

Cholera Prevention: Service, Solidarity, and Peace
Haiti
Monterey Institute of International Studies, a graduate school of Middlebury College
Wesley Lainé

Section I.

The cholera prevention campaign sought to take advantage of the remarkable opportunity to spread the benefits of public health best practices to secure a perpetual peace in impoverished communities in the Southeast of Haiti. More specifically, the project sought to reduce the cholera transmission cycle, and subsequently decrease the prevalence rate and mortality in the Southeast department of Haiti. Through these efforts, we were determined to improve the well-being of our beneficiaries and in the process contribute to *eudaimonia* – human flourishing—a key factor in achieving peace.

Additional funding

In addition to the funding provided by the Kathryn Davis Foundation, the American Chemistry Council generously donated \$5,000 USD to our small grassroots foundation, Haiti Philanthropy, in order to install more chlorinators and purchase more chlorine tablets to purify water reservoirs in the Southeast of Haiti. Consequently, we had the opportunity to simultaneously educate the population and expand the reach of our small water project.

Implementation strategy

In the first week of our project, 10 agents received training outlined in the cholera prevention guide published by the Centers for Disease Control. The material, translated into Haitian Creole, proved to be relatively easy for the agents to master. We spent an entire week going over the curriculum. During the second week, we targeted 40 influential members of water committees in the 15 communities that we selected to come learn the material as well. In rural Haiti, water committees manage decentralized water reservoirs. They are the overseer of all water related activities, including the chlorinators that we install on the reservoirs. We believed that by training them, they too could share the information in their communities. During the third and subsequent weeks, our agents met with locals in small groups, church groups, marketplaces, and community centers to start the small town hall style public health campaign. I rotated duty with different agents in order to participate, supervise, and evaluate as much of the training as possible.

Challenges

An effective public health campaign must be able to meet two key challenges – questions of scale and scope. In order to organize our campaign, we relied on our well-established partnership with the local water agency and its corps of rural water agents, known as TEPAC (the French acronym of *Techniciens en Eau Potable et en Assainissement pour les Communes*, Clean Water and Sanitation Technicians for the Communes). The partnership with the TEPAC, with whom we already worked closely on many water projects, enabled us to reach communities in rural hinterlands of the region and reach many more beneficiaries. However, it proved to be much more difficult than anticipated to get an average of more than 10 people in each session. Consequently, multiple small focus group sessions had to be held on some days, which increased the costs for refreshments. Furthermore, the distance of the communities from the starting location of our agents was a big challenge. Moreover, the harsh condition of the roads hindered safe passage on

motorcycles and vehicles. Our agents had to walk long distances. The costs for fuel and repairs were slightly underestimated in the original budget.

Results

Despite the challenges, the effort of our staff and agents was remarkable. Our beneficiaries, comprised mostly of adult male farmers, female entrepreneurs (known in creole as *ti machann* or small vendors) working in street markets, and children were very attentive and glad to see us. We were encouraged by their questions that ranged from inquiries on the cholera bacterium and effective hand washing techniques. In the six weeks of fieldwork, the ten agents conducted 630 small sessions, averaging 10 to 12 participants. In total, no less than 7,560 people participated in the sessions.

Section II.

Peace

Genuine peace, as President Kennedy once described it, is the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living. Furthermore, it is the kind of peace that enables men and women to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children. In a very real sense, it is hard to imagine this kind of peace in settings of refractory poverty and squalor. My most solemn feelings on this topic concern the daily hardship of children who know no such peace, through no fault of their own, but yet bear the devastation and death more heavily than anyone else. This is especially true and pertinent for water-related diseases and deaths. Diarrheal diseases, such as cholera, are the second leading cause of death among children under five.

Development and peace are one and inseparable. Furthermore, development and peace can only happen when individuals exercise their own agency in its full capacity. Consequently, if genuine peace is our goal, then we must invest our resources to improve the health, education, shelter, and nutrition of the poor. There is a Haitian saying, "*san pè nan vant, pa gen pè nan tèt* ---"when we live with hunger, we will not live in peace." The same goes for waterborne diseases such as cholera; it too is an enemy of peace.

This summer, the *Davis Project* allowed my colleagues and I to build a much stronger relationship with the beneficiaries of our project. Further, I believe that we developed a much stronger sense of empathy with those we served because of the intimate nature of the project. For example, as the project progressed and we earned the trust of the communities, we spent time discussing other matters unrelated to health during our sessions. Topics ranged from entrepreneurship, community building, and matters pertinent to our dreams for a better Haiti. On a personal note, the people whom we served taught me to seek truths upon which I could act and ideas that I could use to continue to build peace in Haiti.

The Davis Peace Prize affirmed to me that public service is still the greatest and the most honorable adventure. One should have as much desire to improve the world as to enjoy it. By focusing on peace, we are capable of doing both. The ways in which to achieve peace, to be sure, are rarely the subjects of unanimity. However, we must find out about the world's wounds and we must find ways to sow peace through meaningful work where it is needed.

Haiti Philanthropy, Inc

The public health campaign is a testament of our grassroots organization's radical solidarity with the impoverished. Our efforts were focused on not only group meetings, but also on going house-to-house, community-to-community, and share life-saving information to each person.

Furthermore, the additional grant by the American Chemistry Council allowed us to continue installing water chlorinators in more communities. I strongly believe that, with the resources allocated to us, we reached our goal of improving the health of our beneficiaries by taking a multilayered approach in our water and health campaign programs.

Fig. 1. - Emilio, the leader of the public health corps, teaches a community water board member the benefits of chlorinated water.



Fig. 2. Women at a water fountain listen to Emilio's instructions.



Fig. 3. Students participate in proper water handling and hygiene initiatives.

