

Primary Source Document

Peace Corps Service Projects in the Dominican Republic

Note: The following accounts describe the work of Peace Corps Volunteers in five different areas: agriculture, business, education, the environment, and health. Notice that Peace Corps Volunteers always work with counterparts or partners—people from the local community who work and learn side by side with them.

Agriculture

A Peace Corps Volunteer was assigned to work in a rural village of 300 people. The village is located in the northwest corner of the Dominican Republic, close to the border with Haiti. It is a subsistence-level farming community that has little of the necessities or luxuries of life: no safe drinking water, no electricity, and limited availability of transportation. The Volunteer designed and implemented a program

to teach rural farmers to conserve topsoil through the use of hillside barriers. He also taught and led groups to create organic compost and organic pesticides. He was involved in the creation of a successful tree nursery in the village. The Volunteer developed a demonstration plot in a model farm in close collaboration with a local farmer, who became a so-called farmer leader.

Business (Small Business Development)

On Tuesday, September 22, 1998, Hurricane Georges devastated the Dominican Republic. The aftermath of the hurricane created many challenges for the Volunteers who were serving there. The small business development Volunteers used their organizational skills, creative problem-solving skills, and team spirit in the hurricane relief effort. One Volunteer served in a particular town as a consultant to the local chamber of commerce. The town suffered tremendous damage from the hurricane and had the largest loss of life in the country. During the hurricane relief effort, this Volunteer demonstrated strong leadership skills. He did the following:

- Managed refugee centers in the community

and used surveys and database spreadsheets to assess and record countless individual needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

- Assisted with the food distribution system in the community.
- Served as administrator of a large donation of money to the Lion's Club chapter in the town to rebuild houses in the community. The Volunteer also worked with the house-building work crews.
- Worked with community members to develop a grant proposal to the Hurricane Georges Disaster Relief Fund for assistance for hurricane victims.

Education

A Volunteer worked for 18 months in the eastern town of Hato Mayor as a teaching resource center specialist. She developed relationships of trust and respect with the school district office and formed strong relationships with individuals and families in the town and in the surrounding rural communities. With her Dominican counterpart as a partner, she has asked the most motivated teachers to provide examples of what can be accomplished with students when the resource center's new teaching methods are put into practice. She also sought out the poorest and most rural communities, which are tradition-

Education

A Volunteer has worked as a preschool teacher for 18 months in one of the largest industrial zones of the country. As a preschool teacher, she has succeeded in developing working relationships with the 18 preschools in the area. The majority of the teachers who work in the preschools have not completed high school. The Volunteer supports the teachers by making bi-monthly visits to each school. She helps teachers develop low-cost teaching materials, write lesson plans, and develop better classroom management tools. In addition to her work with individual

Environment

Prior to a Volunteer's arrival in the community of El Caimito, small farmers were reluctant to work in soil conservation projects because they didn't equate such activity with improving their lives. Before teaching soil conservation methods to interested community members, the Volunteer first had to develop a positive relationship of trust and respect with them. She was able to do this by teaching gymnastics to the girls and women, and going out into the fields to pick tobacco with the farmers. Still, she struggled to find out what would be the motivating approach that would make the small farmers care about soil erosion control measures to protect their

ally neglected, to encourage their teachers and parent groups to be active in efforts to provide quality education to their students and children. In an effort to promote better understanding among children of different experiences, the Volunteer established an interchange between students in a rural school and those in a private academy in the capital city of Santo Domingo. Together with her Dominican partner, she developed action plans to ensure that the teaching methods project will continue to develop and be sustainable in the future, after she is gone. She has also been active in assisting in a local nursing home.

teachers, the Volunteer planned and facilitated meetings with the parent support groups within each of the communities, focusing on helping parents better understand school needs. The Volunteer has been a member of the Women in Development committee for the past year and, through her work with the committee, was able to obtain scholarships for many of the preschool teachers she works with on a daily basis. These scholarships were used to help the young women complete their high school credits and, in some cases, go to the university to study education.

soil. She had an idea that, if something were to motivate farmers to work in conservation, it would have to be an income-generation activity. It occurred to her to help the farmers grow bamboo which, in turn, farmers could use to make handicrafts to be sold in the market. At the same time, they saw that the bamboo was helping to stop soil erosion. The farmers were soon willing to start the process of growing and propagating bamboo. The Volunteer also solicited help from the Dominican government agency responsible for hydroelectric resources to finance a community tree nursery and plant nursery.

Environmental Education

A Volunteer has been a role model for his Dominican counterpart and the staff members with whom he works at the Agriculture Institute. His counterpart expressed it descriptively: “We were here for many years and didn’t even know how to talk and relate to the communities surrounding us. This Volunteer, in a very short time, has created the appropriate communication links between us and the communities. That

has opened our eyes to many possibilities for improving our farming and soil conservation methods that could benefit both sides. We didn’t see this before. The same thing can be said of the teachers in the local schools. We can be a resource for them in environmental education, and vice versa, because of the work initiated by this Volunteer.”

Health

Angosto is a small, rural community in the mountains of the Dominican Republic. Approximately 200 people live there in 23 homes. A Volunteer there was a 25-year-old civil engineer from Massachusetts who worked in the community as an environmental sanitation promoter. In this community, women and children had to walk two miles to get water for

household use and most homes were without a latrine. He worked with community members to develop a small gravity water system and a latrine project. He also showed community members how to develop and maintain similar systems. This Volunteer recently participated in the inauguration ceremony for the new water system.

