

August 24, 2003

My work with Peace Corps

Hi everyone. My voice has been pretty silent and I've been letting Chuck do all the writing. But I am home for a couple of weeks and now have the time to write. Many of you have asked what I do and how I spend my time.

I am loving my job. It combines all my work and life experience to date. I keep telling everyone that I have the perfect job - I supervise no one, my boss is in Washington, and I get to travel all around Africa. In many ways it is similar to my work in Manchester, NH with a group of hospitals. I'm an internal consultant for 7 countries in West Africa: Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde, Gambia, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Peace Corps Directors and staff ask me to come and assist them in either programming or training. Since April, I have worked in 5 of my seven countries. I have an office here at the Dakar/Senegal PC office, but I am not on their staff - Senegal is just one of my countries.

Before I'll tell you about some of the things I've done, let me explain PC a bit. Peace Corps is managed by a Country Director, and each sector program is managed by an APCD (Assistant Peace Corps Director). Sectors depend upon a country's need and the government's requests. They include Agriculture, Environmental Protection and Education, Agro-forestry, Health, Education and Small Enterprise Development. Volunteers work mainly at the village level and many live with families in huts with no running water or electricity. This is particularly true in my region called the Sahel. To become a volunteer (PCV) you must first go through 10 - 11 weeks of Pre-service Training (PST). If the staff believes the trainee has successfully completed the training (2 languages - French and local, technical skills, cross-culture etc.) he/she swears in for two years of service.

Here in Senegal, I have designed and facilitated workshops / focus groups to develop new projects. One was an Eco-tourism Project and the other was an Urban Agriculture Project. These were each 4-day workshops involving government officials who work with Peace Corps, PCVs and any other interested stake holders (International agencies...) I use very participatory methods with lots of brainstorming and small group work. PC strongly believes in having all the diverse stakeholders involved in every phase of project planning and evaluation; a philosophy I strongly support. Workshops are always only in French - still a problem for me, but people say I'm easily understood and that my French is "cute". I also led a two-day planning retreat here in May and on Monday and Tuesday I'll facilitate a program and training review.

I've been to Mauritania twice. Once in April for a weeklong de-stress conference for Volunteers and staff during the Iraqi war. I taught the first three of Covey's Habits. Then I returned for 10 days in May to facilitate a three-day Agro-forestry project review and redesign. I also did the Habits for all the senior staff. I know Chuck wrote you all about our trip, and the wonderful APCD I worked with, Aw.

Week long trips to Niger and Cape Verde were to work with PST trainers on curriculum and in general get to know the staff and their needs. Niger was particularly fun since I had worked there with PC from 1987 to 1990. So many of the Nigerien staff are still

there and they all remembered me. Niger was the first place I haven't taken Chuck. The airfare is very expensive and I was only there a week. I return there from Sept 5 to 12 to facilitate several evaluation workshops. This will be really an organizational development task. They have been working for 8 years with a huge project umbrella, called Household Food Security (Niger is the 2nd poorest country in the world according to the UN). My work that week will be to help the staff reorganize their programs into more sector specific projects.

Finally, I was in Mali for two weeks - a wonderful and energizing trip. I had worked with the pre-service training (PST) program for 5 months in early 1987. The training staff (and many of the office staff) are still there and I was very warmly welcomed and remembered. It is amazing how many Anne Dodge stories could have been created during that short period, but almost everyone had one!! There I designed and facilitated a 5-day PST design workshop (the new trainees were coming 3 weeks later). PC Mali, along with several other of my countries is re-evaluating their PST systems so they wanted me to help them design a transition phase. There were over 30 participants - all the language, cross-cultural and technical training staff. It was fun and interesting - the participants had great energy and enthusiasm. The second week I designed and led a training of trainers (TOT) workshop for all the training staff and the 12 PCVs who will also be participating in the training. What a great group of young people - some of our best and brightest! The highlight of the week was practice teaching sessions in small groups with feedback from peers. The creativity of the non-formal activities and exercises was terrific, especially among the volunteers.

So now I am home for a couple of weeks, completing travel vouchers that I still can't seem to do right, developing curriculum for the field and in general getting organized before the next heavy traveling period. I'll only be in Senegal for 7 days during September. As I said before, a week in Niger, then to South Africa for 15 days - 3 days of which is a meeting with my 2 counterparts from the other African regions (the woman from Kenya finished her tour this month and they haven't yet completed the hiring of a new person) and my boss from Washington. I really look forward to meeting Gene who's in Pretoria (for Southern Africa) and re-seeing Brownie who's in Benin (for coastal West Africa). Brownie and I were together for 2 years in Niger with Peace Corps back in the late 80s. Chuck is coming also and we are taking 5 days before the meeting to go to Kruger Park and then 5 days after the meeting to explore the Cape Town area - I can't wait.

October is already fully booked with a conference on HIV/AIDS and some staff work in Burkina Faso and a return to Cape Verde for a staff retreat. Then Mali again in November. It sounds hectic, but so far I am enjoying it. I'm learning to (and trying to make myself) go slower and book time in between trips. Unfortunately Chuck won't travel with me as often, so it will be lonelier, but I still enjoy the work.

Well, gotta go.

Anne / Anzie