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Water for Cameroon

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When University of Dayton students visited Barombi Village in Cameroon, West Africa, in the summer of 2007, the village chief told them people were getting sick and dying from unclean water sources.

The civil engineering students thought of a plan: design and build a water filtration system that would provide the village of 300 with clean water for drinking, bathing and cleaning.

Less than one year later, the six students followed through on installing their system. Now there is a kilometer-long pipe to pump water into the village, a spigot for communal access and simple filtration systems in each villager's home.

Though the design was simple, the execution was complex. Students needed to raise at least \$15,000 to purchase supplies to construct the water system. They also needed to recruit labor – donated by villagers in exchange for supplies and expertise – to install the infrastructure. They had several hurdles to clear, but the students said success was their only option.

Before the UD system, "the only water sources (were) the stagnant water in the lake and a nearby contaminated stream. Villagers (had) to walk a kilometer (more than half a mile) to access cleaner water from a source upstream, and even that water isn't safe," said Mark Ewalt, civil engineering student.

The students discovered Barombi Village's need for clean water in 2007 while doing service work in Kumba, a nearby city. They traveled by canoe across a lake to visit Barombi and deliver candy, soccer balls, paper and pencils to the children there.

After returning to UD last summer in 2007, the students convinced the School of Engineering administration to create a course in which they could prepare for the Barombi project. In the course, they designed the water system, began to learn the local dialect and started to raise money.

"This project is changing the way the civil engineering department works. It's progressive," said Justin Forzano, a civil engineering graduate who's been to Cameroon twice. "This is what we should be doing with our civil engineering degrees."

Other students traveling to Barombi this summer are Marissa Dolle, Elizabeth Kovalak and Katie Burgei.

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