



HAITI MISSION NEWSLETTER

Religious of Jesus and Mary

Spring 2021



SLASH-AND-BURN FIRE - accidentally scorches 30 acres in Perou

Slash-and-burn agriculture is a method of farming that involves cutting down all the vegetation and burning it. This clears the land for planting and the nutrient-rich ash improves the soil fertility. However, after a few years the soil is depleted and the field must be left to regrow slowly, while the farmer moves to a new area to slash-and-burn.

Here Aneus Saint Jusmar, an Agricultural Technician from Grepén Center, assesses the damage done to over 30 acres of gardens in Perou after a slash-and-burn fire got out of control and burned 1,835 trees!

Besides the danger of out-of-control burns, slash-and-burn agriculture can result in deforestation, nutrient loss, soil erosion, and a loss of biodiversity.

BUT, there are other farming methods and technologies being taught and promoted by the Grepén Center and projects of the RJM Haiti Mission.

This Haiti Mission Newsletter highlights vital rainwater harvesting projects, and the Seed Bank program spurred by irrigation from rainwater cisterns.

This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 55:1,10-11:

“Listen ... everyone who is thirsty! Come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ... the rain and snow come down from the heavens, and ... water the earth and make it bring forth and sprout, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater ...”

FERRO-CEMENT RAINWATER HARVESTING CISTERNS - Gros Morne

When the rains don't come at the right time, crops can die. But with rainwater harvesting using a cistern, there's irrigation water so crops can be watered at key times! Women's lives are improved because they no longer must spend hours traveling long distances to lug water home, no longer washing clothes in the not-too-clean river water, no longer worrying about having sufficient water to cook, wash and clean!

Ferro-cement construction technique uses reinforced mortar applied over a metal mesh resulting in a cistern that can be built relatively quickly, with good strength and which is resistant to impact, earthquake, fire and corrosion.

The ferro-cement technique is labor-intensive but can be learned fairly quickly, which allows people to supply their own labor for their projects.





Mercy Focus on Haiti obtained a grant, provided a coordinator, Alexandra “Alex” Fiefie, and identified engineers Johann Zimmermann and Jacquelyn Zoom (JZ Engineering, Harrisonburg, VA) who volunteered their expertise and time to teach this exciting new technology and certify Haitians to build rainwater cisterns or other ferro-cement structures. The masons built two cisterns, one 500-gallon and the other 1250-gallon, on site at the hen house using this new construction method. These nineteen local masons, who attended the five-day, hands-on workshop in constructing ferro-cement cisterns, are shown holding their graduation certificates.

The grant not only financed this extraordinary workshop, but is supporting these masons in building thirty or so more cisterns in different areas where farmer organizations are providing the rocks, sand, gravel, water and the movement of materials for a cistern to be built to harvest the rain.

- Sr. Pat Dillon RJM

COMMUNITY RESERVOIR - built on hill between Nan 18 and Cotton near Jean Rabel

When a large donation arrived from the Irish NGO, **HAVEN**, it was decided to invest it in a Water Project for one of the communities who suffer dreadfully from drought and have to travel long distances for water. However, when the necessary budget was drawn up, more funds were needed! **The Allegany Franciscan Ministries** and our other donors came to the rescue.

It was a joy to visit and see how this project has progressed over the last four months. Wicho Filor (in red), with his colleagues, Luc Placide (in blue) and Sanfleuris Fleurinor, in cooperation with Casek Riquet, have done marvelous work.

Sr. Valle Chías González-Blanch and I were led along the water route. A huge reservoir was built on the hill that spans the two communities of Nan 18 and Cotton. The reservoir holds enough water to service the five fountains built along the 4 kilometer stretch of pipe line, such as the fountain in the two photos below. At least a hundred people participated in manually transporting bags of cement up the hill in order to build the reservoir. They also dug the canals for the water pipes.



A pump was installed and housing built for the generator, pump and water purifiers. A committee is being formed to supervise and manage the flow of water, collect a small monthly fee from each household and hold community meetings to take care of the five fountains.

The overall health of each one in these two communities, that now have nearby water fountains, is bound to improve both physically and mentally. The women’s workload is lessened because they no longer walk hours to carry home

water that may not even be clean. People from outside their communities are coming to get water too, as many other areas have the same problem.



The people of Nan 18 and Cotton are so very grateful for this basic gift of water. They wave their hands in the air, smile, and after thanking God, they send heartfelt words of gratitude to all who have helped to make this project a reality. May Jesus and Mary bless you for your prayer and generosity.

- Sr. Rose Kelly, RJM



PLASTIC RAINWATER CISTERNS BEING INSTALLED - Gros Morne

A few years ago, **Mercy Focus on Haiti** financed twenty-eight 500-600 gallon rain water collection tanks in the Cressac neighborhood near the RJM house in Gros Morne. Now, thanks again to **Mercy Focus on Haiti**, 40 new plastic tanks like this one, are being installed around Gros Morne!

One of these plastic rainwater cistern tanks has been placed on the roof of Maison Bon Samaritan, a home for the elderly and disabled. Now the 18 residents and staff have water to wash their hands, use in cleaning, as well as running water in the kitchen!

Plastic cisterns are more expensive and not quite as durable as ferro-cement cisterns, but can be the best solution. Farmers receive information on both plastic and ferro-cement cisterns, so they can make an informed decision on the kind of rainwater harvesting cistern that best fits their space and needs.

- Sr. Pat Dillon RJM



SEED BANK PACKETS -in time for Spring Planting

Thanks to the Seed Bank at the Grepen Agronomy Center, farmers throughout the 8 communal sections of Gros Morne are taking advantage of quality seeds that the seed bank buys in bulk, then offers at low subsidized prices to farmers.

The agronomy team regularly holds trainings with those who are interested in planting gardens, but who maybe need a little help to kickstart this endeavor.

The training participants shown here hold seed packets with tomatoes, peppers, onions and swiss chard which they will use to start courtyard gardens. Then after each harvest, farmers must give the seed bank a portion of their harvest. This enables the seed bank to offer quality seeds to even more farmers, and expand after every harvest.

Despite the challenges of responding to the diversity of factors that impact the gardens in Gros Morne, the agronomy team puts many miles on their motos (motorcycles) to visit even the most remote gardens to offer advice and encouragement to the farmers who are perhaps planting a crop of sweet potatoes, yams, or black beans for the first time.

On the right, Grepen Agronomist Teligene Méléus (white shirt) works alongside participants to show them how to use old gallon jugs to make a small yard garden. The goal of these yard gardens, which can be planted in buckets, old tires, or any other vessel, is to both provide diversity to the family's basic diet and provide a new source of income from the excess crop that the family can sell in the market to raise their standard of living.

For more experienced farmers, the Grepen agronomy team offers land preparation and irrigation techniques which enable the farmers to increase their yields. This also results in high quality locally grown vegetables in the Gros Morne market. Larger farmers have been able to plant 3 crops of black beans with a single portion of seeds provided by the seed bank.



- Geri Lanham, with Mercy Beyond Borders and former year-long QUEST Volunteer

UPDATE ON SITUATION IN HAITI

By Srs. Middia Doute RJM, Josela Gil Navarro RJM and Farzana Philip RJM in the city of Port-au-Prince

Anguish and insecurity are paralyzing our lives and our country. We go from crisis to crisis. The situation is getting worse on a daily basis and fear lives in the hearts of all the people. Certain schools are forced to close their doors for the protection of the children. Spontaneous demonstrations fill the streets despite Covid-19.



On February 3, a few moments before the Mass Celebration for the first anniversary of the Haiti Mission's "Pas-A-Pas" (tutoring) Program, **armed bandits took over the streets!**

Despite the shots, three parents accompanied by their children, were able to join us safe and sound. Suddenly, a drenching rain started falling, and immediately the shots ceased and an unbelievable calm pervaded in the streets. Then surprisingly, more children, accompanied by their parents, teachers, staff and others arrived to praise God with us. Joyfully and with much emotion, we said together: "How good God is!"

By Geri Lanham, with Mercy Beyond Borders and former year-long QUEST volunteer
in the countryside town of Gros Morne

Haiti feels fragile. Multiple political and economic forces, some which are hidden and some which operate in plain sight of the public, are negatively impacting the lives of all Haitians who are struggling to live amidst a continuous uptick in insecurity. Gangs with various levels of structure and coordination roam the streets of Port-au-Prince wrecking havoc, even and especially in broad daylight. Kidnappings happen frequently, and they often seem to choose random victims. Roadblocks are a daily occurrence, both among the winding streets that snake up the mountain of the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince and along the national highways to the north and the south that connect the capital to the rest of the country.

This disruption of transportation sends shockwaves throughout the country. Merchants in the provincial cities cannot count on deliveries arriving on time, or intact, and so they increase prices in the local markets of the countryside. The exchange rate continues to rise. Children in the smaller cities fortunately take advantage of the lack of direct violence to continue their educational journey, but the majority of schools in Port-au-Prince and other major cities, from kindergarten all the way up to university, are able to function only intermittently. When they do function, there are days that students travel to or from school under flying bullets if they happen to mistakenly get caught up in some of the frequent gang violence.

President Jovenel Moïse maintains that he is the legitimate president of Haiti, but the opposition begs to differ and coordinates national days of protest. The international community continues to demand that Haiti hold elections in 2021 for all levels of government in order to, they hope, rectify the insecurity issues. An increasing number of Haitians are being deported from the United States to Haiti. These deportees are entering a very volatile country, which is very different from the country that they left or, in some cases, the country that they have never known.

NOTICE

The two QUEST service opportunities:

One-Month Volunteer as a Summer Camp Counselor at Kan Klodin

Yearlong Volunteer from September to August

ARE BOTH ON HAITUS due to Covid-19 and the volatility of the political situation in Haiti.



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