



Santo Community Update

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Haiti



Building a pathway to permanence in the Santo community

Habitat for Humanity launched a full-scale, multiyear disaster recovery plan after a devastating earthquake hit Haiti in January 2010. Part of the plan included building 300 homes in the Santo community in Léogâne. In partnership with former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, Habitat Haiti hosted two Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Projects in 2011 and 2012. Nearly 1,200 volunteers, homeowners and local workers came together two years in a row to help construct the new homes. The homes were built with timber frames, treated walls, tin roofs and concrete perimeter foundations so that the families could upgrade the homes when they were ready. Each home came with a fruit tree and a latrine. We are proud to report that the Habitat-built homes are holding up well and that they withstood the extreme conditions of Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.

Santo residents lead a community council, known as SIDEVAS, to manage the neighborhood's needs. The council has empowered the entire community to achieve success. As with any community, Santo has its challenges, but when a team of Habitat staff members visited the area in January 2018, we found a successful, vibrant community of families with stable, healthy homes. We found that the fruit trees are doing well, and the families have added their own touches to their homes and property. Additionally, the community's landscape has transformed with the growth of new vegetation, as each household planted a garden in their yard.



Sherline (left) and Dieuvina, one of her two daughters, take pride in the porch of their home in Santo.

Sherline lives in Santo with her husband, Millord, and their two daughters. Her family built their new home with Habitat's help in 2011. Sherline and Millord have added a porch to their home and are planning to add a second bedroom as funds allow. Sherline runs a small business from the house, selling food to her neighbors. "My family and I are really happy here," she says. "After the earthquake we weren't sure what we would do. Our old house was completely destroyed, and we had no place to go. We got together with neighbors and other family members and set up camp in a nearby neighborhood.

When Habitat first came here talking about building homes, I wasn't sure what to make of it. I didn't want to get my hopes up too high, but I couldn't help but to be hopeful anyway. And now here I am, so many years later – our daughters are young women now, and I am proud that they will always have this place we call home to return to. When bad weather comes this way, we don't even sweat it; we know that these homes were built to withstand heavy rains. We are thankful for all of those who came down here to help build this beautiful community."



A vibrant, growing community

The Santo community is evolving. Many families have added to their home or upgraded the rooms in some way, such as laying tile over the finished concrete floors to add a layer of protection and a touch of their own style. Most families have erected covered kitchenettes in their yards for cooking, composting or washing dishes. Some bedrooms have been expanded, and one community member named James added a movie viewing area in his back yard for the entire community's enjoyment. All of the families we spoke with are incredibly grateful for the life-changing impact of building a new home after the earthquake. We were happy to hear how community members are rallying together to find solutions when something is broken or needs improvement.



Blondine lives in Santo with her husband, sister and three children. "Things are not perfect in Santo, but I am so happy here," she says. "I used to live in Guerin not far from here, where I rented a place with my family. Our home was completely destroyed in the quake, and we lost everything. We came here with the promise of a new house from Habitat, but what we really got was a whole new lease on life. Though we lost everything, at the end of the day we became homeowners, and that made all the difference in our lives. On the anniversary of the earthquake this year, that's what I'll be thinking about."



Josaphat is a construction worker. He lives in Santo with his wife, four kids and his mother-in-law. He was hired by Habitat to help with the Carter Work Projects. "I am a mason by trade, and it was such a great experience to build with so many dedicated people who came in just to help our community start over," he says. "Not only did Habitat bring lumber, tools and workers, but they even brought trees. Together we planted mango and jackfruit trees, and my family and I have added apricots, breadfruit, coconuts, limes and avocados. The whole experience was a true blessing, and even though the actual build lasted only a few weeks, the results will last a lifetime. I paid attention to the details when we were working on these homes because I was making plans for our future as a family." Six years later, Josaphat has built a second home for his growing family, modeled after Habitat's original construction. He composts and barter with neighbors when he has fruit to spare. He also upcycles when he can and created a dish rack with promotional banners from the build.

Communitywide improvements



In addition to the 300 new homes, 35 water points were installed throughout the community. Since they were installed over five years ago, some of the water points have been repaired, and some need to be replaced. Habitat Haiti is communicating with potential partners in the area about the possibility of making repairs or replacements. The functional water points continue to be a primary source of clean water for families.

Each house built with Habitat's help is equipped with a gutter to collect rainwater to supplement the water from the community water points. Every family we spoke with in January is making good use of the rainwater that is collected in barrels. The latrines that were erected with the Habitat homes were originally designed to be part of a larger project that involved composting. Eventually, the community decided that the composting project was not suitable and required beyond what individuals were able to give. However, the families were able to modify the latrines to meet their needs.



A few of the representatives on the community-led council called SIDEVAS gather to assess the community's needs. SIDEVAS is an acronym for a Kreyol saying that means "Citizens dedicated to Habitat Santo Village's development."

The community council

The community council is made up of 15 members who are elected every two years by Santo residents. Members meet once a month to discuss ongoing projects, community issues and potential solutions. The council is working to increase its organizational capacity and has exciting plans to make improvements throughout Santo, such as connecting all of the homes to the national electricity grid. One example of a short-term project under consideration is the construction of a roof over a metal structure in the community that was used by Carter Work Project volunteers. The local residents will be able to use the structure for a gathering place, local market, etc.



Many thanks to all of the donors, partners and volunteers who made this project possible!

everyone

needs a place to call home



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