

Zambia

VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION

Linking Income, Food, and the Environment (LIFE)



Since 1961.

Program: Linking Income, Food, and the Environment (LIFE)
Project

Job Title: Forestry Extension Agent

Dates of Service: April 30, 2015- April 28, 2017*

Staging Dates: February 9, 2015 – February 10, 2015
(in the USA)

Pre-Service Training

(in Zambia): February 11- April 30, 2015*

*dates subject to change



This document is intended to give an overview of the project you are invited to work on in the Peace Corps. For more detailed information about Zambia and living there, please read the Welcome Book via the link included with your invitation and check out the related Web sites referenced in the welcome book.

For further information about serving as a Forestry Extension Agent in Zambia, call the Country Desk Officer for Zambia at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., (9AM to 5PM, EST):

Toll-free: 1-855-855-1961, press 1, then extension 2326;

or directly at (202) 692-2326

or via email at Zambia@peacecorps.gov

A NOTE FROM THE PROGRAM MANAGER

Dear LIFE project invitees:

Congratulations on being selected to join the training group for the environment sector in Zambia. The opportunity that awaits you here will present you with unique challenges and rewards.

My name is Donald Mwelwa Phiri, and I am the Project Manager for the LIFE Project. Among other things, it is my job to prepare your site placements, design your pre-service training (PST), liaise with government officials, and supervise your work efforts in the field. Along with the rest of the Peace Corps staff in Zambia, I look forward to meeting and working with you.

The environment sector in Zambia is a highly sensitive area where the interests of conservation, politics, and communities converge. You have the good fortune to be invited to work at the critical interface between these areas on issues affecting people, habitats, and resource use in Africa. During your first few months in Zambia, you will be trained in the nuances of operating successfully within the Zambian Forestry Department. You will also learn about climate smart techniques for agriculture, forestry, income generation activities, and many other livelihood and food production strategies being promoted in Zambia.

You are about to come to work in a country filled with the potential for success and disappointment. You will experience both frequently, along with frustration, amazement, fatigue, and excitement. Come prepared for all possibilities.

Best Regards,

Donald Mwelwa Phiri

Project Manager
LIFE

PEACE CORPS ZAMBIA HISTORY

Zambia's forest estate remains largely intact and provides habitat for wildlife and livelihoods to surrounding communities. For communities living around these areas, forests represent potential resources upon which to substantially base their immediate livelihood and long-term development. Should the relationship between these populations and the natural resources be managed effectively, communities stand to benefit. A common weak point in properly managing the forested areas concerns the lack of field staff to train community members in sustainable utilization of forest products, improved agriculture, pre- and post-harvest techniques, agro-forestry, income generation, and business skills.

To address the lack of front line extension workers in rural communities, in 2004 the Department of Forestry requested Peace Corps Volunteers to work as Forestry Extension Agents.

As Forestry Extension Agents, Volunteers focus on promotion of adoption of sustainable agriculture technologies and Agroforestry techniques and help community members to improve their incomes and income-generating opportunities by either implementing alternative income generating activities or expanding current micro-enterprises.

Please note that the project's raison d'être is to assist rural community members to improve their food security in ways that conserve natural resources. This is done indirectly by working with groups and individuals to develop better livelihood security skills and thereby reduce threats to biodiversity, especially in forested areas. Please read and re-read this Volunteer assignment description thoroughly and seriously before finalizing your decision to accept the invitation to training. Please be confident in your decision to come to Zambia.

YOUR PRIMARY DUTIES

As a forestry agent you will focus on working with community members, local traditional leaders, community based organizations, individual households, groups and government extension agents to conserve forest resources in order to sustain the environment.

Your first objective will be to assess the needs of your community. With this information, you will help your community members identify methods for acquiring the necessary skills, information and resources to meet these needs, within the realms of our project framework.

The two areas of concentration in the project are: 1) increased food production and 2) agribusiness.

Regarding increased food production, you will assist rural communities to adopt agricultural technologies and techniques that will lead to increased food production. In agribusiness, you will help community members to increase their incomes and income-generating opportunities by either implementing alternative income generating activities or expanding current micro-enterprises. You will co-train (with counterparts) community members in sustainable agriculture technologies and techniques, including those that address the impact of HIV/AIDS. These will include introducing concepts and benefits of incorporating trees in the farming system and the use and promotion of conservation farming practices.

Tasks will include:

- Conducting a targeted, participatory, gender sensitive assessment of issues related to the use of trees in agriculture and practicing of conservation farming to identify interested participants, hoped for solutions, and existing assets to build on.
- Based on the needs assessment, working with resource people and community members to develop a process to make farmers aware of options, and enable them to adopt locally proven agro-forestry and conservation farming technologies into their farming systems.
- Collaborating with resource people, community leaders, and other counterparts to implement the process. Specific activities may include farmer led demonstrations, demonstration plots, community discussions, field trials, field visits, farmer field days, and farmer led trials.

- Collaborating with resource people, community leaders, and other counterparts to conduct a participatory assessment of progress towards participating farmer awareness and adoption of agro-forestry technologies.
- Collaborating with resource people, community leaders, and other counterparts to design and implement follow-up activities, as necessary.
- Collaborating with successful entrepreneurs and other resource people to work with interested micro-entrepreneurs to develop feasibility plans for sustainable income generating activities.
- Collaborating with entrepreneurs and resource people to provide support for new entrepreneurial activities.
- Collaborating with resource people to conduct an analysis of skills needed and desired by emerging entrepreneurs.
- Collaborating with resource people and entrepreneurs to identify resources and plan activities to learn business skills, such as basic accounting, break-even analysis, product differentiation, marketing, distribution and production.
- Collaborating with resource people and entrepreneurs to implement learning activities, such as individual coaching, shadowing, group training, and participatory learning activities.
- Collaborating with successful entrepreneurs and other resource people to work with interested micro-entrepreneurs to develop feasibility plans for new activities.
- Collaborating with entrepreneurs and resource people to provide support for new entrepreneurial activities.

You will be expected to keep your district and provincial ministry representatives, as well as Peace Corps, informed of your extension activities, progress and recommendations through an extensive monitoring and evaluation system including post records, special activity reports, base-line data collection, quarterly programming reports, and regular meetings. The submission of the LIFE project's monitoring and evaluation quarterly reports is required.

As a LIFE Volunteer you will need to demonstrate considerable flexibility and patience. Government structures concerning forestry are currently going through significant overhauls, and it is a rocky process. International donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this sector tend to be uncoordinated and many are waiting to see the outcome of current reforms before re-entering the sector. Communities near protected forests are often remote, where civil infrastructure and services are under-developed at best and government extension agents may have infrequent access. Community motivation and incentives for forest conservation wavers with the realities and hardships of their lives, meaning that poverty and isolation will be considerable challenges to overcome in pursuing better resource management.

All Volunteers in Zambia are expected to attain and practice the following core competencies: commitment to professionalism and personal well being, the facilitation of sustainable community development, integration of HIV/AIDS Prevention into service, promotion of sustainable practices for food security and integration into the community.

One of the exciting parts of your professional work is to participate in the Peace Corps monitoring, reporting, and evaluation (MRE) process. All Volunteers receive training on the Peace Corps MRE tracking and reporting system. Each Volunteer regularly reports MRE information and this information is summarized to describe overall progress of the project. This important MRE system helps Peace Corps

improve its programming and report its accomplishments. The opportunity to learn and practice professional monitoring and evaluation skills are some of the many valued benefits of Peace Corps service.

The most successful Volunteers are those who apply these core competencies daily, especially striving to integrate into their community. Continuous language learning, cultural exploration and a deep respect for Zambians are crucial to community integration and your successful service.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SECONDARY/ COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The vast majority of your time as a Volunteer should be spent on the LIFE project's primary goals and objectives. However, there are certain times of the year when non-agriculture or environment related activities are also suitable. All Zambia Volunteers participate in HIV/AIDS prevention activities, and informal health discussions can form a part of any work that you may undertake in the community. Secondary projects also serve to enhance the community's self-confidence in its ability to satisfy its needs and demands using local resources. Two examples of secondary projects are well projects and GLOW camps (Girls Leading Our World). GLOW camps seek to encourage youth leadership through self-esteem building, development of good decision-making skills, and promotion of goal setting and career planning.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Available Resources:

Your work catchment area will be about 20 km, so you will be provided with an all-terrain bicycle for transportation. You will receive bicycle riding and maintenance experience during pre-service training. You will need to be conscious of safe riding and maintenance of your bicycle to ensure its reliability and your safety.

To equip you well for your work in the community, you will receive a number of essential books that will guide you into making the appropriate environment and development interventions. Other important resources include government counterparts from the Zambia Departments of Forestry and Agriculture at the provincial, district, and local levels. Your most important resource though, is the community members with whom you'll be working.

Location of Job:

You will be posted in a village in one of the six provinces that LIFE currently works in: North-Western, Southern, Eastern, Northern and Luapula. You will work in communities within a 20 kilometer radius from your base village. Occasionally, you will travel up to 50 km to the district town for meetings with government or NGO counterparts.

Working Hours:

As a Peace Corps Volunteer living and working in a village, your work hours are basically 24/7. While your main goals will be within the environment sector, you will also be occupied with the second and third goals of every Peace Corps Volunteer—sharing your culture with your Zambian colleagues and learning about theirs to teach your family and friends back home about your experiences. These goals dictate that you integrate into your new community and become a part of it.

The project has clear goals and objectives but you will find that your approach to how you accomplish those goals and objectives will be unstructured. You will need to be a good planner and manager of

your time. You will need to be creative and flexible as you set up multiple approaches and activities to accomplish your job.

You will find that some weeks you have many structured activities to keep you busy, while other weeks you are undertaking more informal interactions with your community. You will need to have very good time management skills, the ability to multi-task and manage multiple projects and the flexibility to adapt to varied work schedules.

Cultural Attitudes and Customs in the Workplace:

There are many differences between work situations in Zambia and work situations in America. Many of the things you take for granted in the U.S. simply cannot be here. Patience, patience, and more patience will get you through challenges posed by the lack of efficiency and general lack of resources. You'll find that skills you thought everyone had are not shared by many of your Zambian colleagues, and you may find great satisfaction in transferring these skills to your counterparts. You'll learn in pre-service training some of the basic differences between American and Zambian communication styles (for example, Zambians tend to be much less direct than Americans usually are), and you'll learn to communicate in culturally appropriate, effective ways on your own. Keep in mind that adjusting to Zambian work styles will require some flexibility on your part. The experience of learning to navigate cultural divides in work situations is extremely rewarding.

As a LIFE Volunteer, the community will look to you to practice what you preach, therefore you will be a community role model. Most agriculture and environment related behaviors are rooted in cultural perceptions and related attitudes, therefore you will be expected to be culturally sensitive and try and understand the cultural context in order to help identify appropriate interventions.

Many Volunteers comment on needing to adapt to a foreign work ethic. The attitudes and customs of the people with whom you will be working are as different and complex as the culture itself. Your tendency might be to pick out one or two habits of your work mates and concentrate on them without recognizing that they are aspects of the greater culture. In time you should strive to interpret the culture rather than base conclusions on isolated actions. Ultimately, the key to success is flexibility and an open mind.

Dress Code:

One of the challenges of finding your place as a Volunteer is simultaneously fitting into the local culture, maintaining your own cultural identity, and acting like a professional. It is not an easy act to balance, and we can only provide you with some guidelines to dress and behave accordingly. While some of your counterparts may dress in seemingly worn or shabby clothes, this will be due to economics rather than choice. The likelihood is that they are wearing their "best." A foreigner wearing raggedy, unkempt clothing is more likely to be considered an affront.

Zambians regard dress and appearance as part of one's respect for one another. They value neatness of appearance, which is much more important than being "stylish." You are expected to dress appropriately, whether you are in training, traveling, or on the job. Not doing so may jeopardize your credibility and that of the entire program.

Dress guidelines have been formalized based not only on advice from Zambians, but also on the experiences of current Volunteers. Dresses and skirts should fall below the knees. Appropriate undergarments should be worn, including slips. Spaghetti strap tops for women worn by themselves are inappropriate unless covered with a short or long sleeved shirt, coat or jacket. Skintight sports shorts or trousers are inappropriate but may be worn inside a skirt or dress when riding bicycles. Men and women should wear shorts only at home, when exercising, or when doing work where Zambian counterparts are also wearing them. If shorts are worn in public, they should be of "walking" length. Hair should be clean

and combed, and beards should be neatly trimmed. Men should never wear a hat indoors unless custom in the area allows, and they should always be removed when speaking to an elder. Sunglasses should also be removed indoors.

PC training staff will send you back to your home-stay to dress appropriately if you come to class in what they will consider culturally or professionally inappropriate dressings.

Long hair, unconventional hairdos, blatant tattoos, and facial piercings are not culturally appropriate and may negatively affect community integration. Facial piercings are considered inappropriate and should not be worn during Volunteer service. Tattoos should be covered with clothing. If you have any of these appearance characteristics, a decision to go without them for the duration of your Peace Corps service should be made prior to accepting the invitation to serve in Zambia.

PREPARATIONS REQUIRED BEFORE DEPARTING THE US

You are required to provide certified true copies of your diplomas or degrees upon acceptance and clearance for this assignment. These documents are used for obtaining work permits from immigration department in Zambia. You are also expected to present ten (10) passport size pictures of yourself upon arrival in-country. In addition, you are encouraged to bring a tent and sleeping bag/pad for use during your service in Zambia.

TRAINING FOR YOUR JOB

Your PST will be what we refer to as community-based training. In this training model the majority of the language, technical, and cross cultural training takes place in villages and fewer activities are in centralized training sites. It also implies more individual training work, as well as more hands-on practical work. In short, the training experience will take you to the same kinds of areas as where you will be posted as a Volunteer, offer some theoretical orientation, and then encourage your experiential learning through actual practice.

During the 11-weeks of PST, you will receive structured training in a number of important topics for your work. In addition to receiving specialized language training for your province, you will receive training in Zambian culture, agroforestry techniques, soil and water conservation and management, improved vegetable gardening practices, income generating activities, and small business development.

In addition to pre-service training, you will attend one in-service training (IST) 3-4 months after being posted in your permanent site and a mid-term conference (MTC) half way through your service. IST lasts about a week and a half and MTC about 4 days. Both events give you the opportunity to reconvene with the other Volunteers from your group for follow-up training. Finally, three months before your service ends you will attend a close of service conference which covers a number of things related to your impending departure, such as finishing up your projects at site, post-service benefits, and re-entry to the US.

LIVING CONDITIONS

The living conditions of Volunteers working in Zambia vary, but one thing's for sure: they probably won't be very similar to any living conditions you've experienced before. You will be placed in a village and live in a traditional house, made from mud bricks and a grass thatch roof. You will not have running water or electricity. Your water source may be a nearby well, or borehole, or river, depending on the area. That might sound very different, but these living conditions are surprisingly easy to get used to! Volunteers love the simplicity and uniqueness of the experience after they adjust to it. The important thing to remember about your future housing is that you'll be fine with it if you're flexible and patient.

Public transport can be a major hassle in Zambia, depending on where you're located. Distances are long, roads are sometimes in a shocking state of disrepair, and vehicles can be crowded and uncomfortable. Depending on your placement, you may do a lot of biking—some Volunteers bike distances of 30 km per day. As mentioned, you will be working with people who have access to far fewer resources than most people do in the US. You'll have to be flexible, creative, and patient, and find new ways to do things and new things to do them with.

Mail will be slow—taking on average about four to six weeks from the US to Volunteer sites, and there may be no cell phone service in your village; however, goods (foods and personal supplies) and services (transport, communications) are usually available in district centers. Many volunteers choose to bring a personal laptop with them to Zambia as internet is available both at the provincial Peace Corps resource centers, as well as via your cell phone provider if you select to purchase this service. In addition to the provincial resource centers, email access may be available in larger towns and cities.

Food availability, and the types of food that are available to you, will depend on the location of your site. In Zambia, the staple food is called nshima, which is made from maize meal and cooked into soft lumps that are eaten with relishes, cooked vegetables, fish, meat, beans, or chicken. People typically eat nshima with their hands. You will also have access to other foods, including more typical American-style foods, but the variety will not be what it is in America. Vegetarians should have little trouble maintaining a healthy diet free of meat. Although vegetarianism is relatively uncommon here, a few words of polite explanation usually suffice to excuse you from eating meat in any situation.

During your service you will receive occasional visits from Peace Corps and project staff.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES & REWARDS

Please reference the Welcome Book for more detailed information regarding diversity and cross-cultural issues, and safety and security in the Peace Corps.

The potential rewards and challenges of working and living in Zambia are as varied and unique as the individuals that experience them. Living in a different culture is difficult for anyone at times. You can expect your emotions to fluctuate throughout your time here. You'll experience highs and lows during the course of your service. This is a normal part of Volunteer life. Frustrations can result from specific challenges, like the slow pace of "change" affected in your work, or cultural isolation, or it could be more general and personal. It's important to remember that there are difficult things about being here, and that's just a normal part of the experience.

However, just about every Volunteer will tell you that the rewards make all the difficulties worth it. Forming meaningful relationships with Zambian friends and coworkers, as well as other Peace Corps Volunteers, is priceless. Although your work may seem to move slowly at times, the successes you have will mean a lot to you and the people that you work with. Personally, the rewards vary as much as the challenges do. Everyone gains something different from being here, but everyone gains a lot. Ultimately, you will certainly come to realize that this experience is irreplaceable and unique.

The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of extension workers has crippled both forestry and agriculture departments, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty AIDS causes has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV/AIDS, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV positive people and working with training staff, office staff, and host family members living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner.

Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence, and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength so that you can continue to be of service to your community.

The challenges of village living can be hard on your back. Daily activities such as sitting on low stools, bending over to cook over a fire, riding a bike on bumpy paths and carrying water can all contribute to back problems. Prepare yourself ahead of time by integrating back strengthening exercises into your daily life now. Your back will thank you for it later!

Volunteer service in Zambia is not for everyone. A Peace Corps assignment in Zambia may not be the right place for you right now. Peace Corps respects the process individuals go through to determine if a placement is a good fit, and we respect a person's decision to turn down the assignment or not swear-in to service.

Service in Zambia requires a personal commitment to help others in the face of physical and emotional challenges. It requires a sense of responsibility to your project, your local community, Zambian friends and neighbors, and your fellow Volunteers, as well as the ability to look for constructive solutions when problems arise.

A great deal of patience and tolerance will be demanded of you as you become familiar with local expectations and customs, develop a taste for local foods, struggle to develop fluency in a new language, learn to work within the constraints imposed by bureaucracy, learn to live with very limited privacy, and having necessities instead of comforts.

Volunteers here are happy and truly enjoy the villages in which they live, their friends and neighbors, and their work; however, it doesn't always come easily and it is a testament to their commitment to this Peace Corps experience that allows them to succeed under challenging circumstances.

If you accept a position as a LIFE project Volunteer in Zambia, you are making a two-year (24 full months following training) professional commitment to stay through the frustrations as well as the rewards of living and working in Zambia. Your actions, mannerisms, and ability to adapt and embrace local customs and culture will set the tone for Peace Corps Volunteers for years to come.

If you have concerns as to whether you are ready to undertake the cultural adjustments and demanding nature of such an assignment for two years, then we prefer you do not accept as it will be challenging for your own stability as well as the continuity of the program. If, however, you are prepared to accept and appreciate this commitment, can view yourself as part of a long-term development process, and measure your progress by small successes, then you will appreciate the warmth and sincerity of Zambian hospitality and experience an enriching two years.

COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

Living in the village in Luapula province has been an amazing experience. Riding my bike through the villages in my area, greeting people, developing relationships and seeing the smile on kids faces has been rewarding and inspirational.

My first 6-8 months in the village I would go to visit my neighbor conservation farmer who lives just on the outskirts of the quiet village of Ndobola. To get to their house I walk through the yard of my headman, who as a local politician isn't around very much, always on the move. But his wife and 3 youngest are almost always around. The two oldest are boys, punks in the making, and the youngest a 3-4 year old girl, Ellen. Ellen would cry and cry and cry at first sight of me. Even if I was already yards away from her and started to move towards her she would run for her mom or one of her brothers and just stare and cry. But one day I was coming home from the market at Mwansabombwe, walking past my neighbor's house, one of the oldest sons of the headman, married with 2 kids of his own, and Ellen and her mom were in their yard visiting. I stopped to wish them a good afternoon; 'Chungulo mukwai' and Ellen yells my name, 'Ba Julie' and comes running towards me. A little bewildered I just stand there and then realize she's running as fast as her short little legs can take her so I crouch down and stick my arms out. She runs into my arms and I pick her up, twirl her around a few times before setting her down and asking her how her day is.

Seeing the transformation of this little girl's reaction to me brought such joy in my heart that I'll never forget that first time. Since then she greets me the same way every time I see her and I always make sure to stop and say hello and ask her how her day is going. Maybe she's not a farmer that's doing a permaculture garden but one day she'll be a mom with her own house and field and children and she'll teach her children not to cry when they see a muzungu (foreigner).

Julia Richardson
LIFE Volunteer, 2008 - 2011

They say that it is easy to join a community, but hard to leave one. This is especially true when your life becomes your work and every greeting is your work's fulfillment. This is the life of a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) in Zambia, Africa. In a small village, you become the newest member with the most interesting views. With the latest training from the Peace Corps Zambia staff, your skill becomes the hottest topic and everyone wants to get to know you. Not especially because of where you come from, or what you represent, but because you are the link to their motivation, the newest member that will carry the community closer to the development they have always wanted.

The Linking Income, Food, and Environment (LIFE) project in Zambia equips a Volunteer with more hands-on skill that proves its relevance time and again when living amongst a population of subsistence farmers in a land that is still so close to its environment that almost every person can be said to live near an area of national importance. Forests, game parks, rivers, and waterfalls all create a landscape that is more breathtaking than the grandeur of America because it is so inaccessible and a challenge to reach. Dropped into the midst of the human population, a Volunteer gets the rare opportunity to live so close to a people and a landscape, all while fulfilling a role in development.

Development takes on new meaning when you enter a community whose social structure defines every movement: the greeting, the first impression, the respect for elders, and the surprise of children. To wake in the morning and reach the fields to learn about African soils, the art of storytelling and the elapse of time, all while gathering the day's food.

As a LIFE Volunteer, one gains insight into the necessary nutrition, the food supply, and its impact on the earth, and God's provision through nature. A person's nutrition is heavily affected by the elements, and hygiene and disease run hand in hand. Zambian households manage under stressful conditions while my surroundings crumble under the termites and melt with the rains. I envy my neighbors and

counterparts for surviving this place for the years of ancestry who have also built a thorough knowledge of the pieces of the landscape that are safe and the others of danger. Their joy of the world around them is never ending and through them I learn more about family and the hunting and gathering symbiosis that energizes the children to stay in tune, while their elders teach through words wiser than wisdom. These are stories that one understands over time, and that time is elastic as it gains momentum with stronger relationships and familiar partnerships. All of which, as overwhelming as it sounds, are a blessing for the newest member of the village, the Peace Corps Volunteer.

The main thing I've learned about the LIFE project is that its goals and objectives are extremely relevant to what my community members are already focused on. I've found that generating interest around LIFE project activities is fairly easy and that these projects can have a significant and lasting impact on the way people work and live in the village setting. I've also learned the significance of demonstrating many of the activities myself, giving those I'm working with a tangible example of what is being promoted and showing confidence in the value of implementing these activities.

More than anything, I've learned that my community is incredibly self-motivated and eager to work hard to bring development to their area. In my experience, the community has taken full advantage of having a PCV in their area and has been nothing but receptive to new ideas and experiences. Utilizing this to the maximum has been one of my primary objectives throughout my service so far and I hope to continue learning how to tap into the interests and strengths of my community.

I've also found, however, that the harder I work, the harder my community will work, providing me with plenty of motivation and enthusiasm to continue my current projects and start even more in the future. I've learned that self-initiative is an integral part of being a successful PCV and that any task that seems daunting or insurmountable is often possible with only a bit of determination and resilience.

Sara Blackwell
LIFE Volunteer, 2008 - 2010

As my service winds down, I realize how much a part of this community I've become and how important the community has become to me. The people here, especially my neighbors, are family to me. I know that it will soon be time for me to move on, but the community will always be in my heart. A new volunteer will be replacing me, and the community is anxious and worried that perhaps the new volunteer will not be as open or fit in with life here. I've tried to assure them that as long as they stay welcoming and friendly, the new volunteer will slowly learn to adapt to village life, same as me. What I've found is that it takes at least a year to become comfortable and establish a routine in the village the last year is about nourishing established friendships and relationships.

All trainees should be assured that integration takes time and patience and the more they allow themselves to be a part of new, perhaps uncomfortable situations, the more they will become integrated within the community. Most importantly, integration is not only about becoming a part of the community but allowing the community to become a part of you.

Jenny Haddle
LIFE Volunteer, 2011 - 2014