

KAY BLADA RECYCLING
Progress Report: Work Trip to Haiti
March 2018

Our Partnership with Renewology

Kay Blada Recycling was very fortunate to have the possibility of partnering with a non-profit called Plastic Ocean Project on their new “Plastic to Fuel” initiative. After talking about turning “plastic to fuel” for months, we decided to combine our trips to Haiti to explore the possibility of working together in Hinche.

The plan was that I, “Blada” (founder of Kay Blada Recycling), would meet with this group in Port-au-Prince and we would travel together to Hinche. Once in Hinche, I planned to take them to Kay Blada Recycling, show them my operation and the town of Hinche, connect them with the local government, and introduce them to some of the NGOs in the area.

We left the US on March 4th. Our flights were delayed due to high winds and we arrived to Port-au-Prince late in the afternoon.

Once we were all together, we got into the car and started making our way to Hinche. We were so happy that we were finally together, after months of planning. In the car were Blada, Annie, Getro, Hanna, and the driver — Real. We started making plans for the rest of the evening, and shared some ideas for the rest of the week. As we were talking about everything, the car started breaking down. The driver and Getro were taking care of it— they were pouring water, and I was talking with Hanna and Annie inside of the car. Soon we were on our way again.

The Accident in Port-au-Prince

Just 15-20 minutes outside of Port-au-Prince, going up this famous hill called “Mon Kabrit”, I saw a person coming towards our car with something in his hand, pointing it at us. It did not take long to realize that he was pointing a gun at us and making hand gestures for us to stop the car.

In my opinion, our driver did not realize that the gunman was asking us to stop and he kept going without stopping. That’s when the gunman started shooting at the truck. Our driver got shot and died. Within one second the car went off the road and down to the side of the mountain and crashed. We all lost consciousness (we don’t know for how long) and were (at some point) pulled out of the truck by people who were passing by at that moment. We were all bleeding and one person broke her leg badly. We think that after the car crashed, the gunman came and got all he could and left us bleeding. We lost money, cellphones, important documents like passports...

The Driver is the only person who lost his life. He left 3 children and his wife behind. This man was the only one who had an income in his family. He was probably responsible for some of his siblings as well. Now he is gone, and there is no one to take his place or provide an income.

I was hurt in the head, and in the right eye. I lost some blood from a big cut above my right eye and was able to get stitches. Now, one eye is smaller than the other, and they are probably going to be different for the rest of my life.

What We Did Wrong

- The first thing I can think of is the fact that the other people arrived in Haiti before me, and went out to change money, going back and forth in and out of the airport as more of them arrived. That allowed bad people to tag and follow us.
- We left Port-au-Prince just a little bit too late. Leaving at the time we did (6pm) gave the gunman an easier opportunity to target us.
- We were in a car that was not running well, and the driver had to keep stopping to fix things. In my opinion, stopping so much gave the people who followed us time to plan and prepare.
- Our driver had never been on that road before. From my observation, he was not driving comfortably on the road. He did not know the curves and the bumps. I think little things like that can make a difference.

Lessons Learned

- Never leave Port-au-Prince after 5pm. After 5pm, there is less traffic and it starts to get dark. When it's dark, bad things happen. We should have stayed at a hotel that night and left the next morning.
- We need to make sure we get a good car that can get us from point A to point B without stopping. When you have to stop, people have a chance to learn who is in the car and what you are carrying.

The Generator

This is the repeated story of how things go when you have to get something done in Haiti. I was supposed to pick up the generator in Cap-Haitian. The generator was sent to Haiti days in advance from North Carolina, through a professional shipping company called HSL. The generator arrived in Cap-Haitian, on the northern coast of Haiti. I came to Cap-Haitian from Hinche, travelling over 5 hours to get there, in order to pick up the generator to bring it to Kay

Blada in Hinche. When I arrived at the HSL's warehouse where I was to pick up the generator, I was told that the generator had not cleared customs yet, due to a national strike of government workers, which was happening all over Haiti. The strike was due to workers hardly being paid or not being paid enough.

This generator was going to be used to power our small baler, a machine which will be used to crush plastics into tight bales before transport to Port au Prince. After working for months to make sure that the generator would get to Haiti before I arrived, not only could they not deliver my package, they could not even tell me when to come back. As of the writing of this article, we still have not received any notification of when to return to pick it up.

Now I am not in Haiti anymore; I arrived back in the US one week ago. Our only option now is to either wait until my next trip to Haiti, or to authorize a different person in Haiti to pick up the generator in Cap-Haitien, once the strike is over and things are running smoothly again. This means that the installation of the generator will also have to be done without me, and hopefully that will go very well. I will make sure to update everyone on how that went once it happens, as well as when we start compacting our plastic into bales.

Purchasing the Three-Wheeler

Finally, here is a SUCCESS story!

After dealing with all the trauma from the accident, I felt better to start the process of purchasing the [three-wheeler](#) (a motorcycle with a cart attached). We had raised enough money to purchase the three-wheeler (through an anonymous donation of \$1,000), which we have been needing in order to pick up plastic from outlying areas around Hinche. I got to the dealership and purchased the equipment. I had to do a little bit of running around but that part of the process was fairly easy.

The next part was to legalize the three-wheeler, and that was very interesting. When trying to get any legal papers in Haiti, you should reserve at least 3 days. As is typical in many institutions in Haiti, the workers at the government office where I was trying to obtain license plates were not clear with me about what I was supposed to do. Each step along the process had to be done separately, with no clear plan of the overall process, or the order/sequence of events in the process. There was no photocopy machine there, and they sent me out numerous times to make individual photocopies along each step. I also had to wait for hours to talk to people face to face in order to find out what I needed to do. This was not surprising, but was tedious and annoying. Despite everything, this was not as bad as it could have been, because it only took 3 days to purchase and legalize the three-wheeler. Now, it's there and legal. Our three-wheeler is now doing its job— picking up sacks of plastic from street collectors in and around Hinche.

Thank you so much to everyone, and especially to our anonymous donor, for your continued support, and especially your belief and trust in our work! See the three wheeler on the go [here](#).

Education Program

Kay Blada formally launched its environmental education program three months ago. The program is going very well. The program is unfolding in 5 schools and we have engaged 15 teachers to teach about environmental protection and recycling to children ages 4-12.

I had a chance to go visit the schools during this trip. The children were very happy to meet me, and they sang the beautiful [song](#) that was created by the teacher in charge of the education program, named Madame Dieudonne. We have recycling bins in all 5 schools, and the recycling cart (three-wheeler) will go empty the recycling bins every day. This program is so exciting, and we believe that having this in place will make the rest of Kay Blada's work more successful. However, this education program is going to be costly. As of right now, we are spending about \$300 USD per month. The program costs 1,000 gourdes, or about \$16 USD, per teacher per month, with 15 teachers involved in incorporating the packet of educational materials from Kay Blada into their lessons. Each teacher is responsible for about 40 children. We expect this amount to climb as we add more schools to the program. Check out the recycling song [here](#).

Staff Meeting

Kay Blada Recycling has 3 full time employees, and there's no doubt that we are making a big impact in the community. At our staff meeting, we talked about the new investments we just made (the three-wheeler and the generator), and the policies in place for using this equipment. Our workers were happy with the changes, but they did ask for a raise, which I have also been thinking about heavily for several months. This current staff has been with us for 2 years now, and they are asking only for a 1000 gourdes (~\$16.00 USD) raise per month. I think that my staff deserves this, and we are going to do whatever we can to make this happen for them. This will mean raising an additional 3000 gourdes (~\$50 USD) per month, because there are 3 full-time workers.

Also, our street plastic collectors are complaining about the price they are getting for their plastic. We are looking for a different company in Port-au-Prince who can buy our plastic at a better price. Getting a better price when we sell our plastic will enable Kay Blada Recycling to pay more per pound to the street collectors.

Conclusion

Not every trip to Haiti will be spectacular or productive. This trip was hard from the beginning, with obstacles popping up along each step of the work. The beginning of the trip

was marked by a violent, traumatic event that left one person dead and all others injured. When I tried to pick up the generator that we had purchased and shipped to Cap-Haitian, I was unable to do so due to a national strike. While legalizing or new three-wheeler, I ran into obstacles as well, but this was a predictable event, typical of any endeavor involving the Haitian government. There were important lessons learned about safety, as well as a tragic loss of life, which is a full issue in itself, deserving consideration about possible restitution for the driver's family.

I thank all of you for continued interest, support, and trust in my work and in the development and improvement of Haiti, for the good of all those who will never have the opportunity to leave, to escape the pollution, or to find other means to provide an income to their families.

Blada

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