

Introducing PC Nepal Country Director Andrea Wojnar Diagne

ANDREA WOJNAR DIAGNE, COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR PEACE CORPS NEPAL

Dear Friends of Nepal, my name is Andrea Wojnar Diagne, and I am the Country Director for Peace Corps Nepal as of January 2012! I transferred here after serving as Country Director in Tanzania and Regional Programming Advisor in the Sahel beginning in 2006. It is so wonderful to be here! I am not sure there is a more beloved Peace Corps country than Nepal. Since my arrival I am have been inundated with stories, offers of assistance, and well-wishers who are all so pleased that Peace Corps is returning. It has been truly inspiring and heart-warming to return to such a wonderful ambiance.

As Friends of Nepal are major supporters of Peace Corps and Nepal, I wanted to give you a small update on where preparations stand for the arrival of the first 20 trainees on September 9th. As of mid-August, we have hired 13 local staff, and three Americans (including myself). We spent six months trying to identify a suitable office and finally found one in June. It is in the process of being retrofitted for earthquake resistance; we expect to move in by late October. All 15 of us are working out of embassy offices at Phora Durbar in one big room, plus my office which doubles as a computer server room (so is always kept very cool...). We have hired our



Andrea Wojnar Diagne.

pre-service training (PST) staff, have identified 20 host families in Chautara area of Sindhupalchok, and are finalizing our PST curriculum. In mid-August we began training 12 language proficiency testers here in Kathmandu. Staff are in the field finalizing sites for the Volunteers who will be placed in Parbat, Syangja, and Baglung districts of the Western Region to promote food security through nutrition and agriculture. So things are moving along at a rapid pace, which likely will not let up any time soon.

As Country Director, it is my responsibility to forecast forward to the end of November when our trainees will swear in and become full-fledged Volunteers who will take up the legacy many of you left for them. By coinci-

dence, this is also the 50th anniversary year of Peace Corps arrival in Nepal. So we are hoping to celebrate these special occasions by creating a series of events to mark them:

- Swearing-in will take place on the 30th of November at the Ambassador's residence here in Kathmandu with several VIPs from Peace Corps headquarters. RPCVs will of course be invited.
- I am also working with a Fulbright recipient here to reproduce a theatre production of RPCV Broughton Coburn's classic book *Nepali Aama* which she directed in the US in 1990. Two performances are planned for the 30th of November in Kathmandu, with the 4:30 pm one reserved for honoring Peace Corps Nepal.
- Some people have suggested a photo expo which Nepal RPCVs could contribute to. Would Friends of Nepal (within and outside of Nepal) be willing to help us celebrate that week with this or some other sort of activity? I would be grateful for any thoughts, ideas, or assistance you might be able to offer to help us create a really wonderful week.

The first group of volunteers arrived on September 7, 2012 (see photo page 4). I look forward to working with past and present Nepal PCVs. Namaste!

PEACE CORPS NEPAL ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IDEAS

Do you have suggestions for ways Friends of Nepal can help celebrate the 50th anniversary of Peace Corps/Nepal? Send your ideas to info@friendsofnepal.com.

No Constitution...Now What?

BY SHIVAJI UPADHYAY, FORMER PEACE CORPS/NEPAL STAFF MEMBER

In May of 2012, the Nepalese Constituent Assembly officially missed their last deadline to write a new constitution. The 601-member Constituent Assembly had been elected in 2008 for the express purpose of writing a constitution, and their failure precipitates a constitutional crisis. It is not clear yet what the next step will be, although there is talk of holding a new constituent assembly election in November of 2012. Meanwhile, the country stumbles along with an ever-increasing number of political parties and no functioning government.

SOME HISTORY

In 1996, the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPN-Maoist) under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), Baburam Bhattarai, and Mohan Kiran Vaidya, announced a People's War to overthrow the Nepalese monarchy, establish a federal republic of Nepal, and write a new constitution.

The Nepali government was not able to resolve the crisis although the United States, European Union and India, among other nations, provided extensive military and economic aid to the Nepali government. After nearly ten years of war, King Gyanendra seized full control of power in February 2005, saying he would end the civil war once and for all. He rejected any negotiations with the UCPN-Maoist and their demand to hold constitution assembly elections. Probably this was the day Gyanendra sealed his own fate.

The failure of the 1990 democratic movement achievements, the royal massacre, and King Gyanendra's power grab galvanized an opposition movement that came to be known as Loktantra Andolan II (Democratic Movement II). Led by the seven major political parties and supported by the Maoists, the Andolan forced Gyanendra on 24 April 2006 to



Youth march to protest the lack of progress in writing the constitution. Photo by Naresh Newar/IRIN.

reinstate the Nepal House of Representatives and appoint Nepali Congress leader Girija P. Koirala as its leader. The reinstated parliament unanimously voted to abolish the monarchy.

Under Koirala's leadership, a 12-Point Peace Agreement between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the UCPN-Maoist was signed in India on September 21, 2006. The Peace Agreement provided for an election to form a temporary government whose primary responsibility would be to write a new constitution. The Maoists agreed to take part in the constituent assembly election and abide by the results.

Constituent assembly elections were held on April 10, 2008. Representatives of 55 political parties, as well as 816 independent candidates, competed. The Maoists won in a landslide, taking 220 of the 601 seats, followed by Nepali Congress with 110, and

United Marxists-Leninists with 103. Three parties whose base was in the Terai—Madheshi Jan Adhikar Forum, Terai Madhesh Loktantrik, and Sadbhawana—pooled their 81 seats to become the fourth-largest party. The two pro-monarchy Rastriya Prajatantra parties won only 12 seats, and combined their resources to become the smallest of the five major political parties.

The first Constituent Assembly of Nepal declared Nepal a Federal Republic on 28 May 2008 and elected UCPN-Maoist Chairman Prachanda prime minister a few months later. Based on the 12-point peace agreement, the interim government had three major goals: to write a new Constitution within two years, integrate the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the Nepal Army, and return all property seized by the UCPN-Maoists. The interim government has failed on all three fronts.

CURRENT POLITICAL REALITIES IN NEPAL

The deadline—and then the extended deadline—for writing a new constitution passed with no constitution forthcoming. The current prime minister, Baburam Bhattarai of UCPN-Maoist, has called for new constituent assembly elections in November 2012, but it is not clear that he has the power to hold elections. PM Bhattarai no longer controls the majority, since UCPN-Maoist leader Mohan Baidya ‘Kiran’ split on June 18, 2012 and formed a new party, Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist). The Madhesi People’s Rights Forum—Democratic, which together with the UCPN-Maoists formed the core of Bhattarai’s coalition government, also split on June 10, 2012 following the resignation of 10 members.

WHY DID THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY FAIL TO WRITE A CONSTITUTION?

A major point of contention was how to divide the country into states. Several different ethnic groups have demanded their own state, of which the most powerful is the United Madhesi Front which wants one Madhesh Pradesh (Terai State) covering most of the Terai. Both the Nepali Congress and the United Marxists-Leninists oppose creating states based on ethnicity, while UCPN-Maoist supports it. The Nepali Congress wants to have a small number of federal states based on geography from north to south, while smaller parties have been agitating for smaller, more numerous states. The number of states matters because it will affect resource distribution and economic support.

But that’s the superficial problem. The more fundamental problem is that the members of the constituent assembly were never serious about writing a constitution. There is ample evidence that the big players spent these past four years jockeying for minister positions, not hammering out meaningful compromises.

There are even rumors swirling that the failure of the constituent assembly was part of a larger Maoist plot to seize total control. If UCPN-Maoist and the Madhesi Party had split before the Constituent Assembly expired, Bhattarai would have been forced to resign, but instead both splits occurred within a few weeks after the Constituent Assembly



Security guards waiting for the arrival of anti-government protesters. Photo by Naresh Newar/IRIN.

expired. The timing means that the new election will be held under Maoist stewardship, which could bring in a new Assembly more amenable to writing the kind of constitution the Maoists want to see.

WHAT OTHER PROBLEMS DOES NEPAL FACE?

Nepal has dozens of political parties but no one willing and able to work for the benefit of the Nepali people. The Nepali Congress has lost its hold. Dominated by an aging old guard, the Nepali Congress devalued newcomers and made it difficult for local leaders to rise to positions of power in the central committee. Young voters were particularly turned off by these undemocratic policies. If this is the trend, they should forget coming back to power for another 10-15 years. Scary, since this is the only democratic party.

Corruption is rampant. Most party leaders, including the UCPN-Maoists, are living lavish lifestyles: driving Japanese cars, holding party conferences and meetings in five-star hotels and resorts, exploiting their government allowances, getting govern-

ment-paid health treatment abroad and taking unnecessary international trips.

Nepal’s economic and political priorities are backwards. A country prospers when business thrives and politicians do not. Nepal’s businesses are not thriving; the number of businesses has been going downhill every year and fewer and fewer businesspeople are attracted to Nepal. The economy is so unhealthy that the country can’t pay its own bills. Nepal survives on remittances from foreign workers and grants from foreign donors. Somewhere between a fifth and a quarter of the GDP comes from remittances and two-thirds of the national budget is funded by foreign grants and loans. The only thing growing is the number of political parties and political leaders, because politics has become the way to make money.

Public safety is deplorable. Six years after the end of the war, the PLA has not been completely integrated into the Nepal Army and still holds power in the rural areas. Villagers still live in fear of extortion and kidnappings, and frequent strikes cripple the economy. Meanwhile, politically-connected thugs and dangerous gang leaders commit crimes with impunity.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

It is hard to predict the future of Nepal but right now, it does not look good. Whichever political party is in power, the first thing we need is a good constitution. If we have a new constitution that establishes freedom of speech, rule of law, free economy, decentralization of power, basic human rights and equal opportunities based on merit, the Nepalese people can forget the past and will be able to build and improve their own future.

NANGI HILLS TREK, NEPAL: SPRING 2013

This trek (planned by Don Messerschmidt, N-2) will offer a unique opportunity to experience life and culture in remote Magar villages which were recently connected to the Internet through the FoN-supported Wireless Network Project. Members of FoN will have an opportunity to discuss with villagers and local leaders how FoN can promote Fair Trade possibilities throughout the mid-hills district of Myagdi and beyond. Join us if you can. For more information, see the advertisement on page 9, or visit the website at riadventuretravel.com/destinations/nepal.

Nepal-born Rauniyar Runs for U.S. Congress

BY TAMARA BHANDARI, N-194

Darshan Rauniyar is that rarest of all beings—an idealistic politician. Hailing as he does from Nepal—where political gridlock and corruption breed rampant cynicism—his faith in the ability of politicians to solve problems is remarkable. In August, he lost his Democratic primary battle to represent Washington’s first district in the House of Representatives. His race was closely watched by Nepali Americans, as he was the first native of Nepal to run for national office, and if he had been elected he would have been the first Hindu in the U.S. Congress.

In his campaign, though, Rauniyar didn’t focus on his personal story. Instead, he tried to distinguish himself from his competitors by portraying himself as a man of principle. During this campaign, he was the only candidate to oppose a plan to build a shipping terminal to bring coal from Montana and Wyoming through Washington. Rauniyar claims that “90-95% of the people I talked to were opposed to it, but some of the politicians were supported by unions which supported the [project] and didn’t want to go against them, and some were playing politics.” His firm stance helped raise his profile in the primary, and “showed myself to be someone with character,” as he puts it.

That’s not to say that the groundbreaking nature of his candidacy didn’t play a role as well. Two thousand Nepali Americans donated to his campaign, a significant fraction of a population estimated at just 150,000. However, Rauniyar is quick to point out that his supporters included Americans of all stripes. “I got most of my donations from Nepalis, but I also got more than 9000 votes,” he said. The *Seattle Times* estimates that there are only about 200 South Asians living in Rauniyar’s district.

Despite his loss, Rauniyar is undeterred. He learned persistence young. Raised by a mother who was widowed before he was born, Rauniyar grew up with his sister in

his *mama’s* house. A young widow in 1960s Nepal would normally have been headed towards a life of dependency and suffering, but his mother insisted on finishing high school, and then college so that she could provide for her children. “She’s amazing, and I’m not just saying that because I’m her son,” says Rauniyar. His mother flew out from Nepal for his campaign, and she did not limit her assistance to taking care of the grandkids. “She went to 6,000 or 7,000 houses by herself, town meetings, forums, where she spoke for me,” said Rauniyar.

Rauniyar’s story is the classic immigrant American dream. He came to America more than 20 years ago and obtained a degree in engineering before starting a successful business. Along the way he married, had two children, and became an American citizen. His focus now is on what he can do for his adopted homeland, but he has not forgotten his roots. He laments the political shenanigans underway in Nepal, and his inability to help. “If I were in Congress, I would be a bridge between Nepal and the U.S. I could work with the [Nepali] leaders to get them to change, through economic development, political pressure. I would put Nepal’s cause in



Darshan Rauniyar

the forefront of the Congressional agenda. I would mobilize America’s resources to help Nepal,” he says.

A few weeks after the campaign ended he was still tying up loose ends: filing reports with the Federal Election Commission, sending thank you’s to supporters, shutting down the office in which he had pretty much lived for the past few months. “I’m not sure what I’m going to do next,” he said, “but I’m definitely going to run again. I’m not done yet.”

Welcome New Volunteers



The 20 new Peace Corps/Nepal volunteers are welcomed by American and Nepali officials on September 7, 2012. Pictured: Peace Corps/Nepal trainees; PC director Aaron S. Williams; Nepalese Ambassador to the United States Shankar Sharma; USAID Assistant Administrator for Asia Nisha Biswal; Peace Corps/Nepal Country Director Andrea Wojnar Diagne; and Peace Corps staff.



Nangi women learning paper bag-making from volunteer Jessica Shultz. Photo by Kim Schult.

The Promise of Fair Trade in Nepal

BY DAVE CARLSON, N-3

“No country, anywhere on earth, has achieved long-term economic growth and meaningfully reduced poverty by relying on foreign aid the way the world’s poorest countries do today.”

—Dambisa Moyo, Oxford-trained economist and author of *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is a Better Way for Africa*

It is a vexing problem, indeed: how do we, as returned Peace Corps Volunteers, make meaningful contributions to Nepal’s development? The simplest answer—throw some money at it—may not be the best way to go. Moyo argues that trade, not aid, is the path to prosperity. Over the past year, FoN helped connect 150 communities in rural Nepal to the Internet, thereby improving the ability of the local people to access education and health care. Now, we are looking at ways to encourage trade between those communities and consumers in the West. But it is crucial that the kind of trade we encourage be Fair Trade, not free trade.

Free trade has such a nice ring to it. Who can argue with freedom? And the advocates of free trade include such illustrious international organizations as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. The problem is that free trade as it is commonly defined—international trade left to its natural course without tariffs, quotas, or other restrictions—benefits multinational corporations and powerful business interests at the expense of vulnerable farmers, artisans and workers in places like Nepal. Under free trade arrangements, producer compensation is determined by the market and government policies with little regard to living wage and community improvement costs. Marginalized people end up further exploited and the environment ends up damaged.

Fair Trade is the socially responsible cousin of free trade. It seeks to build equitable and sustainable trading partnerships with marginalized and vulnerable people around the world. Increasingly, consumers in developed nations are using their purchasing power to challenge the current system

and demanding supply-chain accountability. Consumers are seeking alternatives that offer secure and rewarding lives to the less fortunate people who produce the products they buy.

Friends of Nepal’s Legacy Project connected dozens of mountain villages to the Internet. These are communities that until coming online were often not only out of communication locally, but completely removed from the larger world. Although it will take some time before the farmers and artisans of these remote communities gain full access to Fair Trade opportunities, they have already begun reaching out to international consumers.

A case in point: women in the Himalayan village of Nangi and their paper bag-making business. They start from scratch, making their own paper from a bush-like plant known as *lokta*. The process is environmentally sustainable because *lokta* wood is harvested from their plantations on a four-year growing cycle. Once harvested, the women beat the wood with wooden hammers to

see FAIR TRADE on page 8

Memories of Nepal

Hank Lacy, N-14, was posted in the Terai town of Jaleswar from 1967 to 1969. His photographs from that time depict a world that is fast disappearing.



The village of Pheriche, en route to Mt. Everest.



Ganja sellers.



Hank Lacy and his counterpart, 1968.



Jaleswar bazaar.



Hank Lacy at the Nepal-India border.



PCVs Hank Lacy, Bob Blaton, and Jack Gramlich, N/14, in Namche Bazaar, 1967.



N-14 in training, 1967.



Fording a stream en route to Kathmandu, 1960.



PCV Chuck Chandler, 1968.



Cooking bitter melon. Photo by Shom Bhandari.

The Flavors of Nepal

BY JON A. SOUDER, N-44

Now that Prabal Gurung is burning up the fashion world—including dressing Michelle Obama—is there any doubt that Nepali cuisine could be the next big thing, even ending up on a menu in the White House? If you want to be on the leading edge, or just want food like your ama used to cook for you, the Association of Nepalis in the Americas' second edition of *The Nepal Cookbook* is an excellent place to start. This is the cookbook that Nepali mothers give to their kids (particularly boys) when they go off on their own so they don't get too homesick.

In its approach, *The Nepal Cookbook* is similar to what early Nepal PCVs were provided: how to cook dishes that taste like home using locally available ingredients and techniques. The book's 133 recipes cover the gamut: appetizers (15), soups and lentils (11), vegetables (25), meats and seafood (22), chutneys and pickles (24), rice and breads (10), and desserts (26). There is a glossary and description of ingredients, most of which can be found in well-stocked stores or at Indian groceries found in larger cities. Any other ingredients can be obtained on the web: it was very cool to receive from a distributor in California packets of *gundruk* (fermented, then dried greens) and *jimbu* (an herb) with the flag and "Product of Nepal" on the label.

As befitting the origins of the Nepali diaspora to the U.S., the majority of the recipes are *pahadi* or Newari origin, although not without representation from the *himal* (mo-

mos) and *madesh* (particularly appetizers and desserts). Those "secret" ingredients (similar to *epazote* in Mexican food) that provide distinctive tastes, especially *juwanu* (lovage seeds) and *jimbu* are the key to recreating authentic tastes. I was particularly impressed with the mixed sprouted bean soup (Quantee), plantain curry (Kera Ko Tarkari), and of course chicken curry (Kukhura Ko Tarkari).

Not all the recipes were so successful: some probably needed multiple attempts and others were just not to my taste. Beware, many recipes require deep frying. Using a wok (Lodge's cast iron wok is excellent), will reduce the amounts of oil needed and consumed, but it may be that the easy availability and low cost of cooking oil in the U.S. is the reason for so many fried recipes. Also, there were at least five recipes for dried lentil balls, and my first attempt was barely edible. Finally, bitter melon (2 recipes) is just as described: bitter! Both the balls and the melon are worth trying again, though.

The Nepal Cookbook is in the proud American tradition of collecting recipes into books for fundraising. Buy it, and not only will you help out a good cause, but you'll have some tasty contributions to take to your next ethnic potluck to show off the culture and cuisine that had such an influence on your life. Just working my way through two dozen of these recipes brought back a flood of memories.

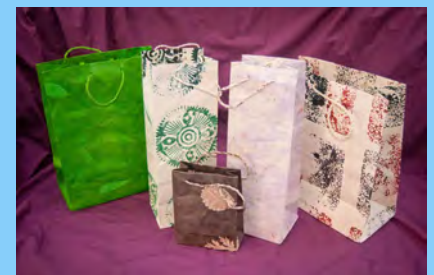
Association of Nepalis in the Americas, The Nepal Cookbook, 2nd Edition ISBN 1-55939-381-5 (Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY) 168 pp. \$14.95

FAIR TRADE from page 5

create a pulp that is made into a very strong and unique paper product that is eco-friendly. The Nangi women's group plans to sell these bags internationally through Fair Trade stores. They are developing other products from their paper, including journals and paper jewelry.

For these businesses to succeed, the producers need the protection of truly fair trade practices. Two key advocate organizations for Fair Trade are the Fairtrade Labeling Organization and the World Fair Trade Organization. The Fair Trade label is applied to trading organizations that treat producers fairly by paying minimum prices and social premiums. Social premiums are a sum of money paid on top of the agreed Fair Trade price for investment in social, environmental or economic development projects. In the United States, sales from items that carry a Fair Trade label have increased dramatically over the past seven years. According to the Fair Trade Federation, North American Fair Trade sales grew 102% from 2004 to 2007. The number of Fair Trade selling organizations is now more than 800 in 58 countries, which impacts the lives of more than 1.2 million farmers and artisans around the world, according to Fairtrade International.

Fair Trade provides an opportunity that aid alone does not. As Bob Chase, executive director of SERRV International noted, "When people become economically empowered, they gain political and social power." In the coming years, Friends of Nepal will continue looking at ways that we can help Nepalis access fair trading opportunities that will empower them to develop their own country.





N a m a s t e !

Nangi Hills Trek, Nepal: Spring 2013

Spring time in the Himalaya... The Nangi Hills Trek is unlike the standard, run-of-the-mill mountain treks in Nepal. This is a great trek for volunteers – and others. It provides a unique opportunity to experience life and culture in villages of the Magar ethnic group in the mid-hills district of Myagdi.



Dhaulagiri Himal from the Nangi Hills Trek

The Himalayan peaks are close by, but more importantly, you'll learn about the Magars, meet them in their villages, and realize their place on a magnificent landscape.

The trek is timed for the rhododendron blossoming season and spring bird migration. Whole families are welcome to join us.

Inspired by the pioneering development work of **Mahabir Pun**, a social hero of Nepal, 'Friends of Nepal' (FoN), a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) group, has assisted in Pun's pioneering Nepal Wireless Project that sets up Internet systems and computer networks in rural hill villages. FoN members have helped design and promote this trek. (Nangi is Mahabir's home village. We'll also visit its neighbors.)

Mahabir Pun holds the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award (also called the 'Nobel Prize for Asia') and is an Ashoka Fellow. Google 'Mahabir Pun' and be amazed at his lifetime accomplishments. You can also read about him and the wireless project at ecs.com.np/feature_detail.php?f_id=507 (scroll to 'The Friends of the 2011-12 Nepal Wireless Project'), nepalwireless.net and ecs.com.np/feature_detail.php?f_id=85.

Trip members will have the opportunity to join villagers for a day or two of volunteer work (there are many possibilities). For non-volunteers, there is an optional side trip up to a Magar yak farm on the south slopes of the Annapurna Himal, or just hang out and enjoy a great place in the hills. *Bring your camera!*

This special trip begins March 23, 2013 in Kathmandu (Easter Week). We'll visit Pokhara, a lakeside town popular with foreign visitors, then trek March 26–April 3. On April 4 we return to Kathmandu and on home.

Read the **Full Itinerary**, etc., online at riadventuretravel.com/destinations/nepal, then click on 'Nangi Hill Trek: RPCV' in the left column for a downloadable file. For more information contact Rusty at Traveler@RustyTraveler.com (phone **888.460.4404**), or Don at dmesserschmidt@gmail.com.

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CONTRIBUTE

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. Pictures from Nepal can be used to illustrate stories and interesting stories from your Peace Corps days may be written up in Memories from Nepal. Updates on your own life, your Peace Corps friends, or Nepali staff members will be included in the Group Notes and Staff Notes sections, and contact information for Nepali staff is always needed.

Send any submissions to nepal.newsletter@gmail.com.

To advertise in this newsletter visit www.FriendsofNepal.com/Info/Advertise.cfm.

MEMBERSHIP

Our small organization relies on membership dues for most of our operating budget. There are two ways to join: 1) Renew your membership to the National Peace Corps Association (www.rpcv.org) and choose Friends of Nepal as your "Affiliate Group." 2) Join Friends of Nepal directly (www.friendsofnepal.com). You can join on the website or use the form below. Basic membership to Friends of Nepal is \$15. If your membership is not current please renew today. Your support goes a long way.

Please make your check out to Friends of Nepal and mail to: Suzie Schneider, 181 Mary Jo Lane, Sequim, WA 98382. You can also use a credit card on the website: www.friendsofnepal.com.

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