

NEWS RELEASE

UCSanDiego

University Archives. RSS 6020

Peace Corp Trainees Gain Practical Experience

July 12, 1966

A broad-faced youth with thick hair and glasses hummed a Nigerian work song as he mixed red clay, cement and water with a rake. A name tag on his tee shirt said he was from Berkeley. Next to him a tall thin negro youth from Alabama sprinkled water on the clay from a punctured oil can. They were making adobe block for a small classroom building.

Not far away, in an area labeled Oshogbo, the flat crack of a .22 caliber blank started several youths into a short race.

Near Benin and a garden planted with tomatoes, egg plant, peppers, corn and cucumbers, a farm boy from upper New York state showed a small group of young men how he had constructed a "fire box" to dry corn.

A hundred yards away, in the "south forty" a girl from Los Angeles turned the spigot on a 50 gallon drum and filled a small watering trough for five piglets.

This is a combination farm, village, recreation area and classroom for 97 trainees for Peace Corps work in Nigeria. Under the direction of the University of California Extension in San Diego, the trainees are building their own rural training site that will offer the same problems they will probably encounter in rural Nigeria.

The different areas of the four-acre site have names---like Benin and Oshogbo --- that are those of Nigerian cities. In each of the areas there is a different project: a classroom, a well for fresh water, a volleyball court, a pig pen, a chicken coop, rabbit hutches, a lath house, a garden.

The chickens--30 white leghorns--laid 18 eggs during the first week. The tomatoes are doing just fine, for the soil they're in. One trainee has broken his finger, but for the most part they're doing just fine too; huffing and puffing behind a pick handle or sweating while they put canvas hinges on a gate made from eucalyptus limbs.

The trainees make the nine-mile journey from the UC campus on the cool cliffs of La Jolla to this hot, dusty hillside six afternoons a week. This is their technical training, their practical experience in construction and agriculture.

In the mornings they go to the classroom for language training (in one of three Nigerian dialects) human relations studies and cross-cultural work. They learn all they can about Nigeria, its people, customs and government.

They learn skills. But mostly they learn an attitude.

"Probably the single most important thing we can instill in these trainees is to be flexible," said Dr. Martin Chamberlain, director of University Extension and the Peace Corps project.

"When the ones who get to Nigeria settle down to work, they'll learn rather quickly that they're not going to change the world overnight. They will have to adjust to the Nigerians' way of life instead of trying to change the Nigerians over to the American way."

"All the technical skills in the world won't help a volunteer if he doesn't go into the job with the proper attitude," Chamberlain said.

During the sixth week of their training the Peace Corps hopefuls will live entirely at the training site. The week following, the trainees, their team leaders (return Peace Corps volunteers) and language instructors from Nigeria will trek into Baja California for a month.

There they will apply the agriculture and construction skills they have learned in a foreign culture.

Final selection of volunteers, graduation for some of the trainees, will take place the third week in September.

(7/12/66)