



Rights Now

The newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee



NEEDS ASSESSMENT: HAITI'S ECOVILLAGES

By Hannah Moy

UUSC places a high value on eye-to-eye partnerships. Instead of telling people what to do, we ask questions, listen to answers, engage in dialogue, and develop creative strategies in collaboration with grassroots leaders. Throughout this process – in order

to ensure that our partnerships are as effective as possible – UUSC staff conduct project assessments to learn from our successes and challenges, and adjust activities and strategies, if needed.

In 2011, UUSC began the EcoVillage

project in response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti. With other local organizations, UUSC built six sustainable villages – called EcoVillages – in Haiti’s Central Plateau, working from the ground-up for 60 families displaced by the disaster. Our project gained so much support that we even had enough funding to begin construction of a school.

Seven years later, UUSC staff member Michael Kourabas visited the EcoVillages and school to hear the latest updates directly from village leadership, the school principal, and our grassroots partner, Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP). Michael’s conversations revealed three remaining needs before we can consider our project successful:

Kindergartners at the EcoVillage school.



Three Remaining Needs of the EcoVillages

Need for Water

Each EcoVillage is equipped with a solar-powered well, which provides clean water for drinking, cooking, gardening, and bathing. In part because of the drought after the earthquake, wells in two of the villages have broken or dried, forcing residents to travel miles on foot to retrieve clean water for their families. UUSC is committed to constructing two new solar-powered wells, so that all residents have easy access to the vital resource.

Need for Electricity

Although some homes have electricity, most still lack it. Among its many benefits, electricity allows students to study at night, prolongs daily activity, and provides a greater sense of security. We plan to bring these benefits to everyone by connecting houses to a public electricity line that runs adjacent to the EcoVillages. After completing the infrastructure, villagers would take responsibility to pay for their own electric bills.

Needs of the School

UUSC is proud of how much the EcoVillage school has grown since its initial stages. Already it serves 172 students in grades K-6, employs seven teachers, and has separate facilities to grow, store, and serve school lunches. During his visit, Michael was touched to hear students share their love for learning and their hope to work, some of them as engineers. Now, UUSC is working with MPP and our co-partner, the Atlanta Church Group, to make the school government-owned, which would shift most of its annual costs to the Haitian government. To qualify as a government school, we plan to construct additional classrooms (to serve students through the 9th grade), bathrooms, a perimeter fence, and an irrigation system for school gardens.

UUSC is committed to grassroots initiatives and partnerships that lead to sustainable recovery. We exit projects only after thoughtful consideration of partner needs and of the communities we serve. Thank you for taking the long and promising road with us.

Hear directly from Michael about his trip to the EcoVillages by visiting uusc.org/recent-updates.

Hannah Moy is UUSC's Associate for Foundations and Donor Communications.

UUSC HURRICANE HARVEY PARTNERS



Alberto Luera, Fe y Justicia Worker Center Board member

Fe Y Justicia (Faith And Justice) Worker Center

Located in Houston, Fe y Justicia is working towards a safe and just recovery following Hurricane Harvey. It is doing so by facilitating safety and skills trainings for “second responders” – most of whom are low-wage, immigrant construction workers and volunteers – to protect their rights and prevent injury while these individuals rebuild many of Houston’s communities.

Refugee And Immigrant Center For Education & Legal Services (RAICES)

RAICES, based in San Antonio, is a long-time partner of UUSC. Its staff are traveling from shelter to shelter to deliver goods and services to meet basic needs, provide legal aid, and organize “know your rights” trainings for undocumented families living in fear of deportation and legal challenges while navigating hurricane recovery.

Living Hope Wheelchair Association

Living Hope is addressing the shortage of emergency assistance for those living with injuries or disabilities in Houston.

Reaching undocumented and African American individuals with disabilities, staff are replacing damaged equipment, repairing houses, and providing financial support for medical, transportation, and basic living expenses.

West Street Recovery

West Street Recovery initially emerged to coordinate truck and boat rescues and distribute meals and supplies to low-income neighborhoods of Northeast Houston. It is now aiding families through political advocacy and case management – connecting them to agencies, organizations, and opportunities providing resources to rebuild.

Lone Star Legal Aid

Lone Star Legal Aid is helping underserved rural populations throughout Texas to recover, regain stability, and rebuild after Hurricane Harvey. Staff are providing free legal services, as well as conducting disaster-based education and community outreach, to low-income communities.

OUR GOAL

UUSC is partnering with Texas-based organizations to serve those hardest hit by Hurricane Harvey yet struggling to access mainstream relief and services. We are supporting impacted individuals who were vulnerable before the storm – undocumented immigrants, the disabled, people of color – because natural disasters often exacerbate existing inequalities.

Visit uucs.org/volunteer to lend a hand in recovery efforts.

CLIMATE-FORCED DISPLACEMENT: A "NOW" PROBLEM

By Hannah Moy

I'd like your help spreading a message that too few people are aware of: climate change is threatening human rights. Right now, even in the United States. Entire communities are being forced to relocate, meaning that they must abandon their homes, their livelihoods, and the land that shaped their culture for hundreds – even thousands – of years.

This is because high emissions, escalating temperatures, and rising seas have already taken a heavy toll. January 2016 registered as the warmest winter on record, with extreme heat anomalies, especially in the northern hemisphere and the Arctic.

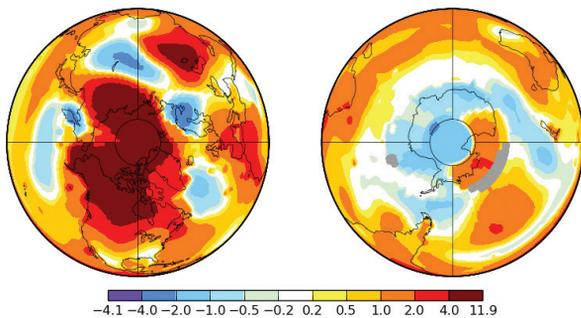
As a result, rising seas and low rainfall have led to undrinkable water due to high salt content in Kiribati, a low-lying atoll in the Pacific. In Kivalina, Alaska, melting

permafrost and coastal erosion are causing homes to fall into the sea. Isle de Jean Charles, an island off of Louisiana, has lost 98% of its land mass and most of its population to climate change impacts. And these are just three examples.

Despite the intense impact of climate change on communities, their land, and their resources, even among those passionate about climate action, most are focusing their efforts on mitigating climate change. Late last year, UUSC Program Leader Salote Soqo joined more than 11,000 political leaders and environmental experts at the UN climate change conference "COP23" held in Bonn, Germany. She noticed that only a handful dealt with the intersection between climate change and human rights, such as climate-forced displacement.

LAND LOSS IN SOUTHERN LOUISIANA





THIS MAP shows record heat anomalies in January 2016. On the left is a view of the North Pole and Arctic region, where temperatures were more than 10°F above average. On the right is a view of the South Pole.

In our human rights approach to climate change, UUSC is shining a spotlight on issues that are largely underexposed, lifting the voices of people who are most impacted while doing so. Together with nearly a dozen grassroots organizations in the United States and 15 Pacific Islands, we are serving communities affected by climate impacts by supporting both the right to remain and the right to relocate – all on the terms of the local residents.

We are following community-led strategies to build water, sanitation, and housing infrastructure for people who want to stay on their land. For those choosing to relocate, we are helping to monitor climate impacts, draft migration plans, negotiate with landholders and governments, and develop programs to preserve sustainable livelihoods and bolster cultural rejuvenation.

UUSC is aware that no one policy, government, or organization can solve the complex climate

problems we and our partners face. So we're sharing what we have learned in order to maximize our impact. One of the ways we are doing this is through our newest research report, *Community-Led, Human Rights-Based Solutions to Climate-Forced Displacement: A Guide for Funders*. The report provides background information on the issue, insights from UUSC's strong local partners, and a call for additional funding and advocacy to support community-led solutions to climate-forced displacement.

As demonstrated in the full report, the critical condition to supporting and funding this work is the right to self-determination. The frontline experts – the local people – should lead if, when, and how they relocate.

It is our responsibility – as donors, supporters, and visitors – to amplify their voices to be heard across the world.

Read our full Guide for Funders at uusc.org/publications.

SHOP THE GOOD BUY

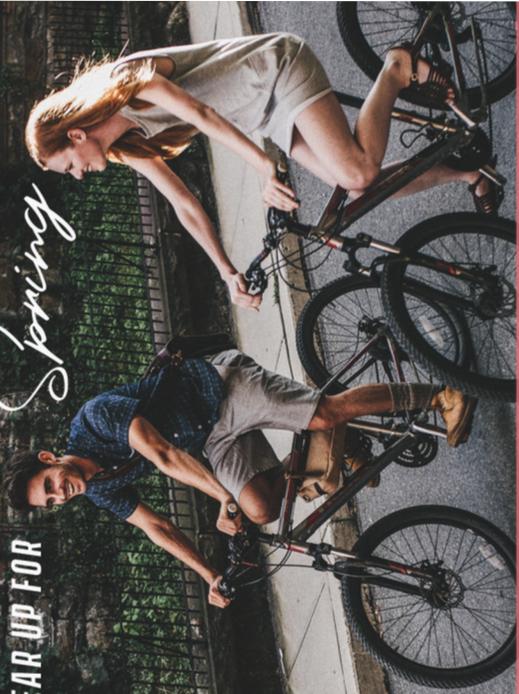


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