



BLOSSOM TOGETHER

2022-2023

HEADQUARTERED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
Since 2017

Introduction

Mission Statement

Blossom Together is a student-led humanitarian organization that supports living standards in developing African countries. From water wells to cataract surgeries to food packages, the effort has provided support in four different countries. To this day, Blossom Together has raised over \$200,000, partnered with various reputable institutions like the World Bank, and helped thousands in need. Blossom Together is proudly based out of the University of Virginia.

Every year, Blossom Together identifies new projects and goals with the sole motivation of offering the slightest bit of ease in the modest lives of those who need it the most. Our services come in many forms under three primary umbrellas: health, water, and hunger. And one step at a time, we aim to make a difference.

Philosophy

Blossom Together stands upon a philosophy for happiness. We base our efforts with dreams of a utopia, where every individual woman and man lives their lives dedicated to the happiness of others, where neither poverty nor famine roams the land, where every newborn is given an opportunity to read and achieve. We have decided that if such a utopia were to exist, it would first have to blossom. The effort works to support the blossoming of this philosophy.

History

2017-18

Blossom Together was founded in August 2017 and had completed its first expedition by the summer of 2018. Upon forming a team of 7 committed members, the first project was focused in Burkina Faso, a landlocked poverty-stricken country in West Africa. Acknowledging the national problems with clean water, education, and famine, Blossom Together set relevant goals that specifically targeted these issues.

The team established connections in Burkina Faso and across the United States. Some key partners included the Rotary Club of Annandale, Northern Virginia Community College, and College Horizon International. Most notably, Blossom Together worked with the World Bank on projects for education. Connecting with Mrs. Vijdan Korman and Mrs. Mariam Diop, surveys were sent out to rural Burkina Faso and the schools in most need were identified. And amongst the alternatives, the village school of Sapone and their total 268 students were selected.

During the summer of 2018, after raising over \$33,000, the team flew abroad to Ouagadougou for a week to complete the project. For the clean water initiative, Blossom Together raised approximately \$10,000 to open three water wells, which were constructed in the communes of Sapone, Koudougou, and Dedougou. These wells are expected to operate without maintenance for 10-15 years, offering the relief of life itself to the daily lives of tens of thousands of Burkinabe. For the second initiative, working with the World Bank, Blossom Together supplied the entire village school of Sapone with school uniforms and school supplies. And for the third initiative, the team purchased, prepared, and distributed 150 food packages during their time abroad. They worked long hours into the night, filling bags with rice, sugar, oil, pasta, tomato paste, and traditional macaroni. Lastly, the team bought and gifted hundreds of stuffed animals to the children of Burkina Faso. The 2018 project was acknowledged and endorsed by the Burkinabe Minister of Education, the Burkinabe Minister of Security, and the US Ambassador of Burkina Faso.



2018-19

Following the summer of 2018, the College of Horizon International, an international school in Ouagadougou, requested a month-long ESL program offered to their K-12 students. For many Burkinabe students, learning English means the opening of vast new opportunities, through which they can pursue a future beyond the limits of their land-locked borders. Through such an opportunity, it was possible that completely new avenues may be made available to the Burkinabe children.

The team prepared for months on end, consulting college professors on how to approach the task, learning basic French to better communicate with the students, and producing two 200-paged binders of teaching material. In July of 2019, two members flew abroad for 5 weeks, teaching English to over 100 K-12 students. By the end of the expedition, the students had proven a great deal of improvement on their final cumulative exams. The 2019 project was acknowledged and endorsed by the US Ambassador of Burkina Faso and the Provost of Northern Virginia Community College, as well as others.

Additionally, Blossom Together raised over \$20,000 to fund 300+ food packages.



2019-20

From the Amazon Forest fires to the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was a very difficult year for many. Unfortunately, due to such external obstacles, the efforts of Blossom Together were very restricted, preventing us from offering our services to the extent that we desired.

Between March and June, Blossom Together offered virtual ESL services to middle and high school students at the College of Horizon Education via Zoom video conferences and WhatsApp group chats. In addition, the effort raised approximately \$30,000 to prepare and distribute food packages in northern Burkina Faso in July 2020. The packages consisted solely of cattle meat, which is not commonly found in rural Burkina Faso.

2020-21

During 2020, despite the continuing COVID pandemic, Blossom Together had its largest project yet, leading projects in three separate countries: Guinea, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The budget for the projects were over \$80,000, which the organization raised in its entirety. Blossom Together once again partnered with the World Bank, along with several new institutions, including but not limited to clinics, school organizations, and small businesses.

The first and largest project was in the town of Ley Hollo (in the Lab region) of Guinea. Blossom Together funded and supervised the construction of a multifaceted water system costing nearly \$50,000. Prior to our efforts, the town had only 20 water wells - spaced out so that only 45% actually had access. Average time to travel and draw water from these wells surpassed two hours each day, and 95% of the water chores were carried out by the women of the town. A very serious, and at times fatal, concern with these wells was their high exposure to waterborne diseases. Throughout the year, from Cholera in July to the Typhoid fever in March, the villagers suffered for consuming a necessity of life: water. Our water system has been carefully designed to offer ease of access to prespecified points in the town. The drinking water system is powered by FO drilling to achieve an estimated flow of $5 \text{ m}^3/\text{h}$. The system will be powered by a solar station. The solar panels will be installed near the borehole. The water quality of the borehole does not require special treatment, only chlorination disinfection will be carried out. It will be done via a 12W electric dose pump. The network is sized to comfortably last until 2035, about 15 years. Blossom Together has signed a 12-month contract with a French engineering firm with the help of our partners, Unite du Monde. After 10 months of fundraising, networking with financiers, and leading numerous informational seminars, Blossom Together raised the entirety of the \$50,000 needed to fund the project and construction will be completed by the end of 2021. Approximately 55% of the total amount was raised overseas, primarily in France and Turkey. The remaining sum was collected domestically, primarily in the DC metro area and Texas. Construction is expected to be complete by mid-2022.



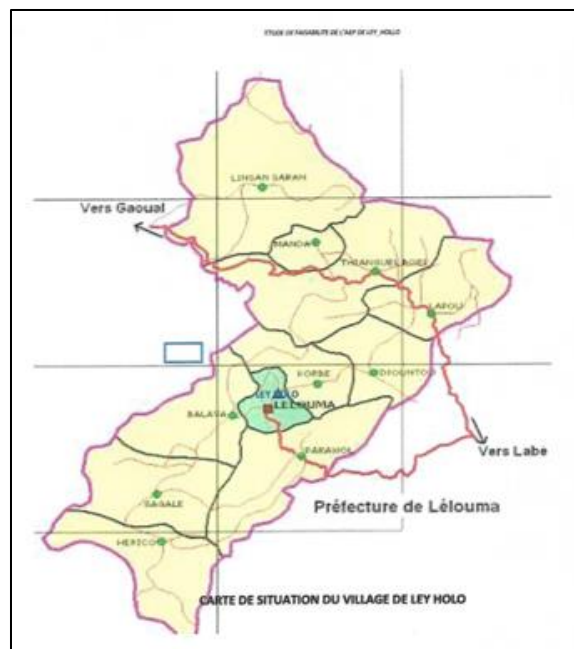


Figure 1 Water system in Guinea provides clean, accessible water through underground piping to the entire green region on the map.

The second project was in Mali and focused on our medical relief initiatives. In the capital city of Bamako, Blossom Together funded and assisted in 100 cataract surgeries in addition to sponsoring follow-up examinations. Cataracts are most commonly found in the elderly, but thousands of children in Africa suffer from cataracts due to the extreme climate conditions and lack of proper nutrition. *Approximately 2.2 million people suffer from cataracts in Africa, and 800,000+ suffer from the disease in Mali alone.* Blossom Together partnered with Embrace Relief to use two of their clinics: Gaoussana Fofana and Clinic Planet vision, both located in Bamako, Mali, in order to execute the detailed procedures. During the surgery, the clouded lens is removed, and a clear artificial lens is implanted. The removal will be done through an incision in the eye through a procedure known as extracapsular cataract extraction. The Blossom Together team travelled overseas to the clinics to assist in the cataract surgeries, gaining this unparalleled experience while completing the objective.



For the third project, Blossom Together funded, prepared, and distributed over 150 food packages to those in need. The food packages consisted of cattle meat, which is not very accessible or cheap in the rural villages of the country. Our packages were sufficient to supply the average family for several months, considering the drying process typically performed. We worked with ONG Education in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso to follow through with our project.



2021-22

This year, Blossom Together concentrated its efforts towards three countries: Mali, Benin, and Burkina Faso. Their initiatives raised a combined total of over \$50,000 in pursuit of helping those in need. With almost complete recovery from the pandemic, a team of seven UVA students traveled overseas to Mali to oversee and assist with projects.

The first project was in Benin, where Blossom Together funded and facilitated the construction of 5 water wells – each specifically located to prioritize the needs of schools and hospitals in remote areas where clean, accessible water is difficult to find. The first well was funded in partnership with Crozet Pizza in Charlottesville, VA, who not only invited the team to hold a fundraiser at their location, but also donated a lump sum to cover the remaining amount for a well. The second well was funded in partnership with the Rotaract Club at UVA, with whom efforts were joined towards stadium cleaning fundraisers. The other three water wells were donated by individual donors, to whom our initiatives were pitched to secure contributions.



The second initiative that Blossom Together led was in Mali, where the team of UVA students personally travelled for a week during July 2022. In Mali, the team's primary efforts were focused on funding and assisting in cataract surgeries, which were performed at Gaoussana Fofana and Clinic Planet Vision. This initiative was very similar to the efforts from last year, where 100 patients were completely taken care of. In addition, the team prepared and distributed food packages to those in need in the villages. The incredible experience was made possible through Blossom Together's partners on the ground, who generously hosted the team and helped organize the expedition.



Figure 2 Eren Okandan, Dylan Pierre Louis (front), and Rachel Lee (right) assisting with cataract surgery.

The third and final project of the year were the annual food packages – prepared and distributed in Burkina Faso. These packages consisted of cattle meat and were given to those in need and unable to afford the protein. Our packages were sufficient to supply the average family for several months, considering the drying process typically performed. We worked with ONG Education – our partners on ground – to execute the initiative.



Figure 3 Melih (left), Dylan (center), Callahan, and Eren smile and pose with the school children in Mali.

Team

Executive Committee

Co-President: Sami Kandil
Co-President: Vedat Dilek
Vice President: Mehmet Dilek
Head of Water Relief: Sunny Singh
Head of Hunger Relief: Rana Gunan
Head of Medical Relief: Eren Okandan
Publicity Officer: Akaela Feng
Treasurer: Melih Kandil

Project Managers

Elyana Zewdie
Savannah Gibson

Firas Dalloul
Rachel Lee

Senior Associates

Dylan Millard
Emanuella Cann
Aissatou Barry
Camille Hollis
Meghan Griffiths
Megan Jones
Niti Potdar

Kenrick Brown
Beth Habtegebrael
Lindsey Fields
Callahan Burton
Unoma Aguolu
Dylan Pierre Louis
Mahdi Alidina

Junior Associates

Aarthika Krishnan
Aroosha Solomon
Adah MacDonald
Riddhi Dixit
Lauren Victory
Martina Gil
Kunaal Agarwal

Sasha Pasmanik
Adriano Andrey
Olivia Aghdami
Emily Ashkani
Jonah Prentiss
Kelvin Chen

Chapters

Blossom Together has also expanded its operations with three chapters. Each chapter has its individual team that works with the headquartered team at the University of Virginia to achieve our common goals. The collaborative effort expands the room for change, allowing Blossom Together to reach more people with more services. Below are the Chapters:

Pinnacle Academy

President: Mehmet Emin

NC State University

President: Huseyin Karaduman

University of Alabama - Birmingham

President: Sathvik Bodepudi

University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

President: TBD

Duke University

President: TBD

2022-23: Preview

Solidifying itself as a premier organization at the University of Virginia, Blossom Together has narrowed its team to slightly shy of 40 members, maintaining a competitive recruiting process. For the new year, the organization is planning on leading three new projects in Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Uganda, and Mali.

In *Tanzania*, Blossom Together will focus its medical relief efforts, funding and assisting in cataract and glaucoma surgeries in partnership with a local hospital. Tentative plans for an expedition this summer is considering Tanzania as a likely destination.

In *Burkina Faso*, Blossom Together will focus its water relief efforts, funding and overseeing the construction of water wells in remote areas that lack clean, accessible water sources.

In *Uganda* and *Mali*, Blossom Together will focus its hunger relief efforts, funding, preparing, and distributing food packages to those in need.



Figure 4 Sami Kandil, Melih Kandil, Eren Okandan, Callahan Burton, Dylan Pierre Louis, Unoma Aguolu, and Rachel Lee (left to right) during their layover in Casablanca, Morocco on their way to Bamako, Mali

Forecast for Expansion

Having established Blossom Together as a Contracted Independent Organization at the University of Virginia, our expansion on Grounds is eminent, opening doors to very advantageous avenues. Beyond that, we continue to grow both domestically and internationally, partnering up with some of the best universities in the country and diversifying our network with different countries.

In regard to global presence, Blossom Together has introduced two new countries this year alone to reach a combined total of six countries. From cataract surgeries in Tanzania to water wells in Burkina Faso, the projects focus on fulfilling essential needs. Blossom Together's wide networks are constantly updating the team with new opportunities to make a difference. In regard to partnerships, we have a continuing partnership with the World Bank, with whom we are working together in the United States, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali. Lastly, in regard to publicity, the organization will seek city, state, and national media coverage, further gaining publicity and thus growing the organization.

In the near future, Blossom Together envisions an exponential growth in the organization's reach, funding, and reputation. The organization will be systematically established within the University of Virginia, creating a smooth operational transition each year towards growing its impact. Within the next couple years, we aim to reach and operating in 10 countries while increasing combined impact to beyond \$500,000.²

An investment in our organization is equivalent to an investment to years of helping others.