

# La Difference



Department: West

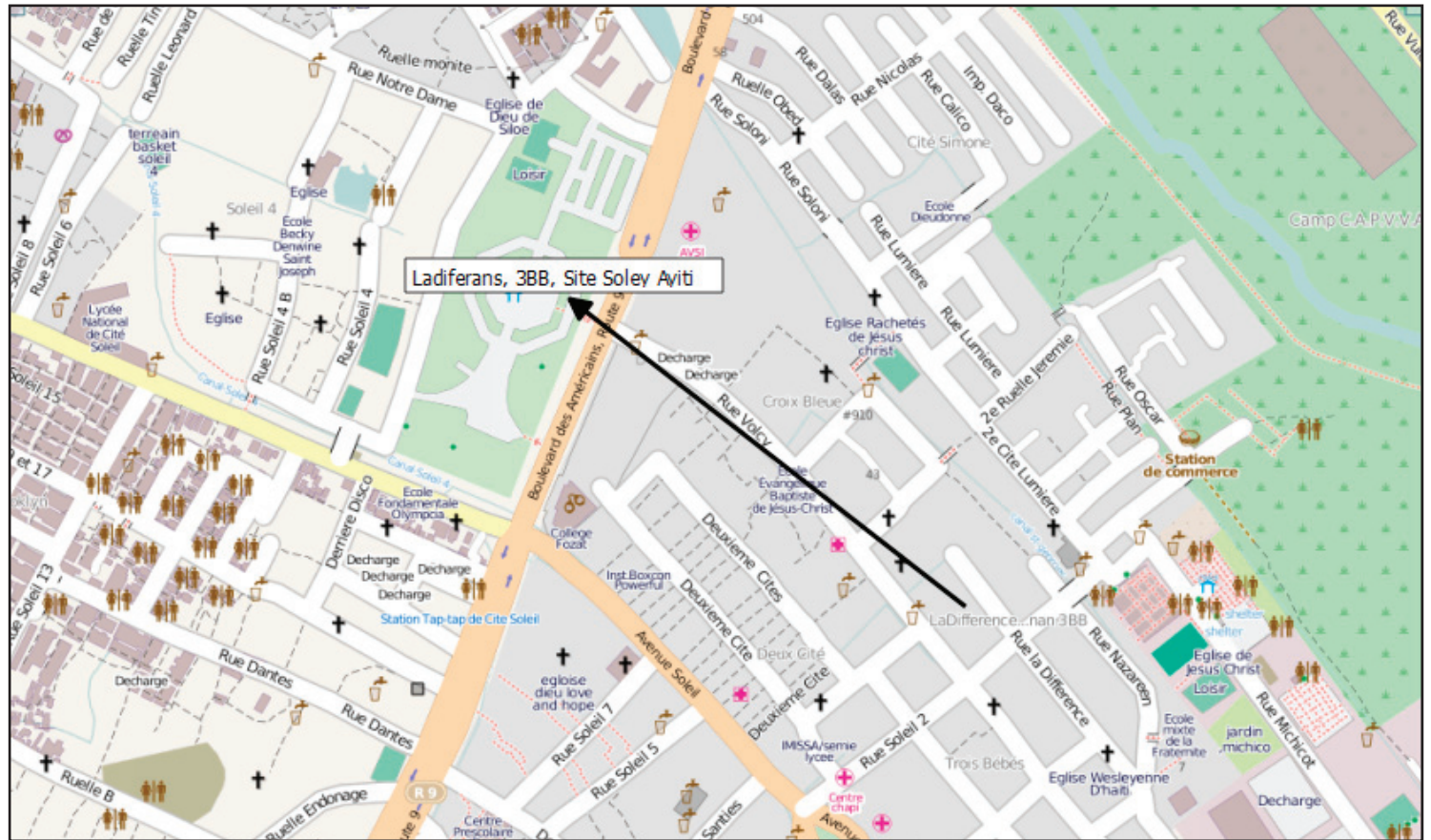
The neighborhood group of La Difference has created a micro-cosm of cleanliness and peace through community cleanups and civic education, despite the poor sanitation situation of the Cite Soleil slum.



**What can other communities learn from La Difference?**

\* Neighborhood civic education and civic action

Wozo Ayiti: From Resilience to Change



## History of the organization:

Cite Soleil is notorious for its lack of sanitation. There is no effective trash pick-up system for Cite Soleil (despite the fact that the largest official dump is situated in the same commune) and few functioning toilets. This means that their trash and human waste (and the trash of Port au Prince), often gets thrown into the open canal system. One of those neighborhoods that suffering from this trash problem was Twa Bebe, which is next to one of Cite Soleil's largest primary canals. One young man, Stephan Italien, became so frustrated with this situation that he decided to take a stand, and transform his community.

## Summary of the work

Italien and his friends renamed their community "La Difference" in the spirit of what they hoped to achieve: a different neighborhood. They began with the materials they had: borrowing brooms and shovels, and using old television sets as wheelbarrows to clean up their streets. Trash cleanup can be a very political thing in Cite Soleil, and they received a great deal of criticism and threats for their seemingly simple act of community service. But they continued on, gradually convincing more and more people of their genuine intentions and to join in. In time they had almost all the neighborhood participating in regular trash cleanups, which was unique among the communities of Cite Soleil.



They also undertook other neighborhood beautification projects: they pooled money together to purchase paint to give to the houses in their area, mixing it at times with white-wash from a nearby battery plant when they ran out of money. They planted trees on the street corners and gave people potted flowers and plants to put in their windowsill, greening up a concrete block neighborhood. Today, La Difference truly is different: it is indisputably the cleanest and prettiest neighborhood in Cite Soleil. All of these efforts, which were done entirely with the means and the motivation of the community, have inspired others to offer La Difference some extra push in the past few years: IOM helped La Difference install a recycling center, LGF helped install a reverse-osmosis water treatment facility, and MINUSTAH has been known to offer La Difference extra paint. But the motor for this change is distinctly the people of La Difference, who wake up every day and still carry out the actions that make La Difference different.





La Difference also has the vision to help other neighborhoods achieve what they've achieved: they work with other neighborhoods to mentor them in creating this kind of change, they participate in the young social movement Konbit Soley Leve, and they have recently been hosting annual "Agro-Artisanal Festivals" where they invite all the neighborhoods of Cite Soleil to celebrate their talents and their capacity.

### **What can other communities learn from La Difference?**

La Difference is an example of effective civic education and civic action: they developed a way to educate and motivate their community about the importance of taking responsibility for their streets,. Their combination of awareness-raising, starting from what they have, and building neighborhood solidarity and unity has produced serious change for them, which other Haitian communities can learn from for their own neighborhood projects.



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