As the Haitian people’s struggle for social and economic justice continues, farmers of the Konbit Vanyan Kapab Agroecology Program are laying the groundwork for a brighter future. By sharing agroecology knowledge and resources with other farmers, they truly believe they can and will improve health, resilience, and economic opportunities in their rural communities.

This past year, 52 farmers and 3 agronomists participated in the Farmer-to-Farmer Initiative. Initial reports from participants are very positive. New agroecology farming techniques have enabled them to grow a wider diversity of crops, increase yield, and in some cases to nearly double production. More importantly, farmers truly believe that agroecology can be a pathway for regenerating farm ecosystems and revitalizing traditions of working together to sustain a food system that advances health, resilience, and economic opportunities.

Ronald Cassagnol, a Farmer-to-Farmer participant, sees agroecology as a way for communities to regain control of their food system and to improve health and well-being. “People in Haiti used to live much longer than they do now” says Cassagnol. His concern is that dependence on imported food has increased consumption of high carb foods and exposed people to more chemicals. “Many people have ‘diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer,’” Cassagnol continued, “and these diseases were not common many years ago. We can grow more healthy fruits, vegetables, and medicines and help the environment at the same time. We are so grateful to the agroecology project—it is about construction, not destruction.”

Cassagnol has become a leader, and his passion for the program is evident. He believes that Agroecology can help communities mitigate impacts from climate change and conflict. “Our environment,” he added, “used to be a paradise, and it can be a paradise again.”

The Farmer-to-Farmer Initiative provides resources to establish tree nurseries in each village. Trees are an integral part of agroecology systems and are also distributed to community members. One community member says: “Trees keep us cool when we farm. They make us feel happy. Our animals are happier, too.” Farmers know that trees also reduce the loss of crops and damage to homes during storms.

Another famer, Odette Joseph, says that she was able to increase production of peanuts through agroecology practices. This made it possible for her to help others during this time of political unrest. Joseph says proudly: “I have been sharing peanuts with members of the local women’s group when they are having trouble finding food.”

Iraméne Leveiller, a farmer new to the initiative, says that “the new economic activities that agroecology brings will get more young farmers interested in farming.” She believes that Konbit Vanyan Kapab is Kreyol (Creole) for “strong Konbits can.” Konbit refers to a traditional work group where people work together for a common purpose. The initiative is based on traditional values of sharing, reciprocity, and working together to ensure the well being of others. Through the Farmer-to-Farmer Initiative, farmers skilled in agroecology—who have been trained as Agroecology Educators—grow the program by sharing knowledge, resources, and ideas so that other farmers learn and test agroecology.

Agroecology is an integrated approach to agriculture that is primarily concerned with access to healthy food, social and economic equity, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem balance. Agroecology is a major focus of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO’s) work to achieve UN Sustainable Development Goals. FAO sees agroecology as a unique approach to meeting the needs of future generations while striving to leave no one behind.
Nerlie was just a little over a year old when she arrived at Fatima House orphanage in 2011. She was born to a young, single mother named Olga from Jacmel. Her mother recognized that something was wrong: her daughter showed signs of being developmentally delayed. Olga did not have the resources to provide food or shelter for Nerlie or to provide the special care she knew that she needed.

Believing her baby did not have long to live, Olga left Nerlie with the Sisters of St. Antoine. The Sisters operate Fatima House, an orphanage in Fondwa that provides a caring and supportive home for about 60 children. Partners In Progress has provided operational support for Fatima House since 2011. Sr. Claudette remembers: “When Nerlie arrived at the orphanage she was really handicap, she couldn’t talk, or walk, and needed full assistance.”

In November 2019, a healthy, thriving Nerlie celebrated her ninth birthday at Fatima House with chocolate cake and birthday candles. She is now in first grade and the Sisters report that she enjoys going to church, playing with other children, wearing new clothes, and dancing to any kind of music. Olga recently learned her daughter is not only still alive but walking, talking, and attending school! She now returns periodically to visit her daughter.

“Nerlie has a grateful and giving spirit,” said one of the sisters. “After her birthday dinner, she come to each sister and say thank you for my birthday party, and she saved cake for her teacher and her classmates at St. Antoine School. She is a great gift to the sisters, and to her classmates, and we learn a lot from her.”

CONSIDER A TAX-FREE DONATION TO PARTNERS IN PROGRESS-HAITI

Did you know that if you are age 70½ or older, there is a way to make a contribution of up to $100,000 directly from your traditional IRA to a qualified charity such as Partners in Progress-Haiti, without it being considered a taxable distribution? Find out how by consulting with your financial advisor. If you have questions, feel free to call PIP board member Joe Hoover at 412-829-1745.

Farmer-to-Farmer (continued)

economic opportunities are critical to giving young people a reason to stay in their communities. As farmers increase production, diversify, and develop value added products, they will be better positioned to compete in the market place and reduce dependence on food imports.

Agroecology has the potential to improve child nutrition and school sustainability as well through farm-to-school initiatives like the successful program managed by the Sisters of St. Antoine in Fondwa. St. Yves School recently launched a similar farm-to-school child nutrition program using agroecology farming practices.

Farmer-to-Farmer (continued)

Odelin Simeon of Papaye will begin training as an Agroecology Educator next year. The training will prepare Odelin to develop and facilitate adult learning activities.

“SHE IS A GREAT GIFT TO THE SISTERS, AND TO HER CLASSMATES, AND WE LEARN A LOT FROM HER.”
Sr. Claudette, Fatima House

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