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# Partnerships, Progress, and Peace Corps

INTERVIEW WITH CARRIE HESSLER-RADELET

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**FLETCHER FORUM:** *The Peace Corps is part of an integrated system creating positive outcomes for communities across the globe. How do you view the role of the Peace Corps in the network of international development actors? Are you focused on particular sectors of development? What new resources do you bring to bear in these efforts?*

**CARRIE HESSLER-RADELET:** The Peace Corps provides host communities with sustainable solutions by sharing America's most precious resource—its people. Peace Corps volunteers live and work among the people they serve and go the last mile where most development agencies, and even host governments, rarely reach, with a focus on grassroots, people-to-people public service.

Volunteers integrate into their communities and develop lasting relationships of trust and mutual understanding. These relationships give volunteers insight into the opportunities for—and barriers to—development, as well as the credibility to introduce new evidence-based tools and approaches that will make an impact. Our volunteers can ensure that the best practice development investments of others are implemented effectively, owned by the community, monitored and evaluated, and sustained over time. Currently, volunteers work in over 60 countries on projects that focus on education, health, community economic development, agriculture, the environment, and youth development.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *How does the Peace Corps' work seek to build bridges between the United States and the rest of the world? What can the Peace Corps*

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**Carrie Hessler-Radelet** is the Director of the Peace Corps, sworn in on June 25, 2014. From 2010 to 2014 she served as acting Director and Deputy Director. She originally began her work with the Peace Corps as an English teaching volunteer in West Samoa (1981-1983). In between, she has spent more than two decades working in public health, with a particular focus on child and maternal health and HIV/AIDS.

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*do that other government agencies and individuals cannot to further the United States' objectives abroad?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** From the very beginning, Peace Corps has been committed to helping our partner nations build individual and institutional capacity, so they can achieve their own development objectives. In fact, in order to establish a Peace Corps program in a new host country, first

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the host country must invite volunteers to serve. What 55 years of partnership in development has shown us at the Peace Corps is that meaningful collaboration and personal relationships are utterly essential to addressing the most pressing challenges of our time.

I firmly believe that this community-based approach is not only a hallmark of compassionate service; it is absolutely the key to Peace Corps' impact around the world. Our work is driven by development priorities that

partner nations identify for their own people. Because of this, Peace Corps has very strong programs around the world—with some remaining uninterrupted for many years through political changes.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *Many foreign policy experts tout the importance of the three D's—Diplomacy, Defense, and Development. What role does the Peace Corps play in that foreign policy structure? How does the Peace Corps work with other government agencies to achieve its goals and those of the U.S. government?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** The Peace Corps works with our government partners to strengthen the impact of our mission, both at home and abroad. Through our collaborations, we have provided new opportunities for volunteers and their communities, exchanged knowledge and best practices in development, and funded projects that make a difference in the countries where we work.

One great example of our interagency work is in the area of food security. Peace Corps has been engaged in food security work for decades and, since 2011, has been one of 11 interagency partners in the U.S. government's global hunger and food security initiative, Feed the Future. Nearly 2,800 volunteers in 43 countries are working to address food security and

supporting the Feed the Future initiative. Together with USAID, Peace Corps has been able to reach communities that may not have otherwise been reached, and has developed new, innovative, and contextually relevant program resources and materials for use throughout the world. As a result, Peace Corps is contributing on a global scale to mitigating food insecurity, strengthening nutrition for mothers and children, addressing climate change and resiliency, and reducing poverty.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *The Peace Corps has been instrumental in collaborative initiatives such as Let Girls Learn and the Global Health Service Partnership. What made these initiatives unique? How can the Peace Corps and other development initiatives replicate this success?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** Our dedication to catalyzing sustainable, community-led solutions is really what makes Peace Corps' work unique, no matter which development goal volunteers are working toward. Let Girls Learn and the Global Health Service Partnership are two great examples of the success we can have when we combine Peace Corps' grassroots network with other development partners.

Since the launch of Let Girls Learn, Peace Corps volunteers around the world have responded to the call to make a difference in their communities of service. Educating girls is essential to healthy and thriving communities, but globally 62 million girls are not in school. Let Girls Learn addresses that challenge by empowering local leaders to put lasting solutions in place that confront the barriers to girls' education. From helping to start a school library to organizing a technology camp for girls, Peace Corps volunteers bring increased focus, resources, and impact to the critical global issue of girls' education.

Through Let Girls Learn, Peace Corps has trained more than 2,800 volunteers to create the conditions necessary for girls to succeed. As of September 30, 2016, Peace Corps volunteers and community leaders have utilized more than \$918,000 from the Peace Corps Let Girls Learn Fund to initiate over 330 community-identified projects, which were matched by more than \$620,000 in local in-kind contributions. With this strong community investment, projects have reached more than 152,000 girls aged 24 and under at the grassroots level.

The Global Health Service Partnership (GHSP) is also one of Peace Corps' most innovative programs—one we are always proud to cite when asked how we are making a difference in public health across the globe or how we are working shoulder-to-shoulder with local counterparts.

Through this unique collaboration among the Peace Corps, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and Seed Global Health, we are helping to address one of the major barriers to health in the developing world—the critical shortage of trained health workers, who make up the foundation of an effective health system and are critical to continued progress towards PEPFAR's goal of an AIDS-free generation.

Since GHSP launched in 2012, over 150 American nurse and physician educators with expertise in 18 medical and nursing specialties have served or are currently serving in Liberia, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Uganda.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *Many organizations have evolved under the relentless influence of globalization. How has the mission and execution of the Peace Corps changed since it was created by President John F. Kennedy? How has it changed since you began your service as Deputy Director and now Director?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** The need for Peace Corps' work—helping to reduce poverty, fostering economic growth, and building relationships in some of the most vulnerable communities across the globe—matters just as

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much now, as it did at the time of our founding. In fact, one might argue that the stakes are even higher in 2016, in our increasingly inter-connected world.

The Peace Corps is still the gold standard for Americans who are drawn to volunteering abroad—who are interested in not just imagining a better world, but rolling up their sleeves and

doing something about it. But we understand that whether Peace Corps remains a vital force in years to come depends on our ability to adapt to trends—to discern what the future holds; to innovate; to grow and transform all while remaining true to our mission.

We have spent the past several years adapting for an even greater impact. We have unveiled a refreshed brand platform that embraces a digitally focused communications approach and aims to make the Peace Corps more accessible to audiences through the platforms they already use. We have undertaken sweeping reforms in our application and recruitment system to ensure that we continue building a volunteer corps of the best and brightest Americans from all walks of life. We have implemented extensive reform of our in-house technical training and program support to enable

volunteers to make a bigger development impact in their communities. We have also launched strategic partnerships and embarked on exciting collaborations—such as Let Girls Learn—to strengthen volunteers’ capacity to respond to community needs. And we will continue to grow, transform, and evolve to meet the changing needs of our communities, our country, and our world.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *The international development community has placed a greater emphasis on cross-sector partnerships as a means to further development efforts. With that in mind, how does the Peace Corps view and operate with regional or in-country partners, such as aid organizations, NGOs, multi-lateral organizations, or the private sector? How can the Peace Corps strengthen these relationships moving forward?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** We are committed to working with organizations across the public and private sectors to create high-impact strategic partnerships. A great example is our partnership with the Special Olympics. The Special Olympics and Peace Corps families have been intertwined from the very beginning. We were founded by the same family in the 1960s, and we are both dedicated to missions of global service—helping young people, adults, and communities around the world reach their full potential. In several countries, Peace Corps works directly with the Special Olympics, through our ministry partners, to reach out to people with disabilities where our volunteers serve.

Last year, we also launched an innovative public-private partnership with IBM. Our work allows highly skilled corporate professionals to serve overseas in short-term, high-impact, pro bono consulting assignments through the Peace Corps Response program. Since the launch, top global talent from IBM has worked with the Peace Corps Response program in Ghana, the Philippines, and Mexico.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *Historically, the Peace Corps has had success stories in which development missions eventually .....  
matured into lasting and mutually beneficial trading relationships. Are there any such successes on the horizon today, or are these harder to come by in today’s world?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** Peace Corps’ central focus has always been people-to-people public service and develop-

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ment. Our priorities are locally driven in order to build bridges on the individual level between our volunteers and their community members.

Because we are focused on building relationships and capacities at community levels, Peace Corps volunteers are uniquely situated to be grassroots ambassadors on behalf of the United States. In many instances, the first groups of volunteers in a country or a specific community are among the first foreigners host community members have met. We are continually grateful that so many countries show an interest in Peace Corps.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *What do you see as the future role of the Peace Corps in globalization and international affairs? How can the Peace Corps adapt to new threats, risks, and other development challenges? What are the biggest challenges and opportunities for the Peace Corps today?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** Over the past few years, the Peace Corps has embarked on the most comprehensive reform effort in our agency's history. After a thorough review of all aspects of our operations, we are now implementing a strategic plan to modernize agency operations and strengthen the effectiveness of our programs. These efforts have already yielded significant results, making the Peace Corps more data-driven, more responsive to our applicants, volunteers, and institutional partners in more cost-effective ways.

When Peace Corps was founded, we were one of the few organizations focused on sending American talent abroad. Now, Americans, particularly millennials, have a wealth of options and we want to make sure that strong candidates are looking towards Peace Corps.

Our forward-looking reforms have been a dramatic success. In the first full year the new application was in place, more than 23,000 Americans applied for Peace Corps service—shattering a 40-year record for the most applicants received in a single year. These application numbers tell us that Americans today are as passionate about Peace Corps service as they have ever been.

But there are changes. Today, even the poorest countries have university trained leaders and poverty-reduction plans. No longer can we send volunteers off to serve in communities with minimal training and an undefined scope of work. There has to be a real job for them and they need to be prepared for it.

And of course, technology is quickly changing the way we connect with the world, and with each other. For example, through Peace Corps' collaboration with the language learning app Duolingo, we were able to

take our world class language instruction and disseminate it on the most widely used education app in history. This partnership resulted in the use of our two Ukrainian courses by over 950,000 people in the United States, Ukraine, and elsewhere around the world. Peace Corps also worked on the course for Swahili, the first African language to be created on Duolingo, which already has over 29,500 people signed up—and it hasn't even been released yet.

Another example of how we have adapted to changing technology is our work with the Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team. This free platform has allowed volunteers to collaborate with thousands of do-good mappers from around the world through their crowd-sourcing platform. A volunteer and their community's need for digital geographic data of their own community can be supplied by anyone with an Internet connection and a willingness to help out. This has resulted in over 7.5 million edits to OpenStreetMap and has digitized over 700,000 buildings and 110,000 roads in the rural areas where Peace Corps volunteers work.

**FLETCHER FORUM:** *You are uniquely positioned to view a wide array of development initiatives across the globe. After decades of development work, there are many discussions and debates about approaches to development, ranging from non-intervention to direct cash transfers. How do you envision the future of development in a rapidly evolving international landscape?*

**HESSLER-RADELET:** People ask me sometimes, when I talk to them about the Peace Corps, why it is that I have so much faith in the impact of our volunteers' service. How much of a .....  
difference can one person really make, they ask.

It's simple. Development isn't one-size-fits-all and there is no silver bullet that can solve all our development challenges, but Peace Corps volunteers are immersed in their communities, living their projects, day in and day

out. They are uniquely positioned to identify windows of opportunity, to secure buy-in from community leaders, and to work with their communities to find and implement sustainable solutions. I envision a future where volunteers continue to adapt, be flexible, and find these creative solutions to their community's specific development needs. *f*

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