

Sewanee Haiti Institute Summer Internship

Spending five weeks in Haiti was not in my initial plans for the last of my college internships. However, when Dr. McGrath spoke with me about working in Haiti, I could not pass up the opportunity. This summer's internship was unique and therefore the preparation for it was also unique. Preparation for our summer in Haiti began during the 2013 Easter semester by taking Dr. McGrath's Biology 232 class "Human Health and the Environment." Dr. McGrath also recommended that all of her interns go with her and Keri Bryan on one of the Sewanee Outreach Office's spring break trips that Dixon Myers coordinated. Much of this preparation was to ensure that I was prepared both physically and mentally for working in Haiti. However, it is likely that Dr. McGrath assigned a large portion of this work in order that she better know me before I became involved with her project. Luckily, I appear to have passed any tests, and after our spring break trip to Haiti, we were able to confirm an internship for me this summer. It is challenging to summarize the internship, our time and work in Haiti, or the project itself. However, I will do my best to summarize it here.

The payment for ecosystem services and agroforestry project begun and conducted by Dr. McGrath is multifaceted, dynamic. The home base of the project is in a community of subsistence agriculturalists in the central plateau region of Haiti called Bois Jolie. Bois Jolie is the primary community that we are working in cooperation with to develop a Plan Vivo, payment for ecosystem services system, and agroforestry project. The project will allow for the economic benefits of protecting the trees to outweigh the short-term benefits of cutting down, burning and selling these trees as charcoal. We want to work with the Bois Jolie community to develop a system in which it is more

economically feasible to keep the trees. We envision utilizing a PES system and Plan Vivo to help improve the livelihood of all peoples involved in and around this project through the objectives previously mentioned. It is possible to place the interest of people first while still protecting or even improving the environment we live in. We hope to demonstrate such with this project.

As mentioned previously, this project is complex and has many goals. The first and most important goal is that the Bois Jolie community has the most input and control over the projects' development. We want to help them accomplish what they envision for their community's future through a healthy partnership. The second goal is to establish a payment for ecosystem services system (PES) in which individuals, companies, and institutions can buy carbon emission offsets on the voluntary market. Through the PES project, a system will be created in which the community in Bois Jolie will plant trees that sequester carbon. The buyer of the carbon offsets will provide the money needed to buy and plant these trees. The Plan Vivo Foundation will provide the infrastructure for the technical aspects of PES project. When this project is fully developed, the Plan Vivo and PES system will be the first of its kind in Haiti.

Plan Vivo and PES are the central elements of the project. However, there are other objectives as well. The community of Bois Jolie has grown and sold coffee. Yet, for the past 50 or so years, this industry has died out along with their coffee trees. Another goal of the project is to help the Bois Jolie community reestablish this coffee industry. Coffee is a shade-growing plant, and therefore apt to grow in the understory of the trees planted through PES in Bois Jolie. Coffee is an important aspect of the project not only because the biomass will sequester more carbon, but also give the farmers

another means to attain cash. Having a means to attain cash is important for numerous reasons. There are little to no public services or governmental support available for Haitians, and basic human rights such as education and health care must be paid for out of pocket. As a subsistence farmer who normally has no inflow of cash, selling coffee will open up a number of opportunities previously unavailable to individuals, their families, and their communities.

Access to cash, carbon sequestration, creating a carbon sequestration program, and planting trees are among some of the more concrete goals of the project. However, there are more intangible benefits and aims of the project as well. Ideally, the project would become a model for other surrounding communities. If the project is successful and spreads to surrounding communities there is the potential to help reforest a greater area and protect the watershed above the hydroelectric dam in Ba Cange. This particular dam provides the power to all of Haiti's capital, Port au Prince. The protection of this watershed would help combat siltation problems that make the hydroelectric dam less efficient. Reforesting the watershed would decrease erosion, improve soil fertility, and increase crop yields for farmers. It is possible that this improvement in productivity would help to increase food security and decrease instances of malnutrition and other health complications associated with living in a degraded environment. In summary, our main goal is to help break the feedback loop that perpetuates poverty, poor human health, and environmental degradation. Now I will move on to discuss what we did over the summer to help move this project forward.

During our time in Haiti, Elizabeth Sega, Ford Rushton, and I helped to expand and double the size of Bois Jolie's nursery. This nursery holds all of the coffee seedlings

and future shade trees that will be the overstory for the coffee crop and help offset carbon emissions. We also helped to collect, clean and plant 1,000 mango seeds, 2,000 more coffee seeds, and 500 grapefruit seeds. Over the course our 5 weeks, a total of 20 enkets, or interviews, were completed over our 5-week internship. Our Haitian project leaders Maxo and Bosquet helped to translate for us during the interviews. Enkets are vital to the project development and especially for creating the Plan Vivo. Interviews are conducted with the head of each family's house for those interested in participating in the project in order to confirm their land holding. Enkets are important for the practical purposes of attaining a Plan Vivo. However, the process of doing an enket is arguably more important than any information we may collect during an interview. Enkets serve as one of the first steps in forging a relationship with the families involved in this project and are a way of showing our mutual commitment to the project.

Although Ford, Segal, Maxo, Bosquet, Dr. McGrath, and I were able to accomplish quite a bit this summer, what I view as the greatest accomplishment is simply working with the Bois Jolie community to build mutual trust and understanding. This will hopefully serve well as the basis for our future partnership.

I would like to mention now that simply describing the project and the work I did this summer in Haiti does little to fully express what I learned during my time spent there. I would venture to say that the work for our internship was atypical. We did everything from squeezing rotten, maggot filled meat off of 1000 mango pits to running errands in Port au Prince. But, these physical actions do little to describe what I remember most from this internship. It is difficult for me to translate this experience into writing and if asked I could not say that there is one particular lesson I learned in Haiti. I

would not say I have learned from Haiti. Haiti is many things, but it is not a place to for people such as myself to take from, ask favors of, or ask what this place can do for me.

Haiti has influenced and changed me. What I take from Haiti is a challenge to my personal perspectives and outlook. Haiti has challenged me to process and consider differently, what my role is as an individual in a much greater whole. I try to be as grateful as possible for what I have, where I come from, and the opportunities that have been given to me. While it is never a bad thing to be grateful, it emphasizes the differences between us and does little to divide the gaps that may exist between people and stand in the way of realizing our connection to one another. Since my time in Haiti I have worked to approach each person as an equal, no matter how different I may perceive him or her to be. Haiti has challenged me to become compassionate and understanding, not out of sympathy, or even empathy, but instead from understanding that we are all people and we are all in this together as equals. I wish that I could give back to Haiti what it has given me. Haiti has challenged me, my perspective, the way that I think, and how I try to approach others. I am constantly questioning our role as outsiders in Haiti. But, what I do know is that taking one's self to a place out of your comfort zone, working independently and being open to others is a good way to further internal growth and begin to realize the human element or our connection to one another.