

You Have Given Far More Than You Know

Christmas is almost here and there is something you should know. You have given a gift you never anticipated, a great gift that grew out of your kindness. First though, before I explain, a quick look back:

It has been about six years since Nor'Wester took the "Dignity Toilets for Togo" project and made it theirs. You may have been part of that group. It was (and still is) the club and other people who wanted to help Rotary with their support. In the first year the club built 15. More people got involved. The next year, 30. People contributed and the following year there were 53 more families who got Dignity Toilets. After that, things paused as far as building but you, my fellow contributors and Rotarians, made sure that our workers were able to feed their families and pay a few of their bills by providing support even though they could not build because of CoVid.

Thanks to the passion and foresight of Paul Wynkoop, past president of Jefferson County East club, the Area 8 clubs came together and created the funding for a global grant. Note: A first in Rotary.

The global grant for the Rotary clubs of Area 8 and the Zenith Club of Lome' has now been approved. Currently, we have built 134 Dignity Toilets. And with the grant we're getting ready to build 100 more in the next 12 months.

You may be impressed by that number. It is a great accomplishment. But there is something there that you don't see. . . what that number means to Ghana.

Every toilet we build takes 6 - 8 people out of the bushes, helps improve health, lowers groundwater pollution, provides safety for women and children, and brings families dignity. And so far we have taken about 1100 people out of the bushes (not including guests). We could not have come this far without your help. Your kindness is affecting more than the families of Togo.

I hold up this project as an example of what can be. And people are starting to pay attention.

A few months back I did a Community Assessment for the Nandom community of 51,000 in the Upper West region of the country. It is rural and primarily economically underdeveloped with 85% involved with farming on vastly depleted soils. The regional capital, what we might think of as the county seat, is a city named WA.

There is a university in WA, the University of Business and Integrated Development, with a specialization in agricultural studies. I made a last minute appointment while on my way to the airport to fly back to Accra and presented my findings from the Nandom Community Assessment to the registrar. I held up the Togo project as a sign of success. In less than ten minutes he was impressed and I was out the door and on my way to the airport.

That meeting led to conference calls and Zoom meetings as the committee to evaluate this project grew. The end result is a group of people from UBIDS, WA, the Upper West Region as well as science specialists and community leaders all adding their expertise to Dignity Toilets. They have determined they want to do our project there and are starting a pilot project to determine exactly how to structure the project so it will be scalable and able to be used in the region. They will do things like evaluate the fertilizer project and have the fertilizer tested and approved by government laboratories, to draw up exact Dignity Toilet engineered plans for construction, and clear lots of little details.

After UBIDS started their process, the fact that they were doing that prompted one of the professors there to call and speak with a friend of his who is the District Community Executive (think very well connected County Commissioner) of an area in Eastern region of Ghana. We met and went over everything DT. He wants to approach his development committee and discuss taking on our project there.

Dignity Toilets has impressed a director in the Agricultural Engineering Division of the government. I met with the director on last Sunday evening and after seeing the videos and Facebook page, after leafing through the Community Assessment, he said, "Interesting that you should bring this to me now. We recently received our guidelines for our funding for next year. Parliament has decided that in 2023 we should look at providing household toilets to the poorest of the poor throughout the country. These are people, farmers, who sometimes cannot afford food. We have 110 districts that have families like this. I think we have something here that will help. We have our first meeting about it tomorrow."

In addition to doing everything else through your kindness and generosity, you have created an example of what could be. Now people want to emulate the project you signed on with, a model that has not been done before. Every group taking it on has agreed to follow the design and keep the name Dignity Toilets. And this is all because of you.

Think of it. If the Ghanaian government takes it on, it will still be Dignity Toilets. And soon the simple toilet designed for poor families will be being built by local people all across Ghana and helping those we are not able to with our model. In this case the government will pay for everything and even pay anyone who participates, family or otherwise. Thousands will be built.

Other groups, organizations, and government agencies are starting to take notice. All because of what you have done. You are truly making a change in the world and it is going to do nothing but grow as more and more people learn about it.

The end result is that you have started a reaction that is bringing, and will bring in the future, dignity to all it touches and helping even those it does not.

What you have done, no one else could do. Your generosity and kindness has created a gift that is starting to change Africa. Merry Christmas!

