

# BURKINA CONNECTION



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO

2017 - NO. 2



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## UPPER VOLTA I CELEBRATES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

by John Sneed, '67-'69



*Trainees learn how to plow during PST in St. Croix, 1967*



*PCVs arrive in Ouaga, Oct. 1967*

In late October 1967, 45 volunteers comprising the initial Peace Corps program in the Republic of Upper Volta boarded a KLM flight to Amsterdam from where, they would continue on a charter flight to Ouagadougou. In September 2017, most of this group will be gathering in Edmonds, Washington, to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this adventure, our friendship with one another, and the values and ideals represented by Peace Corps service. In many ways, Upper Volta 1 may not be much different than all of the other Peace Corps programs that have followed over a half century. But, as the first group arriving in a country that had been independent for only 6 years, it did have some interesting and unique characteristics that have kept us so close together since that day in October 1967.

Perhaps the most unifying aspect of Upper Volta I is that most of us had been together since July of that year. In the early years of Peace Corps, training and selection were

done prior to going to the country. This process ensured that the volunteers knew one another and developed a strong sense of group identity. In July, most of us had first assembled at Dartmouth University for a month-long language course run by one of the great language teachers of our time, John Rassias. One month of the intensive Rassias Method had most of us speaking French at a FSI 3 level, and many of us deeply immersed in learning Mooré, Bissa, and Gourma

from Voltaic instructors. Total immersion--as in living the language, not just speaking it--was key to the Rassias system of instruction. This played out in boisterous volleyball games, skits, performances, and generally being forced to engage with the experience and one another in ways that we had never previously encountered in our educational endeavors. By the end of the month, most of us who had been tentative in our commitment to actually go to Upper Volta for two years were ready to take the next step.

Step 2 in our preparation for life in UV was three months in the Caribbean. Peace Corps operated stateside training camps around the country and, miraculously, ours was on St. Croix in the Virgin Islands, located on a cattle ranch in the hills between Christiansted and Frederiksted. The training was designed as preparation for life in an alien culture, but also as a weeding-out process that

*Continued on page 2*

*Want to know more?*

For more UV1 stories,  
click here for **Jon Berger's**:

## KOUELA MEMOIR

An account of Peace Corps service  
as a well digger, a potato salesman,  
a speaker of the local traditional language,  
and an exiled wilderness paddler.



## UPPER VOLTA I *Continued from page 1*

would guide us to self-deselect if appropriate or, if necessary, the staff would de-select us. As the "Red Book," the Upper Volta 1 training booklet, stated, "Peace Corps service is not for everyone." Several trainees resigned and chose to serve elsewhere. Our training gave one a chance to decide if two years as a volunteer in Upper Volta was the right choice. Training included daily language classes, skills training for the three sectors we were to serve in (public health, agricultural development and well-digging), cross-cultural skills and self-exploration.

The skills development training was ambitious. Looking at the biographies of our group in the "Haute Volta 1" Red Book we were a typical group of recent college graduates, mostly liberal arts majors with zero technical expertise. On St. Croix, the women (public health) volunteers practiced weighing babies (dolls), the ag volunteers practiced plowing with a team of ill-tempered oxen that had been imported for our training from Puerto Rico, and the well volunteers practiced digging a well on a beach located next to the airport and in sight of the St. Croix horse track. As a well-digger-in-training I spent most of my time watching planes land and nags run around the track while the more assertive trainees dug and poured concrete cylinders on the sandy beach which probably still puzzle beachgoers today.

Cross cultural training was a major part of the decision process, and included lectures, role playing, and the most effective part, talking with our Voltaic instructors. The theory (correctly) was that many of us had no experience in other cultures, and that we needed to explore and develop cross-cultural sensitivities before we could effectively engage with the specifics of Voltaic cultures. An interesting part of this self-discovery process was the opportunity to go on a solo excursion, which involved camping alone in the hills around the cattle ranch. This was a pleasant enough opportunity to get away from the daily training commotion of camp life, sit under a coconut palm, and read--a particularly welcome opportunity for the less social trainees!

Field training was the core of the cross-cultural/self-awareness, decision-making process. Begun



*Well-building practice during PST in St. Croix*



*PCV Diane weighs an infant at her site*

## SEND US YOUR MEMORIES!

Share your remembrances and photos with us. We may publish your story in the newsletter or our Facebook page and save it for perpetuity in our history database!

[communications@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:communications@friendsofburkinafaso.org)



Bob Dolian ('69-'71) submitted these photos from his Peace Corps service. Bob was an Ag volunteer in the village of Tibga.

# PRESIDENT'S YIRI: FOCUSING ON WHAT MATTERS

by Faissal Ouedraogo, FBF President

The agricultural sector in Burkina Faso employs about 80% of the population and is the primary source of revenue for the Burkinabé. Many experts believe that agriculture and agribusiness are the future of the country. Unfortunately, investments in the field and training of the actors in the sector are very limited. The Friends of Burkina Faso, partnering with the association *Appui aux Initiatives pour la Valorisation Durable du Potentiel Local* (AIVDPL), has put in place a program that contributes to strengthening the technical capacity of vulnerable producers to increase agricultural production to ensure food security to combat rural poverty. Some specific goals of this project are as follows:

- Training of 375 producers--including 200 women--on the production of rice, cowpea, maize and soybeans;
- Enabling producers to increase their productivity and increase agricultural production and management on their farms;
- Highlighting the benefits of the use of fertilizer, improved seed, and recommended crop-management practices;
- Providing participating farmers with access to government-certified seed and providing them with advice upon visiting their own fields;
- Educating non-participating producers about modern techniques by organizing tours of the project's demonstration lots.

As agriculture becomes the focus of the development strategy of Burkina Faso, it is a ideal sector for FBF projects and will remain an important area for future investments.

One of Malcom X's well-known quotes reads as follow: "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." As of 2015, Burkina Faso had one of the lowest literacy rates in the world at 36%. One of the main reasons for this low rate is the fact that the country does not have enough schools, especially in remote areas. As a philanthropic organization, the Friends of Burkina Faso has helped finance efforts to build schools and provide equipment for students so that the school environment is conducive to learning.

This time around, it is the pupils from the village of Wend-Yida in the rural commune of Thiou (86km from Ouahigouya) that will be blessed by the Friends of Burkina Faso and its partnership with a non-governmental Burkinabe association called NEEED. The goal is to construct a primary school in the village which will provide a durable structure for classes, offices, toilets, a kitchen, and a borehole for water provision. What is truly exciting about this initiative, which is likely key to sustainable development efforts, is the involvement of the people from Wend-Yida in all aspect of the initiative--from identifying the need for the school in their village to providing local construction material and their own labor.

## NEW BOOK BY RPCV JONAH BUSCH ('00-'02)

Protecting tropical forests is among the quickest and most affordable ways to decrease emissions, while also advancing development.

But one critical piece of the puzzle is still missing: finance. Performance payments offer an especially promising approach, providing tangible incentives to reduce emissions from deforestation while going beyond aid to build partnerships between rich and poor countries.

[Why Forests? Why Now?](#) is available from [Brookings Institution Press](#) and on [Amazon.com](#).

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Content originally appeared on the Center for Global Development [website](#) and was reprinted with permission from the author.



[Click here to watch  
Jonah discuss  
Why Forests? Why Now?](#)

# A NEW PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR WEND-YIDA

by Suzanne Plopper, '67-'69

## L'école est la seule voie qui mène au développement

Like many villages in northern Burkina Faso, the village of Wend-Yida (in the commune of Thiou, north of Ouahigouya) built a primary school some years ago so their children could receive a primary school education. As is true for other villages in the region, Wend-Yida relied upon local materials, banco and thatch, for the construction of their school.

While village leaders and parents are proud of their primary school, they recognize that the building is inadequate in many ways, especially in terms of heat, dust, rain and crowded conditions for students.



*A classroom at the current Wend-Yida school*

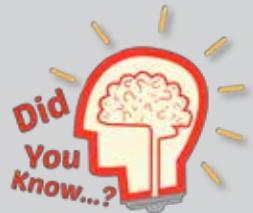
Wend-Yida is one of over 100 villages in the region with locally-built banco/thatch schools that have asked the government to replace their schools with solid concrete structures. Wend-Yida is one of 12 villages that has further taken its request to Association NEEED in the past several years.

Two generous donors to FBF have offered to partner with NEEED to replace a village primary school this year. This is the third time that FBF has partnered with NEEED in the construction of village primary schools. In 2012, FBF contributed to the construction of a single classroom in two villages and another partner to NEEED provided the remaining funds for the construction. In 2015, FBF supported the construction of a primary school in the village of Talle Bouli.

In these school construction projects, NEEED works with regional Ministry of Education (MOE) officials in identifying the highest priority school to replace at the time funds become available. Their selection criteria include: the existence of a banco/thatch school built by the community, a request from the village for help from NEEED and the Ministry in replacing their school, inadequate physical condition of the existing school, adequate staffing by government teachers, village commitment to contribute to the project (generally in the form of providing sand and gravel for the concrete), accessibility of water, and the number of children enrolled in the existing school. NEEED seeks commitment from the village for the construction of latrines for the school.

NEEED follows government guidelines for primary school construction. These include a standard design of three classrooms and an office/storeroom, a deep-bore well, latrines for boys and girls, a simple cookhouse, student desks/benches, and tables and chairs for teachers. These guidelines streamline the process of planning for and building primary schools and eliminate the cost of "re-inventing the wheel" with each new construction. According to NEEED, government guidelines call for an initial investment in three of the six classrooms needed to accommodate the six years of primary school, as the government attempts to respond to the needs of the maximum number of villages. As the initial three-classroom concrete buildings become a reality across the region, attention will focus on the completion of the remaining three classrooms for each school throughout the region. The cookhouse is used to provide a simple noon meal for the children. The government offers schools minimal supplies and parents contribute as possible and necessary to ensure that the children have a noon meal. An important part of this strategy is to shorten the afternoon "sieste," keeping the children at school and thus ensuring their attendance for afternoon classes.

As this *Burkina Connection* "goes to press," the well has been finished and is functioning; and classroom walls are going up in Wend-Yida.



This is the **fourth school** to be built with the support of our generous members!



Visit our website to learn more about the many projects, past and present, made possible by your generous support!



# NEW AG PROJECT TO BOOST CROP YIELDS

by Leslie Berger, '81-'83

The Friends of Burkina Faso recently agreed to fund an exciting new project designed to boost yields for four key crops grown in BF. The FBF Projects Committee received a request for funding from a group of retired Burkinabe agricultural extension agents who had worked with Leslie Berger during her service as a Peace Corps volunteer 1981-83. These extension agents had established an association called Appui aux Initiatives pour la Valorisation Durable du Potentiel Local (AIVDPL) which is being led by Patrice Yaméogo, who was Leslie's former counterpart when she was a PCV.

The eight members of AIVDPL are retired professionals, living in the south-central region in Manga, all of whom have previously worked in agriculture and rural development. The group is interested in giving back to their communities. Their aim is to be able to share their collective expertise in an effort to increase small-farmer income and bolster productivity. The proposal that AIVDPL submitted to FBF highlights the need and possibility of enhancing the crop management skills of farmers through education and to increase their access to improved inputs.

Project funds will be used to set up demonstration plots for crop trials for four main crops – corn, rice, soybean and niebe. The objective is to provide training in improved crop production techniques for 375 farmers in Binde, Gogo and Manga areas of Zoundweogo. By observing and helping out with these trials, farmers will be able to see first-hand the benefits of using improved seed, applying locally produced organic manure, and adopting crop-protection practices to combat pests and disease. In addition to setting up communal demonstration plots on community-designated land, each participating farmer will be encouraged to replicate recommended methods in their own fields. The farmers will have access to improved seed, modern inputs, and the expertise from AIVDPL professionals who will be paying periodic visits to their fields.

## BENEFITS OF THIS AGRICULTURAL PROJECT

- Grass roots organisation and local commitment - AIVDPL, the group that has initiated this project, has the skills required to promote agricultural development and is fully engaged with the local community due to their long careers working in rural development in the region. This project has already fostered local solidarity, with each participating village having elected a leader to coordinate participation of their farmers.
- Government support and engagement - AIVDPL has good relationships with the government and local authorities and to date have briefed the following officials: the mayors of the 3 municipalities, the High Commissioner of Zoundweogo province, and regional and provincial directors of agriculture. Where possible they have met with officials but where that has not been possible they have written to them to ensure that they are fully informed about the objectives of this project. The aim is to enhance collaboration, leverage resources and avoid duplication
- Empowering women - AIVDPL has made it clear to village leaders that half of the participants are to be women farmers. This demonstrates their commitment to empower the lives of women and girls in the region.
- Use of local resources and revival of traditional techniques - One of the main elements of this project is the use of locally produced resources such as manure as a fertiliser source for the demonstration plots and on-farm trials. Participants are obliged to collect and process adequate amounts of manure for the project and must commit to this to be eligible to participate. The farmers are well on their way to digging compost pits with the team reporting that 80% of the pits are already full.



Farmers begin the task of digging pits to store manure



Members of AIVDPL meet with FBF Project Manager, Desiré Bansé



## NEW AG PROJECT *Continued from page 5*

- Project Oversight - Leslie Berger, a FBF Board and Project Committee member is leading project oversight. Leslie is being supported by Désiré Bansé, another member of our Project Committee. Désiré has played a key role in mobilizing local resources. For example, he established contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, which, as a result, opened lines of communication between AIVPDL and Mme Naon, Director of the Centre-Est Region of the Ministry of Agriculture. Both organizations have pledged to reinforce each other's efforts promoting modern farming practices. Another example is that Désiré recruited Lisa Nebie, a Burkinabe Phd student from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. (She is currently studying dairy farmers in the Manga region investigating the impact of climate change and focusing on local adaptation strategies.) Leslie has established an excellent relationship with Lisa who has agreed to visit AIVDPL on a monthly basis to help with communication and evaluation of the project.

### PROJECT PROGRESS

To date, Lisa has held two productive meetings with AIVDPL personnel, one in February and another in March. She found the AIVDPL staff to be motivated, well-organised, and committed to improving the livelihood of the people in the three rural communities.

Lisa has already provided FBF with detailed reports outlining progress made and challenges faced. The main activity from January – March focused on AIVPDL visits to each participating village to improve awareness of the importance of soil nutrition, and the benefits of using manure to improve soil health. During these visits, AIVDPL's technical teams promoted the use of compost pits to store livestock manure collected on farms. One of the main objectives of these early visits was to monitor farmers' progress in digging and filling the manure pits. The team conducted more than 100 field visits for the project launch, raising awareness with a total of 2,259 producers of which nearly half were women.

### NEXT STEPS

In April and May the team will start developing the demonstration plots and training the farmers on the agricultural techniques needed to grow the four crops using improved seed and organic fertilizer. As we go to press, the team is discussing the best protocols for designing the demonstration plots and has ordered the seed that is currently being certified by the Ministry of Agriculture.

We expect this project to be a great success given the combination of Leslie's leadership and Patrice, the driving force behind AIVPDL, Désiré's contacts in Manga and Ouagadougou, Lisa's supporting field visits and reports, and AIVDPL's close relationships with government authorities.

For more information on this project contact Leslie Berger ([leslie@farm.co.uk](mailto:leslie@farm.co.uk)) and/or Désiré Bansé ([desibanse@gmail.com](mailto:desibanse@gmail.com)).

## ANDREW YOUNG SWORN-IN AS AMBASSADOR TO BURKINA



Andrew Young was confirmed by the Senate on September 28, 2016 as the next U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso. Prior to this appointment, Mr. Young served as Deputy Chief of Mission at U.S. Embassy Bamako, Mali, where the Embassy's inter-agency team addressed a wide range of challenges including securing a 2015 Peace Accord, confronting multiple terrorist attacks and successfully countering Ebola outbreaks. On November 16, 2016 Andrew Young received the James A. Baker Award for Outstanding Deputy Chief of Mission.

Mr. Young earned an A.B. from the University of California Berkeley and an M.A. from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Bologna, Italy and Washington, D.C. In 2015, he received the American Foreign Service Association's first Mark Palmer Award for the Advancement of Democracy for his work in Burma, on Capitol Hill and in Mali to promote democracy.

# FBF MEETS NEW BURKINABE AMBASSADOR TO U.S.

by Sali Greeley, FBF Membership Officer



*FBF Board Members Tom Vollrath (not pictured), Aaron Buchsbaum, Kathleen McDonald, and Sali Greeley along with FBF Project Committee members Mead Over and Drissa Dao had a very engaging and informative exchange with the newly installed Burkinabe Ambassador, Mr. Seydou Kaboré (center), and the Embassy Counselor.*

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, four members of our Board of Directors and two members of FBF's Project Committee were welcomed at the Embassy of Burkina Faso by his Excellency Seydou Kaboré and the Embassy Counselor, Mr. Armand Tientoré.

Our group boasted a good representation of FBF members; from the very first group of volunteers to have served in Upper Volta to a recently returned volunteer, plus two non-RPCV Burkinabé.

After warmly welcoming us, his Excellency Seydou Kaboré thanked the FBF contingent for taking the initiative to visit with him. He was visibly appreciative of meeting us and said that he looks forward to getting to know more of our members and to working with our organization to expand and solidify the links that tie FBF to Burkina Faso. The Ambassador had heard about FBF and some of our activities. As designate ambassador to the United States, he had met with Andrew Young, the newly installed U.S. Ambassador to Burkina. Young debriefed him about the Friends of Burkina and the members he had met last fall in Washington DC at the home of former US Ambassador Jimmy Kolker.

Kathleen McDonald spoke about the FBF Peace Award and its previous winners. Aaron

Buchsbaum introduced the Ambassador to our reformatted website. Ambassador Kaboré expressed interest in refurbishing the Embassy's website in similar fashion and suggested that, in due course, FBF and the Embassy link their websites, increasing exposure for both.

Tom Vollrath and the two other Project Committee members informed the Ambassador about current FBF projects in Burkina. The group mentioned that an anonymous donor has offered to build a primary school, in partnership with Association NEEDED, in the village of Wend Yida in northern Burkina. They brought up concerns about accepting this offer due to recent attacks and overall security challenges in the northern region near the border with Mali.

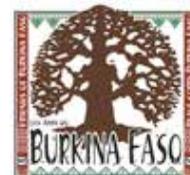
The Ambassador encouraged FBF to approve this project because abandoning it would be a victory for the aggressors. Moreover, he expressed confidence that, if the residents of Wend Yida were to be

involved, they would safeguard the construction site and materials because of their need and desire to have a primary school in the village.

Questions were raised about the possibility of obtaining tax relief from duties levied on imported material used in construction. The Embassy Counsellor, Mr. Armand Tientoré, provided clarification on this issue, namely that FBF partners, not FBF itself, could apply for tax relief should the latter be registered as non-profit organizations.

Our meeting time was set to last one hour; in a typically welcoming and Burkinabé family-like atmosphere, it lasted almost two. We had a wonderful and very productive exchange with the Ambassador.

FBF will continue to engage with the Embassy and hopes for a productive partnership in the future.



# FROM THE FIELD: MEN AS PARTNERS TRAINING

by Elèna Ruyter & Alanna Ross, PCVs

If there is anything I have learned in my time working with young women, it is that gender roles and perceptions impact all areas of development.

When I started a gardening project, for example, I was told that there were certain crops that we should grow because they were 'for women.' Additionally, many of my lessons concerning important issues like malaria, sexual health, and nutrition were interrupted because the girls I was teaching were obliged to perform certain 'gendered' chores. It became increasingly clear to me that tackling the issue of empowerment with women alone was an incomplete task without the partnership of open-minded and progressive men within the community.

With this in mind, I began to engage and challenge preconceived notions about women's role in development. Having these open, and often difficult, conversations is what led me to want to lead the Men As Partners (MAP) conference this year. The purpose of the MAP conference is not just to facilitate discussions within the standing belief system about gender and equality in Burkina Faso, but create a safe space for learning, questioning, and challenging preconceptions. MAP dares Burkinabe to think and act more critically when it comes to issues of gender equality, violence and even sex.

In order to increase the impact of the conference on its participants, volunteers selected men within their communities whom they thought would most benefit from the conference. We also called upon two Burkinabe facilitators, one of which had participated in MAP previously. As a result, MAP 2016 brought together diverse and motivated group of contributors, encouraging them throughout the conference to raise questions, debate and think about how the subjects related to their specific contexts. The sessions engaged subjects such as sexual health and family planning, communication, violence, gender roles and third party intervention. We made sure there was plenty of time for group work within the conference so that participants could work with other Burkinabe from different areas and ethnic groups.

By far the most effective session at the conference was the lesson on sexual health. It was at this point during the conference that we saw a visible change in the attitudes of the participants, who went from timid participation to actively engaging, asking engaging questions and volunteering for group participation activities. What resulted was an unprompted discussion about the roles of men



and women in the household and how men could assist their partners more.

The final day of the conference consisted of each site creating action plans for how they were going to apply their knowledge with their respective volunteers. Upon presenting, each team seemed excited and energized to take a specific plan back to their villages addressing a need they had identified. Not long after the conference, I received a call from one PCV whose counterpart had engaged younger men in the community concerning topics he had learned at MAP.

This year we are excited to be planning a new initiative to increase the sustainability of MAP. With remaining funds, we would like to plan a 'Mini-MAP' in three months' time to bring the participants together again. The goal is not only to put pressure on each team to do something with their knowledge in the three months since the conference but also to provide them with more information, new tools, and the feeling of being part of a gender and development team. We hope that this sense of responsibility will encourage participants to truly take on the charge of being change agents in their communities.

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*Reprinted and edited with permission from the authors. Elèna Ruyter is a Community Economic Development Volunteer and Alanna Ross is an Education Volunteer. The post originally appeared on the Peace Corps Stories [website](#).*



# PROJECT UPDATE: GIRLS SCHOLARSHIP FUND

by Beth Knight, Communications Officer

"When I grow up, I want to become a physical education teacher."

"When I grow up, I want to become a teacher or a doctor because I want to help people."

"When I grow up, I want to be a soldier because I want to defend my nation."

"I want to become a history-geography teacher in order to teach my little brothers and sisters to become teachers like me."

"When I grow up, I want to continue to go to school. I don't want to ever quit school."

Judith Yelkouni, an 11<sup>th</sup> grader at Lycee Municipal Toussaint Louverture is more elaborate: "When I grow up, I dream of becoming a journalist, a lawyer, or an English teacher. Because I love languages. To be an English teacher, you must first like the subject and provide yourself with the means to master the language. To be a journalist or a lawyer as well, you must master the French language. The reason for which I chose the A series [high school track] is to be taught languages."



*Students show off their new backpacks!*

Judith and her classmates living near Yako in Burkina Faso's Passoré province have high hopes. And these girls also have a chance to make these dreams come true. They are in the Burkina Faso Girls' Scholarship Fund (BFGSF) program (<http://burkinagirls.org/>), which supports their education from primary through secondary school.

Why BFGSF? In Burkina Faso, girls' school enrollment drops off after primary school to 83% of the male rate<sup>1,2</sup>. Rural areas have even lower education rates, with girls in the Nord region spending an average of 4.6 years in school, compared to boys' 6.5 years<sup>3</sup>. In Judith's high school, there are 95 boys and 40 girls in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade class.

Education is the number one goal for girls in the developing world<sup>4</sup>, yet long distances to school in rural areas<sup>4,5</sup> and the greater expense of secondary school can be prohibitive<sup>5</sup>.

Being orphaned increases the risk of not going to school<sup>6</sup>, especially among girls<sup>7</sup>. 10% of Burkinabe children have lost one or both parents and their households have difficulty affording school supplies<sup>6</sup>.

To address these barriers, BFGSF provides school fees, school supplies, lunches, uniforms, and bikes to girls, many whom are orphans, in the Yako region each year. With the generous donations of FBF members last fall, BFGSF was able to double the number of scholars in the 2016-2017 school year to 30 girls. On October 27, 2016, the Burkina Faso daily newspaper, *Le Pays*, highlighted these scholarships in an article about BFGSF, FBF, and our Burkinabe-led partner NGO Help for the Future. During this past winter, PCV Catrina Gardner visited the girls as a third-party steward and interviewed them about their experiences in the program.

BFGSF's objective is to let the girls go as far in their education as their academic dreams take them. As a side perk, studies show that girls' education also provides benefits to society such as reduced HIV risk<sup>5</sup>, child marriage<sup>8</sup>, maternal, infant and child mortality, and healthier, more educated families for generations<sup>5</sup>.

But the real impact is in the life of each individual. As Judith, a BFGSF scholar for six years, says, "This scholarship is very important to me, because without it I wouldn't even have made it to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, let alone the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. With our parents, it's not sure that they are going to have the 25,000 or 30,000 [francs] to send us to school or to find the bicycles to come to school. Anyway, for us it's a little difficult, but with this scholarship, everything has become easier. We thank you very much."

*Please Note: Footnotes are hyperlinked.*





# PROJECT UPDATE: TIGOUNG NONMA ATELIER

Since December 2014, Tigoung Nonma (TN), a cooperative of artisans living with disabilities in Ouagadougou, has been fundraising to build a wheelchair accessible workshop. To date, with the help of a [GlobalGiving](#) campaign and FBF, over \$20,000 has been raised. But they still require an additional \$23,000 to purchase land and build a permanent atelier.

Unfortunately, the decline in tourism in BF due to political turmoil and terrorism concerns has greatly reduced the craft market. To confront this and still support its members, TN has diversified its service offering, developing a catering service, equipment rentals, and selling juices and cereals. While these diverse service offerings have helped, it has also increased the need for a permanent workshop location with enough space for the artisans to continue to develop their craft as well as these new initiatives.

To support TN, former British Volunteer, Alice McGonnell started an [Etsy](#) shop, selling TN-produced goods. Please consider continuing to support this organization through a [GlobalGiving](#) donation or purchase of goods.

To learn more about TN, visit their website: [www.tigoungnonma.org](http://www.tigoungnonma.org).



DONATE NOW



The National Peace Corps Association is calling out for action to protect the Peace Corps.

NPCA's #ProtectPeaceCorps campaign is mobilizing our community to secure no less than level funding of \$410 million for the Peace Corps and \$60 billion for the International Affairs budget. Get involved.

The NPCA [website](#) has detailed options for how you can help!



National Peace Corps Association

# #ProtectPeaceCorps

FY18 Campaign Timeline



# FBF RECOGNIZED BY ABURWA

by Sali Greeley, Membership Officer

From the parking lot, I followed my nose and ears to where the appetizing smells and sweet music notes emanated. The large room in the basement of a local church was the setting for the yearly D.C. area-based Burkinabé gathering to celebrate the Independence of Burkina Faso with a cultural night and awards ceremony. A beautiful display of appetizing brochettes, fried plantains, tô and sauce gombo, and riz gras, along with refreshing bissap and jus de gingembre, attracted the partygoers to the back of the room. Hardly could the most serious dieter resist such a feast.

On the front stage decorated with Burkina flags, fabric, and balloons, Burkinabé musicians aided by a DJ brought their talent to life. The whole front part of the room became a huge dance floor. Etienne Yonly, the President of ABURWA, read an opening statement to officially launch the event. He also handed out the ABURWA Awards to five recipients; FBF was one of them. I represented FBF and accepted the beautiful Certificate of Appreciation on its behalf.

Ce fut une belle soirée!

We thank ABURWA for this recognition and we look forward to a solid partnership and cooperation between our two organizations.



Sali Greeley, 2nd from left, with certificate awarded to FBF

## NOW ACCEPTING 2017 PEACE AWARD NOMINATIONS

Have you nominated someone for the Award for Peace?

The Friends of Burkina Faso Award for Peace is established to recognize the contributions of individuals at all levels, to provide support and motivation to those individuals, and to raise powerful examples of good works for others to see and from which to be inspired.

FBF was honored to award the Mogho Naba and U.S. Ambassador Tulinabo S. Mushingi in 2015 and 2016 respectively. They received the FBF Award for Peace statue and the Burkinabe non-profit of their choosing received a \$2000 donation in their honor. Read more about the award winners and donation recipients on our [website](#).

Know of someone that is making a difference in Burkina? Nominate them today for the 2017 Award for Peace!

*click here*  
→

**NOMINATION FORM**



# PCV BLOG: THE WAY FORWARD

by Rachel Ohrenschall

## The Mango Rains

While it is true that in my (southern) region of Burkina Faso the rainy season runs from Mid-May to mid-October, there is one exception to this 7-month drought: the mango rains. Named because they coincide with Mango season, these sporadic rains fall anywhere from March-April and are standalone events, they don't signify the beginning of the rainy season. Our last rain was October 15th 2016, meaning that as of last Sunday March 19th it had been just over 5 months without rain. Imagine this, and now remember that I am a Seattle girl and have never in my life lived for 5 months without rain. Not only has it not rained, but even though it was "cold" season from December -February it was still in the 90's and sunny every day though occasionally it got down to the 60's at night. In comparison, that felt cold indeed.

Last Sunday I was going to the water pump when I received texts from both my closest volunteer, Tim, and my friend Andi in the SW part of the country near Bobo-Dioulasso saying that it was raining at their sites. I knew that if Tim got rain it meant that I would probably get rain as well. But, I needed water so I set off with my 20L water container and brought my hat because it was so hot and sunny. I arrived at the pump and greeted everyone then put my container in line and waited. Suddenly, it started. Big fat drops hit my arm and sizzled on the hot concrete walls of the pump that I was leaning against. The drops felt so cold against my skin that I developed goose bumps, but I was so refreshed and they continued faster and faster. The Burkinabe women at the pump used fabric and large bowls to cover their heads, to protect themselves from the rain. But I took my hat off, and let the rain wash over me. It was such a gift to feel cold; a sensation that I don't ever feel here. The women filed slowly away from the pump seeking shelter—because rain here is a violent experience, the raindrops are large and fall at an extraordinary rate and volume, it isn't at all like the gray drizzle of Seattle, this is thunderstorm weather—and yet I stayed. I stayed until my 20L water container was full, I stayed because as I felt the rain hit me, it seemed like it was washing away all my frustrations with projects, local language, my service and my village. I stayed until I teared up a little from happiness, homesickness, and beautiful serendipity of the moment where after 5 months, on a Sunday afternoon, at the end of a very hard week it rains when I am at the water pump in my blue dress.

I stayed until my 20L water container was full, then I strapped it onto the back of my bike and started heading towards my house. My dress was wet, my sunglasses were fogged, my hair was dripping onto my forehead and yet I was the happiest I had been in a while. I walked in the rain past people taking shelter under hangars and trees, I waved to them and they waved back at me. I could tell in their dubious expressions that they thought I was crazy for walking around in this pouring rain. What they didn't, and couldn't, understand was that I come from a place with so much rain that to me rain is home. The lack of rain these past few months has made me feel even farther away; I constantly and acutely feel the thousands of miles and ocean that separate me from Seattle.

By the time I arrived at my door with my water, my blue dress was soaked through and the rain was lightening up, though I did still hear some thunder. I opened my door to find Amina, my cat, meowing and rubbing all over my legs. I realized he was scared, and it hit me over the head. The last time it rained, in mid-October, he was only 2 months old, he was only a baby and so he might not remember what rain is. I petted him and comforted him then I sat there in shock. He doesn't remember the rain. He has lived most of his lifetime without the rain. The rarity and utmost importance of rain here gives it an almost magical property. I always loved the Toto song but now I truly understand the meaning of the lyric, "I bless the rains down in Africa."

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*Reprinted and edited with permission from the author. This post originally appeared on Rachel's blog: [The Way Forward](#). Rachel swore-in as a health volunteer in 2016. In her PCV village, she has started a middle school health club, community garden, and conducted training sessions with various women's groups on malaria prevention and soap making. Originally from Kenmore, WA, Rachel was an EMT in Seattle and graduated from the University of Washington in 2015 with a BS in Biochemistry.*





Instagram

@joemegna  
#pcburlinafaso



## UPPER VOLTA I *Continued from page 2*

in Philadelphia where the group staged before heading to the Caribbean, we were assigned areas of the city and sent out to explore the community for several days, with a two-dollar-a-day allowance to support ourselves. Later, we were also periodically sent out to explore the culture of St. Croix, and then to top it off we were sent "down island" for a month to experience a mini-Peace Corps experience in places like Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Antigua. These islands had active Peace Corps programs, allowing us to interact with volunteers in the field, as well as explore ideas for projects we might implement ourselves as volunteers. The language instructors accompanied us, holding daily classes, intensifying our language skills and personal relationships with them and each other.

During the latter two weeks of training back on St. Croix we were visited by the newly appointed Country Director of our program, Tom Fox. This represented the single most important aspect of our program success, the staffing of Upper Volta 1. In addition to Tom, six other -- Associate Directors Reg Petty and Dick Spencer; a Physician, Eli Newberger; and three spouses, Elizabeth Fox, Lucy Petty, and Carolyn Newberger -- ensured that the volunteers were well-supported both in the field and in Ouagadougou when we needed some of the comforts of home. That they were, for the most part, new to Peace Corps, not too much older than the volunteers, and extremely competent ensured that the volunteer-staff relationship was productive.

The first sign of the effective staff leadership was how well Upper Volta 1 was programmed. Within a few weeks of arrival in Ouagadougou, the volunteers began spreading out across the country where housing and local support had been identified. The single women headed west to the larger towns, while the men and married couples headed east to the Fada N'Gourma, Koupela, Tenkodogo, Garango axis. Only three volunteers remained in Ouaga, assigned to jobs where they actually had skills and expertise. This regional programmatic assignment insured that volunteers in the three sectors continued to develop close friendships. The well-digging volunteers, for example, interacted frequently with each other as we were inventing a system for doing the work that was substantially different than what we had been taught.

The method we had been taught in training by former Niger volunteers was appropriate for the sandy soils of the Sahara, but not appropriate for the granite geology of the Southern Sahel. In short, the deep wells of Niger called for a "dig a meter, pour a meter" technique that essentially created a large diameter concrete well from the top down, often as deep as 30 meters or more. In Upper Volta, early attempts to follow this approach led to 3-meter dry concrete silos that could not go through the granite lying below the laterite. These failures quickly led to a new approach that had villages responsible for digging the wells down to water at which point the concrete and molds would be brought in and the well constructed from the bottom up. Being in relative close proximity with each other, the volunteers shared this and other well-digging techniques..

Further enhancing the sharing culture among well-diggers was the four Jeeps that were an integral part of the program. These vehicles were essential for moving the heavy steel concrete molds and bags of cement from village to village. They also provided an unusual mobility to the volunteers. We shared these vehicles among the 20 or so volunteers and, often, had to visit one another to exchange the vehicles. The Jeeps also offered opportunities for official trips to Ouaga and some unauthorized excursions to Ghana and Togo. One of the best decisions of UV 1 staff was to set up a shop and warehouse in Tenkodogo, a somewhat central locale in the well-digging region, from where the logistics of the well-digging supplies and vehicle maintenance and sharing could be managed. An especially good decision was the identification a volunteer with mechanical and management skills, Bob Coffey, who was delegated the responsibility to organize the shop and warehouse.

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Archived versions of our newsletter, starting with the very first edition in 1987, are available. Just click on the image above!

Jeeps were not the only mobility advantage early volunteers had. Every volunteer was issued a mobyette, which allowed those of us in remote villages to visit the larger towns for supplies and enabled us to stay in contact with each other and pick up paychecks from the "PTTs", the local post offices. Each volunteer household was equipped with a kerosene refrigerator, a two burner propane stove, a Petromax pressure lantern, a buffet, table and two chairs, a couple of canvas chairs and a mosquito net. Peace Corps had created a sizable paperback library and provided each household with one third of the collection, with the expectation that we would trade books with other volunteers as we worked our way through the two years.

In addition to the library, we had subscriptions to Newsweek that arrived by post a week or so late and occasional deliveries of the International Herald Tribune. But the most essential piece of gear was the short wave radio. Most of us had acquired Zenith Worldmasters in New York, prior to departure, and the evening broadcasts from BBC and VOA enabled us to stay in touch with the outside world. We lived the great events of our time, the assassinations of MLK and RFK and the unrest that followed, the moon landing, the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention, and the ongoing misery of Vietnam through the static of shortwave and the weeks-long delays of the postal system.

Peace Corps intended that we spend our two years immersed in Africa. Communications from home suffered the same delays as the news. Letters took more than a week and phone calls were almost nonexistent. Our blogs were our diaries, most of which have never seen the light of day, beyond a few family and friends when we returned. We had ample vacation time and a travel allowance, but were forbidden to travel outside of the continent. Consequently, most of us had rich experiences on trains, trucks, riverboats, horse and camel that we would have missed had we returned home or gone to Europe

during down time. I visited Niger, Dahomey (Benin), Togo, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and most corners of Upper Volta, usually traveling overland. These adventures eating dust in the back of a truck, buying chicken out the window of a train, sitting in the sun while the bus was unloaded for customs inspection at a border crossing, and meeting people throughout West Africa enriched our Peace Corps experience.

Except for the Thomas Sankara era hiatus between 1985 and 1993, volunteers have shared the privilege of serving in this wonderful country for the last half of a century. I feel certain that volunteers who have served during any of those years could sit down and share experiences with each other and know exactly what the other was talking about. The Peace Corps experience is, to a large extent, about putting oneself in an unfamiliar context, learning to adapt and to grow into it. And that hasn't changed, though much else has changed in the ensuing years. Burkina Faso remains a fascinating country with the same generous people, similar challenges and the handsome rewards. The pleasure of extended greeting while passing on the path, the smell of wood smoke at dusk, the braying of donkeys at dawn, the satisfaction of tô and sauce on the fingers, the heat of piment on the lips, and the sweet quench of dolo on a dusty tongue. It has been 50 years. It feels like yesterday.



Well-digging in Koupela 1967



Lilougou well, dug in 1967, still functioning in 1994!

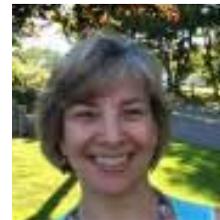
## MEET OUR PROJECTS COMMITTEE

The FBF Project Committee serves as a vehicle to facilitate the organization's support of grassroots development projects in Burkina Faso. Committee members evaluate proposals submitted to the organization and make recommendations, subject to the availability of resources in the Projects Fund, to the Board of Directors regarding project approval. Periodically, the Committee informs the organization's membership and the general public about the progress being achieved and the impact of endorsed projects.



**Désiré Bansé** harkens from Zabré (Boulgou Province). After studying computer science in France, he came to the U.S. where he works as a research engineer at [NIST](#). Désiré joined FBF's Project Committee because it gives him "opportunities to work with a group of people that want to bring change to Burkina, one community at a time."

**Leslie Berger** (Micro-credit, '81-'83), a founding member of FBF, studied Agricultural Economics at Michigan State and worked for [USDA's](#) Foreign Agricultural Service. Based in the UK for 26 years, she is an agri-environmental consultant, and manages a family farm. Leslie is interested in developing more ag projects in Burkina to build resilience in locally produced food supplies and improve livelihoods.



**Drissa Dao** is a cyber-security consultant and an IT security auditor at [NOAA](#). Before moving to the U.S., Drissa coordinated UNESCO clubs throughout the Koudougou region, and led youth cultural exchange programs. Drissa has been an FBF member since 2007. He holds a MS in Information Technology and a BS in Economics and Management.

**Tom Fox** was the first Country Director in Upper Volta from '67-'69. Following a distinguished career with the Peace Corps in West Africa, Tom assumed the position of Deputy Director of Peace Corps' Africa program in D.C. He has also worked for several non-governmental organizations and foundations and helped manage programs for [USAID](#).



**Katie Gehron** (Education, Silmidougou, '12-'15) loved the opportunity to live, celebrate, and work with the Burkinabe. Katie works at Peace Corps HQ in D.C. as a Country Desk Officer. She will be graduating with her Masters in International Training and Education in May 2017.

**Jimmy Kolker** was the U.S. Ambassador to Burkina Faso ('99-'02). He took special pride that the "Ambassador's Self-Help" small grants program in Burkina Faso was the world's largest for community-led projects. Jimmy also served as U.S. Ambassador to Uganda, Deputy Head of [PEPFAR](#), Assoc. Dir. at [UNICEF](#), and Asst. Sec. for Global Affairs at the U.S. [DHHS](#). He retired in January 2017.



**Bagassi Koura** is a journalist and the Managing Editor of [VOA's](#) Bambara Service in D.C. Bagassi has a degree in Journalism and Communication from [UO](#). He completed graduate studies in cinematography at [Berkeley](#). Bagassi has covered African issues for VOA as well as other international news media, including AFP and Reuter's.

**Mead Over** (Wells, Tenkodogo, '67-'69) After a career at the World Bank, Mead is now a Sr. Fellow at [CGD](#), researching economics of efficient, effective, and cost-effective health interventions in developing countries. Much of his work has focused on the economics of HIV/AIDS, preventing and treating malaria, and economic costs of the Ebola epidemic.



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# MEET OUR PROJECTS COMMITTEE *Continued from page 15*



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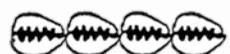
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**Suzanne Plopper** (Maternal/Child Health, Ouahigouya, '67-'69) returned to Burkina in 1981 for 2.5 years as a health educator with a rural water supply and primary health care project in Bougouriba. Since 2002, she has led FBF's collaboration with [NEED](#) in Ouahigouya and FBF's various girls' education/training projects. Suzanne also serves as Treasurer of the FBF Board.



"Burkina holds a very special place in my heart."



**Bony Porrogho** is a Sr. Information Security and Project Management professional. Born in Ivory Coast, raised in Mali and Burkina Faso, and often calls Senegal and Guinea Bissau his family home. Bony joined FBF's Projects Committee in 2012 "to help create change, little by little, but change that truly matters, namely sustainable improvement in people's' lives!"

**Anne Spear** (Girls Education & Empowerment, '08-'10) is a doctoral student in the International Education Policy program at University of Maryland, specializing in literacy curriculum development, social change, gender and education. Ms. Spear is a certified teacher, holding a M.S.Ed in Education and Social Change at the University of Miami.



**Thomas Vollrath** (Agriculture, Garango, '67-'70) studied agricultural economics at the University of Tennessee and conducted applied research on international agricultural trade for USDA's Economic Research Service. A charter member of FBF, Tom is chair of the Projects Committee since its inception. He believes in the core missions of FBF and the value of supporting community-based initiatives focusing on sustainable economic development in Burkina.

*Want to know more?*

To find out more about current FBF projects or to submit a proposal, visit

[www.friendsofburkinafaso.org](http://www.friendsofburkinafaso.org)

