

Waste Management in Dindefelo
Senegal, West Africa
Denison University
Grace Bachmann, USA

Section 1:

The project's goal was to implement a solid waste management system in the village of Dindefelo; provide related educational programming and community outreach; and promote human and livestock health while sustaining their interrelationship with the economy and environment by reducing trash dumping. The Davis UWC grant funded all project and student expenses.

This project became known by Dindefelo's 1400 residents as *Laabal Dindefelo*, ("Cleanup Dindefelo" in Pulaar). Dindefelo is unique relative to similar-size, neighboring villages due to its strong school system and student attendance, the small-scale tourism it has garnered due to the fame of a nearby waterfall, and its role as a marketplace for surrounding villages. These factors have established Dindefelo as a trailblazer among communities and thus a critical location for *Laabal Dindefelo*. The village, which is sustained by agriculture and the verdant mountain and forests that surround it, celebrated the project for its inclusivity and community-focused design. Participation by community members drove the project forward from the start, boding well for its sustainability and growth.

In early June, we hosted a village meeting attended by the partnering community organization (GIE), the village commune's mayor, village religious leaders, Women's Groups leaders, and the President of the Red Cross youth to present the project vision and initial materials to kick off the waste management initiative. Community reception was positive, and the community came to *own* the project; I was not alone in the labor or blueprinting necessary to get the project off the ground. After this meeting, teams of community members and youth accepted project ownership as they were eager to see it succeed.

Over the next several weeks, we networked across the village, solidifying Women's Groups' commitment to bi-monthly clean-up parties, a task they accepted with enthusiasm. Equally motivated were the Red Cross President and youth members. Together, we placed waste containers throughout the village, increasing the number of bins from fewer than 10 to over 100. The Red Cross youth quickly became key players in the success of the project; we dedicated ourselves to visiting each of a dozen Women's Groups with waste education brochures (high in visual graphics to accommodate low literacy rates) to promote understanding of the project's relevance to health and communal well-being. We communicated ideas in Pulaar; I presented an idea to the groups of women, and the Red Cross youth followed to clarify and expand on crucial points. We developed a monthly education curriculum, taught orally, in order to sustain the outreach to these groups for the following 11 months as they continue clean-up activities.

While the project got off the ground in a quick succession of events, an incomplete understanding of local events during summer months posed a challenge. The climate and annual festivities dictate the pace and focus of life in Dindefelo and the availability of people to engage in non-crucial activities. June marks the beginning of the rainy season and thus the planting season, when social events and meetings come second to farm work and are often postponed by rainstorms. The work and pure nature of the rainy season limits time normally used for recreation and secondary projects like our waste management initiative. Local elections became the center of village life for a couple of weeks in June as well, causing many to abandon regular weekly meetings and other commitments. Then, in July, we celebrated the Muslim holiday of Ramadan, which meant a temporary shift in lifestyle, fasting during daylight, and low energy, especially on hot days.

The construction of a storage magazine, where equipment for clean-up parties and for the waste system itself are now held, holds unanticipated importance to community pride. The storage magazine became a visual representation of the system inside the village. We painted it to reflect the *Laabal Dindefelo* theme. So, while the processing site for trash lies hidden outside the village, the storage magazine is visible and a constant reminder of an advancement of which the village is proud. The village grounds are another meaningful, physical manifestation of the project; trash no longer accumulates on the grounds surrounding the village center and the paths leading to residential compounds. Business owners and residents immediately began collecting debris from the ground and placing it in the waste bins. Here, we encountered a physical and behavioral challenge. Waste bins began filling up with organic, non-trash material (dirt, sticks, grass, kitchen scraps, etc.); bins quickly became heavy and

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difficult to lift. This issue highlighted the importance and challenge of changing behavior and encouraged us (the GIE, GIE employees, Red Cross, and me) to remain diligent on educational outreach and on planning a waste management festival after Ramadan to promote appropriate management practices.

Our waste management festival achieved its goal of engaging all generations. We did so via discourse on the project's purpose by inviting community leaders to speak, performing theatrical skits regarding disposal of waste, providing music and entertainment, and interacting with youth through an activity on organic vs. inorganic material. We hosted representatives from the local government in addition to religious leaders and business owners, and ceremoniously opened the storage magazine before giving the keys to the GIE.

A group of American service-learning students spent several weeks in Dindéfelo and helped developed the waste processing site outside of the village—their manpower and resources completed construction of the site. Soon after, our two GIE employees, Bala and Oussoumane, started using the donkey and cart we purchased to collect trash from bins and then transporting it to the processing site.

By August, the first of the Women's Groups had received a stipend for their bimonthly clean-ups and the Red Cross had received a stipend for their education efforts. Employees Bala and Oussoumane had received their first salaries for carting and managing trash. The GIE monitors their progress and will continue to distribute stipends and salaries, supported by the Davis Project Funds. They, in conjunction with the local government, have begun to procure funds to sustain the project beyond the year of funding provided by the Davis Projects.

Section 2:

This project comes at a pivotal moment for Dindéfelo—prominent community members have begun to see the success of this project in concert with the recent changes in political structure and leadership—and it represents a chance to improve quality of life in the village and to create employment opportunities for young people. In a meeting with the village commune's secretary, this project arose as an archetype for future community endeavors. He recognized *Laabal Dindéfelo* as the first initiative under their new political structure and looks to it, though in its infant stages, as a model for how to establish community-integrated programs. What made this project different from other initiatives attempted by NGOs and nonprofit groups was its ability to access the needs, desires, and aptitude of the Dindéfelo community—it was a project for the benefit of Dindéfelo residents, driven by their own motivations, hard work, and local technology.

This project was non-exclusive. It imposed little hierarchy based on technology, skill level, or volume of knowledge. The *Laabal Dindéfelo* system was intuitive to villagers and comprehensible on a cultural level. Villagers had access to information on the waste management system, limited only by their own curiosity and willingness to participate. My definition of peace has come to embody this—complete inclusion of all community entities in a system of human and livestock health, economic prosperity, and environmental preservation. This project contributed to peace by empowering individuals like Women's Group members, GIE employees, and Red Cross youth to become stewards of their village's well-being. While some individuals, like the GIE employees, derived modest economic benefit from the project, their economic gains did not diminish but rather promoted a holistic sense of health for the village. Peace, as I witnessed through the design and execution of this project, is the ability to act in accordance with community values and for the betterment of one's community without sacrificing prosperity in other areas or for other people.

Laabal Dindéfelo challenged me to evaluate Dindéfelo's economic circumstance, environmental condition, and social cohesion with a lens colored by local cultural values and pragmatism. It taught me to trade personal expectations for incisive intentions shared by aspiring Dindéfelo youth and leaders alike. I learned to imagine a world in which each micro-community has the ability to stand upon richness of tradition, and peace is found when that richness serves to propel it forward.

"This project thrived because a myriad of hands and minds embraced its simple yet intuitive framework with spirit and inclusivity. The Davis Projects for Peace illustrated to me that peace lies at the intersection of inclusivity and community wellbeing." -Grace Bachmann

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Figure 1. Grace and Dindefelo's Red Cross Youth conducting a village clean-up



Figure 3. The first Women's Group to participate monthly clean-ups and education outreach, posing in front of the new storage magazine



Figure 2. The project's donkey and cart that will support the waste management system