

Title of Project: **Inclusive Education**
Country: **Zimbabwe**
Nominating College: **Union College**
Project Leader: **Delvin Takudzwa Marimo**

Summary

Building accessible and friendly toilets at Nyamasanga Secondary School, a school in remote Zimbabwe. The project also focused on creating disability awareness in Chitungwiza.

Project Description

Few schools have the resources and infrastructure that accommodates students with disabilities and the cost to attend them is way above the average salary of a middle working class parent. This has caused many students living with disabilities to drop out of school or not even attend at all especially in remote areas. My first approach was to construct four toilets with wheelchair ramps and safety rails on toilet seats at a rural secondary school (Nyamasanga Secondary) in Zimbabwe. I worked with experienced construction workers who lived nearby Nyamasanga School to come up with an architectural plan for the toilet and managed the whole construction project. My second approach was going round in local schools in my hometown and spark conversations around the subject of disabilities. I created an awareness campaign in three schools focusing on how best schools can be inclusive and accommodating to everyone.

I realized it was more advantageous to build these types of toilets in rural Zimbabwe because most schools in these locations are underdeveloped, and they still use pit latrines with squatting holes which pose a greater challenge to PWD. Schools in rural Zimbabwe are usually run by the community, so any construction at the school is approved by the parents' committee, the School's Development Committee (SDC), and less paperwork is involved. I worked with the SDC for Nyamasanga Secondary School in mobilizing resources for the construction project. The SDC is more familiar with their area and they were able to organize meetings with the parents, look for professionals in the area, advertise the project to the general public, etc. Some parents volunteered to carry water and construction sand to the site and cook for the construction workers so as to minimize expenditures. Since the school is a distance away from the main road and where most people live, the headmaster, Pauline Mangai, was in charge of security and managing the workers whenever I was not available.

I initially wanted to build two toilets, one for males and the other for females. However, after having meetings with the school's headmaster and the SDC, they suggested that having only two toilets isolated from others can cause more harm than good to students living with disabilities on campus. Separating infrastructure for disabled students from others would come out as discriminatory and not inclusive. Extending the already existing toilets was not feasible because of the difference in design architecture. I decided to build four inclusive toilets so that everyone at school would be able to use them. As a result, I had to cut some funding on awareness campaigns and channel it towards the construction of toilets. Instead of going to about ten schools to do the awareness campaign, I ended up going to only three schools. I realized that focusing on fewer schools would help reduce the expenses while still effectively covering a wide audience with quality programming.

Constructing toilets was a huge step towards the implementation of inclusive education in rural Zimbabwe. However, the classroom setup and the lack of clean water supply is still a huge issue. At Nyamasanga Secondary School where we built the toilets, the school has only four classrooms and they have not been renovated in years. At the moment, there are not enough classrooms to cater to all

grades. One classroom has grade 1, 2 and 3 pupils learning together because of the shortage of classrooms. The same goes for other grades too. More development towards the construction of classroom blocks and water boreholes is needed in order for more students living with disabilities to attend school.

Reflection

● **How do you define peace?**

I define peace as being able to live in an environment where you can coexist with others and have the freedom to go outside and live and explore with others.

● **In what ways might your project contribute to peace? What changes occurred? Short-term? Long-term?**

My project supported inclusive education, making a school more inclusive and raising awareness through conversations about disability. These conversations challenged misconceptions students and teachers had about disabilities, while working to raise awareness of how microaggressions impact students living with disabilities. For the short-term, new awareness sparked conversations on how best schools can be inclusive. In the long-term, this project will increase enrollment of students living with disabilities at school. The education they are going to receive will have long-term impacts on them and their communities.

● **What did you learn about the dilemmas, challenges, or conflicts that underlie the targeted issues or utilized approaches/strategies?**

When having conversations with students about disabilities, the students asked some hard questions that I didn't have immediate answers for. For example, one student asked, "What if the doctor tells me that the child I am going to give birth to will have a physical challenge, should I terminate the pregnancy or keep it?" I am still thinking about these questions and how to answer them. The complexity of the issues students face, both those who live with disabilities and those who do not, became clear. I also had not realized how having separate toilets for students with disabilities could be stigmatizing. I realized that I am still learning and that issues surrounding disability are not always straightforward.

● **Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has the project changed, challenged, or inspired you?**

I wish I had more time to have the types of conversations about disabilities that were started during my project over the summer. I am inspired to continue to have these conversations and to challenge myself. I am also inspired to continue working on infrastructure projects that can make a big difference for students. What I accomplished over the summer feels like a tiny drop of water in the ocean. The school I attended in Zimbabwe was in a more urban area and had more resources compared to Nyamasanga Secondary School. My uncle attended Nyamasanga school back in the 80s and it is virtually unchanged decades later with no electricity, running water and enough space for students. The needs are great, and I want to help more.

Personal Statement

● **A brief statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing the value of this project and what you have learned. Indicate the student's name (yours or your teammates') for quote attribution.**

Inclusive education not only brings peace to society, but it acknowledges the differences we have as a society and embraces them in a profound way. Working on the project helped me realize that most people want to be allies in fighting social and economic injustice, all they need is access to information and resources. –Delvin Marimo