

UPDATE ON COVID-19 RESPONSE

MEETING EMERGENCY  
NEEDS, BUILDING  
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Since March, Partners in Progress (PIP) has teamed with community-based organizations to be one of the first on the ground to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in Haiti with a grassroots effort to lessen stigma and give community members the information and tools needed to prevent spread of the virus. Together, we designed and launched a COVID-19 prevention education program and distributed hygiene supplies, hand washing stations, posters, and masks. To date, 322 people from eight communities in four departments have participated in the hands-on COVID-19 training. Through participant-sharing of information, hygiene supplies, and PPE, our partners estimate that an additional 3,000 community members have benefited.

Community-based partners in this initiative include École Communautaire Gamaliël de Deslandes, Sisters of St. Antoine, Paroisse St. Yves, and Centre d’Herbergement des Enfants et Adultes Handicapés. Masks were purchased from the St. Antoine Professional School and local women’s groups.

As part of our COVID-19 response, we are also addressing severe food shortages now being experienced in Haiti. The World Food Program predicts that COVID-19 will soon double the number of Haitians facing “crisis-level hunger.” Oxfam has identified Haiti as one of the world’s “top-10 extreme hunger hotspots.”

The political unrest and violence of 2019 had already doubled food prices before COVID-19 made the situation far worse by further disrupting supply chains. Because of the pandemic, food imports to Haiti have decreased sharply, especially those coming from the Dominican Republic. There is now greater pressure on locally-produced crops as fewer vendors and consumers are going to larger markets out of fear of COVID-19. Drought conditions experienced this growing season have delayed—and threaten to reduce—local harvests. We have our own COVID-19 issues in the U.S., but it is difficult to fathom the dire situation other parts of the world face.

Working with community elders, educators, and other local food experts, as well as Global Institute for Food Security at North Dakota State University, we have focused on distribution of traditional Haitian foods that are nutrient-dense, can reduce inflammation, and boost immunity. This includes, grains, beans, nuts, citrus and other fruits, greens, peppers, spices, and medicinal herbs. To date, food has been distributed to 518 households, impacting an estimated 2,590 children and adults.

Partners In Progress and our community-based partners plan to continue food relief efforts into the fall if funding allows. As we do our utmost to meet this urgent, immediate need we will strive to expand long-term food sovereignty and economic efforts and opportunities through the Farmer-to-Farmer initiative of the Konbit Vanyan Kapab Agroecology Project.

Community-driven initiatives, such as Konbit Vanyan Kapab, are critical to reducing dependence on food imports and building local



Clockwise (from top left): 110 year-old Cecil T. and PIP’s Claudy Vital at Jacsonville COVID-19 education for elders; Jacsonville elders handwashing; Traditional food baskets; Savanette Cabral cooperative farm peanuts; future agronomists get their first experience starting a tree nursery in Savanette Cabral; and new farmers in Deslandes design garden plots.

food sovereignty. Farmers are advancing sustainable farm production of traditional healthy Haitian foods and restoring balance to local ecosystems. They are increasing resilience to climate change and other shocks, while spurring local wealth creation through new value chain initiatives. Konbit Vanyan Kapab is going strong despite political unrest, COVID-19 and recent drought. In Deslandes and its seven neighboring villages, farmers and leaders report that they have been able to meet the food needs of residents, even as most of the Haiti experiences severe food shortages.

We continue to grow the program. Farmer-to-Farmer education will be offered to farmers from Gwayavye, a remote mountain community near St. Marc. Increasing opportunities for young women and men to enter careers in sustainable agriculture is a priority. Special efforts are being made to recruit young adults, aged 18-30, for the Farmer-to-Farmer training program and employees for Sister of St. Antoine and St. Yves farms. These recruits will also have the chance to explore post secondary education opportunities in agriculture through our partnership with UNIF.

For more information or to learn how you can help, contact Mike Neumann at 651-260-9787.

## ST. YVES SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT NEARS COMPLETION

**T**hrough determination and much creative problem-solving by our partners and dedicated construction team, construction efforts on the St. Yves School persevered throughout extremely challenging times. After 18 months of work, including numerous delays due to unrest and the pandemic, we anticipate completion of the school by the middle of September.

The new St. Yves School will provide much-needed safe and healthy classroom space for more than 200 rural children and be a center of community life. The project is also advancing stabilized compressed earth block construction (SCEB), a green building method, as well as promoting improved building standards. More than this, the project has promoted inclusion and provided jobs and income-generating opportunities.

Thus far, the project has provided jobs for 67 people from Savanette and Deslandes. This includes men, women, individuals with disabilities, as well as young adults who hope to use the experience as a pathway into construction careers. A total of 48 people from Savanette Cabral and Deslandes participated in one or more training opportunities offered through the project, including SCEB block-making, SCEB wall construction, lime plaster applications, and project management. Fr. Wilfranc Servil of the Paroisse



Left: Worker painting St. Yves School building gallery.

Right: St. Yves worker installs gutters on the new school.

St. Yves, estimates that in addition to the families of 48 construction workers, household income also increased for more than 100 local community members who provided goods and services for the project.

## PIP AND UNIVERSITY OF FONDWA COLLABORATE TO STUDY IMPACT OF COVER CROPS

**P**artners In Progress is excited to announce a collaboration with the University of Fondwa (UNIF) to study the quantitative impact that green manures and cover crops (GMCC's) are having on the health of the soil on the Sisters of St. Antoine (SSA) Farm in Papaye. The SSA Farm supports the nutrition program at the Fatima House Orphanage and the St. Antoine School in Fondwa.

Our preliminary research shows that GMCC's have had a significant, positive impact on crop production over the last three years. Yield has increased and the Sisters are able to produce a more diverse range of crops than in the past, such as orange sweet potatoes and lalo, a type of green. In addition, cover crops like Sunn Hemp provide excellent forage for the cows raised on the farm. Cows provide a source of manure, which combined with biomass from cover crops, helps to increase diversity of soil microorganisms ("té moun" or "soil people"), build soil organic matter, increase soil fertility, and improve moisture retention.

UNIF will engage faculty and students in monitoring soil pH and organic matter as well as the available soil nutrients including nitrogen,

phosphorus, and potassium. They will summarize findings derived from lab analysis. UNIF and PIP will then work together to develop learning activities with Konbit Vanyan Kapab Agroecology Educators as a way to disseminate findings to Farmer-to-Farmer participants and other agricultural groups. These findings will be shared with Global Institute for International Agriculture at North Dakota State University which will work with farmers, PIP and UNIF to test additional varieties of cover crops using improved growing techniques. The University of Fondwa (UNIF) and PIP will also work to develop illustrated educational brochures about the advantages and techniques for integrating cover crops into agroecosystems.

Photos (from top down):

Plantain ready for harvest

Sr. Simone harvesting lalo, a type of green

Cow grazing Sunn Hemp cover crop

Margareth from Papaye harvesting beans growing on SSA Farm

