

## SUCCESS STORY: FROM DIRE TO DARING, SHARING AND OPTIMISM

# FARMERS LEAD FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT

As they did during the pandemic and again after the 2021 earthquake, farmers of the Konbit Vanyan Kapab Agroecology Project are responding to crisis. In addition to preparing to provide food aid during this period of record hunger in Haiti, these farmers are leading a movement to rebuild food sovereignty.

### Catastrophic Hunger in Haiti

Fifty-five percent of all Haitians are in “Acute,” “Emergency,” or, for the first time ever in Haiti, “Catastrophe” phase hunger. This record level of food insecurity, while compounded by gang terror, has been centuries in the making. Past and present forms of colonialism have eroded traditional food systems to the point where over half the food consumed in Haiti now comes from imports.

The spiral of environmental degradation, loss of soil fertility and hunger is rooted in colonization. Sustainable agroecology knowledge and systems of Taino and African Indigenous peoples were displaced by extractive, plantation-style agriculture, ill-suited to Haiti’s climate and topography. Vast expanses of old growth forests were cleared for plantations. Once Haiti gained independence, it was forced to pay reparations to France, which it did through high interest loans. Further logging of precious hardwoods was used to help pay off the loans. The heavy debt burden prevented infrastructure investment that could have improved smallholder farmers (less than 2 hectares) livelihoods.

Trade policies and large development projects have tended to benefit foreign and elite interests at the expense of smallholder farmers. U.S. trade policies have made it nearly impossible for farmers to maintain stable livelihoods and have caused a steep decline in healthy traditional Haitian foods — entrenching dependency on unhealthy imports.

All of this has made Haiti extremely vulnerable to another injustice — climate change. The 2021 Global Climate Risk Index ranked Haiti as one of the countries most impacted by climate change from 2000 to 2019. Farmers report that more droughts and severe storm events have led to more frequent and widespread crop losses.

### Konbit Vanyan Kapab Agroecology Project

From a dire situation comes optimism. For over a decade, the Konbit Vanyan Kapab Agroecology Project (KVK) farmers have led some of the most important work on the planet – advancing Indigenous-based agroecology and revitalizing traditional food systems. They’re not only doing this vital work, they are sharing and expanding it.

The project was conceptualized by elders and farmers to revitalize nearly-lost traditions of working together and caring for the land as a way to increase access to traditional healthy foods, improve the environment, and create new market opportunities. The pivotal origin of this project began with elders from Deslandes and Gwayavye sharing knowledge of indigenous-based agroecology strategies with 93 farmers from Deslandes.

An inspired group of 64 farmers, organized in traditional work groups called konbits, began designing and testing agroecology strategies on three cooperative farms in Deslandes. The trials demonstrated that agroecology could not only more than double yield, but also greatly

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(Top) New KVK Farmer-to-Farmer participants (FAFSI) from Abriko, Abriyo, and Layaye, Haiti share farm designs as part of Agroecology Workshop. (Bottom left) FAFSI Farmers in soil exploration breakout activity at Agroecology Workshop. (Bottom right) Farmers from Payape and Hinche, with bags of cover crop seeds ready for distribution to FAFSI participants.

### AGROECOLOGY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Agroecology is a wholistic food system approach to agriculture that emphasizes the interconnectedness between people, plants, animals, and earth. It is concerned with increasing access to healthy traditional foods; improving biodiversity; restoring ecosystem harmony; building climate resilience; and advancing economic, political, and social equity and inclusion.

Agroecology is considered a regenerative form of agriculture because it mimics natural cycles and processes and can reverse climate change by storing carbon in the soil. Conventional agriculture, in contrast, is extractive, focused on yield and profit, and responsible for nearly one quarter of global greenhouse gas emissions. The agroecology strategies that have proven most successful in Haiti and Uganda draw extensively from the ecological knowledge and traditional food systems of Indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas.

The international peasant movement, La Via Campesina, defines food sovereignty as the “right of peoples to health and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” Exercising the right to food sovereignty means farmers and consumers of a community or nation are able to determine how and what kind of food is grown as well as to have control over market systems.

## ALUR SOIL KEEPERS LAUNCH SOIL MONITORING IN UGANDA



Soil Keepers analyze soil samples taken from FAFSI participant farms in Abindu and Zombo.

In November, young adults employed as “Soil Keepers” participated in a three-day soil quality monitoring training. This younger generation of trained Soil Keepers will work with FAFSI farmers to evaluate agroecology’s in five villages in Nebbi and Zombo districts in Uganda. Matthew Slaughter, CEO of Earthfort, a PIP partner based in Oregon, facilitated the training.

Using cutting-edge field lab technology, Soil Keepers will collect and analyze soil samples for levels of organic matter and biological diversity. Such data will give farmers a picture of the health of the microbiology and other life or “soil people” living in the soil. Soil people perform critical functions such as making nutrients available to plants, conserving moisture, and helping plants build resistance against disease and climate stress. This information will enable farmers to assess the impact of agroecology and to innovate.



# TREES EQUAL LIFE



(Left) Nine-year-old Olwormundu Kizito acknowledged for his tree planting at a gathering in his community of Zombo, Uganda.

(Center) Children starting trees for the tree nursery in Deslandes, Haiti.

(Right) Alur FAFSI farmers starting trees at the ORIW cooperative tree nursery in Nebbi, Uganda as part of their regular Tuesday tree nursery work day.

**T**welve communities in Haiti and five communities in Uganda are intensifying reforestation efforts, including use of trees in agroecology systems. In Uganda, community-based partner Oyera Rural Inclusion and Well-being (ORIW) organized 157 youth and adults in the planting of 12,467 trees in October. In Haiti, Konbit Vanyan Kapab farmers have been urging farmers in their communities to plant more trees.

“Trees are everything,” says Konbit farmer Wachim Mirabo. “Without trees there is no life.”

## This is the future

*“In Zombo, a little boy who saw our team distributing seedlings had the confidence to come closer to me and ask if he could also be given a tree. After thoughtfully choosing a Jackfruit seedling, he ran to his home across the road, and returned to invite me to come with him. Following him, I saw he had indeed already proudly planted it! This motivated more children who were also given seedlings to plant! Before my eyes, I truly saw the future!”*

John Baptist Oyera, Director, ORIW

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION FOR YOUNG ADULTS

**I**n July, the St. Yves School in Savanette Cabral launched a course in Information Technology for young adults. Instructors have been impressed with the eager learners in this new project which trains them in use and care of computers, and basic software applications. Classes take place during the summer and on weekends during the school year. They are designed to give young adults basic computer skills for academic and career pursuits.



Young adults in summer Information Technology class at St. Yves School

## FARMERS LEAD FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENT cont. from front

diversify the kinds of crops grown. Farmer Precile Clervoix, said back then: “You all know my father’s farm used to only grow millet and a little corn. Now I am able to grow beans, vegetables, and other crops I can take to market.”

Early on it became clear that agroecology also had real potential to restore ecosystem biodiversity and build climate resilience. Through thoughtful choice and use of trees, farmers have witnessed a significant increase in the diversity of the bird population. Farmers like Anslo Faustin also report that “Trees planted on my farm and lakou protect my crops and home and there is less damage from storms.”

### Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology for Food Sovereignty (FAFSI)

Seeing the results, more and more farmers and community organizations began requesting support to make the shift to agroecology. In 2018, KVK elders and farmers designed the Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology for Food Sovereignty Initiative (FAFSI). This initiative has since provided opportunities

and resources for farmers to explore and test agroecology and improve access to markets. Agroecology is now being practiced by 355 farmers across 17 communities in Haiti, and 5 communities in Uganda, and it is expanding.

### Farmer-led Response to Dire Hunger

KVK farmers are working to help FAFSI participants optimize next season’s production, and to expand FAFSI opportunities and production on Farm-to-School Child Nutrition farms. FAFSI farmers are now planting cover crops immediately after their fall harvest. This will build soil organic matter, fix nitrogen, and protect soil from erosion. Tree nursery activities, normally slow this time of year, are intensifying to ensure that new FAFSI farmers and Farm-to-School farms have an adequate supply of trees to integrate into their agroecology systems. The traditional healthy foods harvested through these efforts can be purchased by PIP and other NGO’s for distribution to needy communities. Buying local supports Haitian farmer livelihoods and



## ANNE MCCAFFERTY REMEMBERED— A TRUE “PARTNER IN PROGRESS”

Anne C. McCafferty, beloved board member of Partners in Progress, passed away on Nov. 5, 2022. Our sincerest sympathies go her husband John, sons Michael and Andre, and the rest of her family. A truly dedicated and generous “partner in progress,” who contributed her talent, confidence, and can-do positivity to everything she did, is how she will be remembered by her board and staff colleagues.

Anne studied political science at Duquesne University, served in Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in Chicago, and obtained an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh. At her local parish, she was an active supporter of Hearts for Haiti which raises awareness and funds for the teachers at St. Antoine School in Fondwa, Haiti, through Partners in Progress (PIP). Upon joining the Board of PIP, Anne’s work supported sustainable agriculture, quality educational opportunities, and access to nutrient-rich foods for residents of rural Haiti. Anne drafted policies to guide PIP in living out its mission and values in service to the people of rural Haiti. She always brought her experience, talent, confidence, and can-do positivity to everything she did.

Even after her passing, Anne’s commitment to the people in rural Haiti - especially its children - will continue as part of her life-giving legacy. Before her passing, Anne asked that her family direct donations in her memory to Hearts for Haiti at [www.piphaiti.org](http://www.piphaiti.org) or Partners in Progress Attn: Hearts for Haiti, PO Box 11278, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.

rural economies in the process.

FAFSI is expanding. This past summer, farmers from the communities of Abiko, Abryo, and Layaye were recruited and began the two-year initiative. By next spring, FAFSI will expand to 60 farmers from five additional communities. Farm-to-School farms (Paroisse Notre Dame d’Altagrace, Paroisse St. Yves, and Sisters of St. Antoine Farm) will also receive additional technical and material resources needed to expand the size of their agroecology farm plots.