

WATER CRISIS AT ST. GABRIEL'S



The Well

ALERT: NEWS ABOUT A WATER CRISIS DEVELOPING IN FONTAINE

A census has never actually been taken, but the population of the greater Fontaine area is believed to be somewhere between 5,000 to 10,000 people. That community, along with St. Gabriel's School, is facing a serious water crisis. No home in Fontaine has running water. Six wells served as the community's water source which people walk to daily. To the left is a picture of the well at St. Gabriel's School.

Since January however, two of the community's wells have gone dry and the others, including the school's well, are getting very low. It seems unthinkable in this day and age but 5,000 – 10, 000 people could run out of accessible water.

There are 2 factors that appear to be causing the problem. One is the deforestation that took place in the distant past and the other is the stress caused by what seems to be the ongoing depletion of an already a weak aquifer.

Another complicating factor is the rain cycle. The rainy season in Haiti is from May through November and the dry season is from December through April. We are currently in the middle of the dry season. Even when the rains come, we are not sure of how long it will take to refresh the aquifer, if at all.

After much discussion, the short-term solution is to harvest the rain water that falls on the roof of the school and other buildings on the school grounds during the May through December rainy season and store it in a large underground reservoir. This project will cost about \$70,000 and will store in excess of 200,000 gallons of water which will provide relief to the school and community.

Once funded, the reservoir project will take 6 to 10 weeks to complete and then there will be an extended period to fill the reservoir to a point that water can be drawn. With the help of a generous California donor, a little over half of the \$70,000 budget has been raised. If the project can be fully funded soon, it can be completed by the end of July, and the reservoir will be ready for the next dry season and many more to come.

The school and the community are working together to help further resolve the present crisis through the formation of a Water Commission which will develop long term plans, including the possibility of building an aqueduct that could transport water from a spring in the area to the community, a very involved and costly project. It will also develop a reforestation project (plant trees), whose roots will reach down breaking the soil and allowing the rains to be absorbed.

In the meantime, it may be necessary for the community to go back to its pre-St Gabriel's days which means, for most, a long walk to that local river to meet their daily needs. Unfortunately, it's a very small and polluted river and families will have to carefully treat the water with chemicals before drinking.

Insights from readers who have helped deal with water crises and wish to become involved in this crisis are encouraged to contact us. Gifts from donors are welcome as well.