

WATER FOR PEACE: Conflict Resolution through Water

Country: Haiti

Sponsoring College: The College of Idaho

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Section 1:

The goal of Water For Peace project is to resolve conflict through providing the most essential and basic element of life, which is water. This summer, Water For Peace Project brought 14 tanks of 125 gallons to collect and store rain water that run-off from the roofs of the local homes. The completion of this project was possible thanks to the support of the Davis Foundation, Mennonite Salem church, the local government, and residents of *Nan Dero*. With the intention to increase the amount of tanks that Water For Peace project could afford to bring this summer, I made a Haitian lunch at First Baptist Church in Caldwell Idaho on Sunday, March 30th 2014 which raised an additional \$530.00. This fundraising helped me cope with many unexpected expenses during the completion of this project. Most of the materials were more expensive than I had estimated, and this prevented me from buying the number of tanks that I wanted to buy.

I landed in Port-Au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, on Wednesday, August 6th of 2014, and stayed there for around three business days. While there, I looked for the materials for as cheap as possible because the capital is the only place where I could find the materials at a low cost. Most of the materials were purchased in Port-au-Prince and the rest were purchased in Petit-Goave, my home town. During the second week, I met with the members of the management committee from last year to discuss the process of selection, distribution, and installation. Because there are many conflicts between the residents of *Nan Dero*, a small survey investigation was made in order to know who will truly follow the rules of this project. I led a management committee of eighth people. Because visiting each other is part of Haitian culture, it was easy to go to the villagers' houses and chat with them. We had an open interview with them. The villagers were asked several questions such as: Is your neighborhood quiet and do you like it? Do you feel comfortable to visit your neighbor? Do you still share plate with your neighbors? Do you work alone in your garden? How do you feel when your neighbors are in need? Based on their answers, we determined who would happily share the water and who would not. Because one of the Water For Peace goals is to bring these villagers back together, we selected the houses where the owner could be a bridge for the people in conflict.

After this investigation, we selected the houses [together] where the tanks were going to be installed. In addition, we met with the owners of those houses in order to clearly explain them the main goal of Water For Peace project and to teach them the rules that they will need to follow if they accept to host the tanks. On Saturday, August 16, 2014, we had a meeting with all residents who wanted to learn about the project, especially the owners of the houses that will host the tanks. At this meeting, we explained to the villagers the purpose of Water For Peace project, and how this water project was made possible. We also had the opportunity to hear the representative of the local government who talked about deforestation, which many people think contributes to the lack of water in this area. In addition, a young man from *Nan Dero*, who left there many years ago, came to assist with the meeting and talked about Relationship Management. I encouraged them to treat their water before drinking it. By the end of this meeting, we built another management committee for *Nan Dero* and *Nan Temido*. Furthermore, I had the participants work together to write the name of the project on the tanks. The residents of *Nan Dero* misunderstood the project when I first arrived. Many of them thought that I was sent by an NGO and I was making money out of them. I hired a photographer to take pictures, but many of them did not want the photographer to take their pictures. Others were complaining about not being able to have a tank installed at their houses. However, after we met with them on Saturday, August 16, 2014, they became eager to put their hands together for the completion and the follow-up of this project. One thing that deeply

touched my heart was that even though the 14 tanks were not enough to satisfy the residents of *Nan Dero*, they decided to share with an area nearby called *Nan Temido*. They decided to share four of the tanks with the residents of *Nan Temido*, and the rest of them in *Nan Dero*, making it beneficial for more people. In *Nan Dero*, there are around 40 families of an average of ten people per family who will benefit from this project. In *Nan Temido*, there are around 55 families of an average of 8 people per family, but only around 28 families will benefit from Water For Peace Project. However, I am glad that the tanks are strategically placed so everybody in *Nan Dero* and some people in *Nan Temido* can have access to clean water.

The biggest issue I had during the completion of this project was transportation. I had expected support from the Mennonite Salem church for transportation of the materials, but an unexpected situation caused them to travel to the United States at the same time the project was completing. Because most of the roads in Haiti are not very good, it took more than twelve hours to go from Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, to the project site. Together with their neighbors, the residents who were going to host the tanks had to build a small place with cement, sand, and rocks that would hold the tanks. The day that the truck driver was going to deliver the materials at the central location, it was raining so hard that the truck driver had to leave the truck in the middle of the road until the day after. Although the transportation was difficult, I managed to have all of the materials at the central location on time. In collaboration with the management committee and five local technicians, an average of four tanks was installed per day.

Section II:

I believe that Peace is a state of mind in which people feel comfortable to share, to love, and to talk with each other while having access to their basic needs. Peaceful individuals will always find the courage to love, share, to forgive others even if they have been in conflict for a long period of time. When people are at peace, they are connected, and are willing to work together for the best of their own community. People want diverse things to have peace, but they do have many common basic needs. One thing that delays our peace is that we often ignore that we have the power to promote peace in our own locality even on the worst situation of our lives. Water For Peace project promotes peace in many ways.

Not only does Water For Peace project bring water, it also greatly improves the lives of over 700 people. Those people include elders, women, men, and children of all ages. Instead of walking two hours back and forth to get water for home, the residents of both localities *Nan Dero and Nan Temido* now have less stress and feel more comfortable to spend time with their neighbors and get to know each other. Women and children have more time for cultivation, education, and for the treatment of their drinking water. They will promote a better health situation. Moreover, Water For Peace project brings reconciliation between residents who are of different religions, intellectual capacities, economic levels and even political differences, by creating the need to use and maintain a common water source. This project also brings hope and empowers Haitians to make a difference in their own situation by working together. Furthermore, young Haitians are inspired by this water project to provide leadership in development of infrastructure in their own nation. Many young people from *Nan Dero* and *Nan Temido* now realize there is hope, and they are aware that they have the power to make a difference in their own locality, no matter how small it is. Water For Peace Project also brings back some of the Haitian core cultural values such as face-to-face exchange, mutual visit, and reciprocity. Because the residents of *Nan Dero and Nan Temido* do not have to walk as much as before to get water for home, they are now able to visit each other. They have more time to cook and share plates with their neighbors. Furthermore, they are able to help each other in their garden.

Personal statement: The reaction of the residents of *Nan Dero* after understanding the Water For Peace project teaches me that people do not need to wait until they are rich to share a little bit. I realize that I can find my own peace through helping others to make their way to peace.

