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Peace Corps Times



Special Edition—
Volunteers and the
Global Food Crisis

Many Volunteers May Face ‘Silent Tsunami’



Volunteer Scott Wilhelm (2004-2006) inspects a mango tree in his village in El Salvador. Through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, Wilhelm raised money to replant fruit trees that had been destroyed by a volcanic eruption.

In early 2008, the price Volunteers in Panama paid for bread had increased by 40 percent. In the Philippines, which imports more rice than any country in the world, prices have increased by almost 20 percent since the beginning of the year. In April, inflation in that country rose to the highest level (8.3 percent) in nearly three years, largely driven by rising food costs.

Food riots have also brought insecurity to the capital cities of several Peace Corps countries in Africa, and Volunteers across the world are feeling the effects of a growing food crisis.

Many internationally traded food commodities, such as dairy products, vegetable oils, and cereals, have been

rapidly rising in price in recent years. Overall, food prices are up 75 percent since 2000. In April, World Bank President Robert Zoellick spoke of a “doubling of food prices over the last three years.” And in the first three months of 2008 alone, prices increased by about 50 percent. The UN World Food Programme has called this rise in prices “a silent tsunami,” threatening to plunge more than 100 million people on every continent into hunger.

A confluence of factors has created this silent global storm. Economic growth in the form of increased incomes in China and India has driven up the consumption of meat and milk, which in turn has driven higher the demand for

the cereals necessary to produce them. World policies in the form of subsidies for biofuel alternatives to fossil fuels divert corn harvests and reduce acreage dedicated to other food crops. Specific climatic events that have hit harvests have also contributed, such as last year’s drought in Australia, one of the world’s largest producers of wheat. Other factors include higher energy and fertilizer costs, and recent restrictions by some governments on exporting domestically produced foods.

According to Program and Training Officer Christopher Burns, the crisis is urgent in Niger. The problem actually had its roots in 2004, when the combination of drought and desert locusts in the country’s agropastoral areas devastated agricultural production. This resulted in a loss in cereal production of an estimated 15 percent compared to the average annual production over the past five years, and the deficit of what is needed to feed livestock is now estimated at over 36 percent. Average urban wage earners spend more than 50 percent just to buy rice for their families and all signs point to a rice shortage or stoppage by the end of June. Additionally, the cost of food in neighboring countries has risen dramatically.

There is no doubt that, in the aggregate, similar situations will push the people of the countries in which Volunteers work deeper into poverty. According to a report by the Asian Development Bank, for every 10 percent increase in food prices, another 2.7 million Filipinos will fall into poverty—a trend that is mirrored by many other countries served by the Peace Corps.

On May 1, President Bush proposed spending an additional \$770 million in emergency food assistance for poor countries. Families at the lower end of the income scale who spend the greatest share of their income on food have been hit the hardest. “In some of the world’s poorest nations, rising prices can mean the difference between getting a daily meal and going without food,” Bush said.

The \$770 million would be included in next year’s budget, increasing total American food assistance to \$2.6 billion. In the current year, the administration

Peace Corps Responds to Global Food Crisis

By *Peace Corps Director
Ron Tschetter*

At the recent Worldwide Country Director Conference, I asked for a few folks to voluntarily get together and discuss the world food crisis one evening. Emphasizing the importance of the issue, just about all of the conference attendees showed up. Country directors and regional managers were interested in receiving information that could be quickly distributed to the Volunteers.

This special edition of *Peace Corps Times* is in response to that request. In this edition, we have compiled some timely and important information about the food shortage, as well as feedback from posts and Volunteers who are already feeling the impact of the crisis.

The global food crisis is receiving increased interest in Washington as well. I spent much of the past couple of weeks on Capitol Hill meeting with key members of Congress. Several questions were raised about the Peace Corps’ role in responding to the crisis. And, in early May, Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon announced a new international task force, which will prepare a plan of action to tackle the global rise in food prices. The group will bring together the heads of key UN agencies, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, as well as experts from around the globe.

Mr. Ban told reporters at the UN Headquarters in New York, “If not properly handled, this crisis could cascade into multiple crises affecting trade, development, and even social and political security around the world. The livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people are threatened.”

The Peace Corps has also developed a task force to look into ways in which we can provide critical assistance in countries where we serve.

“In some of the world’s poorest nations, rising prices can mean the difference between getting a daily meal and going without food.”

President George W. Bush

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It's Enough to Turn the Stomach

A recent photo in the *Toronto Star* showed a demonstrator in Haiti eating grass in front of a United Nations peacekeeper during a food riot. An accompanying story noted the country's population has increasingly turned to patties made of dirt, oil, and sugar to "quieten the stomach."

Such photos and stories underscore what has been labeled as the "silent tsunami" and many Volunteers are experiencing the storm firsthand. Americans are even feeling the effect, albeit on a lesser scale. At Chuck E. Cheese restaurants, a customer may encounter a "reformulated" pizza cheese at its 490 locations. The high-moisture mozzarella blend spreads better and allows the chain to use less cheese on some pizzas.

While we're certain Volunteers would gladly accept a pizza with less cheese, many are faced with the bleaker reality that food shortages can result in violence and malnutrition among the people in their towns and villages.

Following are samples from people throughout the world in response to a BBC website asking how the global food crisis was affecting them:

The effect in Africa is so bad because the petty traders who control most of the supply of food and other goods don't understand the economics of food price increases, and prices of all other goods are increased without discrimination.

—Accra, Ghana

Thanks to the building of dams, Morocco has managed to keep farming going for major food products, except for wheat, of which it has had to import 80 percent due to a poor harvest last year. Like many countries, its price at the local markets has more than doubled. But food in Morocco takes a great portion of families' income, reaching the average of 40 percent.

—Marrakech, Morocco

In Jamaica, we are gradually feeling the food shortage crisis. The price of bread, flour, and dairy has skyrocketed. As ridiculous as it sounds, the price of ground provisions are more expensive than meat and produce. Also, the price of corn-based products have doubled, if not tripled! At the same time, public workers have not gotten any increase in pay to help them cope with the high cost of living.

—Moneague, Jamaica

Our food shortage is compounded by the absence of domestic cooking gas. I have now resorted to eating in restaurants and local joints.

—Cameroon

It is in that latter country where at least 24 people were killed in protests linked partly to increased living costs. Human rights activists put the death toll at 100. As a result, the government raised state salaries and suspended customs duties on basic foodstuffs.

Following is a sample from Reuters news service that details the violence experienced in some other countries served by the Peace Corps:

- *Burkina Faso*. Unions called a general strike in April over soaring costs of food and fuel that triggered riots in February. The government extended a suspension of import duties on staple foods.

- *Mauritania*. Violent protests sparked by the sharp rise in grain prices last November spread to the capital, Nouakchott.

- *Mozambique*. At least six people were killed in protests that erupted in February over high fuel prices and living costs. The government agreed to cut the price of diesel fuel for minibus taxis.

- *Morocco*. Thirty-four people were jailed in early May for taking part in riots over food prices.

- *Senegal*. Riots erupted in the capital last November over rising prices and unemployment. President Abdoulaye Wade announced an ambitious crop expansion plan in April to make Senegal self-sufficient in staples.

- *South Africa*. Thousands of members of the country's powerful labor federation marched through Johannesburg in April to protest against higher food and electricity prices.

- *Peru*. Peruvian farmers upset by rising fertilizer costs and seeking debt relief blocked key rail and road links in February. They said a free trade deal with the United States would flood markets with subsidized agricultural imports.

In Thailand, the world's top exporter of rice, prices jumped 5 percent in late-April to raise the cost nearly three times the level it was in January. The *Bangkok Post* reports: In several Asian countries, higher fuel prices directly translate into an added burden for the poor through, for example, higher fares on public buses, which are often people's only mode of transport.

In the Philippines, one of the world's biggest importers of rice, the government deployed troops in April to deliver grain

to poor areas of the capital (Manila) amid worries about shortages.

In Indonesia, higher fuel costs mean a rise in the price of kerosene, which is widely used by the poor for cooking.

The Turkish newspaper *Today's Zaman*, reports, "Rice alone has risen 130 percent in the last three months in Turkey, a figure that was only 68 percent worldwide last year."

The World Bank has estimated 33 countries are at risk of social upheaval because of rising food prices, with armies in such countries as Pakistan and Thailand being called to take measures to prevent looting and theft from fields and food warehouses. However, *Today's Zaman* quotes Turkey's minister of foreign trade cautioning food producers about spreading undue fears and taking advantage of consumers. "We won't let our people be milked by market speculators," he said.

The head of southern Africa's de-

velopment bank claims the food crisis is largely due to greed and market speculation, rather than food shortages. "These increases in food prices are not the consequences of food shortages, it's the consequence of human greed that is putting at risk the lives of millions of men, women, and children," Jay Naidoo told Reuters, adding, "There are companies that are making super profits on this issue."

Regardless of the cause, Peace Corps Volunteers are feeling the storm. However, they also have the unique opportunity of being among those able to quiet that storm. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said during the Worldwide Country Director Conference in Washington, D.C., last month: "The Peace Corps has met the challenges of an ever-challenging world by adapting and responding to the issues of the day, but never losing sight of the values that have sustained the Peace Corps throughout its history."

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has proposed supplemental spending to bring the total to \$2.3 billion, according to Stephen S. McMillin, deputy director, U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

Circumstances and results will differ from one Volunteer community to another. Government policies and national differences in food production and consumption, as well as regional differences within countries, will result in significant variations. Farmers who sell their produce for more than they spend on food may actually see their incomes rise, while people who are net buyers of food, such as city residents, will be hurt. While your colleagues and friends may be eating smaller or fewer meals, self-sufficient farmers in other countries may be largely unaffected or even take home a greater profit from the sale of their produce at market.

Today, Volunteers are seeing the multiple faces of this crisis up close because they work where the need is. Over the next few years farmers will respond; they will plant more cereal crops, and adopt new strategies and technologies. Production should increase and countries should recover from drought. The farmers in a position to do so will increase or redirect their efforts to meet a demand which will only continue to grow. Governments and international donors will

increase investment in agriculture. Volunteers will continue to be there, working with those who need support as they work to increase their food production, and overcome poverty.

"In order to break the cycle of famine that we're having to deal with too often in a modern era, it's important to help build up local agriculture," President Bush said, underscoring the efforts of agricultural and environment Volunteers throughout the developing world.



Volunteers in some areas may find food is expensive or in short supply at local markets.

Today, Volunteers are seeing the multiple faces of this crisis up close because they work where the need is.

Secretary of State Rice Addresses Crisis

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice addressed the Peace Corps country directors during the agency's worldwide conference held April 28 at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. Responding to various questions, she was asked about her thoughts on the rising cost of grain by Country Director Mike McConnell, of The Gambia. The following is her response:

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'll tell you, we are very concerned about the status of the food situation in the world. The director of the (UN) World Food Programme, Josette Sheeran, was actually someone who worked for me as under secretary for economic affairs. And when Josette says that there is a "Silent Tsunami," I think we really have reason for concern. She's one of the most levelheaded people that I know. And the United States has historically been in the lead as a donor of food aid, at one point being as much as 62 percent of all food assistance. But the exchange rate, plus the—just the inability to get food to market, or food to people has made it very difficult

Now, there are, kind of, four causes that we really have to look at and then I'll tell you what I think we need to do in the interim. First of all, we've got to understand better what is happening in some conflict areas in terms of the distribution of food. It's obvious that there are places like Sudan, where we've had a sudden uptick in the inability to distribute food. We thought that, in one point, we had done a reasonable job, through bringing routes through Libya, of making at least a distribution of food possible. So, I think we need to look at



Secretary of State Rice responds to questions at an address to Peace Corps staff on April 28.

conflict areas and see—Zimbabwe is another one—to really see where we have problems of distribution

Secondly, we obviously have to look at places where production seems to be declining, and declining to the point that people are actually putting export caps on the amount of food. Now, some of that is not so much declining production as apparently improvement in the diets of people, for instance, in China and India, and then pressures to keep food inside the country. So, that's another element that we have to look at

A third element that we have to look at is the incredible cost that fuel prices, everything from fertilizer to transporta-

tion costs, is bringing on our ability to distribute or to get food to people. And then associated with that, there has been, apparently, some effect, unintended consequence from the alternative fuels effort. Although we believe that while biofuels continue to be an extremely important piece of the alternative energy picture, obviously, we want to make sure that it's not having an adverse effect. We think that it's not a large part of the problem, but it may, in fact, be a part of the problem—the ethanol debate

So, there are several pieces here that need to be understood better, but there are certain things that we know can work. One is: The United States

needs to be able to locally purchase food. It would considerably drive down our transportation costs, it would considerably help markets in the market for local goods. Right now, we have to buy so much American and transport it that it really does eat away at our food aid dollars. And there is a bill on Capitol Hill that would help us do that. And I've been talking to a number of Congress people about trying to get that pushed forward

Secondly, we need to look again at some of the issues concerning technology and food production. I know that GMOs (genetically modified crops) are not popular around the world, but there are places that drought-resistant crop should be a part of the answer. And so, we're looking, again, (at) that.

Third, we need a Doha round, which, if we can complete the current round of trade negotiations, would help to bring down agricultural subsidies by developed countries and give farmers, particularly subsistence farmers, greater access to market. We think this would also help. So, there—it's a multifaceted problem. Now ... the President has just requested \$200 million from the Emerson Trust, to get emergency food aid in response to the (UN) World Food Programme appeal. We are looking at what more we might need to do. We obviously want to address the short-term problem, but these other issues that I laid out, we need a broad-ranging, and somewhat more integrated approach, to make sure that we don't just spend the food aid dollars and continue to face a food crisis down the line.

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We will be considering Volunteers' input and suggestions from country directors on the ground to learn how the Peace Corps can best respond to the crisis at the grassroots level. We believe Peace Corps Volunteers are well positioned to provide information and assistance to their host communities.

At the same time, we are concerned with the effect the crisis can potentially have on the welfare of the Volunteers. Early reports from a few posts indicate that some Volunteers may be skipping meals and are having trouble coping with the hunger that surrounds them. We also are looking into ways in which we can help support Volunteers who live and work in areas that are adversely affected.

Last fall I signed a new agreement between the Peace Corps and the World Food Programme, and renewed one with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Both agreements

allow Volunteers to work with these organizations in the countries where we serve. When I visited Namibia last year, I saw firsthand how Volunteer Angela Brown was working on an FAO Junior Farmer Field and Life Skills Project. In desolate conditions, Angela was helping orphans and vulnerable children plant and grow crops. It was so heartening to see how proud the children were when they showed me their garden of chili peppers.

I hope this special edition of *Peace Corps Times* provides some insight and helpful information. I encourage you to let your Peace Corps post leadership know how the global food crisis is affecting you—how you are doing and what you are noticing at your site. The more we know about the global food crisis, the better we can help serve the people and communities where Volunteers live and work.

Thank you for all you do and for your continued dedication to the Peace Corps.



Country directors from throughout the world meet informally during the Worldwide Country Directors Conference. Director Ron Tschetter asked them to voluntarily get together to discuss the food crisis one evening and was overwhelmed by the turnout. The Peace Corps is now putting together a food security task force to address the issue on a more permanent basis. The task force will be chaired by Deputy Chief of Staff Michelle Brooks.

World Food Programme Encounters ‘New Face of Hunger’

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has said high food prices are creating the biggest challenge it has faced in its 45-year history, a silent tsunami threatening to plunge more than 100 million people on every continent into hunger.

“This is the new face of hunger—the millions of people who were not in the urgent hunger category six months ago but now are,” said WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran, who met British government officials after addressing a UK parliamentary hearing in London in April.

“The response calls for large-scale, high-level action by the global community, focused on emergency and longer-term solutions,” she said.

Analysis being carried out by WFP supports World Bank estimates that about 100 million people have been pushed deeper into poverty by the high food prices. Sheeran said, like the 2004 tsunami, which hit the Indian Ocean and left 250,000 dead and about 10 million destitute, the food price challenge requires a global response.

At that time, the donor community, including governments, the corporate sector, and private individuals, stepped up, giving a record \$12 billion to help with recovery efforts. “We need that same kind of action and generosity,” Sheeran said.

Nutritional losses

“What we are seeing now is affecting more people on every continent, destroying even more livelihoods and the nutrition losses will hurt children for a lifetime,” she said.

Sheeran said WFP is urging a comprehensive approach where all parties, from governments to UN agencies to NGOs, work together. Alongside other partners, WFP will follow a three-track response:

- In the short term, WFP will seek full funding for targeted food safety nets and mother-child health programs in extreme situations and scale up school feeding and use it as a platform for urgent, nutritional interventions.
- In the medium term, WFP will offer its huge logistics capacity to support life-saving distribution networks. Every hour of the day, WFP has 30 ships on the seas, 5,000 trucks on the ground, and 70 aircraft in the sky, delivering food to the hungry. It will also expand cash and voucher programs and support local purchases from small farmers, helping them to afford inputs and sustain livelihoods.
- In the longer term, it will support policy reform and provide advice and technical support to governments

engaging in agricultural development programs; at the same time WFP will pursue local purchase contracts that can help farmers increase investment and yields.

Longer-term solutions

“WFP can, if needed and if asked, ramp up to help cool down a nutritional crisis, so that longer-term solutions can come on board,” Sheeran said.

Just as WFP sends an emergency team into the field to deal with a natural disaster, it has assembled its top specialists to deploy programs to mitigate the effects of high food prices among the most vulnerable.

Sheeran stressed that partnerships will play a critical role in fighting this emergency. WFP has been engaging with donor governments, sister UN agencies, institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and other humanitarian actors, including nongovernmental organizations, to mobilize a coordinated response.

The urgency of the situation is underlined by WFP’s decision to suspend school feeding to 450,000 children beginning in May in Cambodia, unless new funding can be found in time. WFP representatives in 78 countries around the world are facing similar difficult choices.

Source: *The UN World Food Programme*

Bracing for the Worst ...

How will the food crisis affect Peace Corps Volunteers and the communities in which they live? What will they see?

- People may be reduced to having one meal a day.
- Incidents of malnutrition will undoubtedly increase, particularly for infants under the age of five.
- Locals may be forced to take credit, at high interest rates, from merchants.
- Volunteer work and projects may be adversely impacted or impeded because people will be busy trying to cope with the food insecurity; as such, sustainability may be compromised—this is bound to happen across much of the developing world.
- You may be asked for free food.
- Activities and “village life” will slow down.
- You will feel a gut wrench in that you will have more resources to buy food, and you may feel guilty eating it while others cannot. This is likely to be traumatizing.
- There may be a mass exodus in search of food.
- Your living allowance may not go as far as it does now; particularly as food prices continue to climb.

... Working for the Best

What are some strategies Volunteers can use to reduce the food crisis burden and educate their community members? We know you want to help. Here’s how you can:

1. Talk to your community about the food situation. What are their feelings about being helped or needing help? Seek out local initiatives and helpers whose energy and determination are contagious.
2. Be the eyes and ears on the ground and offer any input/information that may help the process. Helpers can become overwhelmed by the “impossibility” of making things better. Being able to listen, to be present, to help others tell their story, and to tell your own story is also part of the job.
3. Try to define the community’s level of food security. Are the granaries still fairly full? How are livestock levels?
4. Be proactive, particularly in curbing malnutrition. There are a lot of “value added” activities that Volunteers can start, including (a) enriched food “formulas” using local resources; (b) Hearth Model/Positive Deviance activities; (c) enhanced nutritional dishes.
5. Consider strategies that families can adopt for conserving/reserving food **now** and setting aside something for later.
6. For those communities with grain banks, remember the goal of the cereal bank—you cannot implement a crisis prevention system during a crisis. Cereal banks succeed where there is good training and community cohesion up front.
7. Be careful about opening the doors of your house as an aid center—if one comes by, others will follow, followed by others.
8. Volunteers should not get involved in food crisis relief—i.e., food handouts. However, everyone obviously has a role to play in collaborating in food security initiatives.
9. Help local farmers plan early and maximize their land and inputs. For agricultural and environment Volunteers, many of you are already doing this as part of your project plans.
10. Work in clusters to learn from health Volunteers how to identify the most vulnerable families in the communities.
11. Do not invent or assume reasons for the impending food security. Instead, rely on facts.
12. Do not blame host governments or multilateral organizations—much of this is outside of their ability to resolve.
13. All told, this is a very delicate situation and Volunteers need to be aware of the realities and complex relationships involved with food insecurity.
14. Discuss things with your peers and the post staff. Use the existing channels and peer support network systems. This is important to help broaden your perspective and deal with feelings of loneliness.
15. Share your experiences and on-the-ground realities with friends and family back home.
16. Give yourself a break. Periodic, regularly programmed breaks are helpful and provide opportunities to re-energize from the strain of daily identification with those facing the crisis.
17. Develop strategies to relieve stress. Walking, jogging, meditation, praying, artwork and crafts, music, and other activities may help relieve the mind and lift some of the stress from your living situation.
18. Develop a wellness lifestyle. This includes positive connections with others, physical health, creative activity, healthy emotional expression, and the ability to feel a sense of purpose in the work you are doing.

Also, Peace Corps Response plays a major role in addressing food security and expects an increased number of projects in the coming year. Those Volunteers near the end of their service who would like to fill such assignments are encouraged to submit an application for consideration. Please visit the website www.peacecorps.gov/response.

Tanzania Volunteers Working Toward Solutions



Volunteers help enhance gardens through a process that improves water retention and increases soil depth in an effort to produce more food.

In a country that suffers from a food crisis in combination with the world's fifth largest incidence of HIV/AIDS—with 1.6 million people affected—Volunteers in Tanzania are rolling up their sleeves and working toward solutions.

The quality and quantity of food produced near homes in Tanzania is a major influence upon the quality of life of HIV-affected individuals and caregivers. Caregivers often lack time and energy to tend distant farms with a resultant decline in local food production creating a dependency on outside food relief. In an effort to increase sustainable household food security for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), the Peace Corps adopted an innovative program for all current environment, health and education Volunteers and their host country counterparts in permaculture and bio-intensive micro-farming.

Thus far, results have proven effective to increase household food production and income from small holdings, with a high probability of replication by

other partnering outreach workers. This farming method involves only local materials, fits within accepted gender roles and social values, and strengthens the local environment in an economically viable manner.

Approach: Regional, technical workshops were conducted on this evidence-based, low input, farming/income generation method. Sessions focused on: sustainable adoption among resource-poor, risk-averse populations; simple methods to improve water retention; the increase of soil depth/health to enhance growth; the role of family labor constraints; and, the value of permanent and perennial cropping systems as a means to develop a sustainable dietary cycle. A key theme was the promotion of “small, doable actions” that can be easily replicated and adapted to meet local needs. By the end of the workshop, key food growing and income generating concepts had been demonstrated such that replication at the local level was seen as feasible and achievable.

Outcomes: Rural families have seen yield increases of over 400 percent when compared to traditional farming methods in semiarid central Tanzania. This simple, visual technique is suitable for low literacy populations; requires little to no external funding; and has been accomplished with local tools. Local trainings, conducted by Volunteers and their counterparts, who partnered with local nongovernmental organizations and PLWHA Groups, have led to adoption by hundreds of rural families in just a few months.

High quality food is now grown near homes where none had grown before. The method requires an initial increase in labor for soil preparation, but this applies only to the first growing season. With proper planting and care, weed growth and water loss are reduced by 80 percent, significantly cutting overall labor requirements while, at the same time, increasing home food and income potential.

Key Recommendations:

- Highlight the value and ease of increasing soil health as a means to improving plant vigor and crop yield, which will lead to healthier, more disease resilient people and communities: “The Cycle of Better Living.”
- Teach and promote “small, doable actions” and the use of only locally available tools/resources, which will lead to acceptance/adoption by resource-poor, risk-averse populations.
- Bio-intensive and permacultural design methods can be replicated easily by partnering community-based groups and individuals, making sustainable diet production and income generation a reality for PLWHA, OVC, and their caregivers.

I arrived in Senegal in 2005, when the price of a 50-kilogram (110-pound) sack of rice was just under 10,000 Francs (\$22.54). In markets recently, the price hit 19,000 Francs (\$42.82). The average rainfall of my area is between 15 and 27 inches of rain. Last year, just 12 inches fell.

Leading with facts and figures isn't usually the best way to capture an audience, but what they boil down to, and what people need to know, is that the late rains (later than any time in my grandmother's memory) resulted in quite low harvests, and for my community, for whom the rainy season determines the bulk of their income, last year just didn't cut it. Throw in the higher food prices (and everything else, thanks to oil driving up transport

costs), and my village is a pretty deserted place right now, as people have flocked to any town offering an opportunity to work.

It is in this context that I would like to highlight the hospitality that characterizes the people of Senegal. I sometimes marvel at the fact that, by all logic, there is no reason my family should host anyone. There's just not enough food; nonetheless, this is never a concern for them. If I were to contribute nothing, they would still welcome me with open arms. It is a testament to their spirit that tough times have not changed this admirable cultural trait, for which I am grateful.

Being a part of the family means my work with farmers goes beyond mere

VOLUNTEERlife



Peter Treut
SENEGAL

advice to villagers, and involves collaborating with true friends whom I want to see succeed because I know them and care for them as individuals faced with pressures that cannot be truly understood by mere numbers.

agency NEWS

President Greet Trainees at the White House



President George W. Bush met with 33 Peace Corps Trainees on April 29 at a special White House send-off event in honor of the 2008 National Volunteer Week. Peace Corps country directors from 65 overseas posts were also present at the event, held in the East Room of The White House.

The President formally sent off the 33 trainees who were leaving for their term of service in Guatemala, and thanked them for their willingness to serve. In talking about the Peace Corps, the President said, “It really is the best foreign policy America could possibly have.”

Teen Website Deemed America's Best; New Kids Website introduced

The Peace Corps Teen Website (www.peacecorps.gov/teen) was awarded the Best Government Website of 2008 by the 12th Annual Webby Awards.

Winners were announced on May 6 and will be honored in New York City on June 10. Hailed as the “Oscars of the Internet” by the *New York Times*, the Webby Awards is the leading international award honoring excellence on the Internet, including Websites, interactive advertising, online film and video, and mobile websites. The 12th Annual Webby Awards received nearly 10,000 entries from over 60 countries and all 50 states, and the Peace Corps won among five contestants in the Best Government Website category.

Peace Corps Director Ron Tschetter also announced the launch of the new website, www.peacecorps.gov/kids, which allows children to participate in a Peace Corps Challenge simulation game that exposes them to life as a Volunteer.

In cooperation with the World Wise Schools program, corresponding lesson plans can be found at: www.peacecorps.gov/wws/educators/enrichment/wanzuzu/

Notes

Volunteers from Peace Corps countries around the world work on projects that can help minimize the impact of the food crisis in their communities. Here are some of their stories:

TONGA

Amanda Strickler, a business development Volunteer, works at the Vava'u Youth Congress in the Kingdom of Tonga. The nonprofit organization's goal is to give the youth of Tonga the skills they need to succeed. One of their most innovative projects is the VYC Greenhouse project funded by the New Zealand High Commission. The VYC Greenhouse functions in a number of capacities: growing vanilla, organic vegetables, and kava, educating local youth in technical farming skills and in micro-business aptitude. Amanda has worked with her counterparts to grow, harvest, and market organic vegetables and kava. They have begun to generate the needed income to maintain greenhouse operations and are gaining the experience needed for greenhouse training curriculum. By means of networking with youth chapter presidents and a women's development group at the Ministry of Agriculture, the pilot training project at the VYC will be an equal opportunity endeavor for those in need of agro-business training.

ARMENIA

Environmental Volunteer Rud Hubbard was assigned to a nongovernmental organization in his village. With partial funding from a Small Project Assistance grant, Rud and his community started the Sustainable Agriculture University Development Project. With the help from sponsors, a training facility was constructed for sustainable/organic farming training. The facility features a solar powered greenhouse for ex-



from the field

perimentation and demonstration, a compost area, and a large area available for crops. The organization works with 17 farmers' associations and 10 partner organizations to train local agricultural advisors from each association. At the end of the project, these advisors will be fully prepared to implement sustainable/organic farming trainings and experimentation in their own communities.

SENEGAL

Each day, Shane Hetzler, an agroforestry Volunteer, passed by a primary school on the way to his counterpart's field. He noticed that the school yard was quite barren and decided that trees would really help. He approached the teachers about his plan and they were enthusiastic; so enthusiastic, in fact, that their desire to spruce up the school yard evolved into a working tree nursery from which each student would get a papaya tree to plant at home.

Their time and effort paid off. Shane writes, "The line of students snaked slowly back to the village, each youngster balancing a papaya on (his or her)

head to be planted at home. This was the culmination of three months worth of watering, weeding, and waiting. The 500-tree nursery would provide papayas to students and teachers. It would also provide over 100 eucalyptus trees to be planted in a wood lot adjacent to the school. The timber sales from this lot would serve to generate income for future school supplies. An assortment of mangoes, cashews, flamboyants, and other ornamentals would provide nutrition, shade, and beautification to the school grounds."

"Suddenly, the chatter of students was shattered by the cries of Moussa who had accidentally dropped his papaya plant in the road. The sack carrying the plant had split and the plant itself looked pretty grave. It was only after five minutes of trying to calm down the sobbing child that we convinced him to take it home and plant it anyway. If the papaya didn't make it, we would replace it for him with one of the extras planted for just such an occasion. Fortunately for everybody involved, a couple days later he reported back that the papaya was doing well in its new home by his hut."

MALI

Agriculture Volunteer Christin Spradley, working with a local women's association, started a community garden to address issues of nutrition and income in her village. Using her local language and management skills, she was able to mobilize local resources and secure Peace Corps Partnership funding for the project. Christin trained the local women in appropriate gardening techniques and showed them how to use the vegetables in their daily diet. In addition, Christin worked closely with the women's association in her village and three surrounding villages to begin shea nut production to increase income.

BELIZE

Participation has been excellent in the newly implemented school garden project, started by Volunteer Michael Graham. Even children not involved directly through the school participate. They had a pretty good first harvest yield, and the children were able to take home okra, habanera pepper, pumpkin, cilantro, Chinese cabbage, and black beans they had grown themselves. The children also began to learn about composting, organic pesticide, mulching, and transplanting.

Some of the children also showed excellent individual effort and responsibility in watering the garden during the dry season. Michael had planned to build on the success with increased participation by the teachers and possibly getting the children to start their own gardens at home. He has already noticed an increase in small gardens around the village and thinks they may have been motivated by the school garden.

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And if you'd like to know more . . .

Secretary of State Rice transcript at Peace Corps Headquarters: www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/04/104120.htm

White House Statement on Food Aid www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/05/20080501-5.html

USAID Press Release on Emergency Food in 2008: www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2008/pr080428.html

World Food Programme calls high food prices a "silent tsunami": www.wfp.org

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