

SHARP4SDG6 - Addressing Lack of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Infrastructure and Education in Sekameng, Lesotho (June 2020 –) Drexel University

Project Team (all Drexel students/alumni): **J'Anna-Mare Lue (Jamaica)**, Balkirat Sidhu (US), Chanyeong Park (US), Jagoda Jedrzejek (US), Julia Langmuir (US), Leila Nzekele (US), Linford Smith (Jamaica), Napalya Dewar (US), Sarah Wetzel (US), Stephanie Shosanya (US), William Aniagoh (Nigeria)

Project Goal

The objective of this project was to design and execute a water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) community capacity-building effort to encourage a more resilient and sustainable future for the people of Sekameng, Lesotho regarding peace and health. This effort includes the construction of ten (10) single household latrines and the hosting of two educational workshops on Sustainable Menstruation as well as at-home Water Purification and Drought Preparedness.

Additional Funding Efforts

In addition to the Projects for Peace grant, the project team hosted two restaurant fundraisers on Drexel University's campus and utilized crowdfunding through a GoFundMe campaign.

Project Background and Rationale

This project was borne out of previous research conducted by members of the project team. In 2018, two members of the project team conducted water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) focused research. One study explored community attitudes regarding WASH and the impacts of drought on the health, food security, and economies of rural communities, while the other investigated the impacts of water scarcity on children's well-being. Both projects were conducted with the intent of informing future World Vision (<https://www.worldvision.org/>) Lesotho policy. These projects recommended the development of more water infrastructure, especially communal spaces which could serve a larger population and be achieved with financial limitations, as well as provision of more WASH education resources and information. This recommendation was based on the responses of community members in focus group interviews. Hence, the host site was chosen because of the project team's existing relationship with the community and World Vision, who served as a local partner for the SHARPSDG6 Project.

Challenges, Communication, and Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Drexel University's complex nature of distributing funds, it often felt like it was not possible to execute the project. Because of this dynamic, the project is still ongoing. One of the biggest challenges was that due to a delay in Drexel processing, the money was unable to be spent during the project period. In early April the project team learned that we had to seek out a Drexel faculty mentor due the student-led focus of the project. After we identified a faculty mentor there was a lull in communication from the University regarding the availability of the funds. We started working on a contract with World Vision and were told that Drexel would need to use a separate contracting process. We ended using the SHARP/WV contract but had to wait for Drexel's approval. At this point the contract is approved, and World Vision is currently signing up to be an approved Drexel Vendor. This is the last step of the process until the grant money can be transferred to World Vision and the project can be fully executed.

A significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic limitations on travel led the project to be implemented remotely. Additionally, due to social distancing and restrictions on gatherings, workshops were postponed until restrictions are lifted. However, the project team and World Vision Lesotho are working on resources printed in the Sesotho language to summarize the information to be presented at workshops. Another challenge to executing the project remotely is reduced interactions with the community, whereas the project was intended to be community-oriented initially.

Some communication difficulties arose due to the utilization of and adjustment to remote modalities, as well as dealing with ever-changing policies on a University, Municipal, National, and International

level. However, virtual meetings have allowed the project team to outline and plan the project with World Vision Lesotho. This collaboration led to the project objectives shifting from constructing ten communal latrines to ten single household latrines in consideration of local context and culture and hesitancy to use shared spaces amid the pandemic. With this said, once World Vision Lesotho receives the funds, the procurement of materials and construction phases are scheduled to be completed within two months.

It is highly recommended that future PfP grantees form and maintain relationships with local partners for projects, especially during the pandemic. This promotes equity collaboration and provides cultural context and nuance that aligns projects with the needs of the community.

Peace

[John Galtung](#), the founder of peace and conflict studies, defines peace as the absence of violence. For the purpose of this project, peace is defined as a state in which human needs are easily accessible and are distributed in equity. According to [UNICEF](#), there is a close linkage between access to water and conflict. However, WASH is a "largely untapped platform for sustaining peace" as it addresses underlying causes of conflict. SHARP4SG6 contributes to increasing equitable access to water and sanitation, a human right, for the Sekameng community, therefore increasing access for all. Access to basic human needs has a direct contribution to the maintenance of well-being and community cohesiveness. Increased access to sanitation will allow for better hygienic practices and protection from disease. This, in turn, allows communities to focus on the development of infrastructure and innovation freely.

Once the project is implemented, it is expected to provide adequate sanitation to 10 families who are currently living without means of sanitation. The infrastructure is expected to last 15-30 years and will lead to better health outcomes in the community -- including decreased incidence of illnesses, especially diarrheal diseases -- and promote dignity and safety. ([WHO](#)). Additionally, the educational workshops will contribute to community WASH knowledge as well as complementing community knowledge by promoting sustainable WASH behaviors, which will also lead to improved community health. ([WHO](#)) The project's overall goal is to support the community by capacity building alongside World Vision and the people of Sekameng to build a more resilient community in terms of peace and natural disaster.

Impact on Project Team

This project has greatly impacted the way in which the project team views the world, particularly understanding the realities of communities like Sekameng where a majority of the population is without access to clean water and sanitation and are therefore vulnerable to conflict and natural disaster such as drought. There is a realization that engineers, scientists, and other professionals cannot be solely focused on the advancement of Western countries but have a role to play in equitable and sustainable development globally. Additionally, doing work like this promotes humility and self-reflection to challenge yourself and institutions to be more equitable, community focused and human-centered professionally and personally.

Personal Statement

"Three years ago, I was in Sekameng conducting WASH research as a first-year student, not realizing that sometimes research was for research's sake until a community member asked what the outcomes would be as people have come before to conduct similar studies and left without any action. This project is a full-circle to me because not only do I have the opportunity to build infrastructure and promote education and self-determination in the same community, but it also grounds me as an engineer and academic to remember that equitable research cannot exist without praxis." **J'Anna-Mare Lue**



State of Latrines in Most Households who Have One in Sekameng



Amalooloo Latrines that will be built for SHARP4SDG6