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Discussion Section: Cross Cultural Projects
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Bon Sel: Serving the Underserved

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Bracketed numbers represent image on screen during presentation.

[1] Introduction

Good morning. My name is Robert Sedlack, and on behalf of Dana Bartelt and Maria Rogal, I would like to thank you for joining us today for our discussion session of cross-cultural projects. During the first half hour of our time together, each of the three of us will spend a few minutes discussing the specific projects on which we have worked with our students. The second half of our time today will be devoted to an open discussion with you that springs from the assessments and inquiries you have concerning our brief presentations. I therefore ask that you hold your comments and questions until the end of the presentations. Having read both Dana and Maria's abstracts and discussing their work with them I know that several threads will run throughout all three presentations and I encourage you to be aware of them. These include practical design experience, exposure to and understanding of a foreign environment, cross-disciplinary collaboration, social impact, cultural responsibility, and cultural signifiers, to name just a few.

Bon Sel: An Interdisciplinary Student Design Collaborative

The Project

[2 opening] My presentation covers a single project. Yet, I believe this project represents all of the aspects mentioned in the AIGA Call for Entries: research (faculty, graduate student, and undergraduates), collaboration (with both other disciplines and industry), creative thinking (including the crossing of national and cultural borders), and the realization that future graduates may not necessarily work in the traditional role of a graphic designer—whatever that was!

[3 BS=GS] Not unlike many traditional identity, packaging, and marketing assignments for consumer goods, Bon Sel (“Good Salt” in English), offers practical design experience for both faculty and students. But, it also creates opportunities to research and practice the application of a communication process in a foreign environment by emphasizing the importance of cross cultural understanding. Furthermore, the project necessitates multi-disciplinary exposure and involvement, and focuses on the important social impact that can be achieved through good design.

Background

[4 Sat.1] In addition to being the poorest country in the western hemisphere and suffering through decades of political upheaval and social challenges, Haiti was devastated by tropical storm Jeanne in September 2004. The disaster killed 1,900, left 900 missing and presumed dead, and destroyed the homes of thousands of Haitians. The storm caused horrific damage that will affect generations to come. This satellite image shows the Gonaives peninsula before the hurricane. These small rectangles are salt ponds at various stages of production. **[5 Sat.2]** This image shows those same ponds after the hurricane.

Our design program has identified one aspect of this tragedy, however, as an opportunity to reinvigorate a critical Haitian industry and also affect dramatic change in the area of health-care. A dedicated interdisciplinary group of faculty and students has been assembled to help the Haitian people once again access one of the world’s most abundant and necessary substances. This basic commodity is salt. **[6 salt pond]** More than 80% of Haiti’s salt production capacity was destroyed during Jeanne.

Led by graphic and industrial designers in coordination with Notre Dame’s Haiti Program and public health officials, our multi-disciplined team’s endeavor is to first address the speed and efficiency of the initial phase of the salt harvesting process and, second, improve the packaging and marketing of the end product so Haitian consumers understand the added health benefit of co-fortified salt. The co-fortification process involves the addition of two ingredients during salt processing: iodine and diethylcarbamazine, or DEC. DEC helps prevent Lymphatic Filariasis (LF), also known as elephantiasis, which is ravaging the entire nation. I want to warn you, the next image is quite graphic. **[7 LF]**

Past Work and Experience in Haiti

[8 Collaboration A] Notre Dame is in the unique position of having invested more than a decade in the country working side-by-side with the Haitians. Our time and talent have been focused on forwarding critical issues including healthcare and local economies. Along with various collaborators, students and faculty from disciplines including Architecture, Marketing, Business Administration, Engineering, Biology, and Anthropology have contributed thousands of hours to a variety of successful initiatives. We see these partnerships and positioning as a foundation by which to accomplish initiatives, all the while working with the Haitian people as they move forward to a better future. (Describe chart.) **[9 Collaboration B]**

The Good Salt project is unique in that it allows design faculty and students to take the lead to further the important humanitarian work in Haiti. Building on past success, we have mobilized a strong multi-disciplinary team that includes both faculty and students. Critical to the project is that our team involves Haitian collaborators in every phase. At project end, we want the people of Haiti to be the recognized leaders in this venture and intend for Good Salt to become an export, crossing beyond the borders of Haiti to others in need of similar health benefits, including those in 82 other endemic countries around the world that suffer from LF (elephantiasis).

Focus

While the entire salt process “from ocean to table” presents various design challenges, we have chosen to address the two most pressing issues at the beginning and end of the production and distribution chain: 1) salt collection and 2) packaged salt distribution to consumers. **[10 market]** For the purposes of this presentation, I will concentrate on the challenge of graphic design as it applies to packaging and promotion. Haitian government and health officials understand the important health benefits associated with fortifying salt and approved a pilot program just months before tropical storm Jeanne. However, marketing and communication challenges with the fortification program existed well before the storm. Prior to the destruction, an unsuccessful product packaging and marketing campaign to distribute iodized salt was launched. For various reasons, the importance of iodized salt in the Haitian diet was not communicated properly. So inadequate was the graphic communication that many end users actually washed their salt in an attempt to clean it, effectively washing off the beneficial additive. **[11 flamingo]**

Collaboration

A moment ago I mentioned Notre Dame's long time involvement in Haiti. This is primarily due to the dedication and passion of Father Tom Streit, a biology professor at Notre Dame. Along with Notre Dame's Haiti Program, he has spent the last decade working to eliminate LF in Hiati. In his role as program director, he serves as chief administrator for the grant Notre Dame received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the amount of \$6 million dollars.

[12 org chart A] Other key collaborators include Haiti Program Manager Sarah Peterek, Jean Marc Brissau, who is in charge of the Haitian government's salt fortification factory; Wesly ????; Trevor Milner., a salt expert who works for the Pan-American Health Organization; Joe Guiltinan, chairperson of the marketing department in Notre Dame's College of Business, as well as three MBA students, most importantly Didier Jean-Francois, a Haitian; the Haiti Working Group, a student-run campus organization; DDB's Chicago office; and my colleague industrial design professor Paul Down. We were also fortunate to be able to have direct contact with Dr. Marie Bijou, ?????, and ????, who came to Notre Dame's campus as part of an international Salt Symposium this spring. And the list goes on and on...

[13 org chart B] It is with this great and complex group of people—from the States and Haiti—with whom our graphic design students are working. It could happen no other way.

Consumer Salt Distribution

The move to co-fortified salt in Haiti provides an opportunity to review and improve the Haitian consumer experience with this product. Currently, many Haitians do not understand the potential health benefits associated with iodine and DEC fortified salt and therefore improperly use the product. **[14 woman]** Current consumer habits and practices, together with the challenge of effectively communicating fortification benefits, create a list of questions regarding packaging that we have begun to answer, including: How do we change the delivery system? Are the proposed bags the best choice? How does the consumer use these bags after purchase? How is salt packaged in different parts of the world? How can packaging and marketing communicate the fortification benefits? How can packaging discourage washing salt before use? What useful raw materials are available in Haiti? What existing Haitian industries can support our cause? What price point is acceptable in the Haitian market? Could additional distribution channels help facilitate better acceptance?

Brand Architecture, Packaging, and Marketing

Our graphic design team is developing the brand architecture, including an identity program and a promotional campaign clarifying the long-term benefits of Good Salt to the Haitian consumer. [**15 Logos**] Designers, teamed with engineers and marketing specialists, are developing a distinctive packaging system that takes into consideration cultural mores, available materials, the current bagging process, portability, storage, ease of use, and information communication. Our packaging research, exploration, and development targets two mainend goals: creating a better delivery mechanism for the product and giving an identity to the health benefits. [**16 Nick's icon**]

Due to the high rate of illiteracy in the country, our marketing development is exploring alternate avenues of disseminating information that are not in line with the traditional advertising prevalent in more highly developed countries.

Current Development

During the course of the semester, select graduate and undergraduate design students, guided by faculty, immersed themselves in this project. Continued collaboration with engineers, marketing specialists, and anthropologists will move the project forward. With the initial work done by the design students as a stepping off point, marketing research will be accumulated that focuses on the purchase and consumption of salt in both first world countries and developing nations. This research will assess packaging, shipping, unit cost, and user patterns.

[**17 DDB**] At the very end of the semester, our graphic design students gave a presentation to a group of executives from DDB, including Pat Dermody, President of DDB Chicago, and Michael Robinson, TITLE??, who has overseen the launch of new products such as Equal and counts Morton Salt as one of his main clients.

DDB has committed to the following assistance: additional design research; focus group testing; a meeting with Morton Salt; connections to DDB's Latin American office to expand our understanding of marketing in developing countries; marketing efforts in the popular worlds of sports and music; and contacts with another global corporation to further explore DEC-infused bullion cubes.

All of this after just a two-hour presentation by three undergraduate design students and one MBA candidate describing the project and their work to date. As you can imagine, I was pretty happy with their efforts.

Conclusion

Projects like this exemplify the shift occurring in academia by [**18 quote**] “emphasizing a broader and more diverse focus for design students,” as the Call for Entries states. The extraordinary social impact that future designers will have should be both recognized and promoted by engaging projects that demonstrate the life-changing impact that design can have when applied appropriately and in collaboration with organizations dedicated to social betterment.