

Assessing and Leveraging Religious Health Assets For Safe Water Projects in Rural Haiti

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Background

During the three months we spent in Haiti, we began to understand the relationship of religion and safe water through community formations, focus group discussions, and participatory action research. We also realized that US organizations, churches and individuals have a huge effect on the programs and systems implemented in Haiti. The second half of our project was thus informed; in-depth interviews of US stakeholders was necessary to fully understand the role US churches, FBOs, and leaders play in safe water projects in Haiti. This poster presents findings from research with entities in the US.

Methods

The process we used for gathering information about US based NGOs and churches was one-on-one interviews. Following the question guideline we developed, general questions were asked about work in Haiti, followed with specifics on involvement in safe water in Haiti. Questions also included probes about partnerships, the sustainability of projects, and cultural differences.

After transcribing and analyzing the interviews, nine major themes emerged regarding best practices for safe water projects and partnerships in Haiti.

Best Practices for Work in Haiti

Roles from the United States

- I. People in the US have three main responsibilities to Haiti:
 - a. Financial Support: raising money to maintain and expand current projects, writing grants and sponsorships
 - b. Networking and connecting people, data and resources
 - c. Sending people to Haiti: the only way to describe Haiti to its fullest is to experience the culture for oneself
- II. "Champions for Haiti" are unexplainably energetic and enthusiastic about work in Haiti. A few characteristics of such persons include a long term commitment to Haiti, a vision for a hopeful future, and sharing that passion with others.

Best Practices cont.

Community Involvement

- I. It is important to involve Haitians from the outset by organizing and operating projects from a Haitian perspective.
- II. Begin new projects with existing partnerships and established members of the community.
- III. By meeting with city councils, water committees, and other community based organizations, researchers will find the projects that are most desired and needed and can develop projects to meet the community requests.
- IV. Equality in power is essential. Sharing leadership roles between Haitians and Americans means sharing the power and responsibility, which makes project commitment a two way street.

Leadership

- I. Haitian leadership is one of the most critical elements for successful programs in Haiti.
- II. Project coordinators need personnel that are dedicated to the project or mission. They should have knowledge about the field, love the work they do, and be capable of giving advice to Americans and Haitians. These individuals can also raise awareness about what does and does not work, educate others, and successfully identify people appropriate for other jobs.
- III. Though leaders come in all shapes and sizes, they have a few similar characteristics. They are responsible, trustworthy, hard working, well-respected, and motivated to do good for their communities.

Staff Meeting in Jolivet, Haiti
Photo by Bret Walker



Communication

In the US: Post trip presentations are crucial for making others aware of Haiti and the current projects.

In Haiti: Everything is debatable and negotiable, from the market to the repair shop, so expect this in meetings.

Between the US and Haiti: Keep lines of communication open; if you don't communicate on a regular basis, do not expect projects to continue with a systematic nature.

Best Practices cont.

Expectations

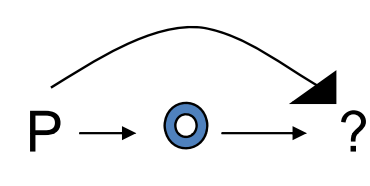
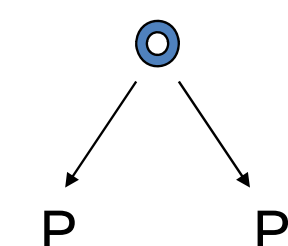
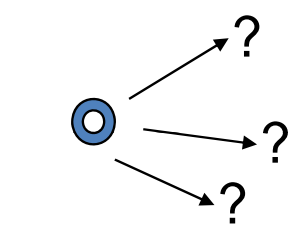
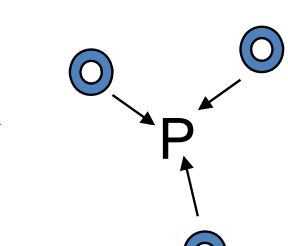
- I. Having a clear set of expectations and a mission statement will highlight the goals of the partnership, the responsibilities and roles of each participant, and the expected process for accomplishing tasks.
- II. To avoid confusion and to promote success, keep a clear set of records and program criteria.
- III. No matter how clear one is with the development of a project, programs need to be open to change. There is a difference between paper contracts, goals, and projections and the reality of working in Haiti.

Personal Relationships

- I. Having a relationship with your Haitian partners makes all involved feel like part of a team and increases commitment.
- II. Trips can have a focus other than a work project (water, medical, building, or agriculture). Building and maintaining relationships is just as important. Coming to Haiti can shed light on a bigger picture and can promote awareness in home congregations and communities.
- III. Partnerships should benefit all involved. Each partner should and can bring something to the table that can be an asset. Be sure to build relationships with more than one person in a community. Programs designed to help a community should communicate with a variety of people.

Integration of Problem and Solution

There are many ways of seeing a situation, so try to look at things with more than one lens. Also, appreciate that the way outsiders see a community and the way community members see their own community may not be the same.

- I. Do not look for only the short-term fix to a problem, but look for the long-term investment and solution.
 
- II. Sometimes two problems can be solved with one solution.
 
- III. Value the unanticipated and unforeseen outcomes of a project.
 
- IV. Value all areas of a problem, prevention, treatment, and emergency solutions.
 

Best Practices cont.

Culture and Language

- I. There are many misconceptions of *vodou* in Haiti, and it is important to be educated about the facts and realities. Some practices can be detrimental to people's health, but *vodou* helps people explain what they do not understand. Because people seek solutions from as many sources as possible, it is important for Americans to work along side of the *vodou* practices, not against them.
- II. Violence is another misunderstood phenomenon in Haiti. This is an historic method for creating change and is not as barbaric as the US media portrays.
- III. There are several cultural nuances that Americans should be aware of including ideas around time, quality standards, free versus purchased products, methods of negotiation, and the desire for a building with a project.

Mechanisms for Sustainability

- I. Have sustainability written into the mission statement.
- II. When developing a project, think about the long term needs the project will demand (tools, parts, expertise).
- III. Haitian programs should rely on Americans as little as possible. Have plans in place for when they leave.
- IV. Meet not only with leaders but with people that benefit and are affected by the program/project.
- V. Use as many locally produced products as possible.
- VI. Follow through and follow up helps sustain projects.

For More Information

For more information on Safe Water Projects, PowerPoint presentation, or Best Practices Manual, please contact:

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