It was an incredible opportunity for participants to meet other girls, gain new ideas, learn how to use the AppInventor program, and return to their community with a new energy to begin working on their projects and ideas to dominate the competition. The teams are looking forward to Moldova’s regional pitch event that will take place on April 24. By May the semi-final round and final round will be selected, and then the World Pitch event is July 10-14 in San Francisco. Learn more about the Technovation Challenge [here](#).

See how you can contribute to workshops like Volunteer Sara Hoy’s on our Peace Corps Partnership Program [page](#).



THE GIRLS USE SKYPE TO TALK  
AND SHARE CULTURE WITH  
STUDENTS IN THE USA.

# TechKobwa Camp For Girls - Inspiring Students And Teachers Since 2013

July 12, 2015

*By Elisabeth J. Turner*

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Rwanda
- 👤 Project: Rwanda - Camp TechKobwa

**R**wanda's vision to become a technology-driven country may seem far off, but they are quickly making progress. Despite inherent obstacles in rural areas, one program is helping to overcome those challenges by developing technology-free pedagogy skills among Rwandan ICT teachers and inspiring both the teachers and their young Rwandan students to be confident in rural science and technology classrooms.

TechKobwa, began by Peace Corps Volunteers in 2013, is designed to empower young Rwandan women to speak up, raise their hand, and get creative with how technology can solve the problems of their communities.

Camp Director, Elisabeth Turner, kicked off the 2015 program on Tuesday 4 August with 10 ICT teachers at IPRC West in Karongi District. The teachers spent four days engaged in intensive training in ICT skills and STEM pedagogy, including lessons on electronics, algorithms, computer-programming, and using resources to teach ICT without computers. Lessons are organized and taught by visiting technology experts from Michigan State University and IBM.

Sixty secondary-age girls joined the program on Saturday 8 August and embarked on a week-long journey to learn skills, gain confidence, and become innovative problem solvers. After

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Source: <http://reb-tdm.org/newsandevents.php?newsid=32>

camp, they will be encouraged by their ICT Teacher to start media and technology clubs to share their new knowledge with peers – exponentially increasing the number of students impacted by TechKobwa.

The Kigali-based start-up Creation Hill has sent five of their best mentors to serve as role models, translators, and teachers during the program and will help the students with a Mission Innovation project in which they must

identify and suggest solutions to some of their communities' most challenging problems.



STUDENTS BEGIN WRITING IDEAS FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT FOCUSED ON TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL COMMUNITY PROBLEMS.



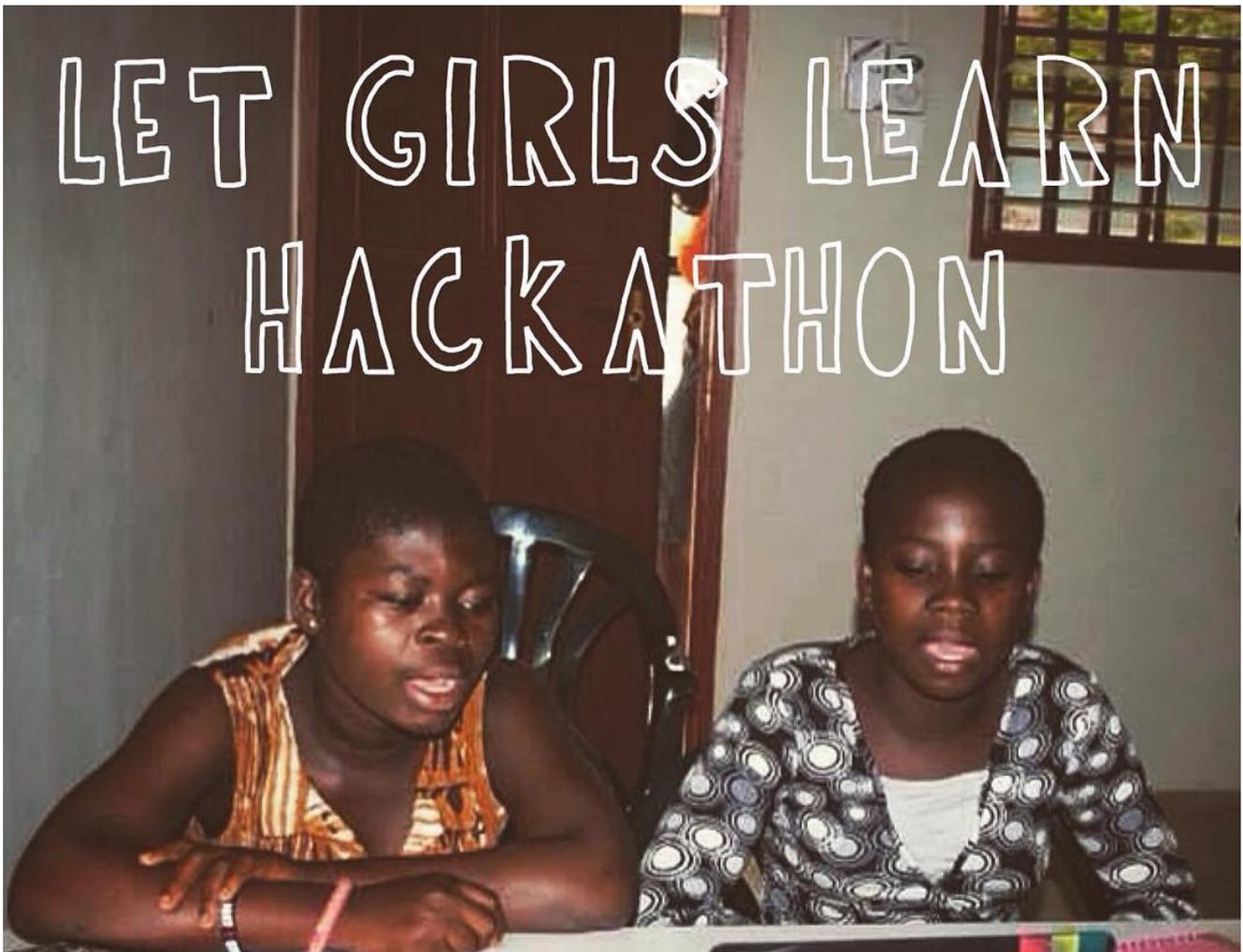
TEACHERS DOING A PARALLEL ALGORITHM ACTIVITY LED BY PROFESSOR LAURA DILLON OF MSU.



TEACHERS DOING A PARALLEL ALGORITHM ACTIVITY LED BY PROFESSOR LAURA DILLON OF MSU.



TEACHERS, JUDITH AND JACQUES, USING ELENCO KITS TO LEARN ABOUT ELECTRICAL CIRCUITRY.



## Let Girls Learn - Jimmy Meet World

July 13, 2015

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Ghana
- 👤 Project: Ghana - Let Girls Learn Hackathon

It is estimated that 54.1% of Ghanaian girls aren't enrolled in secondary schools (SHS) and only 28.1% of girls complete SHS. Given that more girls in schools mean lower teenage pregnancy rates, lower maternal mortality rates, lower infant mortality rates, lower rates of HIV/AIDS, and better child nutrition, much more needs to be done to break down barriers to female education in Ghana.

Through the Let Girls Learn Hackathon, female SHS students and a team of developers will work together to brainstorm and come up with ideas for overcoming barriers to girls' education. The students will also receive leadership and technical training as well as career advice from female leaders in STEM fields. Support the Let Girls Learn Hackathon by visiting <http://bit.ly/LGLHACKATHON> or share this post with your family and friends.

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Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/47pnjviw7q/>



# Owosso woman helps teach technology in Rwanda

July 12, 2015

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Rwanda
- 👤 Project: Rwanda - Camp TechKobwa

LOUISE HEMOND-WILSON OF OWOSSO AND FR. ALPHONSE TWIZERIMANA, WHO LEADS A BOARDING SCHOOL IN JANJA, RWANDA, ARE WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP STUDENTS IN THE AREAS OF TECHNOLOGY AND LIFE SKILLS.

**O**WOSSO — Louise Hemond-Wilson has traveled to more than 60 countries, but a trip to Rwanda last summer was unlike anything she had experienced before.

That's because Hemond-Wilson went to teach a special class focused on technology for girls, ages 12-22, at Groupe Scholaire de Janja, a Catholic boarding school in the northernmost province of the central African country.

It's part of an effort across Rwanda — which was ripped apart by civil war and genocide just over 20 years ago — to diversify its economy and improve life for all of its citizens, regardless of gender.

The class was deemed a big success, so much so that it allowed the school's headmaster, Fr. Alphonse Twizerimana, to come

to mid-Michigan last month and discuss the country's difficulty with poverty at area churches.

"In our country, girls tend to be the most vulnerable in society," Twizerimana said Wednesday at Hemond-Wilson's home in Owosso. "So we think if you raise the girls, you raise the entire nation."

Hemond-Wilson, who works as an engineer at IBM, said she was called on by the company to perform a difficult task — first, travel to Rwanda where, far away from the conveniences that are expected in Western society, the natives boil their water so it's safe to drink and use latrines instead of modern toilets.

Then, she would go to a school that struggles with its technology infrastructure, largely relying on 3G service as its sole means of

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Source: [http://www.argus-press.com/news/article\\*6539585e-2828-11e5-8d5f-232e3164f9f1.html](http://www.argus-press.com/news/article*6539585e-2828-11e5-8d5f-232e3164f9f1.html)

connection with an increasingly globalized society.

Finally, she would teach what she knows to 60 girls, many of whom felt uncomfortable speaking English, more who had never even seen a computer before.

Thankfully, Hemond-Wilson was not alone. The effort was made in conjunction with institutions including Michigan State University, the Peace Corps and the Rwandan government. Colleagues and family came along for the trip, including her own college-age daughter.

Regardless, it wasn't the easiest trip she has ever made.

"You get there and realize that there are few people who are my age or older, because of the genocide," said Hemond-Wilson, who is 50.

"It's very profound, the efforts that are being put forward to rebuild from nothing. I think it's very commendable. ... For my daughter, it was a 'Wow' moment. But I told her, more people in the world live like we lived for the time we were there than how we usually live."

The group would focus its effort on what became known as "TechKobwa" (roughly translates to "technology for girls" in Rwandan) — a two-week camp primarily focused on technology, but also incorporating elements of life skills, communication and problem-solving.

But before the girls came to school, Hemond-Wilson said, the group would teach the teachers of Rwanda — so that after the Westerners went home, technology skills wouldn't just go with them.

Indeed, that didn't happen. Twizerimana said that since the camp ended last August, girls at his school feel more comfortable than ever in using equipment that used to be considered "for boys only."

What's more, Hemond-Wilson will again travel to Rwanda next month

for another TechKobwa camp — this time at a technological hub in a larger city called Kibuye, on the west coast.

"You can't give what you don't have," Twizerimana said. "Rwanda has started a competence-based curricula whereby anything learned at the school can be applied to life. We're not teaching technology for people to move on out of the country, but to use it as a tool to improve Rwanda."

Hemond-Wilson added that attendees came from all over Rwanda, most from areas even more remote than Janja, some traveling hundreds of miles by bus on dilapidated roads just to get there.

"We tried to focus on taking girls from places where there was an economic vulnerability," Hemond-Wilson said. "One of the things they did at camp was to come up with a plan for how they could perpetuate and expand on what they had learned here."

Breaking down language barriers can be a challenge, whether it's in learning English or binary code. One of the more interesting solutions, brought upon by a lack of Internet connectivity on a given day, came when Hemond-Wilson was trying to instruct students to be safe online.

Without the use of a computer, she instructed one student to act as a search engine and literally ask other students, acting as individual websites, whether they had the information she was looking for.

"It's actually a very visual way to teach what happens in a search," she laughed.

As many students were only comfortable speaking Rwandan or French, Hemond-Wilson said that getting her points across in English was difficult at first, despite the presence of interpreters. But as time went on, she began to see a breakthrough.

"There was this one girl in the audience when someone else was making a presentation who raised her hand

and practically jumped out of her seat, saying, 'I don't think this is going to work!' To have such a vocal display of her opinion, in English, was a pretty remarkable thing to see."

Hemond-Wilson and her associates left with a newfound appreciation for Rwanda — and Twizerimana prospered just as much.

Through the Catholic Diocese of Lansing's Office of Missions, he has for the past month preached at area churches including St. Paul and St. Joseph in Owosso and St. Mary in Durand.

"The difficulty he faces is so great," said the Rev. Jeff Poll, who led the congregation at St. Mary until recently moving to the pastorship at Light of Christ Parish in Deerfield. "It's about \$100 for room, board and tuition, which is nothing to you and I, but there, it's a lot of money. And it still doesn't buy the basic necessities that you need in order to learn.

"His message was very well-received by the congregation and it was wonderful to have him over."

Twizerimana is scheduled to leave July 21 and return home — where, he says with a smile, he expects to see a number of students who want to hear how his dialect has changed in the month he's spent abroad.

But he will miss being in Shiawassee County.

"This has been a very exciting experience. When I go about Owosso, I see many people stopping and saying, 'Hi.' They're so good and friendly, and that's important to me," he said.

"When I came here, I didn't know what to expect. I just wanted to fit in. And everyone here has helped me to do that."

If you are interested in donating to Groupe Scholaire de Janja, write a check to the Diocese of Lansing, Attn: Accounts Receivable, 228 N. Walnut St., Lansing, MI 48933.



# Uganda T4D Example

July 15, 2015

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Uganda

**B**etween the library work, reading intervention groups, two-hour workshop, and meetings of today I got to spend an hour finishing a movie with my MDD team. 56 pupils, girls and boys from P4 to P7, gather for hours and hours every day to sing and dance in preparation for our competition next Friday but today we got to relax and have movie time.

The first week at site I watched “War Dance,” a movie about a small school in Northern Uganda who overcame endless obstacles and competed in the National Championship for MDD. I was immediately inspired. My lifetime love of creativity, art, and music re-emerged in a place I was least expecting it. Since then we have met for rehearsals throughout the week; they normally giggle as I sing, dance, and teach them my theatre “skills” (including improv sessions as a reward on Fridays). To inspire them further, I borrowed a projector, duct taped a white sheet to our mangled cement wall, and started a showing of this movie.

I’ve never seen a group of sixty teens more engaged. I love that these Lugbara, Alur, Kakwa, and Madi kids were learning about the other tribes of Uganda (i.e. The Acholi tribe & the Bwola dance)... They were learning about their own nation’s culture! How cool is that? //This movie hits closer to home than I will ever entirely understand, although I understand more than my heart can really handle at this point. West Nilers are also survivors living in the war zone, people who have lost loved ones, and men and women who are still coping with the memories of those terrible times. I love helping these kids with artistic expression, with overcoming the terrible experiences of our lives, and with learning to channel our hope and perseverance instead of dwelling on our pasts.

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Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/5kqvqtcrb/>

# Girls Rock STEM

July 16, 2015

By *Larissa Connett*

 Region: EMA  
 Post: Morocco  
 Project: Morocco - Girls Rock STEM

It's amazing how quickly a year passes. I remember this time last April when I had first arrived to site, I had met a teenage girl in town who had impeccable English skills. She became a really close friend over time and my quick connection to other girls in town. She was in her last year of high school and was studying hard for her Baccalaureate (BAC) Exam.

**Side note: The Baccalaureate (BAC) Exam is similar to exit exams in the United States, where students need to pass certain marks on subject tests in order to graduate or exit high school and continue to the workforce or continue their studies. However, in Morocco, the BAC Exam holds more weight in terms of deciding the future course of study for students. The subject areas with the highest marks are what you are able to study in university, setting forth a path that is determined by your skill set rather than where your passion may lie.**

My friend was really excited about the possibility of studying computer engineering in college. She wanted to be a software developer like her older sister. She studied rigorously for her exams. At the end of the BAC exams she received her results. Her highest marks were in English and that is the course of study and career field that she would be allowed to enter. It was hard to watch her excitement for going to university dissipate as she found that her skills did not necessarily meet her passion.

It was interesting to witness the difference in

the educational structure of Morocco versus the United States, where autonomy is valued alongside standardized tests to determine what course of study/career field that you may enter.

With statistics stacked against girls in the STEM fields (particularly that [UNESCO's Institute for Statistics](#), recording that less than 30% of the STEM careers in Morocco are held by women), the "leaky pipeline" with the lack of encouragement for young girls and women to pursue their interests in STEM fields does not go unrecognized. By observation, there are limited resources for students in general to discover their skill sets and passions in order to properly prepare a trajectory for studying and their careers. Things such as personality tests (Myers Briggs, True Colors, etc.), goal setting, guidance counseling are few and far in between.

Thus stemmed the idea of putting together a team to develop a week-long camp for girls across Morocco, to give them the platform to discover their love of STEM fields through alternative programming and service learning projects and to merge their skill set with their passion.

The Girls' Adventures in Mathematics, Engineering and Science (GAMES) Camp was a week-long spring camp held in my site with the help of several Peace Corps Volunteers and Host Country Nationals. Structured around exploring issues of environmentalism and sustainability through STEM lenses, we

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Source: <http://gadmaroc.blogspot.com/2015/06/engineering-creativity-girls-rock-stem.html>

completed a mural, built a tire playground, constructed [KidWind](#) solar panels and wind turbine kits from [Vernier](#) and participated in a video exchange with STEM undergraduate students from [Philander Smith College](#) in the United States. In addition, some campers participated in a land auction game that required them to think critically about how land is used, conserved and the consequences behind the decisions that we make. On top of the programmatic activities, we held a host of activities centered around leadership style identification through True Colors, team building and goal setting.

Over 60 girls, ages 14 – 18, participated in the camp and adopted several new technologies such as understanding how solar and wind energy can be harnessed and subsequently building solar panel and wind turbine kits, geo-mapping and engineering concepts through constructing a tire playground. The campers analyzed their personal waste generation, health and safety as well as creating

Public Service Announcements about environmental issues.

My favorite part of the week (besides the random dance parties), was the day that we hiked up a mountain and prepared tajines for lunch. Note to self; guiding over 90 people and their expectations up the side of a mountain on a hot day is no easy task and it isn't the wisest decision to prepare tajines for that large group of people (pre-made sandwiches would be advisable for the future). However, we paired our hike and picnic with a few activities on the mountain like a scavenger hunt with facts about climate change and desertification, trash pickup and taking the girls to the edge of the mountain to see the beautiful panoramic view of our town. Hearing the gasps and silence in awe of the view made the whole day worth it! Also, on the climb down the mountain to return to the camp, we crossed the river and had an impromptu water fight.

The level of gratitude for the numerous

individuals who put in effort to make this camp a success cannot be surmised into a short 'thank you'. However, deep appreciation and gratitude must be made to Vernier and KidWind for donating the solar panel and wind turbine kits that will be made accessible to Peace Corps Morocco volunteers to use for future programming. Philander Smith College, specifically Dr. Nastassia Jones and the Social Justice Institute, for arranging undergraduate students video projects on environmental pollutant cycles for the video exchange with the female camp participants. Also, M'Hamed Kadi, the Peace Corps Morocco Librarian, for the long list of resources that he provided to us and lastly, the real movers and shakers of the camp; Peace Corps Volunteers and Host Country Nationals who worked every day of the camp, from sunrise to sunset, and rolled with the punches to assure that every camper had an unforgettable time.

What an awesome week!



# Kumasi Hub of Global Shapers Community and Peace Corps present Let Girls Learn Hackathon - Global Shapers Community

July 21, 2015

 Region: AF

 Post: Ghana

 Project: Ghana - Let Girls Learn Hackathon

**A**ll around the world, women are severely underrepresented in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math). One reason for this is because 62 million girls around the world are currently not attending school. In Ghana, female graduates comprise less than 17% of those completing tertiary-level STEM studies. It is estimated that 54.1% of Ghanaian girls aren't enrolled in SHS and only 28.1% of girls complete SHS.

Given that more girls in schools mean lower teen pregnancy rates, lower maternal mortality rates, lower infant mortality rates, lower rates of HIV/AIDs, and better child nutrition, much more needs to be done to break down barriers to female education in Ghana and around the world.

Through a 24-hour hackathon, the Let Girls Learn Hackathon will gather teams from different regions of Ghana to brainstorm, collaborate, and develop innovative solutions to barriers to girls' education.

Each team will be formed by a diverse group of participants, including female SHS (secondary school) students, Peace Corps Volunteers, university students in STEM fields, and software developers. During the hackathon, the SHS students will also receive leadership and technical training, so that they can continue to effect change in their respective schools and work to overcome barriers to their education.

Global Shapers Community is an initiative of the World Economic Forum with a network of more than 400 city-based hubs developed and led by promising young leaders, with a mission to make positive impacts in our communities. The Global Shapers of Kumasi hub comprises of dynamic individuals committed to positively contributing to community, country, and global development.

Peace Corps Ghana traces its roots and mission to 1961, when President John F. Kennedy sent the very first 52 Peace Corps volunteers to serve their country in the cause of peace by living and working in Ghana. Those

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**Source:** <https://www.globalshapers.org/news/kumasi-hub-global-shapers-community-and-peace-corps-present-let-girls-learn-hackathon-6>

volunteers were received warmly by Ghana's first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah on August 30, 1961. Five decades later, Peace Corps Ghana is more vital than ever, working in critical areas of health, education and agriculture.

Additionally, Peace Corps Ghana equip volunteers to help implement critical initiatives like the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

(PEPFAR) and Feed The Future (FTF) Food Security Initiative. Peace Corps Ghana Volunteers continue to help countless individuals who want to build better lives for themselves, their children, and their communities.

Peace Corps Ghana ICT Committee works to leverage technologies to support the works of Peace Corps Volunteers and communities in Ghana. The ICT Committee investigates how

to incorporate various technologies in the daily lives of Ghanaians to improve development and quality of life, provides technical support to Peace Corps Ghana staff and volunteers, helps establish ICT labs at JHS and SHS schools, and organizes activities like the Let Girls Learn Hackathon to help promote Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) in Ghana.



CAMP TECHKOBWA PARTIPIANTS GIVING PRESENTATIONS.

# Teaching tech and spreading skills in Rwanda

August 19, 2015

By **Elisabeth Turner**

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Rwanda
- 👤 Project: Rwanda - Camp TechKobwa

**T**echKobwa was launched by Peace Corps Volunteers in 2013, inspired by Rwanda's resilient and ever-growing information technology and communication sectors [ICT]. The purpose is to expose young women to technology in a creative, non-threatening environment that encourages them to explore, engage in and consider future careers in ICT. Lessons include basic computer skills, computer programming, photography, internet safety and electronics, as well as leadership development, problem-solving skills and career mentoring.

Additionally, a teacher training program, led by Rwandan technology experts and faculty and

professionals from IBM and Michigan State University, seeks to equip rural ICT teachers with new technology skills, effective pedagogy and facilitation skills that they can utilize to improve their teaching and transfer ICT skills to additional students when they return to their schools.

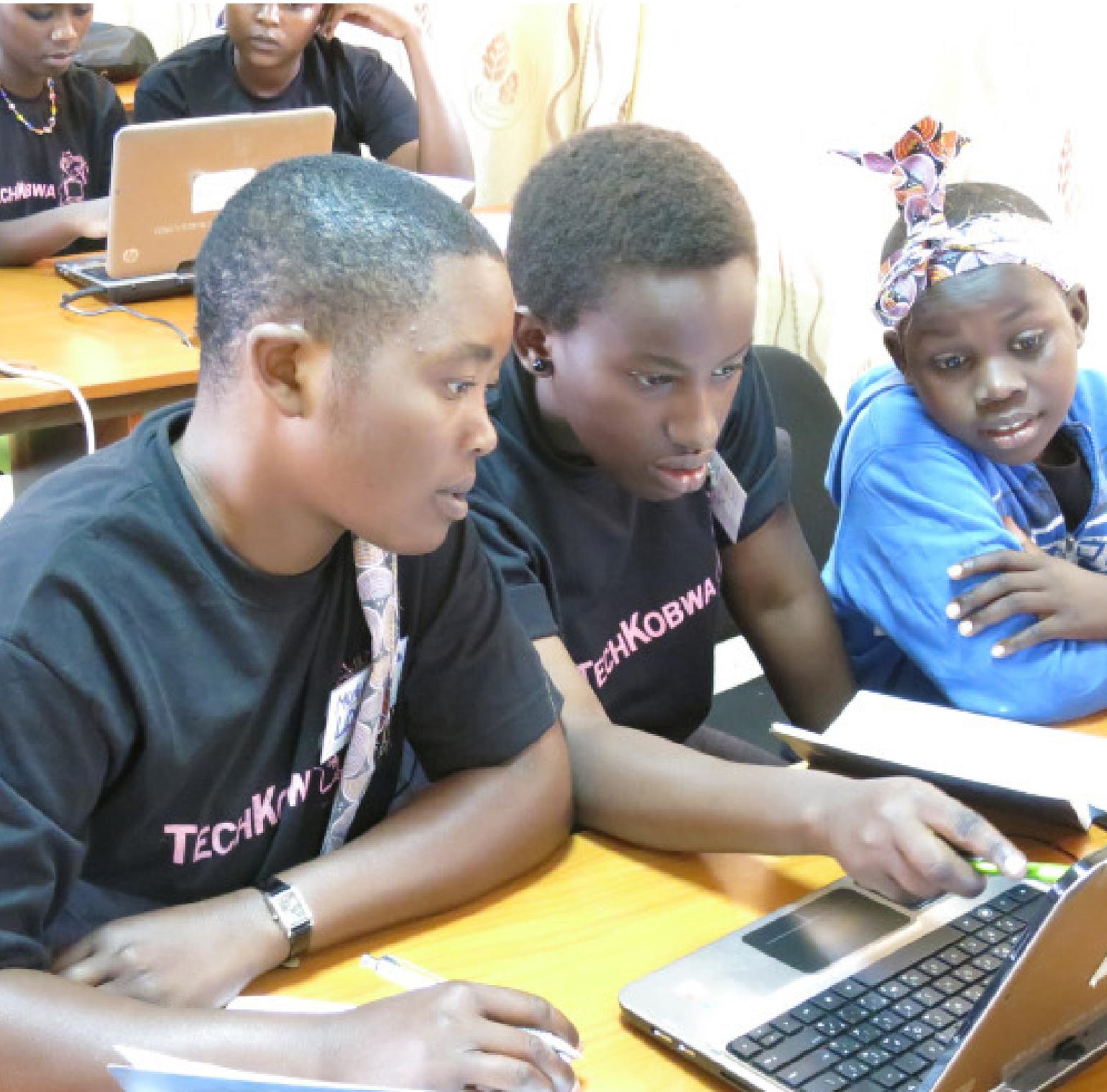
TechKobwa 2015 hosted 60 students and 10 teachers from 10 schools across Rwanda. The primary sponsors included the Peace Corps, Michigan State University, IBM, Rwanda's Ministry of Youth and ICT, and Creation Hill, a Rwandan ICT mentoring program. Additional financial support was provided by IEEE-Computer Society and ACM-W. On the ground help came from Korea International Cooperation

**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20151231173158/http://passport.peacecorps.gov/2015/08/25/teaching-tech-and-spreading-skills-in-rwanda/>

Agency [KOICA] volunteers, Creation Hill mentors, Akilah Institute and Kepler Rwanda. Members of Girls in ICT and Carnegie Mellon University-Rwanda participated in a Career Panel highlighting future opportunities for the participating students.

A Peace Corps Small Project Assistance [SPA] grant covered all logistical operations on the ground, with a generous donation of learning space and computer labs from IPRC West, Rwanda. Other funding provided visiting experts from the

United States, ELENCO electronic circuitry kits and digital cameras as well as an external evaluator to conduct professional monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes.



# 30 more SolarSPELL libraries built at Appropriate Technology Workshop and Build Day at Cal Poly

September 21, 2015

By *Laura Hosman*

 Region: IAP  
 Post: Micronesia  
 Project: Micronesia - SolarSPELL

**O**n October 24 2015, students from across Cal Poly's campus gathered for an interactive workshop on Appropriate Technology for the Developing World and to participate in the hands-on activity of building 30 additional SolarSPELL libraries. The workshop and build were led by Prof. Laura Hosman.

The students, representing a wide variety of majors, participated in a lively discussion about some of the challenges of bringing technology to developing world contexts, when a lack of technology may not have been the problem in the first place. The workshop also highlighted some successes and failures of ICT in developing regions.

The hands-on build activities saw students jumping in to solder, drill, heat-shrink, glue, fasten, cut, splice, affix, and much more... as they enthusiastically built 30 SolarSPELL libraries in approximately 2.5 hours. Feedback received from the event indicated that the

students truly enjoyed the experience, and felt they were able to contribute to a real-world project.

Here are some quotes from the students:

*The simplicity of the SolarSPELL design made me realize what appropriate technology might look like.*

*The hands-on project makes you feel like you are making an actual contribution to helping address a problem. The design of the technology reflects the needs of the location.*

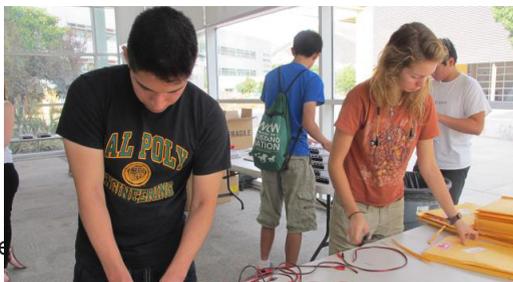
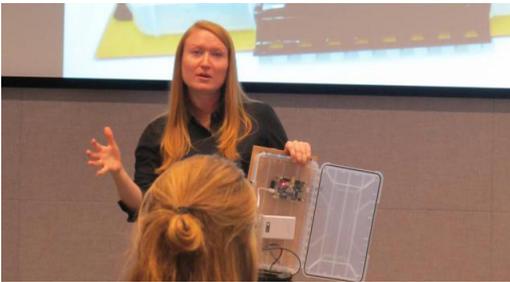
*It was a humbling experience that made me really consider the way technology interplays with social/political/economic situations.*

*I loved the build aspect because it made me feel a part of something bigger than myself.*

Cal Poly's own Mustang News covered the event and released a video featuring the day's highlights.

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**Source:** <https://ict4dviewsfromthefield.wordpress.com/2015/11/12/30-more-solarspell-libraries-built-at-appropriate-technology-workshop-and-build-day-at-cal-poly/>



# Computer training seminar opens doors for community

September 25, 2015

-  Region: AF
-  Post: Tanzania
-  Project: Tanzania - Computer Training

**P**CV Elizabeth Crompton (2011–13) recently conducted a seminar in Tanzania using a free, open-source computer operating system that is accessible in developing countries. Learning to search the web for information is a critical skill in Tanzania due to the lack of offline computing resources. Seminar participants

also created an online community using the open-source operating system to help other students develop their computer skills. The ultimate goal of the seminar was to foster computing and programming skills that teach self-reliance and problem-solving and improve students' employment prospects.

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Source: [http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013\\*04.pdf](http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013*04.pdf)

# Alumni

Serving in the Peace Corps provides invaluable experience to the Volunteers themselves, and it gives them confidence, humility, and insights that they carry with them to their next challenges and careers.

These stories of alumni highlight that beyond the more famous Reed Hastings examples (CEO and Founder of Netflix, Swaziland RPCV), there are countless examples of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers making use of their experiences using ICTs during their service.

# Dot-Com's Dirge Is Peace Corps' Jubilation

August 13, 2001

**T**he Peace Corps has found gold in the dot-com bust. Displaced IT workers are a prime source of new volunteers.

What has been a depressing time for IT workers in the dot-com sector has been exactly the opposite for the Peace Corps. Although the governmental volunteer organization doesn't have any statistics yet on the impact the flood of displaced dot-comers is having on volunteerism, it reports that applications and phone calls from prospects are up significantly.

Nowhere is the interest rising more than in the areas around Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., all of which have two things in common: a large IT industry presence and a Peace Corps office.

The San Francisco office has been running its own ad campaign targeting displaced dot-comers for the past few months. Press director Ellen Field says out-of-work Internet workers represent a logical target for the Peace Corps, which typically relies most heavily on educated people in their twenties to fill its volunteer ranks. Young, single professionals are most likely to be willing to live in remote locations for two years, which is the Corps' minimum time commitment.

According to Field, the dot-com bust has helped to lift the Peace Corps out of a volunteering slump that began 20 years ago. The volunteer count—nearly 7,500—is at its highest level since the early 1970s. Field admits that one of the primary drivers of displaced IT professionals' interest in volunteering may be disillusionment after seeing riches come and go so quickly. "Perhaps working for the dollar doesn't have as much meaning," she says.

But for those who aren't willing to give up two years or would prefer to work on IT projects rather than teach English or dig irrigation ditches, there are other options, such as the 18-month-old Geekcorps. The brainchild of dot-com veteran Ethan Zuckerman, Geekcorps—which on Monday merged with the 36-year-old International Executive Service Corps—offers techies the chance to volunteer for IT projects in developing countries for as little as three months. Zuckerman, former VP of R&D for Tripod Inc. before it was acquired by Lycos Inc., says Geekcorps was founded as a reaction to the Peace Corps and its lengthy commitment requirement, which can come with a price. Says Zuckerman, "By the end of two years, your skills are out of date."

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Source: <http://www.informationweek.com/dot-coms-dirge-is-peace-corps-jubilation/d/d-id/1011466>

# A Brooklyn Inventor Eases an African Headache

September 14, 2002

 Region: AF

 Post: AF

**F**or centuries, women in rural Africa have carried heavy loads on their heads as they take goods to market. But a man in Brooklyn thinks he has a better way, and — as far-fetched as it may seem — people in one African nation have begun to listen.

Arnold Wendroff, an itinerant inventor who worked in the Peace Corps and later studied in Malawi, has designed a wooden handcart to relieve the burden there.

Slightly larger and more stable than a wheelbarrow, the handcart can be easily built using native materials and two bicycle tires. It is also cheaper to make and more practical than a bicycle. Best of all, a woman can carry far more in the cart than she can on her head.

The carts are now being used not only to replace head-borne baskets, but also to haul trash in Malawi's capital, Lilongwe, to carry produce in remote provinces, even to ferry sick people to hospitals. Politicians are paying attention, and Western development experts speak admiringly of Dr. Wendroff's efforts.

It is a sweet vindication for Dr. Wendroff, a 60-year-old with a bristly beard who spent years crisscrossing Malawi like an evangelist, talking about his handcart to anyone who would listen.

There is nothing exceptional in the cart's design, Dr. Wendroff is quick to point out. The latest model is based on sketches in a book he bought at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

But in a region where the work force has been

devastated by AIDS, the need for cheap and practical alternatives to what is known as "head-loading" is immense, said Prof. John M. Staatz, an expert in African agriculture and transport issues at Michigan State University. Much of the continent still lacks the money for such longer-term solutions as more cars and better roads.

"It is really of great importance," said Jephthah Chagunda, the director of the Malawi Rural Travel and Transport Program, which is financed by the World Bank and recently bought and distributed 16 handcarts in a pilot project. About 65 carts are in use in Malawi, with more being built by a farmers' association and by the Lilongwe City Assembly.

For Dr. Wendroff, the handcarts are just one part of a decidedly eccentric career. He is an occasional research associate in the geology department at Brooklyn College.

He got a Ph.D. in sociology by studying witchcraft and traditional medicine in Malawi in the 1980's. There is no patent on the handcart design, and Dr. Wendroff said he made no money from the handcarts. He said he lived off a modest pension and a small inheritance.

"This will revolutionize the way they live, because they have to get their own water and firewood every day," Dr. Wendroff said recently outside his Park Slope home. He was sitting comfortably in one of his handcarts as a visitor wheeled him on a demonstration tour from his brownstone to Prospect Park, half a block away. With his 150-pound frame balanced

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Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/14/nyregion/14cart.html>

in the cart, he seemed as light as a feather.

Still, the handcarts have not been an easy sell.

The concept first dawned on Dr. Wendroff in 1989, when he was helping a friend clear some land in the Catskills. Later that year, in Malawi, he showed pictures of American garden carts to farmers, who were eager to buy them. But the cart's steel axles were unavailable there.

In 1992, Dr. Wendroff returned to Malawi with wheels and axles, traveling the countryside and trying to persuade government ministers, nonprofit groups and others to manufacture carts. Everyone was enthusiastic, but no one built them.

In 1998, he finally succeeded in persuading the Malawi minister of agriculture to hold a handcart demonstration. A favorable report followed, and two years later he met with the president of Malawi, Bakili Muluzi, which resulted in some favorable publicity in Malawi. But still no carts.

He redesigned the cart in wood, making sure it could be built and repaired with local materials like cast-off bicycle screws. Nuts and bolts that can be bought at any American hardware store are extremely rare in Africa, he explained.

"It's so simple," he said as he led a visitor to his basement workshop in Brooklyn. He laid out the tools required to build a handcart: saws, hammer, screwdriver, brace, tape measure, square, plane, and countersink.

Simplicity, as it happens, was part of the problem.

Unlike Asia, where bicycles and rickshaws have been mass-produced for decades, Africa has always looked to the West, where motorized transport and roads were the model.

There has been a "deep-seated stigma associated with handcarts, as they are considered a technological retrogression," said Peter Njenga, an Africa-based analyst for the International Forum for Rural Transport Development, in an e-mail message. But the fact is that there is no money to pay for more advanced methods.

Now, history may finally be turning Dr. Wendroff's way.

"There's been a recognition that they need simpler means of transport in the short term," said Stephen Brushett, an economist at the World Bank, which has been criticized for favoring giant development options like highways and dams.

There has also been a recognition that traditional African head-carrying has a price. Although studies have shown that African women have developed a special gait to deal with the loads they carry on their heads, many have suffered spinal injuries from excessive burdens in recent years, Mr. Chagunda said.

During Dr. Wendroff's latest trip to Malawi, in June, several nongovernmental groups ordered carts and expressed interest in helping distribute them throughout the country. Eventually, he hopes to take the idea to the rest of the continent.

Dr. Wendroff trained a number of Malawian carpenters to make the carts. The parts and labor to build a cart cost about 3,000 kwacha, or about \$40, a lot of money in a country where the annual per capita income is \$190. But other methods are far more expensive: an ox cart costs about \$400 (without the ox).

In Lilongwe, the City Assembly has begun using the carts for garbage collection and street cleaning (replacing the wheelbarrows that were used previously). They are being used as ambulances by a rural hospital in Chitedze. The officials who worked with Dr. Wendroff in Malawi have been sending him follow-up questions by e-mail.

"The women love it, and best of all, they're suggesting improvements," Dr. Wendroff said. "It really seems to be catching on."

Dr. Wendroff has even learned something about salesmanship. On his last trip, he noticed that despite their poverty, Malawians spend money on perfumed soap, because of the sexy billboards advertising the soap in Lilongwe. Could something similar be done for handcarts?

"We don't have money for advertising," he said. But he has decided that naming it the Livingstonia cart — after the 19th century colonial explorer — may have been a mistake. "Now we're thinking of calling it the Africart," he said.

Doing research? Search the archive for more than 500,000 articles: [Today's News](#) [Past Week](#) [Past 30 Days](#) [Past 90 Days](#) [Past Year](#) [Since 1996](#)



CONCHY BRETOS, RIGHT, ADVISES HOUSING AGENCIES ON HOW TO CARE FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN THEIR HOMES. HER DAUGHTER PILAR WORKS WITH HER. CREDIT ALEX QUESADA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES.

# A Social Solution, Without Going the Nonprofit Route

March 5, 2009

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Benin

It used to be that people who wanted to solve a social problem — like lack of access to clean water or inadequate housing for the poor — created a charity. Today, many start a company instead.

D.light, a company cofounded by Sam Goldman, who spent four years in the Peace Corps in Benin before earning a master's degree in business from Stanford University, is an example. Mr. Goldman started D.light with the mission of replacing millions of kerosene lamps now used in poor, rural parts of the world with solar-powered lamps.

Having used kerosene lamps himself while living in Benin, Mr. Goldman learned firsthand of kerosene's problems — it is expensive, it provides poor light and it is extremely dangerous. When the son of his West African neighbor nearly died after suffering severe burns from spilled kerosene, Mr. Goldman said he realized he wanted to create a venture to solve both

the social and economic problems caused by these lamps. His time in Benin also convinced him, he said, that only as a business could a project become large enough to reach the great number of people who use these lamps as their primary source of light.

"We could have done it as a nonprofit over a hundred years, but if we wanted to do it in five or 10 years, then we believed it needed to be fueled by profit," he said. "That's the way to grow."

Since the company incorporated in May 2007, it has raised \$6.5 million from a combination of investors who, Mr. Goldman said, are able to push the company on both its social mission and its profitability.

What to call these innovative businesspeople is the subject of some debate. The terms "social entrepreneur" and "social businesses" are generally used to characterize people and

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Source: <http://nyti.ms/1s7mqpf>

businesses that bring entrepreneurship to ventures that have a social mission. Yet there are those who would limit the social entrepreneur label only to those without any profit motive. A separate, but related, category are companies referred to as “socially responsible.” These are generally companies whose core business does not necessarily have a social mission, but who display socially responsible characteristics, like environmental sensitivity.

Because of the difficulty of defining these social ventures, it is hard to gauge the exact number of them, but there are indications that there is increasing interest in the idea of using business to tackle the world’s big problems. Last year, 630 people attended a new conference, Social Capital Markets, on social venture investing. According to Kevin Jones, the creator of the conference and a principal in Good Capital, an investment firm focusing on social business, two-thirds of the participants signed up after the collapse of Lehman Brothers, which he called a sign that people are flocking to what he calls a “new asset class.”

Experts concede that not all social problems respond well to the for-profit model. One example could be early childhood education. “If you set it up as a business, you might be able to raise money more quickly and grow more quickly,” said David Bornstein, the author of “How to Change the World” (Oxford University Press, 2004), an often-cited book on social entrepreneurship. “But if you want to be profitable, you might find that you have to make choices that diminish the quality of your program and then

children won’t learn to read as quickly. While Stanley Kaplan can make a fortune selling education to well-heeled people, providing the same services to low-income kids would probably not provide a very good income.”

Mr. Bornstein said it came down to one crucial question: “As you grow, will the economics of your business work in favor of your mission or will they work against it? In the case of providing access to [solar energy](#) for people in villages, the bigger you get, the cheaper your product will be, so the economies of scale make sense.”

Conchy Bretos, too, chose a for-profit model for her venture. While working as Florida’s secretary for aging and adult services, Ms. Bretos learned of the difficulties that force older people to leave their homes and move into nursing homes for lack of proper care.

With a partner, Ms. Bretos started the MIA Consulting Group, a business that advises governments as well as private housing developers on how to bring assisted living services cost-effectively to low-income housing communities so that older people can be cared for in their own homes.

Ms. Bretos said that a business was the natural model for their venture. “We came from a strong business background and we developed a business plan,” Ms. Bretos said. “By doing that, we discovered that we were offering something that no one else was offering. We got our first client even before we incorporated and within a few hours we had to form a company to be able to put together a contract. It was just easy to form an S corporation.”

Ms. Bretos said she also had to make a living. “In this nation, we equate success with profit,” she said. “We wanted to be profitable while also doing something that was right and giving back to the community.”

Advisers who work with these kinds of companies say the rise in social business reflects the times. “Historically, social and legal norms tended to recognize and treat for-profit and progressive social or environmental motivations and activities separately,” said Jonathan S. Storper, a partner at the law firm Hanson Bridgett who specializes in sustainable and socially responsible business. “These lines have blurred and converged as the business world attempts to respond to the modern culture’s demand that businesses be good stewards of the environment and society.”

Still, there are legal issues to consider. The basic analysis, Mr. Storper said, is whether the organization’s primary goal is to maximize shareholder profit or to benefit the public. “If the primary goal is to benefit the shareholders, then the legal structure should maximize the ability to create wealth,” he said. “While nonprofits have advantages, such as an exemption from paying taxes and the tax deductibility of donations, nonprofit activities are restricted to its charitable purpose.”

He noted that the government and the public “generally are less able to scrutinize the operations and finances of for-profit businesses.” But, he added, “The mission of an organization may benefit from the broad public involvement and support inherent in nonprofit organizations.”

# 7 Rules of Design From MIT's Guru Of Low-Tech Engineering

September 30, 2009

🌐 Region: AF

- 1. Try living for a week on \$2 a day.** That's what my students and I do when I teach my class about international development. It helps them begin to understand the trade-offs that must be made when you have only very limited resources. More broadly, it was in the Peace Corps in Botswana that I learned to carry water on my head, and noticed how heavy the bucket was; and I learned to pound sorghum in to flour and felt the ache in my back. As a designer, I came to understand the importance of technologies that can transport water or grind grain.
- 2. Listen to the right people.** Okay, so you probably don't know what it's like to carry fifty pounds of firewood on your head. Well, don't pretend that you do. Talk to someone who has done it. I believe that the key to innovation in international development is truly understanding the problem, and using your imagination is not good enough.
- 3. Do the hard work needed to find a simple solution.** As Leonardo da Vinci said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication"—and it is the key to this type of design work.
- 4. Create "transparent" technologies,** ones that are easily understood by the users, and promote local innovation.
- 5. Make it inexpensive.** My friend Paul Polak has adapted a famous quote to the following: "Affordability isn't everything, it's the only thing" and there's a lot of truth in that. When you are designing for people who are earning just one or two dollars a day, you need to keep things as cheap as you can and then make it even cheaper!
- 6. If you want to make something 10 times cheaper,** remove 90 percent of the material.
- 7. Provide skills, not just finished technologies.** The current revolution in design for developing countries is the notion of co-creation, of teaching the skills necessary to create the solution, rather than simply providing the solution. By involving the community throughout the design process, you can help equip people to innovate and contribute to the evolution of the product. Furthermore, they acquire the skills needed to create solutions to a much wider variety of problems. They are empowered.

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Source: <http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/design/a3395/4273680/>

# The One About My Community's Emergency Medical System

August 26, 2011

🌐 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Panama

👤 Project: Panama - Community Emergency Medical System

**T**his story is a throwback to my service in the Dominican Republic, but on the anniversary of our very first week of providing emergency medical care with the Paramedic team in Manzanillo, I thought it fitting to document our process in the annals of history. Enjoy!

One sunny afternoon, I was sitting with my neighbors drinking coffee in our plastic chairs trying to catch a breeze. I had been in site for nearly six months and felt that I had a pretty good grasp on the dynamics of the place. The hospital administrator rolled up to our growing street gathering and took his place in the low-back plastic chair on the corner. "Bea," he said to me, "I need a favor. We need an ambulance for the hospital, can you get us one?"

Fast forward to nearly two years later, and I never did get that hospital administrator his ambulance, but what we did do together as a community was create an emergency medical system staffed by local first responders who use a basic mobile phone software to provide pre-hospital care to emergencies in my site of Manzanillo in the northwest corner of the Dominican Republic. But let's back up!

After that fateful conversation I had that afternoon with the hospital administrator, fondly known as Papito, I started investigating the idea of an ambulance donation. I did a Google

search and sent a mass email to friends and family back home. I also sent many emails to organizations I read about online and one finally took the bait! Little did I know, this connection would turn into a full-blown emergency response system project (and subsequently sour me at the idea of ambulance donations as legitimate forms of aid). I heard back from Trek Medics International, an organization dedicated to "improving emergency medical care anywhere." And so I began a series of intense conversations with the Executive Director, Jason, who pushed me for more specific answers to my "can you donate an ambulance" question. As it turned out, when I dug a little deeper within my community, I teased out from the hospital administrator that what we really needed was a collaborative solution to the actual problem of inadequate pre-hospital care and a lack of reliable inter-facility transfer capacity.

So, I'd found the jackpot organization that could help me tackle this – now what? After a series of conversations between community members, we unanimously agreed to invite Trek Medics to send a team down to investigate the possibility of starting a pilot program. One thing led to another and the big boss, Jason, decided that Manzanillo was the perfect place to launch their newly developed Beacon technology (essentially a way

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Source: <http://bronwenraff.blogspot.com/2016/03/the-one-about-my-communities-emergency.html>

to crowd-source transportation and medical attention, like emergency Uber). Working under the supervision of the local fire department, we gathered recruits who had to interview, study, train, and perform simulations for several weeks before we allowed them to “graduate” as community first responders. Simultaneously, I was training local dispatchers and working with the fire chief, Ramoncito, to give the fire station a central role in the new service as dispatchers of local emergencies.

The team of responders (fondly referring to themselves as “paramedics”) also had to prove themselves as reliable partners with real skin in the game. For example, they initially offered to help the local civil defense during Holy Week and stationed themselves for service at the beach when the holiday crowds flocked to Manzanillo’s beaches. There they encountered a number of patients with problems ranging from wounds to dehydration and intoxication. While no serious patients were treated (thankfully), their simple presence on scene

proved to be a small, but critical first step in their growth: it showed the community that the response team was more than just a good idea, it built their confianza (trust) in our new service exponentially.

Then, we had to start giving our responders bigger tests so that we knew we could safely grow. This included: handling simultaneous emergencies; ensuring that a sufficient number of available first responders were distributed equally as the coverage area expanded; training our team members as instructors in order to train neighboring communities, introducing a new version of the Beacon software funded by Google, and learning to use newly minted motorcycle ambulances the organization donated to our local fire station. And on and on it went...one good idea snowballing into a thousand more - all community-driven to make a well-oiled emergency medical system.

There is still so much to do, but for something that started as a simple conversation over much-too-sugary coffee, it is now the primary method

for emergency transport in my rural community. Today, six months from the date I finished my service in the Dominican Republic and have moved on to a similar Peace Corps Response position in Panama, we still have a fully functioning emergency medical service in Manzanillo and have expanded (with help from USAID and other generous organizations) to the entire province. Locals are the crux of the organization and run the entire operation. This was a project that never would have functioned without a vested community interest (especially as I knew nothing about first aid myself before it started!). Key community members were part of every decision and the driving force excited about this organization’s entry into Manzanillo. After initial contact with Trek Medics, I became a critical community organizer, but I was never the driving force. As Jason reminded me various times throughout the process, “We can’t want it more than they do. They have to be a part of every step.” A very valuable life lesson, indeed, especially in the realm of international development.

# An Inside Look at the Tech Awards: Technology Benefiting Humanity

September 19, 2011

Recently, I interviewed David Whitman, vice president at [The Tech Museum](#) in Silicon Valley, where he directs its signature programs, including [The Tech Awards: Technology Benefiting Humanity](#). In collaboration with the Uffizi Gallery and Museo Galileo in Florence, Whitman coordinated The Tech Museum's international exhibition on Leonardo and other artist-engineers of the Renaissance. For 14 years, he managed U.C. Berkeley's famed Hertz Concert Hall. Later, he assisted in establishing Art Basel Miami Beach. An independent writer and photographer whose work has appeared in more than 100 publications and exhibitions, Whitman often travels abroad and has resided in Belgium, Brazil, and as a Peace Corps forester in the West Indies.

Rahim Kanani: Explain a little bit about the founding and motivation behind The Tech Awards.

David Whitman: Eleven years ago, The Tech Museum partnered with the Center for Science, Technology, and Society at Santa Clara University and Applied Materials to create an international program recognizing innovative people who develop "technology benefiting humanity."

The 5 categories for The Tech Awards—environment, economic development, education, equality, and health—were derived from the U.N. Millennium Development Goals in 2000. And later, the Global Humanitarian Award was

established.

Each year, 15 laureates are selected, from among hundreds of competing applicants, in an independent review conducted by the Center for Science, Technology, and Society. Since its inception, The Tech Awards has inducted 245 laureates and awarded \$2.75 million in unrestricted cash prizes.

We bring The Tech Awards laureates to Silicon Valley for a week of activities designed to expose them to potential funders, social entrepreneurs, corporate executives, media, researchers, students, and many others. We commission films about the laureates, hold workshops, offer speaking and networking opportunities, connect laureates to Silicon Valley mentors, and present a public Showcase, Conference, and Gala. As a tranquil escape from these intensive activities, in recent years Nokia has treated the laureates to an airship ride over the San Francisco Bay.

The high point of The Tech Awards Week is the Gala. It's one of Silicon Valley's most important and most beautifully staged events. World-class photojournalists and photo agencies contribute images that are projected onto an immense screen half a football field long, bringing the world into the Gala, magnificently. The legendary photography editor Karen Mullarkey is the force behind this element of The Tech Awards.

Naturally, The Tech Awards is also shaped by personal experiences. As former Peace Corps

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**Source:** <http://www.forbes.com/sites/rahimkanani/2011/09/19/an-inside-look-at-the-tech-awards-technology-benefiting-humanity/>

volunteers, the program's co-founder, Dick King, and I have experienced first-hand many of the conditions that inspire The Tech Awards laureates to take action. At last year's gala, as he paid tribute to the program's other co-founders, Dick told a moving story. When he arrived in his Salvadoran village, one of the first neighbors to befriend him was a timid, naked, malnourished, barefooted young child. Years later, the haunting memory of that boy, and the daunting conditions and poverty he had to endure, inspired Dick to help create The Tech Awards.

Rahim Kanani: What have been some of the examples of winning technologists or organizations over the last decade?

David Whitman: All 245 laureates—including the 15 to be honored next month—are listed on our website, [thetechawards.thetech.org](http://thetechawards.thetech.org). The diversity is staggering. Seattle-based PATH is a 3-time laureate of The Tech Awards. And often in the media these days is the phenomenal Khan Academy, one of the education laureates of 2009.

Recipients of the Global Humanitarian Award include [Queen Rania Al Abdul-lah](#) of Jordan, Al Gore, Muhammad

Yunus, [Gordon Moore](#), [Bill Gates](#), Kristine Pearson, and James C. Morgan in whose honor the award is named. The 2011 award will be given to social entrepreneur Jeff Skoll at The Tech Awards Gala on Thursday evening, October 20, at the Santa Clara Convention Center.

Rahim Kanani: In carving out the landscape, where do we currently stand with respect to the intersection of technology and social change?

David Whitman: Using your landscape metaphor, technology and social change seem, to me, like elements of a mighty thunderstorm. Thunderstorms alter the landscape with the forces of wind, rain, and fire. Depending on our perspective, these changes can be viewed as negative or positive—just like with social change. And as technology continues to change exponentially, the conditions leading to social change around the world are being created with corresponding speed and impact.

Rahim Kanani: Where are we headed?

David Whitman: My profound hope is that technology will help bring us closer together rather than creating technologically unequal worlds with all

the tragic and enduring consequences that would generate. I also hope that humans will always be in control of technology rather than the alarming possibility of the reverse situation. Contemplating a world dominated by artificial intelligence is no longer science fiction. We are moving swiftly into a new realm.

Rahim Kanani: If you were to advise budding technologists about using their learned expertise towards social change, what would you say?

David Whitman: As Queen Rania said at the awards ceremony last year, "The Tech Awards laureates see technology's potential and promise, putting their talents to work for others as leading techmanitarians."

Become a techmanitarian. Consider others, especially those outside your usual circles. The world is far more complex, mysterious, and diverse than most people experience. Consider how your innovations can be truly meaningful. Imagine someone for whom your innovation would have a positive and perhaps life-changing impact. Be a force for good. Truly use technology to benefit humanity...and all other life forms, too.



ASTRONAUT AND RPCV JOE ACABA SPEAKS DECEMBER 7, 2012, AT PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS FOR "PASOS ADELANTE: HISPANIC INNOVATION IN ACTION," A DISCUSSION ON DIVERSITY IN INNOVATION.

# Astronaut and RPCV Joe Acaba Compares Peace Corps Service to Living in Space

January 1, 2013

**A**stronaut and RPCV Joe Acaba Compares Peace Corps Service to Living in Space. Astronaut and returned Peace Corps Volunteer Joe Acaba visited Peace Corps headquarters on December 7 as the keynote speaker for "Pasos Adelante: Hispanic Innovation in Action," an event sponsored by the Peace Corps Office of Diversity and National Outreach. Acaba's speech was followed by a panel discussion highlighting the importance of diversity and innovation in an increasingly connected world.

"Peace Corps will always be a part of who I am. Serving in Peace Corps is just like living in space: You are working with people, away

from your family, in a new environment, and you are occasionally faced with uncomfortable situations. I was just as affected by my service in Peace Corps as my time in space," said Acaba. "Being in Peace Corps, you learn to adapt, to communicate effectively, and to be creative—all 21st century skills that really got me to where I am today."

Acaba served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Dominican Republic from 1994–96 as an environmental education awareness promoter. Acaba has spent 138 days in space during two missions, most recently returning in September. He is recognized as the first NASA astronaut of Puerto Rican descent.

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Source: [http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013\\*01.pdf](http://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/media/pctimes2013*01.pdf)

# From South Florida to Southeast Africa: Local Educator Bringing Robots

May 26, 2014

 Region: AF  
 Post: Burundi

**T**he U.S. State Department warns Americans not to go there, but Don Chambers says he can't wait to get to Burundi next month.

He's got a mission: to start setting up a school.

For the past two years, Chambers, 57, has been running his Pompano Beach-based Greenbot Company, which does robotics education workshops for kids in local schools. But now, he says, the time is ripe to bring his brand of science, technology, engineering and mathematics education more than 7,500 miles across the globe to the Burundi American International Academy in Southeast Africa.

Innovations have now made it possible to open the doors of technology and the wonders of the Internet even where electrical power currents don't run consistently or with the kind of juice Americans expect, Chambers says.

"A year ago we couldn't have done this," he says, tooling around with a gizmo that makes it possible to run a computer server on 5 volts. (Most American homes run on about 120 volts.)

All three stories of the Burundi American International Academy have been built near Lake Tanganyika in Burundi's capital of Bujumbura. Chambers is hoping he'll hear the sound of

200 students, pre-kindergarten through sixth-grade, running through the halls where he will be headmaster come September.

"I worked there in the Peace Corps," said Chambers, who has two master's degrees, one in chemistry and one in chemistry education, from Columbia University. "I've always dreamed of going back."

For Freddy Kaniki, a Burundi native who now works as a pharmacist, investing in this school – and hiring Chambers – is what he felt drawn to do after living through Burundi's 12-year civil war, which ended in 2005. His father and two brothers were killed in the country's ethnic violence.

"(I wanted to) invest in a school to plant the right seed in the younger generation," Kaniki said in an email from Burundi.

Chambers was hired after a friend recommended him and Kaniki came to South Florida on a two-day visit.

"My choice of Don was based mostly on his values," Kaniki said. "During those two days (visiting South Florida) my role was to talk to Don, his wife and his sons about their values and beliefs. I was very much satisfied as I was satisfied on a professional side."

Source: "<http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2014-05-26/news/fl-south-florida-to-burundi-adventure-20140519/robots-south-florida-chemistry>"

Chambers, his wife and three sons will be setting off for Burundi's distant shore on June 9 so he can start finishing all the opening work. These past few weeks, he and his family have been loading up a container full of his own robotics equipment and literally a ton of other stuff donated by the community.

[Palm Beach County](#) Schools donated environmental science, math and reading books. The Miami-Dade School District is sending nursing supplies, books and classroom science kits.

Richard Newman, a resident of [Boca Raton](#) who collects robots, has been working every contact he has in

the robotics world to get supplies for the effort. He's assembled 200 robotic soldering kits from PARALLAX Company.

"It's a pleasure for me to help kids on the other side of the planet," he said.

Chambers started his career as one of Columbia University's first Peace Corps fellows, teaching science in the inner city of New York. Before and after that, though, the lure of foreign lands has always kept him moving. He came to South Florida after his gig teaching robotics in Tokyo, Japan was interrupted by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Bringing his family across the globe to

set up a school in one of the five poorest countries where just one of every two children go to school doesn't faze Chambers. He's going to have at least 100 computers at the school – he can set them up for \$35 each, he said.

Chambers said he is convinced that opening a private school, registered in the United States as a nonprofit, that appeals to the middle class is one of the missing pieces in a Southeast African country. Toyota is setting up in that country, he pointed out.

"Toyota is betting on it," he said. "They are probably seeing the beginnings of development."

# Sustainable impact: Former Student Recounts Lessons Learned at Penn State

October 16, 2014

By *Erick Seo*

 Region: AF  
 Post: Namibia

**W**hen he came to Penn State in 2009, Erick Seo brought with him a heartfelt passion for humanitarian work. Throughout his teenage years, he had traveled on several short-term mission trips. Seo explained, “Most of my volunteer service had been religious oriented, so when I came to Penn State, I wanted to find out if there were other avenues I could explore.”

He was introduced to the Humanitarian Engineering and Social Entrepreneurship (HESE) program by an upper-class student who had shared his experiences from a recent journey to Kenya. Seo said, “After we talked, I started attending classes through the HESE curriculum.”

In no time, Seo came to realize the intensity of the program. He traveled to Kenya for three weeks during the summer of 2012 and saw firsthand the impact of HESE projects. He explained, “I was on the field for the venture Mashavu, meaning ‘chubby cheeks’ in Kiswahili. It represents healthiness and growth. Mashavu is designed to combat the inaccessibility of primary healthcare. Because primary healthcare is so expensive and time consuming, people weren’t able to fully get treatment

without risking financial instability. They would have to take off work and travel far distances, only to find that their ailment was a common cold.”

In order to confront this, Seo and his team designed a system of entrepreneurial community health workers who provide pre-primary health services in rural areas. He was able to witness the traction this kind of service offered and the appeal to the community. “Every day, between one and two-hundred people came to utilize this service. Not only did this experience highlight the impact it had on the recipients, but it also benefited the local Kenyans that operated the venture. They were punctual and eager, clearly showing they were excited to be a part of something meaningful.”

Seo said all of their ventures were partnered with the Children and Youth Empowerment Center, located in Nyeri, Kenya. Though he wasn’t able to see all of the projects’ fruits of labor firsthand, he was able to deduce, just from the excitement and the participatory attitude of the Kenyan coworkers, that the impact of the HESE projects was tremendous. “The experience in Kenya radically changed my opinion of what it means to be humanitarian,

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Source: <http://news.psu.edu/story/330559/2014/10/16/academics/sustainable-impact-former-student-says-metta-prepared-him-success>

and I saw how a well-planned project with a sustainable business plan can yield significant results.”

Not long after his return to the United States, Seo decided he wanted to go back to Africa. He recalled, “The Peace Corps seemed like an excellent option. I applied that fall, which also happened to be the first semester of my senior year.”

Putting his studies on hold, Seo returned to Africa, where he remains dedicated to promoting sustainability. “Khanjan Mehta, director of the HESE program, emphasized the importance of sustainability more than anything

else. This is the most crucial piece of knowledge I learned from him and the program, and I have been making that my mission for every project I work on.”

He is currently designing a community college in Namibia. Seo said it’s the first of its kinds and is very unique, even in the vastness of Peace Corps projects. “My site is the Tate Institute of Technology. The project was initially designed as a school for the deaf and disabled however it soon evolved into the Glowdom Community College.”

The project has been visited by Namibia’s president, Hifikepunye

Pohamba, and by Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon.

Seo said he sometimes regrets that he never completed his bachelor’s degree. “I am considering taking classes through Penn State’s World Campus to finish.”

For now, he continues to hold wishful thoughts for the future of his projects. “HESE classes equipped me with the appropriate mindset to achieve success. I feel I must give credit where it is due, so I want to thank Khanjan for his tutelage.



# Corps to Career: From Robotics Student To Social Entrepreneur

November 24, 2014

**P**ease Corps was excited to participate in the 2014 [Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#) taking place in Marrakech, Morocco, November 19-21, where we helped the U.S. government promote economic and social entrepreneurship around the world. This post highlights one way that Volunteers promote entrepreneurship every day.

As a Volunteer in rural Mexico, Sam Bhat-tacharyya saw the problems his community faced, experienced those problems firsthand and, as a result, truly understood them. Now he's working to solve these problems for his community — and the rest of the developing world. After wrapping up his service, Sam is now pursuing an MBA at MIT with the intention of growing two of his secondary projects into social enterprises.

A few years ago, Sam was pursuing a PhD in

robotics from Vanderbilt University when he realized he wanted to put his knowledge to more practical use and have a positive impact. That was when he remembered the photos his high school physics teacher, an RPCV from Senegal, showed him. So, he decided to leave academia and apply to Peace Corps.

His technical skills made him an ideal candidate for the Peace Corps program in Mexico, even though he had no experience with Spanish. A few months later he found himself partnered with an astrophysics research center teaching students in rural Mexico. Shortly after, he began to settle in and integrate into his community.

Sam made more Mexican friends and gained more connections in Mexico. One of these connections was the director of a local NGO that was focused on providing support and services to people with disabilities in the local

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**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20151231173841/http://passport.peacecorps.gov/2014/11/24/corps-to-career-from-robotics-student-to-social-entrepreneur/>

area (including economic skills training, providing a support network etc.), including making low-cost prosthesis (see example above). The director asked Sam to help because of his background in robotics, and Sam became an integral part of the team. While still in Peace Corps, he worked with the NGO to start a workshop to make prosthesis that “are functional enough that a United States Veteran can use them and a Mexican Middle School Teacher can afford them.”

According to Sam, a project like this is extremely necessary in Mexico because there is no economic safety net for the injured or ill. Furthermore, diabetes is a huge problem in Mexico and contributes to a large portion of the amputations in the country. Much of Mexico’s economy is informal, so by giving people the ability to get back to work with functional prosthesis, they are also getting the ability to recover their economic livelihood and help Mexico develop. Now, Sam and the founder of the NGO are branching out and starting a for-profit business to manufacture low-cost prosthesis on a larger scale in order to reach and

help a much larger market.

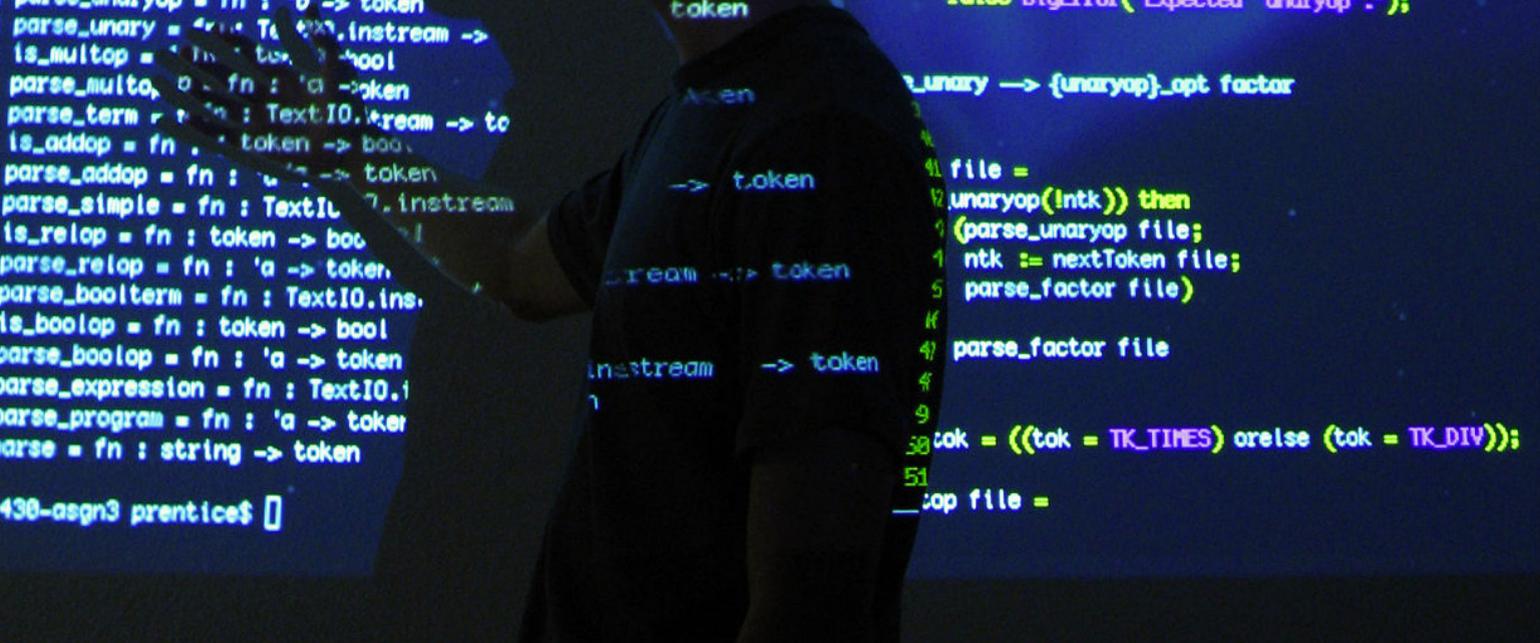
As a teacher in rural Mexico, Sam also noticed that he hit a brick wall when trying to integrate technology in the classroom. He realized that online learning systems would be a great asset to his students, but also found that he lacked something critical to implementation: reliable internet. But he didn’t just give up trying to use technology in the classroom. Instead, he created a type of file that would allow his students to benefit from technology based classes without actually having to be online.

The file basically works like an mp3 file. When they have a Wi-Fi connection, students can download a file to their cell phones and then, without Wi-Fi, they can open it anywhere (on the bus, at home, etc.). Therefore they can watch educational videos and take quizzes on a topic practically anywhere they go.

Sam realized this is a powerful tool that could be useful far beyond the Mexican village he was working in. Giving anyone with a cellphone access to these files can be extremely

useful in education and development, especially because so many people have cell phone now, and they don’t necessarily have a reliable internet connection. So, Sam is also working on bringing this program to as many people as possible.

According to Sam, PCVs have an amazing advantage in solving important problems in the world today. But, he also recognizes that many people with the skill set and knowledge necessary to solve these problems aren’t spending enough time actually learning about and experiencing these problems. His suggestion? That people with the technical experience go out of their comfort zone and volunteer. Beyond that he also encourages RPCVs who have spent two years working to find innovative solutions and to diversify their skillset as much as possible to enter the professional world. In a society that emphasizes such high levels of specialization, maybe diversifying is actually the better way to solve the pressing issues in the world.



# One Coder's Journey To Use His Skills For Social Good

January 27, 2015

🌐 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Guyana

**M**y husband Craig Dennis started off his career in software development going down the traditional route. But he realized early on he wanted to use his skills for good. He committed to taking the nontraditional path, and though it's taken him to some unexpected places, he has always tried to remain true to it.

Craig's journey proves that having a niche skill and a desire to do social good doesn't mean there's only one job or path out there for you.

## A Vital Lesson Early On

Craig attended college for a while at Arizona State University, but he soon realized the computer classes were dated and that he was studying material he knew wasn't actually happening in the real world. So he dropped out of college and spent a lot of time in Barnes and

Noble reading books and learning from people he worked with.

From there he went on to work for various tech and consulting companies. At one point early on in his career the consulting firm he worked for placed him at a credit card company to consult on workflow.

The credit card firm had Craig sit with a group of women doing data entry to see how he could help them. He wrote some code to automate 80% of what these women were doing. Then he came in one day and the lights were all dark in their area. They no longer had jobs.

"I wasn't happy with that," Craig says. "My boss said—and this sticks in my mind to this day—'You better get used to this feeling because this is your job—to automate people out of their jobs so the bottom line increases.' It was right then I started thinking I needed to find something better to do with my skills."

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Source: <http://www.fastcompany.com/3041387/one-coders-journey-to-use-his-skills-for-social-good>

## Something Better

Craig began to think about the Peace Corps, and it turned out that year the Peace Corps was introducing a technology program. It seemed like a sign to Craig, so he signed up and a year and a half later was stationed in New Amsterdam, Guyana.

In the Peace Corps, Craig worked for a technical institute where he helped build a computer lab and, along with other volunteers, wrote a countrywide curriculum that could be used at the other three technical institutes. He also taught full-time students and working adults.

“I’d never taught before. It was very shoot from the hip,” Craig says. “Watching those kids get it was so cool. These were kids who needed confidence more than any other thing I taught them.”

Craig still keeps in touch with many of his students, some of whom went on to work repairing computers, writing software, and running a successful electronic store. When Craig returned to the States, he knew that staying on this path of social good was important to him.

“I had felt what it means to do fulfilling work and I didn’t want to give it up,” he says. “You spend so much time at work. If you don’t believe in what you’re doing, what’s the point?”

## Coding For Good

Eventually Craig and I moved to New York City when I got a job at Idealist. During our company holiday party, Craig sat next to Idealist founder and executive director Ami Dar, and it turned out he was interviewing Craig without his knowing it.

“I was telling him I had found a place to teach working adults and I was thinking about doing it,” Craig says. “But Ami talked a good game about how if I worked for Idealist, every day I’d be using my code skills for good. The next day he offered me a job. I took it because I knew I could catch up on the tech I’d missed out on while I was in the Peace Corps, while also being fulfilled.”

For seven years Craig worked at Idealist growing the development team and wearing many hats. “It was a good run,” he says.

During a two-month sabbatical, which all Idealist employees are encouraged to take after seven years, Craig and I went to the Philippines where we saw people struggling. “I sat a lot on the beach just thinking about what access to technology could do in a place like this,” he says. “And I kept seeing a quote on all the schools about teachers being the key to the future. It was a sign that I should really teach. It had been seven years and I was still thinking about it.”

While in the Philippines Craig was trying to learn a new coding language, and he signed up for a website full of

online courses called Treehouse. Their mission of wanting to provide affordable, accessible technology to people everywhere lined up with where his heart was, Craig says. When we returned to the United States, Craig found a job opening for a teacher position in their Portland office. He went through a long process of interviews and got the job.

## Leaving One Great Job For Another

Despite his excitement about jumping back into teaching, there was a part of Craig that was hesitant about leaving his comrades at Idealist. “Nothing is ever finished, and there are parts of the code base I knew I was leaving for someone else to struggle with even though I knew they’d eventually get it.”

“But I did a lot of mentoring during my later years at Idealist, and I knew that they all knew I was a teacher and would want this for me,” he says.

To other developers hesitant about taking the leap and using their skills for good, Craig has two words: “Do it.”

“We are needed so badly in that world,” he says. “Take advantage of this time when there are these jobs out there where you can feel good about yourself. If you’re doing stuff you believe is unethical in your heart, you’re part of the problem. Don’t be.”



RAPID DIAGNOSTIC TEST  
COMPONENT.

# Joseph Conrad Brings 3d Technology To Low Resource Health Care

February 19, 2015

By *Cindy Long*

🌐 Region: AF

📍 Post: Zambia

**M**alaria is a major health threat, especially for those in regions of the world without access to advanced health care. But Joseph Conrad '00, a research assistant professor with the Wright Research Group at Vanderbilt University, is part of an international team using 3D printers to research and develop enhanced rapid diagnostic tests (RDT) for the disease.

Similar in function to a home pregnancy test, malaria RDTs are simple devices used to quickly diagnose infection without sophisticated lab facilities. They are developing technologies that improve the sensitivity of existing rapid tests to provide clear diagnosis

of malaria even in the absence of symptomatic infection.

“Existing rapid diagnostic tests are designed to detect the presence of a protein in a small volume of blood,” Conrad explains. “The protein is produced by malaria parasites as they grow, and it’s a specific marker of infection. In individuals with high numbers of parasite in their blood, there is a high concentration of the protein. In individuals with low numbers of parasite in their blood, there isn’t so much protein, and the rapid diagnostic tests have trouble identifying its presence in the small volumes of blood they are designed to assess.”

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Source: <http://www.centre.edu/joseph-conrad-99-brings-3d-technology-low-resource-health-care/>

“Our approach and device use magnetic beads to capture the malaria protein from a relatively larger blood specimen than can be used in an RDT alone,” he continues. “The magnetic beads with the protein attached can then be collected using a strong, external magnet and deposited directly onto a commercially available rapid diagnostic test. The test can then be developed normally. Our device facilitates both the chemical and physical steps in this specimen processing routine. It produces positive test results at much lower levels of malaria protein than a rapid test without enhancement.”

Malaria RDTs are often used to quickly screen for malaria infection, and while they are efficient to use in places where microscopes or DNA testing aren't easily accessible, the rapid tests aren't sensitive enough to detect very low levels of malaria.

In countries like Zambia where malaria control efforts are advancing, individuals with symptomatic (high-level) malaria infection are being successfully identified and treated for the illness. However, with existing tests, individuals with asymptomatic (low-level) disease may be left undiagnosed and can continue to transmit malaria to others. Conrad and other members of his team at Vanderbilt intend to fill this gap by improving the sensitivity of the tried and true malaria RDTs to identify low-level infections.

Their international team is housed within the Vanderbilt-Zambia Network for Global Health Technologies (VZNIGHT), a post-doctoral research and training program. Conrad works closely with a resident researcher, Priscilla Lumano-Mulenga, a VZNIGHT Fellow and a Zambian physician and infectious diseases specialist. Together, using 3D printer technology, these researchers can fast-track device design in advanced laboratories and deploy designs to rural Zambia where they can perform field trials in realistic conditions.

“We believe we're one of the first groups to implement device design and field testing in low resource settings using 3D printing technology,” Conrad says. “Because Nashville doesn't have endemic malaria, our development and field testing teams are separated by long distances and difficult logistical connections. Device design typically uses an iterative ‘design, test, re-design, repeat’ sort of approach. In the case of low resource diagnostic technologies, this often results in devices that work well in nicely appointed laboratories and then fail to perform from the back of a motorcycle in rural areas.

“We don't aim to revolutionize this design paradigm, but the practicalities of work spaces in different hemispheres means that there could be a ton of time between iterative steps. Using 3D printers in both spaces, we

can design and test a device in our Vanderbilt labs as well as print and concurrently test the design in the field in Zambia. Receiving feedback and integrating it into subsequent redesign steps can move at the speed of email rather than the speed of FedEx.”

Malaria isn't the only disease that can be combated with this technology. With funding from the Fogarty International Center at the National Institutes of Health, Conrad is expanding work on this device to include HIV rapid tests for early infant diagnosis. Others are developing applications for rapid Ebola diagnostics. Their work is also supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

“My global health work began as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Zambia where I contributed to a variety of HIV and AIDS education efforts, and I've been fortunate to have opportunities throughout my research training to work in low resource settings from Haiti to China to Zambia. Training in HIV Immunology and epidemiology and global health provide useful context for our ongoing efforts to develop low resource diagnostics. But my academic career in international, biomedical research really has its roots in the Centre College classrooms and offices of Young, Olin and Crouse and the BMB and International Relations courses I took there.”



MIKE BUCKLER TEACHING  
MATHEMATICS.

# Corps to Career: Social entrepreneur uses technology for grassroots change

April 14, 2015

By *Mike Buckler*

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Malawi

**P**ease Corps Malawi was the most influential experience of my life.

It was incredibly hard emotionally, and sometimes physically, but it exposed me to a new reality (one with a lot less artifice and window dressing) and allowed me to confront the truth of developing country life in a very intimate way. The challenge also helped me turn inward and take a deep, honest look at myself and ways that I could improve as a human being. Peace Corps is definitely not an experience for the faint of heart or the

emotionally guarded. It's about facing down fear, overcoming challenges, and finding out who you really are on the inside and as a human actor on this planet.

My development philosophy is definitely informed by what I saw during Peace Corps and, additionally, what I didn't see. I saw problems, but I didn't see things getting better for my community or the communities around me. I lost students and colleagues to treatable diseases; I cringed at the sight of malnourished children and crippled adults.

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**Source:** <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/corps-to-career-social-entrepreneur-uses-technology-for-grassroots-change/>

Yet, among the local people, I also saw a lot of grit, resilience, community spiritedness and intellect. It was clear that these folks were victims of circumstances beyond their control. It was also clear that very few international development decision makers took local people seriously. They were viewed as a problem to solve, not a resource to embrace.

Village X, a social enterprise in Washington, D.C., is our attempt to change the narrative. We created our flagship product – the Village X app – to turn restaurant meals and online shopping into much-needed donations for small-scale, community-led, transparent projects in Africa, starting in Malawi and Ghana, and eventually in the U.S. The app allows users to get a discount, give some savings to a chosen grassroots project and see direct impact through live picture updates provided by recipients, together with Facebook friends.

Consumers experience physiological “highs” from saving and giving. Why not put these two highs together and make everything transparent? Our app is turnkey cause marketing for local restaurants and online retailers interested in providing what customers repeatedly demand but rarely get from corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaigns – transparent impact.

Someone recently described our app as Groupon, Etsy and Kiva rolled into one. Another suggested that we call the app “Giving Social,” referencing D.C. deal company Living Social. While I’m not enamored with these comparisons, I’m flattered that folks think we have a big idea that can scale, touching millions of shoppers, businesses, and villagers and supporting thousands of projects. That’s definitely our goal.

Friends of Village X, our affiliated 501(c)(3) nonprofit, employs all the grassroots development lessons we learned during Peace Corps service. We work only with villages recommended within our trusted grassroots network because we want to collaborate with committed, ambitious recipients. Villages choose, plan, partially finance, implement and document projects, building confidence and capacity, with oversight from Friends of Village X country representatives. Village residents do all the work and reap the lion’s share of benefits. Eighty-five percent of each donation actually reaches the ground for direct project costs.

The most important thing I learned in Peace Corps drives this unconventional approach: people make sense when you take time to understand them. Within the context of their everyday environments, and personal

histories, people generally exhibit behaviors that seem appropriate, if not rational. Taking time to appreciate the unfamiliar in others is hard and involves literally walking in their shoes and studying their environments, including language, culture and history. It’s grueling, but the resulting enlightenment is worth it.

These lessons are literally embedded in the DNA of Village X. We know that grassroots development is hard, but we have helped local people accomplish it successfully and will continue to do so, hopefully on a much larger scale. Our strategy for scaling is to invite input and participation from the Peace Corps network, a community of over 200,000 people with an unrivaled wealth of grassroots development knowledge and expertise. Together, we can put local people first.

As cultural and linguistic specialists who live and work among local people, Peace Corps Volunteers are the special forces of international development. Like military special forces, Peace Corps Volunteers and their insights often lurk in the shadows after service, falling on deaf ears of the status quo. That needs to change. It’s time for Americans directly to experience faraway places and the people who inhabit them, and technology makes this possible. The Village X app is just the beginning.



PCV MIKE FRANK AMONG

COLLEAGUES.

# Through the lens of youth

October 29, 2015

By **Bettina Barillas**

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Botswana
- 👤 Project: Botswana - Viewfinder Botswana

**C**lick. Click. Click. Clickclick. Clickclickclick.

Twenty young people brandishing brand-new digital cameras excitedly snapped pictures. The classroom was filled with *Ooohs!* and *Ahhs!* as the flashes pop-pop-popped away, leaving us, the instructors, with a vague feeling of being hounded by paparazzi. But instead of being at a red carpet gala, we were in a small village in Botswana teaching photography.

Our project, Viewfinder Botswana, seeks to give young people a voice to talk about issues that *they* care about. By creating powerful images, youth can help drive the discussion of decision makers in their communities... and make their villages better places in the process.

Although youth are the hardest hit when it comes to social challenges such as poverty, substance abuse and unemployment, they don't have an outlet to talk about these issues at the community level. Through our project, we empower our young photographers to drive the conversation around the issues that are important to them.

Through funding from the U.S. Embassy in Botswana, my fellow Peace Corps Volunteers Mike Frank and Maitham Basha-Agha and I train young people in basic camera handling, composition and ethics. Using loaned cameras, the youth then produce a portfolio of five images addressing a social challenge that they have seen in their village.

Tlotlo Bannyaditse—from Thamaga, Botswana—chose to photograph the impact

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**Source:** <https://web.archive.org/web/20160101160855/http://passport.peacecorps.gov/2015/10/29/through-the-lens-of-youth-photography-for-social-change/>

of alcohol abuse on the young men in his village. In his photo, four young men are seen at a *shabeen* (a traditional bar) sharing a beverage called 'Power.' The drink's name comes from the strong effect of its main ingredient: battery acid. The beverage is so strong it melts through plastic cups. The youth in his photo use a glass mayonnaise jar. With [34.1 percent](#) of youth in Botswana between the ages of 15-24 seeking work, Tlotlo sees that young people lack opportunity. Botswana is a land known for its plentiful diamonds and wildlife, but its most important resource—the youth—are often overlooked.

When Tlotlo's photo was shared with traditional and government leaders, they expressed surprise at the youth's hopelessness—one chief did not even know the drink 'Power' existed in his community.

In the three villages where Viewfinder Botswana has run so far, youth have documented social challenges such as unemployment, substance abuse, lack of reliable public transportation,

single mothers and abandoned buildings used as places for crimes. Youth have also used the final project as an opportunity to talk about the things they are proud of in their communities. Said one Viewfinder graduate, "I chose to photograph young people in small businesses because I want people to know that we in Molepolole village try by all means to take ourselves out of poverty."

Lead facilitators and PCVs Mike and Maitham have learned much about their country of service as well! "Many things that I greatly understood were so greatly expanded by discussing students' photographs with them," Mike said. "I have gained a deeper respect for the people of Botswana through Viewfinder."

After 20 hours of classroom time and shooting, these images are displayed at a community gallery and community leaders are invited to begin a conversation on the documented social issues. To date, the galleries have been attended by tribal chiefs, ministers of parliament, representatives from the

U.S. Embassy Gaborone, Botswana, social workers, professional counselors, teachers and international social organizations.

The program has gained many fans, including U.S. Ambassador to Botswana Earl Miller. Attending a gallery showing in Molepolole, he spoke to the huge benefits of using photography "as a flexible tool that crosses cultural and linguistic barriers... It is an accessible way to describe realities, communicate perspectives, and raise awareness of social and global issues... By empowering youth to discuss challenges in their communities, [Viewfinder Botswana] permits leaders to learn more about issues important to youth."

With the recent success of the project, the Viewfinder team hopes to take the programming across Botswana to other villages with Peace Corps Volunteers. If a picture is worth 1,000 words, imagine the impact of more than 100 PCVs training youth in their villages to share their voices across the country through photography.



# SHAPE Club was asked to perform our two malaria songs at the local radio station

November 5, 2015

📍 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Uganda

**S**HAPE Club was asked to perform our two malaria songs at the local radio station. The first is our “STOMP Out Malaria” song in 3 languages and the second is my “Malaria Cups Song,” which has been many hours of learning. It was the first time seeing a radio station, being in a recording studio, and being on the radio for everyone there. These two songs will be kept and used as radio plugs throughout the weeks, months, and years to come AND the kids will be starting a “Buzz about Malaria” radio show. We also plan to distribute these songs and PSAs to the bus stations, movie

halls, and restaurants so that they can be incorporated into the all-day music that already exists.

This is all really exciting news for SHAPE Club and seeing these boys and girls just in awe of their experience today was so worth the exhausted of this year. What I find myself reflecting on right now is the transformation in my kids these past months. SHAPE Club started as a very shy P6 girl and a scatterbrained yet energetic little boy (Jeremy) until 43 members joined, and probably only because we mentioned playing football (#grassrootsoccer).

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Source: <http://sabeoh.tumblr.com/post/132724956507/shape-club-was-asked-to-perform-our-two-malaria>

# Kicking off Teacher Technology Training with the Peace Corps Volunteers in Chuuk

November 12, 2015

*By Laura Hosman*

 Region: IAP  
 Post: Micronesia  
 Project: Micronesia - SolarSPELL

A very exciting new chapter for the PISCES Project began last week when we met with three Peace Corps volunteers located in Chuuk, FSM. Pictured below, from left, are Ben Walter, Melody Alvarez, and Elana Meitler, who will be leading teacher training in technology use at the Chuuk Lagoon schools where they are stationed. Also pictured are Bruce Baikie and TR Mori, PISCES team leaders. It was fantastic to see them again and hear about the adventures they've had since we'd last seen them in March, as well as to hear about some of the exciting initiatives they've spearheaded in conjunction with the Department of Education—including working together on developing and establishing a repository of lesson plans for teachers at the state-wide level.

After catching up with them, we were eager to give them the training syllabus that our team (see the [previous post](#)) had written over the

past semester, with 10 suggested lesson plans for teaching first-time technology users. We're eager for their feedback on what was useful and what can be improved in the next edition.

We next showed them the solar chargers we had brought for Melody and Elana, as their schools currently do not have electricity. We were very excited to have found these [Ready Set Solar kits](#), from Fenix International, as they provide an affordable, easy-to-use charging solution for tablets, as well as for mobile phones, which will be stationed at the schools on Romanum and Fefen islands, respectively.

We held a solar set-up training session outside of the iSolutions cyber-café, which was simple, straightforward, and attracted the attention of passers-by (as well as one curious canine!)

The next day, we had a training session on using the tablets, and on the contents of the of the educational server we had set up, which contains a repository of educational materials,

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**Source:** <https://ict4dviewsfromthefield.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/kicking-off-teacher-technology-training-with-the-peace-corps-volunteers-in-chuuk/>

based on the [RACHEL server](#), but localized for Micronesia in much of its content. This server's content will be available via a high-speed intranet that is already set up at the iSolutions cyber-café, and will soon be available to the schools at which the Peace Corps volunteers are stationed, once the paperwork is finalized with Telecom FSM and the long-distance Wi-Fi links can be established by the PISCES team.

We are so excited for this opportunity to be working together with the Peace Corps and for the possibility to have locally-based teacher-trainers at these island schools. We've asked Melody, Elana, and Ben to weigh in on whether the tablets are the desirable form factor, or whether ruggedized laptops would be preferable moving forward, as we plan to set up computer labs at their schools in the future. However, since I am of the opinion that the most

important success factor for computers-in-the-schools initiatives are the teachers' attitudes towards and use of the technology, it is really wonderful that we can start off this initiative with teacher training.

We are very eager for the school year to start in a few weeks, and to hear from the Peace Corps volunteers how things are going!





EXCITEMENT IN THESE 14  
YOUNGSTERS!

# Spotting the Space Station with my village

November 23, 2015

By *David Kurtz*

- Region: IAP
- Post: Eastern Caribbean
- Project: Eastern Caribbean - STEM Education

**T**he first few years of my federal career in the 1980's were spent at NASA headquarters working for the Business Management Division of the newly initiated Space Station

During those early “design phase” days, I looked forward to the future when the Space Station would actually be up in orbit, with astronauts on board carrying out interesting science experiments in zero gravity.

Little did I know that three decades later I would be a Peace Corps Volunteer on a tropical island, watching the Space Station go over my head, along with about 15 screaming children from my village.

It had been a good week for astronomical events in my village. Sunday night was a beautiful lunar eclipse, Monday night had a big, bright, nearly full moon, and Tuesday night was the first time since my arrival that the Space Station—now large enough to be the second brightest object in the night sky (after the moon, of course)—passed over top of Dominica. There have been a few passes overhead in the early morning hours, but I was waiting for an evening transit to invite my students to watch with me. Plus, I told many of the village residents to watch for it as well. It turned out to be a memorable event for all who saw it!

Anyone can go to [NASA's website and sign up](#) to receive email notifications when the Space

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/spotting-the-space-station-with-my-village/>

Station will be passing over your location. I often used the site back in West Virginia to watch the Space Station go by. After my arrival on Dominica, I was pleased to find out that this NASA service was not just limited to locations in the U.S., but also has many international locations. The only city listed for Dominica was the capital, Roseau, but I figured my village was close enough so that both the timing and directional information that NASA provides would be close enough.

I announced at school that I would be down at the playing field that night to see the space station, and anyone who wanted to join me would be welcome. The station was scheduled to pass overhead between 6:51 and 6:55 p.m. Some students said they would watch from their own homes, but others said they would join me.

As it grew darker, youngsters began joining me at the playing field next to our little primary school (which has

a total enrollment of 30 students). At first, we counted stars as they appeared, and talked about the Space Station and what they could expect (“No, the astronauts will not be able to look down and see you waving at them”). While we were waiting for the designated time to come, I tried taking a picture of my “Space Station crew” (a few more came after the picture below was taken). It didn’t come out all that well in the darkness, but I loved seeing so many youngsters who were interested enough to join me that night.

We were all eagerly counting down the minutes until 6:51. There were at least 15 of us, and maybe even a couple more. I was a bit worried when it did not immediately appear exactly at 6:51, but I should have realized that the mountains behind us would make its arrival a bit later. Eventually, one of the students noticed it moving up from behind the mountain. All the students started screaming with glee as this big,

bright “star” silently moved across the night sky. (I think the students were yelling so loud because they wanted the astronauts to hear them!)

It turns out that many folks in the village heard their screams from the playing field, which alerted them that the special event I had earlier described to them was now taking place. Although it hurt my ears at the time, I enjoyed hearing their enthusiastic cheering as it flew overhead (the next day, one of the villagers who lives on top of the mountain asked me about all the screaming they had heard last night— apparently our screams reached clear to the top of the village!).

It was good to capture their imaginations about the vastness of space, and the universe beyond the confines of our little village. Hopefully we can do this again someday, but eventually the novelty will wear off. The first time is usually the best time, and that night was a wonderful experience!



# Fighting malaria with a cell phone - there's an app for that - Peace Corps Senegal

December 18, 2015

By *Jensen Daniel*

- Region: AF
- Post: Senegal
- Project: Senegal - Malaria Data Collection

Since its inception in 2012, the active approach to community-based malaria management PECADOM+ (Prise en Charge à Domicile) has been scaled up and implemented in three districts of Senegal. The program will expand to districts in the Kolda region of Senegal this year, and is also being replicated in other African countries like Togo, Benin, and Madagascar. Results have been extremely promising: people who face barriers to receiving care are being treated during transmission season, and

reports show a marked decrease in severe malaria cases.

As the program evolves, old problems persist, and new ones arise. In her experience with the PECADOM+ program in 2014, PC Senegal Health volunteer Sarah Mollenkopf saw that various issues were preventing the PECADOM agents (DSDOMs) from effectively collecting data on health-related behaviors and stock of anti-malarial drugs. Using DiMagi's CommCare platform, she created a smartphone application she calls PECADOM+ Mobile.

INTRODUCES THE MOBILE APP TO DSDOMS FOR USE WITH BOTH THE PASSIVE PECADOM PROGRAM AS WELL AS THE ACTIVE PECADOM+ MODEL.

Source: <http://peacecorpssenegal.org/2015/05/19/fighting-malaria-with-a-cell-phone-theres-an-app-for-that/>



# Biolite

December 27, 2015

🌐 Region: AF

📍 Post: Malawi

**B**IOLITE x  
P E A C E  
C O R P S //  
“Biolite is the best  
Christmas present  
ever, and my most  
valued possession  
as a Peace Corps  
Volunteer in rural  
Malawi. I can make  
my own morning  
fuel in five minutes,  
and I use a fraction  
of the time, sweat,  
and firewood I  
'wood' otherwise  
use cooking on a  
traditional mbaula  
stove. It also helps  
my case as I advo-  
cate for improved  
natural resource  
management in  
my community. It's  
a (bio)life saver!”  
Thanks @arman-  
sfield for sharing  
how you bring  
#energyeverywhere

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN  
MALAWI USING HER BIOLITE.

Source: [https://www.instagram.com/p/\\*0kexdvkw-/](https://www.instagram.com/p/*0kexdvkw-/)



# Managing Stock Levels with SMS Solution Aids Fight Against Malaria

January 25, 2016

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Senegal
- 🔗 Project: Senegal - Malaria Smartphones

In the fight against malaria, Senegal has been a leader in West Africa in testing new strategies and implementing innovative solutions that has resulted in a marked decrease in malaria burden. However, one issue constantly plaguing the efforts of program administrators and critically restricting the positive potential of these programs has been the struggle to manage stock levels and avoid stock outs of key materials. Without prophylactic drugs and bed nets, the most vulnerable populations cannot be protected from getting malaria. And without reliable access to medications, those who get malaria cannot be treated.

In a growing partnership between [PNLP](#),

[Dimagi](#), and [Peace Corps](#), seven volunteers assisted during the training of regional, district and health post officials for the pilot deployment of a stock management application designed by Dimagi in the District of Kolda. Chief Health Post Nurses will use this application, [CommCare Supply](#), on simple feature phones to send a weekly SMS reporting the level of stock of key malaria medications and diagnostic tests. The information from the messages will be summarized and analyzed automatically in a series of online reports that will be accessible by program administrators at all levels of the health system. This rapid system of reporting aims to improve the district's ability to anticipate or resolve stock issues.

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Source: <http://www.dimagi.com/blog/from-peace-corps-senegal-managing-stock-levels-with-sms-solution-aids-fight-against-malaria/>

Throughout the next year, Peace Corps Volunteers will continue to provide technical support on the

ground for application use and data access and assist in information gathering to evaluate the program's value

as it compares to other stock reporting systems already in place.



# The Bed Net Surveillance Program - Sarah in Mada

January 25, 2016

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Madagascar  
👤 Project: Madagascar - Malaria Data Collection

A couple weeks ago I attended a training in Tana (the capital city, Antananarivo), for Peace Corps Madagascar's new Bed Net Surveillance Program. As part of a malaria initiative, Peace Corps Mada is embarking on a new project that uses [Open Street Map \(OSM\)](#) technology to map many of our sites and then use that data to geographically view and analyze the usage of bed nets. OSM, for those who don't know, is similar to Google maps, but it is far more detailed, and is open source, so anyone can add and edit features. This is perfect for our use because there are groups who can crowdsource and help us map our sites from all over the world. Crowdsourcing is work done by groups of people who get together and map (and have mappyhours). We also had the help of students from home, as well as friends and family. By sending out the links to our specific tasks and sites, people were able to help make our base layer maps, which are satellite images with added features, such as buildings, roads, rivers, and their uses. In the three weeks between finding my site on OSM and attending the training, my site was almost entirely mapped! Thanks to the

help of others, most of us volunteers only had to mark a few things, mostly labeling the CSBs, churches, schools, communes, markets, and things that only we would be able to do.

The next step is to print out the maps and take them back to site, so we can use them to collaborate with our ACs and other community members to track health phenomena, but bed net usage in this case. Volunteers will be conducting surveys to create coverage maps, meaning they will be surveying to see who uses and does not use bed nets. A note on bed nets—during this September through November, the largest bed net distribution in Madagascar's history took place, with 10.5 million nets given out in 92 of the 113 districts. After lots of census taking and mapping, the next phase of the project will be BCC, which is behavior change communication, one of the main aspects of what we aim to do as PCVs. After lots of work with our community members and CHWs, during which we will target the households, another survey will be taken to see what impact the BCC had, and another map will be made. This project will take up a good amount of time, and is expected to last through September or October of 2016.

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Source: <https://strawbqueen.wordpress.com/2015/12/18/the-bed-net-surveillance-program/>

# Engineers Week + Girls Day!

February 25, 2016

By *Dominique Gebru*

🌐 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Jamaica

“Miss, did you mean to say ‘she’? Your doctor was a woman?”

The other day, I was talking with a group of students and explained to them that I had made a visit to the doctor. One of them (a boy) was confused when I said that my doctor was a female. There were two Grade 3 girls standing with us, and as I told the boy that your gender has nothing to do with the type of career you have, that “a woman can be a doctor just in the same way that a man can,” the girls chimed in, “and a man can be a nurse too!” The boy, oblivious to any embarrassment I felt for him, eagerly replied, “oh yes! I’ve met a man nurse already!”

Gender stereotypes disproportionately impact girls and women, particularly when it comes to career choice. Thankfully, both here and in the US, this is changing, but we still have a long way to go.

This week is celebrated as Engineers Week, and February 25th is extra-celebrated as Girls Day! Girl Day is a special day devoted to showing girls the creative side of engineering and inspiring them to pursue engineering and STEM career paths.

Currently in the US, only 12% of professional engineers are women. Teza Technologies, a US-based company, is working to change this. Check out their impressive (and shocking) infographic below:

School-aged girls are excelling in math and science, but more than half say they don’t consider engineering or STEM professions for their future careers. [Teza Technologies CEO Misha Malyshev](#), works with nonprofits to reverse this trend and organize programs that teach students, especially young women, hands-on applications of science, technology, engineering and math. Girl Day takes place on February 25th and is an opportunity to teach girls about the difference they can make in the world as an engineer or STEM professional.

The status quo won’t ever change if we do nothing. I’m taking advantage of my interactions with young girls and boys at school to promote gender equality through conversations like the one I had with those Grade 3 children about doctors and nurses. No one should ever be told that they can’t pursue a profession (or even school subject) that interests them because of their gender.

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Source: <https://twoyearsponderock.wordpress.com/2016/02/25/engineers-week-girls-day/>



LET GIRLS LEARN AT ASHESI  
UNIVERSITY EVENT.

# IBM and Peace Corps partner with Ashesi in Let Girls Learn Initiative

March 14, 2016

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Ghana

The [Corporate Service Corps \(CSC\)](#) team from [IBM](#) in partnership with the [Peace Corps](#) visited Ashesi to lead a workshop on women empowerment under the [Let Girls Learn](#) initiative. Other partners included [Pyxera Global](#), [Techaide](#) and the Ministry of Gender and Social Protection.

According to the Let Girls Learn initiative, 62 million girls around the world are not in school, and the chance to get into school becomes harder as they get older. Started by Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the United States, the initiative is to help expand access to education for girls and remove barriers that make

it impossible for them to attend school. This workshop at Ashesi marked the first [collaboration](#) between IBM and Peace Corps in support of Let Girls Learn.

Girls from various junior and senior high schools attended the workshop alongside students from Ashesi who acted as co-facilitators. In her opening address, Angelina Kyeremanten-Jimoh, Country Manager of IBM, shared her growth and journey to becoming a top executive at IBM, encouraging the girls to be confident as women and to work hard and excel in school.

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Source: <http://www.ashesi.edu.gh/stories-and-events/2154-ibm-and-peace-corps-partner-with-ashesi-in-let-girls-learn-initiatve.html>



IBM, PEACE CORPS, AND ASHESI UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANTS.

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# Girls are Powerful and Can Change the World

March 14, 2016

By *Trisha Chang*

**Region:** AF

📍 Post: Uganda

👤 Project: Uganda - Nakaseke IT Camp

**T**hird-year Peace Corps Volunteer Leader Trisha Chang sat down with youth club leader Josephine N. to talk about her personal transformation through participating in Peace Corps camps and clubs programs.

When I sat down with Josephine on a Friday afternoon, she had just come from a weekly meeting with her girls group in a central Ugandan village. She started the group to pass on the lessons and skills she has acquired through six years of participation in Peace Corps Uganda leadership and women's empowerment programs.

Josephine's motivation to pay it forward comes as she sees so many girls in her community without access to support or positive role models. A sentiment Josephine expressed several times throughout our meeting: "Everyone was born to be everyone." In other words, all of us are born with the potential to be anything and everything we want to be, but we need support to get there.

Listening to Josephine tell her story, I was struck by her optimism and tenacity, and equally, by the appreciation she has for the Peace Corps Uganda family.

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**Source:** <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/girls-are-powerful-and-can-change-the-world/>

Josephine's story is one so intertwined with Peace Corps Volunteers, and so embraces the vision of Peace Corps Uganda's Girls Leading Our World (GLOW) camp program, it is hard to tell where one starts and the other begins. She began her relationship with Peace Corps Volunteers in 2009, when she was nominated by Liz K., a Peace Corps Volunteer at her secondary school, to attend her first GLOW camp. That week changed her life, as Josephine describes, by showing her "that girls are really great... they are powerful and can change the world. Before Peace Corps I never knew my worth, I never knew how important my voice was, I never knew that I could be part of change in my community... I never really understood that youth were the leaders of tomorrow."

Since then, with the support of many Peace Corps Volunteers, she has attended two additional GLOW camps, one GirlTech camp to support

women in science and technology, and was a lead youth facilitator throughout Peace Corps Uganda's Youth Technical Trainings in April 2015.

Engaging participants like Josephine on an ongoing basis reflects Peace Corps Uganda's long-term involvement model for youth development. Attending a local camp hosted by Volunteer and local partners is one entry point for youth to be brought into a system that aims not just to teach skills, but to provide ongoing opportunities for youth to develop confidence and practice leadership skills over time. Peace Corps Uganda, and Peace Corps more broadly, does not prescribe to one-size-fits-all.

For example in 2013, Josephine and fellow camp GLOW alum worked with their local Peace Corps Volunteer John V. to inspire girls in village schools in their area to take on leadership roles by presenting lessons they learned from camp, expanding

the reach far beyond the original goal. Through John's support and with the interactive and customizable camp curriculum, the girls had many opportunities to practice engaging with local youth and communities.

By October of 2015, Josephine had the confidence and leadership skills to start her own community-based organization called YIELD, "Youth in Empowerment and Leadership Development." YIELD works through local schools to empower young people, like its founder, to better understand health issues like HIV/AIDs and malaria, as well as take on leadership roles in their community. As Josephine says, "I have not to wait for people, or for my parents to wait for me."

Through her tenacity and the support of Peace Corps Uganda's youth programs, she is already part of the change and a shining example that youth are not just leaders of tomorrow, they are leaders of today.



# Preserving ancient languages with new technology

March 30, 2016

By Zach Rosen

🌐 Region: AF

📍 Post: Benin

**T**ayiri panna weima nà hùàga, ííó?  
*Nateni forms sentences like bowls, correct?*

More than anything, it's the laughter of my Nateni informant, Hillaire SABI, and the emphatic clapping of his hand on my back that lets me know that I'm finally starting to understand not just basic Nateni vocabulary but some of the profound differences in how the Natemba both look at the world and use language to frame that worldview.

Language acquisition, even in European languages similar to English, can be one of the most difficult challenges a Volunteer will face during their service. To truly speak in another

language, a Volunteer needs not so much to let go of their own culture and worldview so much as learn how to reposition themselves in the frame of their host community's social consciousness. If German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was correct in saying that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world," then the act of learning a new language is the tantamount to cartography during the age of exploration — an exercise in fear, stomach maladies and retracing the very boundaries of the world we see ourselves existing in. In a word: the singularly most daunting task you're going to face during your community integration.

Despite encouragement from the Peace

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Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160330182115/http://passport.peacecorps.gov/2016/03/30/preserving-ancient-languages-with-new-technology/>

Corps to acquire not just the national language of a Volunteer's host country but to concentrate on the acquisition of local languages as well, many Volunteers do not necessarily have the resources — or sometimes even a clear framework — to assist them in leaving the safe shores of English. This becomes an even greater issue in a country like Benin, in West Africa, where there are 55 recognized languages, and innumerable dialects. Peace Corps simply does not have the means to develop resources for every linguistic community in the country. However, with the modern omnipresence of technology like smartphones in our lives, even at post, perhaps Peace Corps doesn't need to.

It was this idea in mind that I initially began working on the development of an Android app that we could use to create a national local language database here in Benin. Several weeks and innumerable cups of coffee later, *BLA!* was officially launched in Benin.

The Benin Language Acquisitor app for AndroidOS (or *BLA!* for short) is just one response to the call for new linguistic resource development, using technology as the means to do so. The application allows users to collect Peace Corps-related vocabulary in their community, offline, and then upload that data to a cloud

database when in range of either cellular data service or Wi-Fi later on. My team's goal is to create a database of each unique local language, cross-referenced by Volunteers' posts (so as to track dialectical differences, as well), all while working with the local language tutors and informants in the host community. From there, that database can be used to create dialect-specific language resources and even be used to develop new apps that Americans can use at home to learn some of the many beautiful languages spoken here in Benin.

Perhaps more importantly, however, time is running out to collect data on these languages at all.

Of the 7,000 known languages spoken in the world, some estimates show that by 2100 [nearly half](#) of these languages will no longer be spoken — will go extinct. To understand the gravity of this, consider waking up one morning to the realization that English is no longer spoken — and never will be again — by your neighbors, by your friends or even by your children. Many languages, like Anii — a language unique to the community around the city of Bassila here in Benin — are likely to go the way of high school Latin far sooner than that, as aging populations continue to pass away without their offspring learning

their ancestral languages or having sufficient means to record them.

Why is this important? Because to build an app like *BLA!* is actually not that difficult given adequate Internet resources and enough dark roast. This same project can be easily duplicated in, or adapted to (thanks to its simple coding), any other Peace Corps country in the world, making us Volunteers uniquely capable of creating and deploying similar language preservation projects across the globe.

We can, with technology as it is, start to record these languages before it's too late.

Considering how closely linked a language is to a culture's accepted psychology and cosmology (learning about and disseminating information about these two being the prime objective in all third goal activities), the fact that we can deploy software-based tools like *BLA!* is sufficient enough inspiration to do it.

Zach Rosen is a currently serving TEFL Volunteer and linguistics nerd in Benin, West Africa. His primary assignments include teaching 6th and 7th grade equivalent English at a rural CEG in the Atacora Department of the country, and working with Beninese teachers to improve their English proficiency and teaching practices.\*



# Benefits of design thinking for ICT4D

April 18, 2016

By *Brenna Grey Mickey*

🌐 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Vanuatu

**O**n the walk to my first day of work in Vanuatu I wasn't quite sure what to expect. When I went to meet my future coworkers, no one was in the office. I had been assigned to work in the Ministry of Youth and Sports Development as a web design and development consultant through the Peace Corps Response Program, assisting in the project planning, implementation phase and being the technical liaison between my office and the Office of the Chief of Information.

Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) is the leverage of communication technologies in aim to bridge the digital divide. ICT4D is remarkable

in its definition, meant to serve as the great equalizer, giving a voice to people across the world, despite geographical location or monetary status, creating communication by finding solutions for issues of accessibility and affordability.

Design thinking is a type of problem solving for projects brings a flexible, iterative approach to clients' needs, with the end result being a user focused solution. Design thinking is essential in the ICT4D world while leveraging initiatives and developing useful products, for people who would benefit from it the most.

Imagine giving primary school children on a remote island in the South Pacific access to

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**Source:** <https://medium.com/volunteering-in-vanuatu/benefits-of-design-thinking-for-ict4d-2741df58e32b#.qbmh39bs0>

online courses to learn English, or how having access to accurate weather forecasts could benefit a fisherman's business in Albania. Imagine a classroom full of girls being mentored by local professionals and international specialists, learning to code and design, bridging the gender gap in the tech field because of the necessity for a web presence for foreign aid. So often we take for granted the amount of information we have at our finger tips, as our mobile devices have essentially become extensions of our bodies.

## Having people on your team with different backgrounds can only make the product stronger

As an American, I have been raised in an extremely technologically and socioeconomically advanced society. I grew up with privileges like running water inside of my home, reliable transportation and medical care, a microwave, internet access, electricity, public schools; honestly without thinking about life without them. Most of my coworkers grew up on small, remote islands, only accessible by boat or plane. They had limited access to drinking water, a drop toilet or no toilet at all, outside living spaces, and access to public education only through the 8th grade.

My third day of work, we had a finalized site map and requirements document near finalized in two days, for not one website, but for three. The board members and stake holders were all eager to give their input in an activity that could loosely be described as card sorting. While my technical skills helped frame the process of the website, what was even more important was the content that we were going to be providing the user.

Most people accessing these sites will be doing so through their smart phones, on islands similar to where my coworkers grew up. What would someone accessing the website from a 3G network on their smartphone want to find out? This is the point in which I realized how our backgrounds were going to in fact produce a stronger product than if an entire team of outside consultants were hired. This is one of the biggest benefits in my mind that the Peace Corps helps facilitate with goal one: To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women, allowing for cross cultural coexisting in the workplace.

## Mobile first isn't an option, it's a necessity

Mobile design in ICT4D should never be treated as an option. It is estimated there will be [6.2 billion smartphone users](#) worldwide by 2020. This is 70% of the world's population using internet ready devices in less than 5 years. It is also estimated that mobile traffic will account for 80% of all internet access by this time, making the necessity for mobile products undeniable. While laptop or desktop computers are expensive and usually just in offices in Vanuatu, most families have access to at least one smart device, making the need for a mobile-friendly design a high priority.

This isn't a new revolution in the ICT4D world. Mark Zuckerberg launched Internet.org or Facebook's 'free basics' package last year with the goal of "bringing internet access and the benefits of connectivity to the two-thirds of the world that doesn't have them." Your phone now comes with the Facebook app and Facebook Message app in 37 countries across the world, you can then message and

surf these apps with no data charge on whatever network you're accessing.

I've personally benefitted from this while living in Vanuatu, which is one of the countries that currently are involved with this program. I keep a phone with the specific service provider only for free, direct access to my friends and family across the world. This is quite literally making the world more accessible to the ni-Vanuatu people and visitors of their beautiful country, making global communication not only a reality, but free of expense.

## Not a user, but a human

Too often it is easy to throw around the widely accepted idea of user-focused design and taking away the humanistic aspect of who is going to be using the product. The word user to me makes it seem like the person only exists to use the product we're creating and doesn't take in to consideration the millions of other factors of their humanity. When designing a website or app, in the back of my head I always am thinking "would my mom be able to figure this out?" Too often we lose sight of the ones creating the experiences as the experts and how most of the users of the products will not necessarily understand what a hamburger menu on a mobile device would be used for or why it is so important to have intuitive interaction touch points.

This is even more important in ICT4D, taking in to consideration the limitations and environmental differences for the people using your launched product. While Wi-Fi is available in businesses and private residences in developed countries, most people accessing the internet in developing countries will typically use it from a 3G network.

# Touchscreens touch lives in Benin

April 26, 2016

By *Evan Fowler, Benjamin Lavin, and Jake Meyers*

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: Benin
- 👤 Project: Benin - CommCare App

Over the past few months, Benjamin Lavin and I have built a mobile app that tracks real, useful data as part of our work as Community Economic Development Volunteers in Benin. Peace Corps Benin Volunteers and our community partners are now using mobile technology to conduct standardized surveys about bed net coverage in our villages, asking community members to sign with their fingers on smartphones as they pick up their new nets, and tracking the demographics of the people sleeping under the nets that Peace Corps Benin has distributed. All of this information is automatically compiled in spreadsheets and easily accessible to project members.

In September, I was halfway through a long day at the Stomp Out Malaria Boot Camp training, and my energy was starting to flag. But as I listened to Dimagi's Claire Cravero (an RPCV) describe the app-building platform CommCare, my fatigue melted away. I left boot camp with a deeper understanding of the potential of mobile technology and the confidence that Dimagi staff would provide support if and when I decided to build an app.

Although I had never built an app before, and in fact had just purchased my first smartphone

a couple of months before, I left Stomp feeling empowered to build an app. I had seen the user-friendly interface and knew that I could learn the basics with CommCare's online tutorial specifically tailored to Peace Corps Volunteers. CommCare provides an exciting way to collect data (which is an oxymoron in my book).

I started thinking about where an app might be useful in Benin. What data is really pertinent to our communities, donors and Peace Corps itself? Peace Corps Volunteers in Benin are exceptionally well-placed to find gaps in bed net coverage and distribute nets to fill those gaps. Roughly every three years, the Beninese government, with the support of several international partners including USAID, distributes nets to all of the households in Benin. Inevitably, there are people who are missed in these large distributions, like nomadic groups, orphans and students who live away from home. Finding these people is relatively easy for Peace Corps Volunteers and their work partners. The Programme National de Lutte contre le Paludisme (an initiative of the Beninese government, supported through PMI), provided the nets that Peace Corps Benin is distributing and has asked for information regarding missed populations so they can be more comprehensive in

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/touchscreens-touch-lives-in-benin/>

the next national distribution. Peace Corps Volunteers are also uniquely suited to collect information on bed net utilization.

Until February 2016, this entire data collection process was paper-based. Paperwork is bulky, difficult to decipher due to illegible handwriting and, if left sitting in a corner for too long, can become a home to mouse nests and spiders. The documentation piece of bed net distributions was a barrier to Volunteers who, like most people, would rather avoid paperwork when possible. Data collected via paper also has to be typed manually into spreadsheets for analysis, a time-consuming and inefficient process.

It became clear that a CommCare app to capture the data from the bed net distribution process would be useful to Peace Corps, donors and the Beninese population. I approached our Malaria Program Peace Corps Volunteer Leader, Hannah Eisen, with my idea. Benjamin Lavin, the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer for the Benin Against Malaria Committee, also signed on to the project. Together, we made a plan to collect all of the data previously captured through paperwork in a streamlined application built on the CommCare platform.

The app started as a plan on paper and slowly grew into a functional app in English. Translation to French took some time, as we had to make sure the language was clear and easy to understand even for someone with only a middle school education. After several iterations of the app that integrated input from Peace Corps' Beninese staff, we were ready to test. Kelli Schmitz, a rural community health Volunteer, field-tested the app in her community. Her work partners' education levels ranged from college to middle school. With a tablet in

hand, they administered surveys to 60 households and distributed 132 nets, returning with valuable feedback from the field.

After incorporating their suggestions on wording and ease-of-use, we moved forward with our plan for training Volunteers and their work partners on how to use the app. We made a guide on how to use the application in both French and English with plenty of visuals. Peace Corps' Malaria Initiative hosted two bed net distribution seminars during which Volunteers and their work partners learned the app and practiced their survey skills. By the end of these short trainings, everyone felt confident using the app and that they felt that they could use it for a distribution in their community. The most popular feature, especially among work partners, was the signature capture. People's faces lit up as they watched their finger leave a mark on the screen.

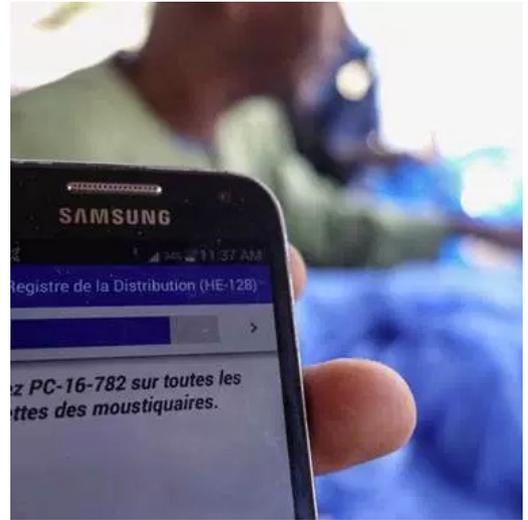
All of the volunteers who completed the training plan to complete a bed net distribution using the app before they close their service. One Volunteer has already surveyed an entire Fulani camp. The Fulani are a nomadic ethnic group found in Benin and other regions in Africa. It took him two days to survey 150 households, with the average survey taking 2 minutes 37 seconds to complete. As soon as he had synced his phone, our Bed Net Officer could see how many nets he would need to distribute and start working on the logistics of moving the nets to the region.

The Benin Against Malaria committee welcomed new members in March. Benjamin and I trained four people on how to control and steer the Bed Net Distribution Application and discussed future possibilities (behavior change communication through diagrams and

videos that are integrated in the app, for example). We also went over how to collect and disseminate the data so it's most useful. There is a five-month overlap between when these officers were trained and when Benjamin and I will finish our Peace Corps service, so there is time for a complete transfer of knowledge as well as space for collaboration. We envision this app will be sustainable for years to come, growing and shifting as data collection needs change. CommCare runs on any Android device and PC Benin is procuring 20 Android phones for the malaria program, to be made available to Volunteers as they use the app.

Our bed net distribution app has been published on the CommCare exchange [here](#). Anyone can download it and make changes so that it fits their own country's needs. The PC Benin team hopes that this tool is useful in other countries and can help facilitate the distribution of treated mosquito nets.

*Benjamin Lavin and Evan Fowler are a team of Community Economic Development volunteers based in southern Benin. Benjamin is a New Yorker who studied economics and statistics at Macalester College and currently works with a trash collection service, trains womens' groups on food preservation, and does monitoring, reporting and evaluation for the Benin Against Malaria Committee. Evan, who is from Louisville, graduated from American University with a degree in international relations and focuses her efforts in Benin on teaching business skills to apprentices and working with gender-equality programs. At the close of their service in September, Benjamin aspires to continue to work in international development while Evan will pursue a career in industrial design.*





SMART SISTAS IS AN INNOVATIVE  
NEW CAMP FOR NI-VANUATU  
GIRLS AGES NINE TO 14.

# Vanuatu's Smart Sistas celebrate International Girls in ICT Day!

April 27, 2016

By *Brenna Grey Mickey*

📍 Post: Vanuatu

🌐 Region: IAP

**S**MART Sistas is an innovative new camp that brings together ni-Vanuatu girls ages nine to 14 to attend sessions on everything from leadership skills and girls' empowerment to technology for development.

This May, Volunteers Laura Loveland and Grace Whitmore, along with Peace Corps Vanuatu staff and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), will host the first ever Sistas Mastering Advanced Real Technology (SMART) Sistas Information and Communications Technology (ICT) camp.

After starting a technology committee in 2014, Volunteers realized that adolescent girls throughout Vanuatu needed to be included

in the country's burgeoning ICT market, as women—especially in rural areas—were historically underrepresented in the technology and innovation space.

Grace, Laura, and others wanted to create a supportive and fun environment for technology learning. “We thought that a camp would provide the individualized attention needed as well as the camaraderie among the participants,” said Grace.

Volunteers will choose 10 girls from the central Shefa Province to take part in immersive courses that leverage web development, computer-aided graphic design, and game-making to help students broaden their horizons and improve their understanding of

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/vanuatus-smart-sistas-celebrate-international-girls-in-ict-day/>

the tech industry. The girls will also receive specialized training on leadership, gender empowerment, and career exploration – looking at career options in the telecommunications, computer hardware/software, and electronic media fields, all of which have been steadily growing in Vanuatu.

SMART Sistas is an innovative new camp for ni-Vanuatu girls ages nine to 14.

In fact, Vanuatu's tech community has experienced intense growth over the past few years. Last year the United Nations celebrated Vanuatu's innovation with an award for improving ICT to reach Sustainable Development Goals. Vanuatu has also benefited from a newly installed submarine cable promising to deliver "super-fast" internet speeds, and the Telecommunication and Radiocommunication Regulator (TRR) recently launched community computer labs, tablets at schools and internet cafes country-wide to spur greater technology use

and creation.

Volunteers leveraged this energy and engagement to pull together tech leaders from TRR, the Reserve Bank of Vanuatu, USP Emalus Campus, Wan Smolbag, and private sector partners including software innovators Garden Code and TechRocket as well as Computer World who provided hardware. "Our goal when designing the camp was to make it as sustainable as possible," said Returned Volunteer Lynda Mae Wilson. "Instead of it being a "Peace Corps"-sponsored event, we designed it to be community-focused. We also have active members, both male and female, from local banks, universities, telecommunication companies, the government IT agency and local nonprofits."

SMART Sistas gives girls who may not be familiar with ICT time to explore and play. Twelve-year-old Nukurei says that coming from a village and having little experience with laptops and tablets makes her feel like an

outsider in the capital, Port Vila:

"The girls in Port Vila... they play most of the time with their toys. They call these toys laptops, and sometimes tablets which makes me confused. I can't do what the girls do. I see them draw and paint using their fingers. They can talk to their friends and see their friends' faces at the same time. Wow! They even type letters and play games on these machines. They talk about going online and Bluetooth. I am so ashamed because I don't know what they are talking about."

Volunteers hope that the SMART Sistas camp will help girls like Nukurei feel more confident and included in the technology space. Thus far, more than 70 girls applied for the camp, confirming that need for tech skills is strong. Volunteers hope to expand the camp to other regions in Vanuatu next year and bring more girls than ever into the tech field.



# Let's Talk about Sex(ual Health)

May 5, 2016

- 🌐 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Nicaragua
- 👤 Project: Nicaragua - Chat Salud

**Y**esterday I googled “safer sex.” You’ve possibly done it too. Most people have. Perhaps you wanted to double check something that your friends were talking about or maybe you were simply curious about an aspect of your own health and didn’t want to navigate a face-to-face discussion.

While sex permeates many aspects of our lives, including health, relationships, self-esteem and gender dynamics, it is still a sensitive and often uncomfortable subject. For topics such as sex, the Internet is particularly useful. One of its unappreciated beauties is that you don’t need to endure the discomfort of an in-person conversation. Instead, you can investigate your concerns and questions in private. After all, your search engine can’t judge you. But how do you get the answers you need when you don’t have Internet access?

In January 2012 I moved to Nicaragua to serve as a reproductive health educator with Peace Corps. During my training a fellow Volunteer suggested that one of our roles as Volunteers was to serve as Google for our communities. At first I found this idea slightly condescending — I don’t have all of the answers. But then I understood his point. In more developed countries, people are used to finding answers to intimate questions independently. However, in a country like Nicaragua, where only 10.6% of the population has Internet access, most people do not have the luxury of finding immediate answers to more embarrassing inquiries in an anonymous manner.

In smaller communities the reality is that the public health system is not easily accessible. This is due to a number of barriers, including geography, socioeconomics and culture.

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Source: <https://web.archive.org/web/20151231174600/http://passport.peacecorps.gov/2013/08/16/lets-text-about-sexual-health/>

Additionally, generations of cultural beliefs have led to the perpetuation of false information. Getting correct answers to sensitive questions generally requires a face-to-face conversation, and in small communities this usually involves friends, family or both — even in the medical center. Anonymity is rare and *pena*, — meaning embarrassment, shame or shyness — is abundant.

Like everyone, Nicaraguans have questions about their sexual reproductive health and want to make informed decisions. While Google is not an accessible or familiar resource to many, Peace Corps volunteers have identified a tool that can help Nicaraguans bypass the “*pena barrier*” that needs no cultural adoption — the cell phone.

In Nicaragua, more people have access to cell phones than to indoor plumbing or electricity. After months of discussing various strategies for using cell phones to deliver health

messages, Peace Corps volunteers and their Nicaraguan colleagues settled on a platform: ChatSalud.

ChatSalud, an SMS-based sexual and reproductive health hotline, is the first of its kind in Nicaragua. The goal is to empower Nicaraguans to lead healthier, safer and more productive lives by providing correct sexual reproductive health information and connecting them to local resources in a free, confidential, reliable and accessible manner, directly through their cell phones.

Using FrontlineSMS, a free, open-source software, we have been able to leverage its auto-response function to create a platform that will deliver culturally sensitive and contextually correct information on five central themes: reproductive health, safer sex, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and domestic violence. The system is entirely demand-driven and interactive; users can select which theme to explore and from there

select the information he or she wants to receive.

Users “info” to ChatSalud and automatically receive a text that contains a menu of informational categories: the menu says “Text 1 for HIV,” “2 for STIs,” “3 for safer sex” and so on. Users then continue to text to receive more detailed information. From teenage girls approaching their first sexual relationships to men wanting more information on STIs after noticing a potential symptom, to women concerned about the cycle of violence who are looking for domestic violence resources in their communities, ChatSalud is a resource for all Nicaraguans.

*Chloe Lew is a current Peace Corps Volunteer in Nicaragua and ChatSalud’s public relations advisor. She has been living and working in a small community in Nueva Segovia since 2012. There, her service has been largely focused on girls’ empowerment and teen pregnancy prevention.*

# Successful Second Deployment of 25 SPELL Solar Digital Libraries with Peace Corps in Vanuatu

May 20, 2016

 Region: IAP  
 Post: Micronesia  
 Project: Micronesia - SolarSPELL

**T**he Solar SPELL team from Cal Poly held a full-day training session at Peace Corps Headquarters in Port Vila, Vanuatu, on September 9, 2015. Volunteers traveled to the training from across many of the islands that comprise Vanuatu, and were extremely enthusiastic about being able to use the digital libraries in the schools and communities where they are stationed.

This training was the second of two this summer carried out by Cal Poly Professor Laura Hosman and the team of students in the Liberal Arts and Engineering Studies (LAES) Program at [Cal Poly](#) who worked on designing, developing, and deploying the library over the past few months. A total of 50 Spell libraries have been deployed with the Peace Corps in the Federated States of Micronesia and in Vanuatu.

Prof. Hosman led the training with the assistance of Ginger Jacobs, a student who participated in the LAES course. Ginger played a leading role in finding and curating the library's content, and led the training that

focused on that area. Another student from the course, Beth Hotchkiss, who had focused on the library's design and production while on-campus, served as the team's videographer and photographer during the on-site training.

The Peace Corps volunteers across the Pacific Islands commit to two years of volunteer service, and are most frequently posted to schools. The majority of these schools will not have reliable electricity/power or Internet connectivity, so these libraries are designed to provide relevant educational content in these challenging environmental conditions—especially for first-time users of such technology.

The [Solar SPELL](#) library was designed to help meet the needs of the Peace Corps volunteers, vis-à-vis enabling and improving education, in the field. It includes open access content, much of which is localized for the Pacific Islands. The offline library's content can also be found in on-line version here: <http://pacificschoolserver.org>

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**Source:** <https://ict4dviewsfromthefield.wordpress.com/2015/09/21/successful-second-deployment-of-25-spell-solar-digital-libraries-with-peace-corps-in-vanuatu/>

The library's hardware is designed to be as simple to use as possible, with no moving parts in order to avoid overheating. The solar panel and plastic case are waterproof, providing an extra level of protection against the salt air and humidity that is ever-present in the Islands.

After covering the nuts-and-bolts of how to use the library (and the tablets) during the morning session, the afternoon training session shifted to a more frank discussion of the societal, political, and human-nature-type challenges that the volunteers might face in introducing new technology to places it has not been used before. New technologies are most frequently disruptive when introduced for the first time. We therefore initiated a brainstorming and discussion session of "What might happen?", "What could go wrong?", and (therefore) "What *should* I do?" Considerations such as meeting with village chiefs and school principals before introducing

the technology within the schools or communities were brought up. Many participants reflected that this session had been, for them, the most valuable of the day.

The enthusiasm of the Peace Corps volunteers was matched only by the gratitude they expressed to the team for our work on the libraries, for its relevance and helpfulness to their work, and for the training session itself. This appreciation was echoed by the Peace Corps staff as well. It was both humbling and extremely gratifying to hear so many expressions of "Thank you so much," "This will be so appreciated by my community," "This is fantastic."

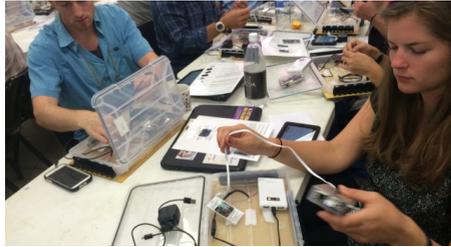
A quote from the first email of thanks we received, the day after the training: "I really can't praise or thank you all enough for what you've done (and are still doing) in this project, and feel very privileged to have a role in it. That being said, I can at least say this

much:

Y'all done real real *real* good."

Our team is particularly grateful to Peace Corps Vanuatu Country Director Keith Honda, for being an early supporter of the project and for encouraging the partnership and training to take place, and to Alexis Cullen PCV, for her diligence and enthusiasm in spreading the word about the libraries across Vanuatu's volunteers, and in co-coordinating the training. Additional thanks to Solomon Jimmy, and we look forward to keeping in touch with all of you as we gather feedback from Vanuatu and work to improve the libraries!

The SPELL Solar Digital Libraries project was made financially possible through a Community Grant from the [Pacific Telecommunications Council](#), an in-kind donation (of Banana Pis) from [LeMaker](#), as well as an in-kind donation (of Nexus 7 Tablets) from [Inveno](#).





TECHNOVATION CHALLENGE  
TEAM AND THEIR APP.

# Encourage Girls from Technovation

May 21, 2016

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Moldova
- 👤 Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

**T**echnovation Challenge is the largest and longest-running tech competition for girls. It entails a 12-week curriculum that girls ages 10-18 go through with a mentor or coach. They learn how to identify a problem in their community and figure out a solution by creating a business plan and mobile app. Plus, all of this is done in English! An incredible challenge since for many of them this is an introduction to new things like writing a business plan, critical thinking through developing a mobile app in AppInventor, and utilizing English (often times their 2nd or 3rd language)!

I had shared a few weeks ago about the [Regional Event we hosted in Moldova](#) where a local Moldovan team had advanced to the semi-final round. Thanks to local community support and through a crowdfunding campaign we're making it possible to send the girls to participate as a visiting team during the World Pitch Event in July in San Francisco.

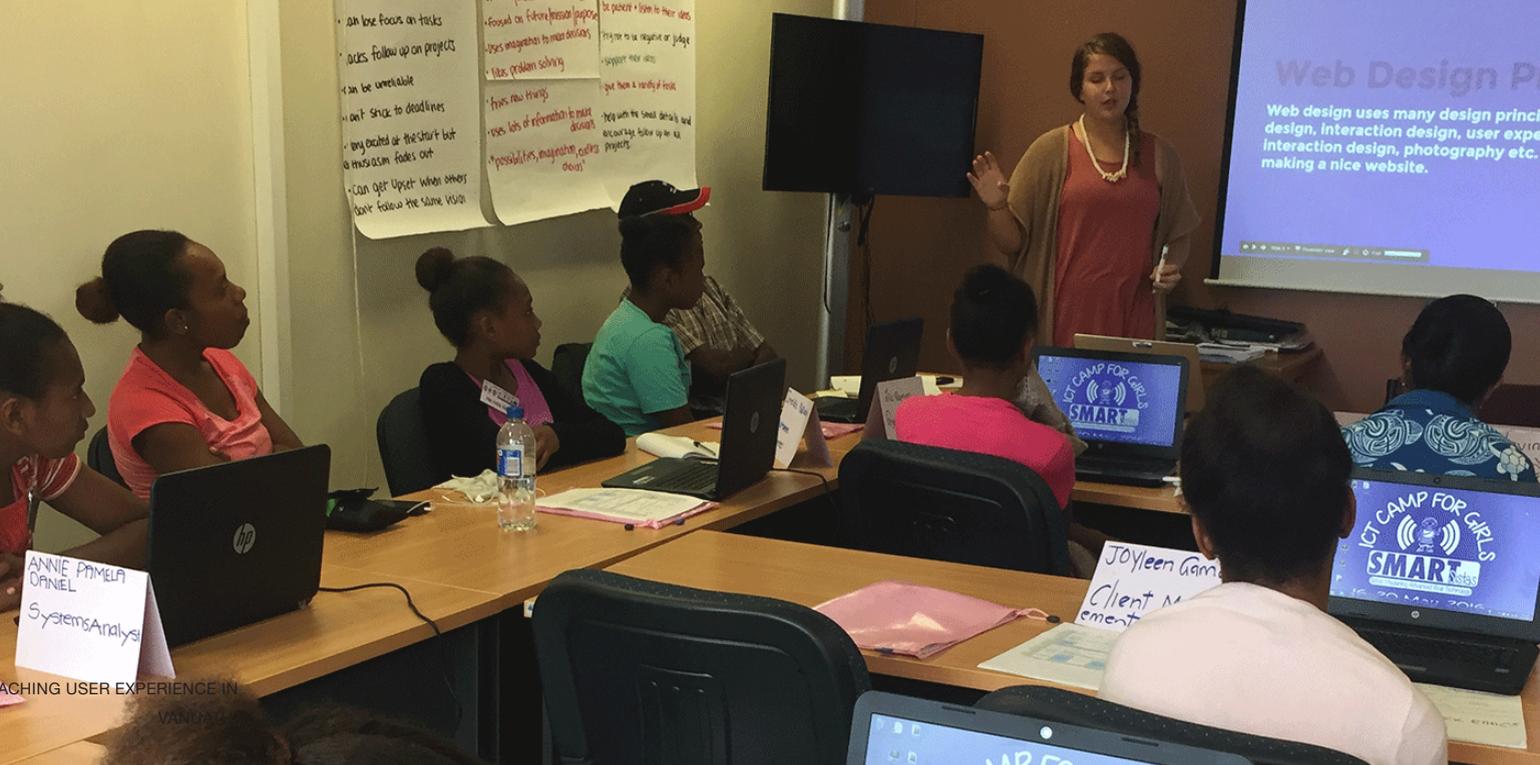
The girls will have the opportunity to attend the World Pitch Event and participate in learning from workshops, tours of tech companies, and network with other girls from around the world who are problem-solvers from their communities and future women in tech! We still need help in this crowdfunding campaign with about one week left! Give, share, and be part of encouraging girls in developing IT solutions!

Thanks to these awesome local partnering sponsors: Tekwill, Sun Communications, and Girls Go IT all funds will be doubled! So if you give \$25... it turns into \$50! Viola! >> <https://igg.me/at/tech-moldova>

This year has been an incredible year, from the all-star organizing core team, to the mentors/coaches who rose up to the challenge, and all the girls who worked long hours on turning their ideas into reality. By the semi-final round Moldova ended up having 3 teams in the semi-finals! Three! A great accomplishment that all 3 teams should be proud of!

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Source: <https://sarajoyhoy.com/2016/05/21/encourage-girls-from-technovation/>



# Introducing UX, UI and interaction design at an ICT Camp for Girls in Vanuatu

May 25, 2016

- 🌍 Region: IAP
- 📍 Post: Vanuatu
- 👤 Project: Vanuatu - SmartSistas By Brenna Grey Mickey

**B**eing in the right place at the right time has never been as applicable as when describing how I got involved with being able to teach at the SMARTSistas ICT Camp for Girls. This camp is an initiative that has been in the works since 2014, from a former volunteer who did most of the leg work, but her time was up in Vanuatu before the camp was fully planned and funded. Thankfully, Peace Corps people are the best and there were willing volunteers to pick up with the committee right where she left off. The [SMARTSistas ICT Camp for](#)

[Girls](#) is part of a wider Peace Corps initiative, [Let Girls Learn](#).

## What is Let Girls Learn?

“As part of the U.S. government’s commitment to Let Girls Learn, First Lady Michelle Obama and the Peace Corps have formed a powerful collaboration to expand access to education for adolescent girls around the world. Educating girls is essential to healthy and thriving communities but, globally, 62 million girls are not in school, and barriers to adolescent girls

**Source:** <https://medium.com/volunteering-in-vanuatu/introducing-the-concepts-of-ux-ui-and-interaction-design-at-an-ict-camp-for-girls-in-vanuatu-f363f9ea5eba>

completing school are particularly significant. In some countries, fewer than 10% of teenage girls complete secondary school.

This program will address that challenge by empowering local leaders to put lasting solutions in place. Peace Corps Volunteers who live and work at the grassroots level will serve as catalysts of community-led change, and every American can get involved and make a difference.”

Having the opportunity to participate, even in the small amount that I did, in a Let Girls Learn program is something that is really meaningful to me. After living in a few developing countries, there are trends about gender roles and inequalities that are a little more in your face than they are in the states.

The projected short term outcomes of the SMART Sistas Camp are to increase self-esteem, develop skill set knowledge of how to develop and master information communications technology related careers. The long term outcomes include increasing the number of women in the ICT field, long term skill development, closing the gender gap for IT positions and increasing knowledge to reduce poverty.

## Vanuatu Specifics

It is estimated that only 6% of schools in Vanuatu have internet access which puts approximately every 205 students in competition for every one computer. While the need for digital literacy is high, the availability to learn these skills is low. It's estimated that 80–90% of households throughout all 84 islands in Vanuatu have access to at least one mobile phone. However, according to the [National Republic of Vanuatu](#), Vanuatu is the first government in the world to have a detailed report for a MGOV (Mobile Government), meaning there is a specific plan in line for the national government to dive into mobile communication technology.

While most islands do not have access to computer labs at schools, most homes have smart devices. The SMART Sistas ICT Camp for Girls allowed 10 girls, 5 from the Shefa province and 5 from the other provinces, to travel to the capital of Vanuatu with her parent. They attended 24 hours of ICT technical training through the [TechRocket.com](#) curriculum, 12 hours of leadership and gender empowerment training, and 4 hours of career exploration in web design, networking systems and telecommunications, totaling in one full week of learning. They were introduced to HTML/CSS, Python, graphic design and web design. It also happened to fall during the national ICT Days in Port Vila, celebrating the opening of the new convention center and discussions about the realities of ICT in Vanuatu.

## Schools across Vanuatu are categorized in to 3 ICT categories:

Level 1—The minority, schools that have a working computer lab for students, with an average of 10 desktops, all secondary schools (about 20/514 schools or 3%)

Level 2—The minority, schools that have no lab for students, but a few computers for teachers and admin (about 50/514 schools or 9%)

Level 3—The majority, schools that have no computers or ICT capabilities at all (about 445/514 or 89%) [The Republic of Vanuatu](#)

This is what makes SMARTSistas ICT Camp for Girls essential in the development of ICT literacy throughout the provinces. I was asked to teach a session during the web design and development day of the camp, accompanying a local developer's sessions on HTML5 and CSS3. With the target audience of this presentation being girls from 9–14 years old, with a different cultural background than my own, I was a little nervous. I

have never taught anyone this young web design before and I was a little nervous I wouldn't be able to get the general ideas of UX, UI and interaction design across to girls who had little to no knowledge of web design before.

I decided to put my presentation together ([presentation on Slide Share](#)), presenting in English but having a majority of my slides in Bislama, the national language of Vanuatu. While the participants in the camp all could speak English, I wanted to have a frame of reference just in case something was missed. I also tried to give real life, and easy to relate to examples to ideas like UI design. I provided the definition to UI design the followed by questions about a book on fish. I asked the girls if they were creating a book cover for a book on fish what would go on the front of that book? Would that book cover change if it was a children's book about fish? Would that book cover change if it was a book teaching you how to catch fish? I found examples like this really made some light bulbs go off and allowed for them to translate these new ideas surrounding web design and relate them to things they already knew about.

After leaving the session I was a little uncertain how well it was understood or perceived. As I was walking out of the door, one of the Peace Corps Volunteers in charge of the camp came up to me and said “they want to know more, can you make a hand out or something for them to take back?” Now, if that isn't good feedback I don't know what is. I almost felt a little stupid not thinking of doing something like that in advance, of course they're going to need a hand out, the majority of them will not have easy access to internet when they go home.

The experience was humbling, uplifting and overall amazing to see girls that wanted to learn about development and information technology communication. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and that was 8,200 miles away from home.

# Meet Team ‘Girls in Power’”

June 2, 2016

 Region: EMA  
 Post: Moldova  
 Project: Moldova - Technovation Challenge

I’ve had the great opportunity to directly work with 2-3 Technovation Challenge teams over the past 2 years during my Peace Corps service. This past year I worked with the team, “Girls in the Power” from Balti composed of 4 high school girls and an amazing computer teacher from their school.

For most of the girls who were between 14-16 years old, this was their first time doing anything like this and working together as a team. Their computer teacher, Mrs. Inna has been teaching for a total of 10 years in informatics and this was also her first time to experience a program like this as well.

Technovation Challenge is the largest and longest-running tech competition for girls. In Moldova this is the 3rd year it has been happening here. For 12-weeks, girls ages 10-18 go through a curriculum with a mentor or coach. They learn how to identify a problem in their community and figure out a solution by creating a business plan and mobile app. Plus, all of this is done in English! An incredible challenge since for many of them all of these things are new to them.

The girls from “Girls in the Power” created a business plan and designed an app called ‘Emotional Test’ to address some of the problems teenagers face, such as difficult communication with adults, misunderstandings with their peers, dependence from the virtual world, desires to be confirmed by

society and lack of trust, etc. Teen suicide is on the rise in Moldova, and girls are even more affected than boys. The app they created proposed a test to identify one’s emotional state and offers advice based on the results.

I met with the girls and Mrs. Inna a few weeks after this year’s program and local competition. We celebrated the end of the school year and all that they had learned and accomplished since we first met in January.

I asked them a few questions as we reflected over the past couple of months during the Technovation Challenge program.

## **Q: What did you learn from Technovation?**

*“I learned how to work in a team, to be more careful about small details, and patience.” – Catalina*

*“I learned interesting information from the psychologist we worked with. Also I learned how to make a business plan and how to make it interesting with info-graphics.” – Patrisia*

*“I learned about how to use a new program like ApplInventor.” – Mrs. Inna*

## **Q: What was the most challenging part?**

*“The most challenging part was working in a group and trying to implement the database into our app.” – Iulia*

*“Working in English was really challenging, but it helped us!” – Valeria & Patrisia*

*“It was challenging to prepare our presentation*

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Source: <https://sarajoyhoy.com/2016/06/02/meet-team-girls-in-the-power/>

in English.” – Patrisia & Catalina

To note: For most of these girls they have never before presented in front of a large group of people nor have they done so in English.

**Q: What was fun about Technovation?**

“To immediately see the end result of

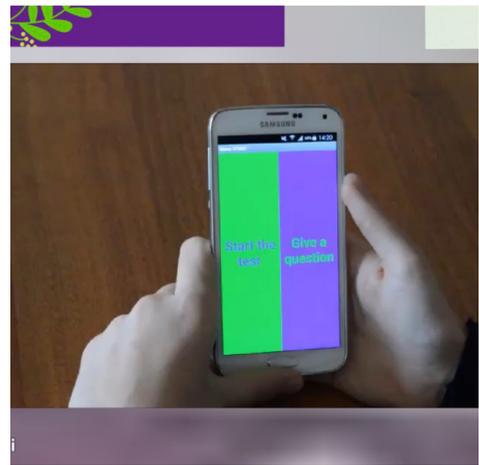
making an app using ApplInventor and the end result of everything when it all came together.” – Catalina

“To be able to see the results immediately after the girls did something in their project.” – Mrs. Inna

**Q: Tell me something interesting or funny about when you were working on your project together...**

“I learned how important it is to make sure you save your work. One day I was working on our app in the ApplInventor program and we lost all the information I had just done. I had to rebuild it all over again. It was a hard lesson to learn.” – Catalina

“We had fun, we took time to dance together during our breaks (laughter).” – All





# IBM links arms with Peace Corps to ‘inject’ tech in IRRI, Searca

IBM CORPORATE SERVICE  
CORPS, LAGUNA, PHILIPPINES.

July 23, 2016

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Philippines
- 👤 Project: Philippines - IBM Partnership

**L**OS BANOS, Laguna — A recently minted partnership between the US Peace Corps and technology behemoth IBM is providing a shot in the arm for the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

The Peace Corps and IBM had recently formed a public-private partnership, through the Peace Corps Response (PCR) program and IBM Corporate Service Corps (CSC), which was launched recently in the Philippines.

The collaboration gives IBM’s highly skilled corporate professionals the opportunity to serve in foreign countries in short-term, high-impact pro bono consulting

assignments.

The Philippines is the second country to benefit from the partnership, with the PCR for IRRI and Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (Searca) commencing in December 2015.

Peace Corps director Carrie Hessler-Radelet said the tie-up brings together IBM’s multinational reach with Peace Corp’s grassroots network.

“Peace Corps and IBM share a common dedication to problem-solving in a way that makes a measurable impact in the world, whether it is re-inventing information and

Source: <http://newsbytes.ph/2016/07/23/ibm-links-arms-with-peace-corps-to-inject-tech-in-irri-searca/>

revolutionizing technology or helping communities address pressing needs at the last mile of development,” she added.

Dr. Gil C. Saguiguit Jr., director and head of Searca, said the project marks the first time they are hosting a team from IBM. “Already, we are impressed by the credentials of the group who will do their ‘Peace Corps’-type of work here,” he said.

Meanwhile, the “injection” of technology to IRRI comes in the form of an innovation-driven project to push the world’s premier rice organization deeper into the digital era by digitizing its library and science academy, among others.

The rice research outfit is expected to benefit from the knowledge and technology recently contributed by the IBM Corporate Service Corps (CSC) in the Philippines – 15 IBMers from 10 countries who wrapped up their stint at the sprawling IRRI compound in this town.

The 15 members of the IBM CSC came from the US, Brazil, South Africa, Slovakia, Italy, Spain, Mexico, the Netherlands, and India.

Grouped into five teams, the IBMers presented their recommendations to IRRI during the program’s closing ceremonies on Thursday, July 21.

David Raper, who leads IBM’s Corporate Citizenship for the Asia Pacific and Greater China, said working with two international organizations – IRRI and Searca – was a source of pride for the volunteers.

“We really appreciate the value of being able to work on difficult programs. And when a difficult program like this will help many people, I think IBMers are proud that they and the company can contribute to that,” he said.

Raper added: “IBM sees this corporate service co-program with three

types of benefits: benefit to the partners we work with; benefit to IBMers to grow and develop their career; and benefit to IBM who, through this partnership, has been able to learn about new issues, learn about problem-solving in different way and understands the Philippines better, which is also important to us as a business.”

IBM employee Melody Balcet, also a Peace Corps volunteer recently inducted by US Ambassador Philip Goldberg at the Peace Corps’ Manila Office, served as a specialist for institutional strengthening to help build the capacity of IRRI’s voluminous research information assets by digitization, big data analytics, cloud computing, and other information technology (IT) strategies.

The project is on its last two weeks, but Balcet will stay on to complete a three-month period, this time wearing her hat as a Peace Corps member.

Aside from Balcet, other members of IBM’s service corps are Richard Chang, Michelle Kennedy, Prashant Negi, Kirsten Haver Droeze, Ayrtton Gomes Ribeiro, Alisson Decio Fernandes, Marian Schwarz, Jacqueline Liston Velasco, Dinaz Taylor, Roberto Raffo, Diana Dierks, Pedro Gutierrez de Cos Herrero, Adrian Mitchell, and Melissa Greco.

Andrea Escalona, CSC program manager for IBM Asia Pacific and Greater China Group, said they chose the town of Los Banos for the project’s site “because we have some experience with agriculture and research kind of location.”

She said the project for IRRI and Searca has a four-week timeline of completion, while its Peace Corps component is three months. The recommendations for each of the project’s components it is now up to IRRI and Searca to implement.

For the IRRI Library, the rice institution

seeks to transition from a “brick-and-mortar” library of resources into a virtual, fully digitized, network-based library.

On Big Data, IRRI has now in its position a hardware capable of storing data up to 200 terabyte (TB). The agency’s Web and Enhanced Country Dossiers, on the other hand, aims to create a single consolidated “one-stop-shop” for country briefs, requiring only little manual tasks.

For the Science Academy, the vision of IRRI is to transition it from training center (TC) into a world-class Rice Science Academy (RSA).

Meanwhile, Searca’s Knowledge Management seeks to scale up business practices and strategies both internally and externally by, among others, extending social media reach.

IBM Philippines president and country general manager Luis Pineda described the project as a privilege for the Philippines to benefit from the Peace Corps and IBM partnership.

“Through our combined strengths, we aim to make sustainable impact to the communities we will both serve,” said Pineda, adding their collaboration with IRRI and Searca is unique more so with two rice institutions responding to agriculture’s regional and global challenges.

Raper said they are now presently choosing the next batch of IBMers to join the lined-up projects through 2017. “We have probably 10 times more applying to into these projects than they were able to go... it is very competitive and something that people really want to do,” he said.

IBM started the CSC in 2008, its *pro bono* consulting program aimed at helping find solutions to some of the most challenging problems in communities worldwide while giving IBM employees with unique leadership development.



# We are the Girls of Tomorrow

July 26, 2016

- 🌐 Region: AF
- 📍 Post: South Africa
- 👤 Project: South Africa - Girls of Tomorrow By Chris Harris

**T**he idea for the Girls of Tomorrow Program was born while waiting on a taxi one early September morning.

I thought back to the giants in science that had inadvertently catalyzed my own interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math). Growing up, we all heard names like Einstein, Carl Sagan and Galileo, but what about women? How are girls in South Africa going to develop a passion for the sciences without female role models?

When I started work at my site, I wrote a Let Girls Learn Peace Corps Partnerships Program (PCPP) grant proposal and we launched Girls of Tomorrow. My desire was to galvanize girls in our community through empowerment and education. My fellow Volunteers and I too frequently see our female students get pregnant or lose interest in school because they lack job opportunities post-graduation. Girls in our communities are disproportionately burdened with domestic duties and often shy

away from math and science because they are traditionally male-dominated subjects. But we know that women earn more on average when working in STEM fields, and that communities do better as a whole when women are well-educated and independent.

Through Girls of Tomorrow, we worked with 120 Grade 7 girls, strategically reaching them before they enter high school. We conducted school visits to three schools over the course of a month, and transported the girls to the science center to engage with our resources, staff, and educational and empowerment activities. They also were given space to study and meet women already working in STEM fields so they would have local role models they could look up to. Working with my colleagues, I developed a booklet highlighting female leaders in STEM for the girls, as well as other resources celebrating the achievements of women in STEM.

Students, teachers and principals alike were

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Source: <https://www.peacecorps.gov/stories/we-are-girls-tomorrow/>

supportive; we distributed the booklets we created and excitedly watched as the girls flipped through them and read about the struggles and achievements of the women in them. They broke into groups and chose the women that they connected to the most. Over the next month, the girls developed presentations on the women they were studying, to be presented to professionals in STEM fields.

When the big day arrived, guests included STEM professionals from as far as the U.S. and India, and leaders from agencies like the Department of Science and Technology and the U.S. Consulate. The girls paraded into the science center singing “We are the Girls of Tomorrow!” We opened the day with a number of speeches from accomplished female scientists, the

U.S. Consul General in Durban and university faculty. The girls roared with excitement and could hardly wait to present their projects.

When it began, the audience was impressed by the confidence and poise with which the girls presented. They performed dramas, poems, songs and dances. We couldn't believe that these girls were only 12 years old. One group that called themselves “The Space Girls” performed a 10-minute drama on the life of Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut.

Another group, “The Clever Bunch,” wrote and performed a song about the neurosurgeon Alexa Canady, causing members of the audience to cry (including me!). They confidently sang, “What Alexa Canady has shown us, is that even if no one has ever done

something before, you can be the first.” What a difference it was from the beginning of the project. Most of the girls had never spoken publicly before in their lives, let alone in front of an audience full of scientists!

The overwhelming success of the project has inspired us to launch a second phase of Girls of Tomorrow. Our plan is to bring these same girls to the university to learn how to apply, what careers are out there and how to make the most out of high school. They'll also become ambassadors for the project and teach their sisters and younger classmates some of what they learned. And we're bringing the boys on too, as “Ally Ambassadors.” We couldn't be more proud of these girls and how far they've come, but more importantly, how incredibly proud they are of themselves.



# Micronesia Peace Corps SolarSPELL Program extends into Second Year with Training of Incoming Class of Volunteers!

July 28, 2016

 Region: EMA  
 Post: Micronesia  
 Project: Micronesia - SolarSPELL

**T**he US Peace Corps in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) hosted the SolarSPELL team for a second year as the team carried out a workshop with this year's incoming class of Peace Corps volunteers. The training took place in Madolenihmw, Pohnpei in July, 2016.

Laura Hosman and Bruce Baikie led the training, which included an overview of the SPELL library's hardware, website/educational content, and the tablet that the team included for each Peace Corps volunteer to be able to access the library's content once in the field.

The training also benefited from a (surprise!) special guest talk by one of last year's cohort of volunteers, Dana, who spoke to this year's cohort about some of the potential and unexpected challenges they might face in using the SPELL libraries at their schools, when the workshop transitioned to the discussion of teaching strategies, potential in-field

challenges, and how to address them. Thank you, Dana, for sharing your insights and contributing to the training!

The SPELL team is especially grateful to the Peace Corps staff in FSM, particularly including to Rodney Salas, who was an early champion of the SPELL project and its implementation with the Peace Corps volunteers FSM. Not only was FSM the first country to receive SolarSPELLs, it is also the first to renew the partnership and invite the SPELL team back for a second year. We're very grateful for the opportunity and continued cooperation!

The Peace Corps volunteers in FSM, and indeed across the Pacific Islands, commit to two years of volunteer service, and are stationed at schools. Most of these schools will not have reliable electricity/power or Internet connectivity, so these libraries are designed to provide relevant educational content in these challenging environmental conditions. The

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**Source:** <https://ict4dviewsfromthefield.wordpress.com/2016/07/28/micronesia-peace-corps-solarspell-program-extends-into-second-year-with-training-of-incoming-class-of-volunteers/>

Peace Corps volunteers' responsibilities include teaching English, using technology where possible, and working together with the community and the school to help improve the education available at the schools where they are serving.

The Solar SPELL library was designed to help meet the needs of the Peace Corps volunteers, vis-à-vis enabling

and improving education, in the field. It includes open access content, much of which is localized for the Federated States of Micronesia and for the Pacific Islands. The offline library's content can also be found in on-line version here: <http://pacificschools-erver.org>

The library's hardware is designed to be as simple to use as possible, with

no moving parts in order to avoid overheating. The solar panel and plastic case are waterproof, providing an extra level of protection against the salt air and humidity that is ever-present in the Islands.

Thank you, Peace Corps FSM for a second year of collaboration and cooperation with SPELL!



# Girls of Tomorrow

August 4, 2016

-  Region: AF
-  Post: South Africa
-  Project: South Africa - Girls of Tomorrow

**T**he idea for the Girls of Tomorrow Program was born while waiting on a taxi one early September morning. I thought back to the giants in science that have inadvertently catalyzed my own interest in STEM, years ago. Growing up, we've all heard names like Einstein, Carl Sagan, and Galileo, but what about the women? How are the young girls here in South Africa going to fan their fiery passions without role models they can connect with? Did I even know, if my students asked me, which females in STEM I would point them to? I knew my extension at the University of Zululand Science Center was coming up, and so I developed a tentative plan to galvanize the young girls in the area using successful females in the STEM fields as role models.

The primary goal was to empower girls. I wanted to make sure that they didn't feel like we were pushing the STEM studies onto them. For this reason, we would emphasize the women who were outstanding in STEM, not necessarily the science itself. By doing so, we could simultaneously foster interest in STEM studies, studies which are dominated by men and which consistently lead to lucrative and rewarding jobs.

As soon as I started my extension at the Science Center, I hit the ground running. Within the first week, I briefed my colleagues on my ideas and we developed a more structured plan. We excitedly wrote the Let Girls Learn

grant and began developing the resources we'd need for the project. We decided to target 120 Grade 7 girls and hit three different schools. We chose this age because we knew the girls would enter High School in the next year, and wanted to motivate and provide them with tools as they move into unfamiliar and often threatening environments. Too often in this area girls don't make it through High School. We wanted to give them a reason to.

I put together a compilation of notable females in STEM for the girls to use while my colleagues surveyed local schools. My booklet featured women from various fields within STEM and from countries all across the world, especially from the continent of Africa. We developed posters, teacher trainings, games, gender workshops etc. and as soon as the funding came in, we launched.

We located three schools that we knew would excel in the project. When we arrived at the schools in early April and met with the girls and their teachers for the first time, we could see that their excitement nearly matched our own. "We want to study science!" they screamed. We put on a drama for them and introduced ourselves and the project. The teachers and students were eager to move forward with the project, and throughout the course of the month we continued our visits.

The girls received our Girls of Tomorrow Booklets and broke into groups. They chose the female in STEM that they felt most connected

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Source: <https://girlsoftomorrow.wordpress.com/2016/08/04/girls-of-tomorrow/>

to, and soon after began working on projects on their new heroines. All of the girls developed posters and accompanied them with some form of presentation. Some of the girls wrote and acted out poems, some created intense dramas, and some performed original songs. As we aided the girls in the development of their projects, we knew that we would arrive with something incredible in the end.

After getting to know these girls for a month, and letting them get to know us, we bussed all three schools to the Science Center. I brought on five other Peace Corps Volunteers and together we worked closely with the JICA Volunteer who I'd been executing the project with as well as Science Center staff and interns. Throughout the day, we ran gender workshops, a teacher training, empowerment activities, science shows, and role model talks. The girls even got to meet real female scientists who came in to support them. At the end of the day, the girls practiced their presentations and used the microphone for the first time so that they'd be prepared to present. They then recorded what it means to them to be the "Girls of Tomorrow." They wrote things like, "Being a Girl of Tomorrow means that I will never give up and never lose hope!" and "It means never forget who you are and what you want to be." The energy was soaring as we saw them off at the end of the day.

Over the next week, we prepared for the girls' final visit, which was the big day where the girls would officially become the Girls of Tomorrow! It took a lot of preparation, but judging by the success of the event, our work paid off.

The day started with explosive energy as the girls filtered into the Science Center singing and dancing, proud to show the world their work over the last month and a half. We had guests from as far as India and the United States, and from science occupations throughout South Africa including the Department of Science and Technology, the University of Zululand, the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement, and Science Centers across the country.

The ceremony began with a variety of interesting and earnest speakers, mostly female scientists who discussed their own struggles growing up in male-dominated fields. Dr. Betty Kibirige, for example, told us the poignant story of her gender struggles growing up in Uganda and how she eventually became a Professor of Physics. Our speaker of the day was the U.S. Consul General in Durban, Francis Chisholm, who told a personal story and discussed her own children's studies in science in addition to her eloquently-spoken, prepared remarks.

Next, the girls had the chance to tell their stories to the dignitaries. In a poster exhibition, the girls talked about the women they'd been studying and also their own hopes and dreams for the future. The intention was for the girls to get exposure to the guests, but in reality, the guests are really the ones who gained something from their interactions with these wide-eyed and sanguine girls, ready to take on the world.

Following the posters were the presentations. This was surely the highlight of the day as the girls sang proudly across the stage or confidently played

the roles of the women they'd been studying. Their presentations were phenomenal and were excellent representations of the passion they'd shown for their studies throughout the project. It was really beautiful.

After lunch and at the end of the day, the girls, their teachers, and the guests returned to the auditorium. Proudly and with huge smiles on their faces, and even some tears, the girls officially became the Girls of Tomorrow! They sang and danced and told us with their eyes how much it meant to them to be a part of this project. It was unclear whether we were more proud of them, or they were more proud of themselves. There was no doubt; the project was a major success.

After it was over, the teachers pleaded to continue the project. The schools were graciously supportive and the learners thirsted for more. Now, we are planning phase two of the project, where we will train the Girls of Tomorrow to be Ambassadors for the program, and even bring in the boys as Ally Ambassadors. "This was just too good to be a once off event," said the Director of the Science Center. And indeed it won't be. This project will continue for a long time to come, and after these girls move into High School, we will start with a whole new group of girls, and even reach other schools.

As we move into phase two of the project, myself along with the Science Center staff eagerly await the day we hear the girls screaming again, at the top of their lungs, "We are the Girls of Tomorrow!" and teach them to share what they've gained with their sisters, schoolmates, teachers, and even the boys.



# Let Girls Learn Technology

September 5, 2016

🌐 Region: EMA

📍 Post: Thailand

👤 Project: Thailand - Hour of Code By Andrew Snyder

**S**anook, mai? Was it fun? *Sanook Mak!* Soooo much fun! This is probably the most important question and answer whenever we do a project or activity in our communities. Sometimes our activities have kids running around and laughing, sometimes they work as a team to accomplish a goal, and sometimes they are just enjoying the opportunity to learn a new sport or activity with their American friend.

Whatever the case, as PCVs we are often looking for creative, fun and innovative projects to take back to our sites. Here is where the work of the Technology for Development (T4D) committee comes in. Maybe you have heard of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) projects but are not sure what they are or how you might start one. Perhaps you have been asked to, or are interested in implementing some project-based and problem-based learning activities. If you can relate to any of these situations, T4D would like to share two upcoming initiatives; Hour of Code activities for your community in December, and a Girls' Empowerment Camp in early 2017 hosted by students and faculty from Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University.

Earlier this year I had an opportunity to introduce a free and web-based computer programming activity, Hour of Code, to schools in my community. The idea behind Hour of Code is very simple: Introduce students of all ages and abilities to computer programming through puzzles based on popular games,

shows or movies. Participants start with simple goals and as they progress, the puzzles get increasingly more difficult. This year, one of the goals of T4D is for every PCV site to include at least one activity from the Hour of Code during Computer Education Week, **5-11 December 2016**. We recognize that some of you may not have experience with coding or are unsure how and where to start, so we are currently hard at work creating lesson plans for you to use, as well as helpful keyword lists for each puzzle in English and Thai. We will distribute these resources via the [wiki](#) closer to the event, but we encourage anyone interested to start looking around [code.org](#) to check out what the website and Hour of Code activities have to offer.

This semester we began a partnership with professors from the Faculty of Education, Educational Technology and Innovation Program at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University to begin an English, Technology and STEM project for 3rd and 4th year university students. This collaboration came about after a brief guest lecture on the Hour of Code and STEM activities in the classroom, which led to discussions about possible future activities and an exchange of project proposal ideas. As the students' progress through the project timeline they will receive hands-on training of basic computer programming concepts, prepare lesson plans, and practice teaching with their peers. In later stages, they will learn how to incorporate life skill activities into their teaching and camp facilitation. All this

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Source: <https://pctmagazine.org/2016/09/05/let-girls-learn-technology/>

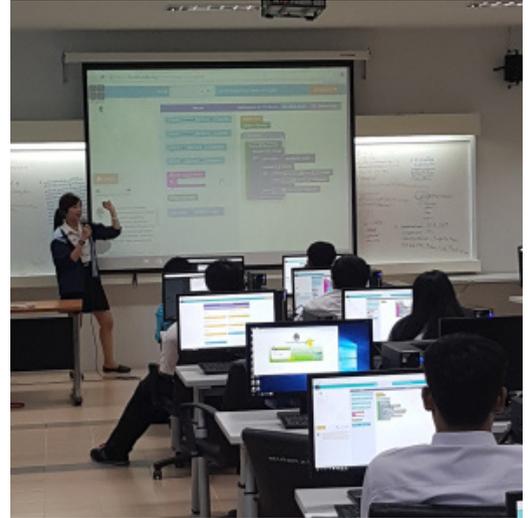
will lead up to the Girls' Empowerment Camp early next year. To date, 57 students have been selected to participate in the initial project and have completed several courses in computer programming concepts. They will begin assisting weekly guest lectures on computer programming and Hour of Code activities during the months of September and October, and they'll serve as Thai speaking technical support for your counterparts during the Hour of Code event in December. The feedback from the students and faculty has been overwhelmingly positive and they are looking forward to sharing the Hour of Code activities with their peers. In fact, the response has been so overwhelming that Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University has requested we increase the original goal of introducing 200-250 students to Hour of Code to over 700 students from the Faculty of Education!

The final piece of the project is a **Let Girls Learn** based Girls' Empowerment Camp focusing on technology. The objective of **Let Girls Learn** is to give girls opportunities to improve

their chances of success and continue learning. Girls are historically under-represented in computer science and other STEM fields, and as Volunteers we have the potential to reach hundreds of students and link them to computer science and STEM activities and opportunities. Together with a renewed focus on providing a solid foundation for future activities in PCV communities, the Girls' Empowerment Camp aims to expose and inspire Thai girls to use technology in a fun environment, and in a way that is engaging and easy to learn. The main feature of the camp will be introducing students to Scratch 2.0, a block programming language very similar to the Hour of Code activities. Additionally, we hope to create a community of students who will share and collaborate as they learn and try new projects and computer programs. With help from teachers and Peace Corps Volunteers we will start preparing participants to become leaders of computer clubs in their schools and communities. There will be games, life skills activities, and all around camp fun with university students serving as councilors

and facilitators. We look forward to continuing to develop ideas and cannot wait to see what great things will happen both during and after.

This is an exciting time to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand. The **Let Girls Learn** initiative has opened many new opportunities for PCVs to participate in camps and other activities geared towards increasing Thailand's technological development. The T4D team is excited about moving out from behind the scenes and being a more active part of these activities. Peace Corps worldwide is also engaging more with technology and sharing ideas with Volunteers about how they can utilize tech in their communities and projects. As we continue to grow and learn from each other and from other Peace Corps countries, we cannot wait to see what you may dream up and complete in your communities. We invite you to start thinking about technology, STEM, and the Hour of Code events, as well as other ways in which you can give your students the opportunity to play, learn and grow through technology.



# No Internet, no power, no problem. Solar library empowers schools abroad

September 7, 2016

🌐 Region: IAP  
📍 Post: Micronesia  
👤 Project: Micronesia - SolarSPELL

**M**any islands in the Pacific Ocean lack two things that are essential for accessing information and performing educational pursuits: a library and the internet.

*Laura Hosman, a new assistant professor at Arizona State University, created SolarSPELL: a digital library that generates its own Wi-Fi signal and solar power. Photographer: Pete Zrioka/ASU*

Without this access many teachers are without strong lesson plans or curriculum and community members lack books and multimedia.

But a new Arizona State University faculty member has figured out a way to deliver a digital library that doesn't depend on existing internet connectivity — rather it comes with its own Wi-Fi hotspot.

Laura Hosman is an assistant professor who began a joint appointment in ASU's Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering and the School for the Future of Innovation in Society this semester.

Her innovative device, the Solar Powered Educational Learning Library, known as SolarSPELL, is a digital library full of educational resources that generates its own Wi-Fi signal

and solar power. All that is needed to access the information is an internet-capable device, such as an iPad, laptop or smartphone. Basically, it's a self-powered plug-and-play kit, portable enough to fit into a backpack.

The plastic case containing the technical components is waterproof and weatherproof, and covered with a compact solar panel.

The real genius of the device lies in its small, durable, credit card-sized computer — known as a Raspberry Pi — that is used as a server and delivers the educational content over its own Wi-Fi hotspot.

"The server is one directional, so the Wi-Fi doesn't connect to the internet, but it serves up our offline library in the form of a website, so it looks and feels as though you're online," explains Hosman.

## Curating localized content

On the SolarSPELL website are thousands of educational resources, including videos, ranging from math and English lessons to agricultural information to overviews of climate change.

*SolarSPELL's educational library is accessed*

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Source: <https://fullcircle.asu.edu/faculty/solar-library-empowers-schools-abroad/>

using an internet-capable device, such as an iPad, laptop or smartphone. It operates like a self-powered plug-and-play kit. *Photographer: Pete Zrioka/ASU*

Just like a community library, SolarSPELL can be a hub for people of all ages — from young children looking to watch instructional videos to community members looking to improve their agricultural practices.

In curating the content, Hosman insists on including as much localized information as possible. Currently, most educational content available to Pacific Islanders is provided by the governments of the U.S., Australia or New Zealand, and is not localized at all.

“When identifying content for SolarSPELL we try to think like a Pacific Islander, with a goal in the future of empowering locals to create their own unique content,” she says.

This means the device has a dual purpose of teaching things like science and geography, but also preserving and communicating local, traditional and indigenous knowledge. One example, preserved and accessible in the device, is a series of more than 70 Micronesian Seminar videos that cover 100 years of Pacific Islands history.

The importance of providing localized content came to Hosman several years ago during what she refers to as “a light bulb moment.”

“I was showing a Micronesian Seminar video to a teacher and student, and their amazement at seeing the country’s president on the screen made me realize that these two had never actually seen a Micronesian — someone who looked like them — in a video before,” says Hosman. “It makes a huge difference if you can see yourself and your culture in the curriculum.”

## Integration with Peace

## Corps

SolarSPELL has a strong working relationship with the U.S. Peace Corps in Vanuatu, Micronesia and Samoa. Peace Corps volunteers in the Pacific Islands are stationed at remote, rural schools for two years, and have a mission to teach English and where possible, technology in the schools.

“SolarSPELL provides a synergistic approach to the Peace Corps volunteers’ educational responsibilities, particularly when introducing technology into schools for the first time,” says Hosman.

She has learned that introducing technology in rural areas is only successful when the instructors are both technically proficient and embedded in the local community — a perfect fit for Peace Corps volunteers who know the local educational environment.

“It can take a long time to change the locals’ mindsets and skillsets toward using technology. But Peace Corps volunteers are tech savvy and are integrating SolarSPELL into schools in a successful way,” she says.

There are more than a hundred SolarSPELL devices in the Pacific Islands, with 90 devices being managed by active Peace Corps volunteers.

## A future at ASU and beyond

In January, Hosman will be taking SolarSPELL to Tonga for the first time. She is working with four engineering students in the Polytechnic School, one of the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, on curating content specific to Tonga and creating hands-on lesson plans for teaching about solar power.

With the help of ASU students she says SolarSPELL will continue to evolve and improve — from enhancing the library’s website features to identifying more cost-effective assembly methods and components to

potentially coordinating a SolarSPELL build day on location in the Pacific Islands with teachers or high school students.

*Laura Hosman is working with engineering students in the Polytechnic School to introduce the device to Tonga in January 2017. From left to right: James Larson, electrical engineering junior; Laura Hosman, assistant professor; Bruce Baikie, engineering mentor and implementation manager/lead; Tyrine Jamella Pangan, software engineering junior; and Miles Mabey, robotics engineering junior. Photographer: Pete Zrioka/ASU*

Hosman says the project seems to “exponentially expand” with student interest and enthusiasm. “What’s exciting is I don’t know what direction it will take next because ASU has an unlimited outlook and mentality,” says Hosman.

Long term, she hopes to see the device’s use expanded to all islands with Peace Corps volunteers, and then beyond.

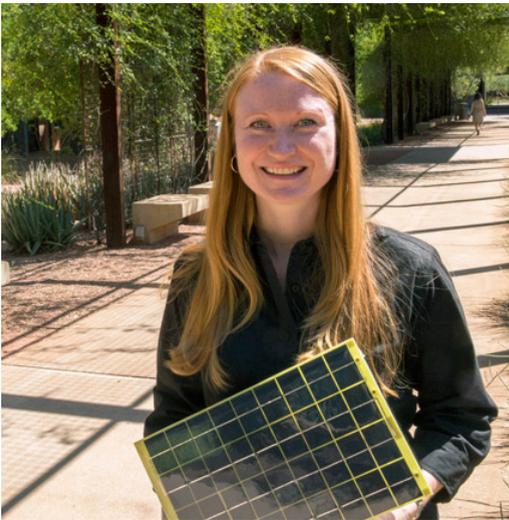
“With time and dedication from ASU students it could go across Africa and Asia,” she says.

Lofty aims like expanding SolarSPELL’s reach around the globe is what attracted Hosman to ASU.

“Teaching innovative concepts at a school that’s number one in innovation in the country is the dream,” says Hosman.

She was attracted to the Polytechnic School for their project-based classes, especially with engineering students. “At many schools, engineers learn a lot of theory, but don’t get their hands busy ... yet being able to tackle hands-on projects is a main reason why many of these students became engineering majors,” she explains.

Hosman has taken previous students to Haiti, Micronesia and Vanuatu. She says bringing students into the field to see their work take fruition is a life changing experience that alters their trajectory from there on out.





# Let Girls Learn Computation Class

November 11, 2016

📍 Region: IAP

📍 Post: Peru

I just wanted to share an update on the Girls in Technology class that I helped to start in the high school. We started classes last month, and so far have had great participation from the teachers and the students. We've already seen progress in their confidence in using the computers, even though we're at the most basic level still. Keep in mind most of these girls don't have a computer at home, so even just providing a space where they can discover things on their own is beneficial to them. Photo below is from the very first class:

I'm really excited to see how far these girls will go in furthering their education, and so happy that the community supports this project. Let Girls Learn focuses on providing quality education to all girls around the world in order to reach their full potential. Ensuring that girls receive an education is one of the

most effective ways to advance a country's development. It has been proven to end cycles of poverty and improve health outcomes. To quote President Obama,

"The single best indicator of whether a nation will succeed is how it treats its women. When women have health care and women have education, families are stronger, communities are more prosperous, children do better in school, nations are more prosperous.... If you want your country to grow and succeed, you have to empower your women."

The Let Girls Learn initiative is only a year and a half old, but I personally see the positive changes that some of my fellow volunteers have made in their sites. In Cutervo, which is only about an hour away from us, a fellow volunteer started a Student Soup Kitchen so that students who study far from their homes

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Source: <http://thepersonsnewgroove.tumblr.com/post/153043347759/let-girls-learn-computation-class>

have a place to eat lunch. She was the first Peace Corps Peru funded LGL project. And over in Ancash, a volunteer from our Peace Corps group is currently raising money for a women's empowerment group that focuses on knitting. If you're interested in supporting him through donations, here's the [link](#). Keep in mind that in order to receive an LGL grant, the communities have to provide at least 25% of the proposed budget. This

ensures that these are community-led projects, and not just volunteer driven, so that these projects continue long after the volunteer has finished their 2 year service.

I feel really proud that Peace Corps Peru has partnered with the Obamas' Let Girls Learn initiative. Regardless of political beliefs, I think we can all agree that women all over the world deserve to be provided an equal education.

The effects of gender inequality are real, they exist, not just in developing countries but in the U.S. as well. This initiative is making tangible differences that combat gender inequality in developing countries, which in turn positively affects our nation. With the U.S. government about to begin a new administration, I hope that the Let Girls Learn initiative continues so that it, and young girls, can reach their full potential.

# U.S. PEACE CORPS (GH)



PHOTO COURTESY OF FLICKR/  
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF  
AMERICAN HISTORY.

## Tech can reshape the U.S. Peace Corps and bridge political divides

December 17, 2016

**E**arlier this week, President-elect Trump met with some of the top leaders of American tech companies. Some of these leaders are trying to find common ground after being on the receiving end of some of his sharp-worded tweets.

Like many of my friends in the tech community, I'm faced with the reality of a Trump presidency and searching for a way to honor the calls of President Obama and Secretary Clinton for national unity and a chance for the president-elect to lead.

My struggle comes from looking for common ground with a president-elect whose policy goals I largely do not support but recognizing from my time working in the Obama White House just how ineffective obstructionist

politics can be for Americans who rely on a functioning federal government.

As we seek to unite a divided country, one unconventional area where we might find common ground, and discover a hidden opportunity for the tech community, is updating a historic government agency — the U.S. Peace Corps.

### Surprised? Let me explain...

In December 2013, President Barack Obama was preparing to meet with a group of U.S. tech leaders at the White House. I was the senior advisor for mobile and data innovation at the White House, and I asked Reed Hastings, the chief executive officer of Netflix — and,

**Source:** <https://techcrunch.com/2016/12/17/tech-can-reshape-the-u-s-peace-corps-and-bridge-political-divides/>

like myself, a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer — if he would like to join me for breakfast with the director of Peace Corps, Carrie Hessler-Radelet.

Reed enthusiastically replied, “Yes!”

Carrie and I met with Reed the morning before his meeting with the President, and then I walked him to the West Wing. Reed seemed to relish his discussion with the President, jokingly [offering the President a cameo in House of Cards](#). But I didn’t think much else of Reed’s visit until I saw media reports the following day. To everyone’s amusement, [Reed considered the highlight of his day to be his breakfast with the director of the Peace Corps](#), where they discussed how the agency had been influenced and changed by technology.

Reed’s conversation with Carrie at breakfast that morning sparked two new questions:

- As the length of time a new tech startup goes abroad has been condensed from 4-5 years to 12-18 months — could recently returned Peace Corps volunteers supply the boost Silicon Valley needs to grow businesses successfully and responsibly in the most remote parts of the world?
- Before the end of the next president’s first term, it’s estimated that there will be [99 percent cell phone adoption](#) worldwide — and [1 billion smart phone users](#). How should the Peace Corps staff up, train up and partner up to better leverage and teach tech in the most remote regions of the

world?

## Peace Corps’ got Entrepreneurial Talent

Every year more than 3,500 Americans finish their Peace Corps service, mostly in rural areas in more than 60 countries. The Peace Corps has long acted as the last mile of international development, but it could also become the last mile of critical tech training. It has an unrivaled footprint



of volunteers canvassing the planet — they are ambassadors of culture, teachers of water-saving agricultural techniques and emerging leaders in their own right. They’re building deep, meaningful relationships with local communities.

Historically, federal agencies, non-profits and non-governmental aid organizations have heavily recruited this rich talent pool of international

experience and resilience. One of the many positive side effects of the tech community working closely with the Peace Corps is also tapping into this rich talent pool of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. These resilient Americans can supply the boost tech companies needs to grow businesses successfully and responsibly in the most remote parts of the world.

As an example, more than thirteen years ago I served as a business and technology volunteer in Nicaragua. Based on the challenges my neighbors and I faced in making calls to the United States, I co-founded a small phone company in 2005. We erected 80-foot internet towers in rural villages to enable Nicaraguans to call the United States and other countries at a tenth of the price charged by established carriers. Eventually our company, Llamadas Heladas, became one of the largest phone companies in Nicaragua.

I am not alone. Other Peace Corps Volunteers have also gone on to start much more successful tech companies, including Reed — who served as a high school math teacher in Swaziland — and Amy Pressman, who served in Honduras before co-founding her billion-dollar tech startup, Medallia. And it’s not just tech startups, Knight Foundation, with more than two billion dollars in assets to support, among other things, the development of civic tech, is run by Alberto Ibarguen, who served in Venezuela.

## Building a Digital Peace

## Corps

President-elect Trump should choose a Peace Corps director with technology in his or her DNA. Critically, the next director needs to make technology a priority in every facet of the organization, from staffing and training to the partnerships it builds.

Why? Great, tech-powered, business ideas can come from anywhere. Take Lyft, for example, a billion-dollar Silicon Valley company modeled after the successful ride-pooling in Zimbabwe. Or consider Ushahidi, a popular crowd-mapping tool used during domestic disasters — created in Nairobi.

Facebook powers more than a billion people's social media identities but the Government of India built the world's largest biometric identity system for more than 1.2 billion people in a fraction of the time. One of the most successful mobile money companies, M-pesa, was not founded in America, but in Kenya. Analog versions of Deliveroo, Postmates and Munchery were implemented decades ago in countries such as India and Nicaragua.

Ultimately, by bringing the Peace Corps into the 21st century, we can empower communities across the globe to take advantage of emerging technologies that can positively impact their lives.

## Digital Peace Corps (beta)

Peace Corps Director Hessler-Radelet has made dramatic improvements at the agency, including significant structural changes that make it easier to apply to serve as a volunteer — reducing the application process from several days to less than an hour. The Peace Corps has also expanded its digital footprint and improved its outreach, recruiting and marketing, resulting in a 100 percent increase in applications over the last two years.

The agency's Director of Innovation,

Patrick Choquette, [has formed strategic partnerships with software firms, such as Duolingo](#), a language training software company. The Peace Corps has also been [leveraging local knowledge to crowdsource invaluable geographic information](#) that can be incredibly helpful in the wake of disasters.

Building on these successes, the next director has the opportunity to make the Peace Corps an important player in spreading the benefits of emerging technologies — enabling this historic agency to have as much impact in the 21st century as it had in the 20th. The wave of technology change is only growing. Whether it lifts or further isolates many parts of the world is being decided now.

The next Peace Corps director could help shape this future in the following ways:

## Staff Up

- Establish a Tech Corps — Similar to the Obama Administration's recruitment of tech talent after the Healthcare.gov meltdown, the Peace Corps should recruit 80 technical volunteers — 10 for each region of the world where volunteers serve — building open-source tools other regional volunteers can leverage.
- Launch Open Source Software Competition — The Peace Corps should host an annual contest to identify the Top 10 open-source projects, built by members of the Tech Corps, and give winners financial and developer support to deploy their tools worldwide.
- Partner with USAID and Local NGOs — The United States Agency for International Development is building technical solutions — from mobile money to blockchain — that will need practical and technical assistance on the ground. Tech Corps and

other volunteers could help train locals to run and maintain the technology being implemented.

## Train Up

- Expand TechHire globally — My last assignment at the White House was creating [TechHire](#), which brings together businesses, coding boot camps and local governments to help those without a college degree learn to code and fill more than half a million vacant tech jobs. The Peace Corps, in collaboration with USAID, could expand TechHire globally — supporting the development of coding boot camps around the world.
- Build makerspaces — Work with local organizations to establish and build out makerspaces to teach locals about invaluable technologies such as 3-D print-

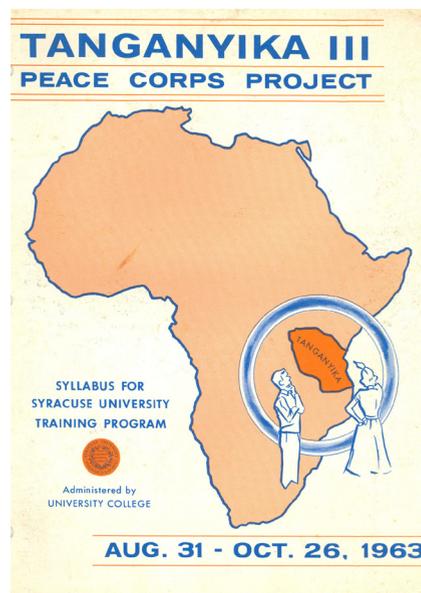


PHOTO COURTESY OF FLICKR/NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY.

ing, robotics and solar power.

- Put artisans online — Teach local

artisans how to sell their goods on sites such as Etsy, eBay and Shopify, or show them how to successfully crowd-fund to acquire working capital needed for business growth.

## Partner Up

- Form partnerships with S. tech companies – Many of these tech companies have not only developed some of the world's most innovative software and hardware but have also expressed lofty goals to make a difference in the world. The Peace Corps should work with companies like Twilio or telecoms, for example,

to donate text messages for use by local healthcare clinics and others, similar to [ChatSalud](#).

- Launch E-book Drives – Partner with Amazon, Kobo and other major e-book merchants to allow consumers to donate e-books to students abroad exploiting the proliferation of smartphones that have dramatically lowered barriers to accessing e-book content.
- Establish a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Innovation Fund – The top social entrepreneurs and accelerator programs – such as Echoing Green, Knight Foundation, Omidyar Network and Skoll Foundation, among

many others — could host an annual event to review applications to fund the best ideas from volunteers on the verge of returning, giving them a path to stay in their local countries to make even greater impacts.

Finding common ground with someone whose policy goals you may strongly disagree with is incredibly challenging. But this isn't about any one of us or the president-elect. This is about coming together as Americans, with the Peace Corps and the National Peace Corps Association, to help evenly distribute our future to the people who need it most — the communities Peace Corps Volunteers are uniquely trained to serve.

# Tonga Peace Corps Embraces the SolarSpell Digital Library

December 20, 2016

🌐 Region: EMA

📍 Post: Tonga

A team of students and faculty from Arizona State University (ASU) traveled to Tonga the second week of December 2016 to deliver their portable ruggedized solar-powered digital library for use in schools and communities across Tonga. The [SPELL](#), or Solar Powered Educational Learning Library, is self- (solar) powered and generates an offline Wi-Fi hotspot that delivers thousands of books, videos and educational content, much of which is specially curated for the Pacific Islands. The team delivered training to 16 US Peace Corps volunteers who teach in the local schools for two years, most as English-language teachers.

The day's activities consisted of an overview of the history of the development and implementation of the SolarSPELL project; training on how to use the SolarSPELL's hardware and software; a scavenger hunt to familiarize volunteers with the library's content (with SolarSPELL t-shirts as prizes); a brainstorming session on how volunteers could use the SolarSPELL itself to collect stories from their communities and counterparts as well as to create new, localized educational content.

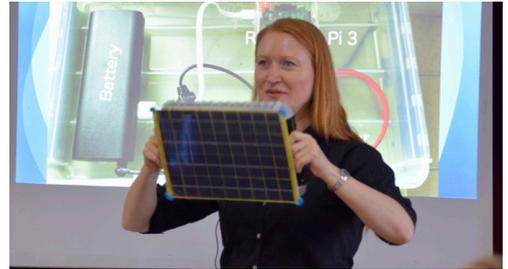
The team received email feedback from one volunteer the day after the training:

I just want to thank you for today. I know we were all really excited by the wonderful new technology and teaching possibilities, but I was really blown away by this project. You guys have really "thought of everything". Working in a Developing country is challenging, but seeing your perseverance to deliver something you're passionate about is inspiring in itself. I may be a "new" volunteer here, but I can't wait to hit the ground running using this great new tool in my teacher tool box. I love the student involvement and the evolution of it all, and how simple you made it. This will be an amazing asset to me for my next 2 years– Thank you!

This implementation with the US Peace Corps in Tonga expands the SolarSPELL's footprint to four Pacific Island nations, with prior deployments in Vanuatu, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Samoa. It is also the first SolarSPELL deployment that saw the team working in tandem with ASU's library staff. Not only did ASU Assistant University Librarian Lorrie McAllister travel with the team and lead part of the Peace Corps training, the [SPELL's content rich website](#) debuted a new, streamlined design that was developed in conjunction with a team of staff from ASU's library, led by Deirdre Kermis.

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**Source:** <https://ict4dviewsfromthefield.wordpress.com/2016/12/20/tonga-peace-corps-embraces-the-solar-spell-digital-library/>





# Peace Corps Volunteers to Improve Monitoring & Evaluation with DataWinners

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS  
AND STAFF IN MADAGASCAR.

January 10, 2017

🌐 Region: AF  
📍 Post: Madagascar

**P**ace Corps/Madagascar MERI Committee Training Workshop

HNI's Third-Year Peace Corps Volunteer, Julissa Soriano, assisted the DataWinners Client Support team in coordinating a two-day DataWinners training workshop for 15 fellow

Peace Corps Volunteers in Madagascar.

The workshop covered a range of functions using HNI's mobile data collection platform, from building a simple questionnaire all the way to Advanced Questionnaires with XLSForm, which the PCVs enjoyed creating.

Source: <http://hni.org/blog/2017/01/10/peace-corps-volunteers-to-improve-me-with-datawinners/>

# Thailand - Let Girls Learn - Girls Empowerment: Technology

January 13, 2017

- 🌐 Region: EMA
- 📍 Post: Thailand
- 👤 Project: Thailand - Hour of Code

**T**he Girl's Empowerment: Technology 2017 Project is a multi-phase plan aimed to expose as many Thai youth, teachers and future teachers to computer science in a way that is fun and creative, ultimately culminating in a 4 day/4 night Girls Empowerment camp/training experience. 40 girls aged 12-13, 10 Thai counterparts, 10 Peace Corps Volunteers will be drawn from communities throughout Thailand.

Each day of the camp will consist of activities, lessons and games dedicated to developing youth leadership, gender equality, problem solving, critical thinking, planning and the importance of persevering through challenges. Planned sessions will include technical instruction using Scratch 2.0 computer programming language, development of life skills through Right to Play, and women in technology career fields. Activities and lessons addressing these learning areas align closely with Thailand's nationwide youth development goals.

In an effort to increase the opportunity for young girls in the areas of Science,

Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Girls Empowerment: Technology Project 2017 will reach beyond the confines of the one-time training. In addition to increasing the participating youths' knowledge across the aforementioned goal areas, the project will also increase counterpart and youth leadership capacity, provide necessary skills to support and sustain the project within the individual participating communities, and engage more host country entities in the planning and implementation of the project, allowing for ongoing engagement after completion of the camp itself with a community-based technology club.

This project has been designed to expand access to education for girls in Thailand as part of the Let Girls Learn Program. Learn more at [letgirlslearn.peacecorps.gov](http://letgirlslearn.peacecorps.gov).

Your contribution increases the impact of Ms. Wirt, her fellow Peace Corps Volunteers, and their communities; and makes a brighter future possible for young women in Thailand.

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Source: <https://donate.peacecorps.gov/donate/project/girls-empowerment-technology/>