

Can't Get There From Here: Years ago before a special Saturday night service at my small country church people in another community called for directions. Roads were curvy so I asked a local and he said, "oh, you can't get here from there." I tried it later and discovered he was almost right.

Water in Haiti is an elusive resource that has challenged hundreds of NGO's and engineers for decades. There is either too much, washing villages and crops into the sea, or there is none, and having a reliable source is unreliable. It seems that only one in six wells drilled on La Gonave ever function more than a year or two.

Challenges are many: drilling through hundreds of feet of rock, getting drilling equipment here, contaminating the well by drilling through the "bottom of the island"; drilling deep on a tall mountain to list a few. Other numerous issues must be addressed to actually get to the water and once the well is in, the focus of the challenge changes but does not go away.

Generators are costly and expensive to operate; require frequent maintenance (not a natural concept in Haiti); are heavy; and, they frequently wander away like the goats. Life span of a generator is short and most eventually become a wonder of Haitian ingenuity with pieces of innertube and rubber glue. When the rainy season begins the deadly dry season is forgotten until it suddenly "happens" again.

Our first dry season started a day before we were told it was upon us. Pipe to the well was missing large portions, the generator tank was leaking, there was no fuel and no one could find the keys to the pump house. We took responsibility the first year for water for the two communities of Sousafilip and Dent Greirn.

A water committee was formed for the next year as we had purchased a new generator. We explained the need for management and upkeep to be prepared for this year. The generator finished that dry season in good form and water was sold in preparation for this year.

This week we have no water, the generator will not run, the money was all spent on something else, Port a Bonheur has a broken generator, Non-Sema has no money for fuel and Abamang is providing an old generator that slowly pumps so some can get water at the well. Most are bathing with less than a gallon of water and limited water is used for cooking. I'm uncertain if many ever drink water.

At 6:30am they began filling a big drum with 40 gallons of water to wash sheets for the Church seminar that begins this Sunday. Priorities are a challenge. Our objections are puzzlement to the community who face this year after year.

Are we too focused on "tomorrow"? In a culture where living day to day is a way of life are priorities for the future a challenge that has no direct route? Can we get there from here? Will we keep trying?

Shirley, La Gonave, Haiti, Feb 20th 2009. Barely clean and slightly frustrated.