



A collection of essays, photos, and news

Editors: Bob and Betty Soppelsa, RPCVs, Odienné, '68-'70
Submissions to elizabeth.soppelsa[at]verizon.net

Reason for Hope in Côte d'Ivoire

Grant D. Godfrey¹
2001-2002

Nearly 18 months after Alassane Ouattara assumed the presidency, economic, political, security and development challenges continue to confront Ivoirians on a daily basis. The good news is that the government and the country are making progress on these issues. Though Côte d'Ivoire will need help to address each of them, its leaders have not waited on outside assistance to begin, and the country has regained a positive, though not smooth, trajectory.

In late July, I traveled to Abidjan to observe assistance provided to the new National Assembly, and had the opportunity to interact with a number of leading Ivoirian parliamentarians and senior legislative staff. Of course, I also took the opportunity to enjoy some attiéké and alloco and look around the city, which I had last visited in 2009. Abidjan had a bustle about it I had not seen since Peace Corps evacuated us in September 2002. The traffic was bad, not from roadblocks, but because the city was more active than it had been throughout the years of crisis. Construction sites and repair efforts were visibly underway.

My favorable impressions of Abidjan, however, do not mean that the country has overcome its social and political cleavages; in fact, these have been exacerbated by the long years of the rebellion, the horrible violence following former president Gbagbo's refusal to accept the 2010 election results, and the slow and unconvincing steps toward reconciliation taken by the new regime. Shortly before I left Abidjan, the first of a series of attacks on strategic installations such as military and police bases and the main Abidjan power plant occurred. President Ouattara now has the unenviable task of providing security to a suffering nation while simultaneously disarming a large number of those who fought to end Gbagbo's attempt to hold on to power. Security issues will likely continue to present an unwelcome distraction to his administration's policy goals.

¹ *Grant D. Godfrey is Program Manager for the Great Lakes and West African post-conflict countries at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). The views expressed here are his own and do not necessarily present the views of NDI.*



Bonne Année!

Best wishes for a healthy and peaceful new year!
Bob and Betty

Fostering reconciliation and building participatory democratic institutions can alleviate security pressures, but they cannot be accomplished by presidential decree. Though the government quickly established a Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it has yet to launch any major activities. On a more positive note, the government launched talks with opposition parties in April that have resulted in draft legislation on establishing official status and protections for opposition leaders, and reforms to political party financing. By adopting the legislation, the government has an opportunity to build sorely needed trust with opposition parties and demonstrate to the population that its commitment to reconciliation and reform goes beyond words.

The opposition must also demonstrate its good faith, not only to the government as a negotiating partner, but to its large base of support. Unfortunately, the former president's Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI) boycotted the legislative elections, depriving its supporters of a voice in the National Assembly. The FPI and its allies would make a great mistake by continuing its boycott during local elections that have been planned for February. Though they have some legitimate grievances—for example, the composition of the electoral commission needs to be revised—a boycott will only further weaken the opposition, as has been seen in a number of African countries. Instead, the opposition needs to use local elections—especially in areas where the opposition enjoys broad support—as an organizing tool that will help establish their legitimacy in the eyes of potential supporters and strengthen their negotiating position with the government. Participating in elections will also help the opposition sort out leadership questions in the post-Gbagbo era.

One reason I believe Côte d'Ivoire can at last begin to overcome its troubled and divisive politics is because of the impressive leaders it has in the National Assembly. Its caucus presidents and committee chairs and even backbench members showed a dedication to their office not always seen in developing democracies, staying to work on capacity building after the parliamentary vacation had begun. Though women make up only 11% of the Assembly's members, a third of these women occupy leadership positions. Among them are the first vice-speaker of the

Assembly, and the chairs of half the standing committees, including the powerful Committee on General and Institutional Affairs. The men and women of the Assembly made it plain that they intend to set up a positive example for the country, exercising the full power and judgment of an independent branch of government. While the opposition is not in parliament because of their boycott, political competition between President Ouattara's RDR and the PDCI is already helping Assembly leaders avoid becoming a rubber stamp for the government. In November, a government bill lost a committee vote that it expected to win and caused the dismissal of the cabinet; a rarity in Côte d'Ivoire's political system, this kind of event provides learning opportunities for both branches in managing the checks and balances of a democratic system.

Though many challenges lay ahead, and the country has much lost ground to make up, after a decade of conflict and decline there is reason for hope in Côte d'Ivoire.

Article from Nestlé—does any reader have comments or more information on this?

Nestlé UK & Ireland double commitment to FAIRTRADE as KitKat 2-fingers is certified

Oct 26, 2012



“Additional 4,500 cocoa farmers in the Ivory Coast benefit from FAIRTRADE Premiums and the Nestlé Cocoa Plan. Nestlé UK & Ireland will double its commitment to FAIRTRADE from January 2013 by gaining certification of its 2-finger KIT KAT.

By extending the FAIRTRADE certification across the most popular of the KIT KAT range, an extra 800 million bars a year will now carry the mark, becoming the first mainstream brand in the biscuit aisle to gain FAIRTRADE certification.

Nestlé UK & Ireland will now purchase an additional 5,300 tonnes of sustainable cocoa from FAIRTRADE farmer co-operatives in the Ivory Coast.

The Nestlé Cocoa Plan focuses on five key areas:

1. **Better farming** by training farmers in more sustainable farming practices;
2. **Better schools** by aiming to build 40 schools in the next 4 years, and by supporting community projects;
3. **Better plants** by providing 12 million highly productive cocoa plants to farmers, the yield (and therefore income) will be improved.”

4. **Better cocoa** by improving the supply chain and paying a premium for quality cocoa;
5. **Certification** through independent partners like FAIRTRADE.”

► **Read more at** www.nestlecocoaplan.com

FOCI President's Message

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! Bonne Année, santé, l'argent, et fromage! Who doesn't love cheese? The news wasn't good in RCI over the holiday when many died in a crowd. Let's hope the year brings better days for RCI.

Here in Washington, we have just celebrated another inauguration. With the New Year, we also hope to have more fun with FOCI. Another trip to the African Art Museum, more attempts to find grant winners, more calendars to sell!

One of my dream projects is to save the cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire. As both the country and chocolate are near and dear to my heart, I would love to find a way to support or start a project to get cocoa legally harvested and exported. If you have any leads, contact us.

That's all for now, except thank you to Megan and Koné and la famille de Koné in Paris, who hosted me with the best *sauce arachide* this side of Abidjan, though Taabo knew sauce. The baguettes were formidable! I am getting hungry just thinking about it.

Marianne

Treasurer's Report

Taylor Kay

In 2012, FOCI awarded a \$600 grant to a San Pedro-based NGO call Elan d'Amour that assists HIV-affected families. Our contribution supported an education program that built awareness of the challenges these families face, and encouraged patients to continue anti-retroviral treatment.

A second call for grant applications did not result in any winners last year, but we are always on the lookout for new submissions! These should be sent to friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com. Proposals are scored by the FOCI executive board on the following criteria: Does the NGO have a diverse Ivorian membership, respect talents and skills of Ivorians, and respond to the needs of Ivorians? Does the NGO have one of the following as a development goal: Build capacity for self-reliance; is sustainable; promote entrepreneurship/self-help; engage in micro financing; is educative or supports and provides educational opportunities; and consistent with FOCI's international development goals.

FOCI finished the year with a net income of \$597.39 and \$11,178.54 in our checking account. We earned \$378 above expenses on calendar sales, and received \$1095 in dues and donations in 2012. Expenses amounted to \$875.61, the main part

being \$600 towards a small grant, and \$169.50 for the FOCI website. Teleconferencing, postage and a wire transfer fee related to the grant made up the balance of our expenses. We run a lean operation! So far in 2013, we've collected over \$500 in dues, donations and calendar sales (which are still available!).

Dues are, well, due! The barrier to membership is low: an annual membership is just \$15. You can send a check made out to FOCI at 170 Mussey St, South Portland, ME 04106. Did you know that you can get a joint FOCI-NPCA membership via either the National Peace Corps Association or via FOCI? Write us a check for \$50 and we'll transfer \$35 to NPCA, or join NPCA and check the FOCI box.

Thanks,
Taylor



National Peace Corps Association Awards Announced

NPCA presents its awards biennially and/or in major Peace Corps anniversary years.

For more information, follow these links:

- [The Sargent Shriver Award for Distinguished Humanitarian Service](#)
- [The Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award](#)
- [Global Community Project Competition](#)
- [The Loret Miller Ruppe Award for Outstanding Community Service](#)
- [The NPCA Electronic Media Award](#)
- [The NPCA Print Media Award](#)

The Newest Member of the FOCI Family



New baby Rose, daughter of our secretary, Nathalie Gamache ('99-02) and her husband Moussa Diaby.

Announcements/Requests

❖ A new book by Raven Moore, RPCV

Kick Start It!

Being pushed to be independent in the Peace Corps made me love the challenge of living successfully lost. When the teachers at my site had the idea to get computers for the elementary/ middle school, I figured out how to write a grant proposal by pouring through successful ones. When the community wanted to create a better place than the snake-filled woods for children to go to the bathroom, I looked up latrine diagrams, figured out how much components cost, how much of each was needed, and ran off to find the village mason.

Everyone who feels they have something important to create should be nurtured to do so in their own way - at least that's how it is in the Peace Corps. What if we all saw ourselves as resources worthy of mutual rewards as Kickstarter promotes? Would it be anarchy? Or, would it be peace? If nothing was chosen for you, would you be able to choose for yourself? Would you prefer a wealth of options, good and bad, or do you only want to see what someone else thinks is good for you?

Standing alone is standing up on your own. Being able to share your point of view in your own way is what wheels your independence. Every time I get lost on a jog, it is to know exactly where I am on another day when it counts the most. Having the willingness to be lost, to teach yourself, and to try something new, leads to greater discoveries. This kind of uniqueness is what Peace Corps promotes to all of its host countries and is one critical part, in addition to its exploration of identity, that my first book "Padre" relives with you.

Random acts of kindness, belief in adventures, and full community involvement in those adventures keep the world upbeat. My love of adventure and subsequent writing sprung from a two-week, high school trip to Spain. I raised my fare with poinsettias and my torture was finally spared by a neighbor disappointed to see me chin-down and doubtful at her steps. Fortunately for me, she had the right realization and after sighing that I was the least enthusiastic, poinsettia seller ever, bought the last \$300 worth of my orders. She chose to keep the world upbeat and make it better. My love for unknown territory grew from there and Kickstarter is right behind me. If you'd like to get involved with my next adventure in self-publishing, click [here](#) to explore.

❖ **Book List.** We are trying to create a list of Ivorian writers or Ivorian-themed books to add to our Website. Send your lists to friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com to help create the master list.

❖ **Identify yourself!** Send an e-mail with your latest contact information (e-mail and snail mail addresses) to friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com

❖ **Join our Facebook group!**

<http://www.facebook.com/groups/8510168090/>



**INTERNATIONAL CALENDAR 2013
Returned Peace Corps Volunteers
International Calendar**

Nearly gone! Contact FOCl for a copy.
friendsofcotedivoire@gmail.com



Bob and Betty Soppelsa,
PC training, 1968

**Thank you to all who contributed to
this newsletter!**

*Please send your stories, photos, book
reviews, announcements, and ideas for
the next issue to
[elizabeth.soppelsa\[at\]verizon.net](mailto:elizabeth.soppelsa[at]verizon.net).*