Project Summary

In a country where sanitation and good health still remain major threats to peace and social justice, it requires innovations to help the government remedy some of these problems. For decades now, Liberians in the rural part of Liberia have struggled with clean water, sanitation, and quality health; the Davis Project for Peace – Community Led Toilet Sanitation has helped to address these issues. The project was executed with the goal of improving health and sanitation in that part of Liberia; hence, reducing the practice of open defecation, which is practiced by about 62% of the population of Gbartala community. It began with a public awareness heavily backed by radio engagement on the project, and the effects of open defecation on the livelihood of people. The workshop which was the last stage of the project brought together two hundred plus people—because of event capacity we invited mostly heads of household—and two speakers to speak on open defecation and its effects, good sanitation, and as well as having the city mayor of Bong County and representative aspirants form part of this initiative.

Project description

I constructed three public toilets in Gbartala Bong County for my Community Led Toilet Sanitation project. The selection of this project site was based on the death of my cousin from cholera, and inspired by the idea of finding a solution to this unsanitary problem in that town that is a threat to many families. Essential to this project was the sense of belonging it gave me and the reflection of my lineage. Since I last visited Gbartala during my vacation as a kid, I didn't realize the deplorable living conditions people living there were faced with, nor did I know there were kids somewhere in my hometown suffering from poor health because of the lack of adequate toilet facilities until I took a tour in Gbartala which led to this vision. While there were too many unforeseen circumstances and challenges from the inception of this project, to the roofing, and the climax, I used some of my past experiences to pull through. Backed by this was my self-confidence and team work ability. I realized from the earliest stage of my project that I wouldn't be able to handle all the stress alone. Therefore, I brought on board young minds who are passionate about change in Liberia, and highly supportive and dedicated to making difficult tasks accomplished. Eventually, I asked everyone on my team have a shared responsibility and functions essential to the growth and success of the project. This project painted a clear picture of how Liberian youths are now willing to work together with love, faith, and optimism to make the impossible possible and dreams become realities. It happened that around the roofing stage of the project, I temporarily ran out of money. Confused and afraid of not getting the balance of the project funds transferred in time, due to international wire transfer restrictions, I ran to my colleagues in our group chat to solicit views of how to go about with the remaining phase of the project. It was based upon some of their recommendations that I managed to reach out to specific individuals to make contributions towards the project in both cash and kinds. As I reached out, in a twinkling of an eye, I started to receive emails and messenger messages from people who helped with radio coverage for the completion of the project. While it's true that I wanted this project to be completed within the timeframe, I never lost track of myself. I was patient and always relating to my teammates to make this project a successful one.

I also struggled with the sudden increase of the US currency conversion making prices rise dramatically overnight and also the addition of other materials to the budget by the construction company which were not included in my proposal budget, leading to a significant change in my budget expenditure. However, it was a fruitful end rooted in hard work and dedication. Each toilet was built with an environmentally friendly septic tank that will control groundwater pollution and prevent the toilets from overflowing. Two toilets
were painted aquatic green and one aquatic blue and each toilet had two modern commodes, and two rooms, allowing for a male and female restroom. The project ran from May 20th with buying of material to building of toilets to July 8th with the community dedication of the toilets. With so much joy and appreciation on the faces of the people of Gbartala, I am hoping to keep applying for grants to help eliminate open defecation in rural Liberia. My dream is to construct one hundred modern toilet rooms around Liberia, and I have completed eight: ninety-two more to go.

**Reflection**
My project defined peace as having access to resources and opportunities in a clean and healthy environment. With the construction of these three toilets, with one situated at the border of Gbartala and Suakoko, I am certain that it will help maintain the pre-existing peace among the people while promoting good health practices. Also, during the program, there was a play performed by team *WeCanLiberia* that talked about peace and good sanitation, and how the toilets would bring town residents from nearby to interact with the people of Gbartala. There was also a social discussion after the program among the elders and city mayor in regards to how the toilet keys should be distributed, and the fee each town will contribute toward the maintenance of the toilets. In all this, the project helped me build a social cordial relationship with females in my hometown - asking how they take care of their bodies, whether or not they have heard anyone talking about menstrual hygiene or diseases we get as females from using dirty cloth as pads, toileting in buckets, bushes, rivers as well as unclean public toilets. Sadly, most of them have not had any idea about these things. As part of my dream to contribute to the growth of Liberia which also tethered to building the minds, I educated them as peers, letting them know that they can be like me or other great women in Liberia and the world at large. Though some people thought this project was so huge for a girl who is just entering college with little project management skills, I beat their thought and won. With courage, one does not know the name of fear but rather sees everything as an opportunity to do better to the greatest extent. As I concluded my project, I realized that the lessons we take from initiatives we undertake are useful for our future engagements. They can serve as guidance for what we want to do next and how we can correct the wrongs in our pasts to build a better future. Because I knew I needed to save lives somewhere, and knew I could do whatever I wanted, my mind was made up towards making sure this came to pass.

**Personal statement**
A leader is not beaten by physical phenomenon but by his/her own thoughts. Therefore, our determination, driven by passion turns the most unachievable things into things we can achieve. – Deborah Gonkpah