Haitians Raise Food Locally: Counters rising costs of imports

As he inspected his fields, Guy Cedieu, plantain farmer from Gwo Mon, could no longer deny the obvious. His crops had been struck by the dreaded Black Sigatoka fungus. As it became evident that the fungus had infected several fields, Cedieu, also the coordinator of the farmers’ cooperative AGPGM, called for an emergency meeting to discuss the problem. AGPGM members understood that they had to act quickly. The spread of Sigatoka had brought great distress to farming communities throughout the country, with plantain crops destroyed and farmers on the brink of financial disaster.

Once AGPGM members assessed the gravity of the situation, they agreed to approach the Lambi Fund of Haiti to explore solutions to their problem.

Black Sigatoka is a disease which has wreaked havoc throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation (FAO) reports published in 2006, Haiti’s plantain production has decreased significantly from 600,000 tons in 1981 to 300,000 in 1994. While some of the decrease has been attributed to failed agricultural policies, the rapid spread of this deadly fungus in the past 10 years has posed serious threats to the country’s ability to produce marketable crops of healthy bananas and plantains.

Plantains and bananas are staple foods that represent major dietary sources of carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins A, B6 and C, potassium, phosphorus and calcium. They are consumed for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They are boiled, fried and pounded into banana flour. “Plantains are just as important as rice to the Haitian diet” says Josette Perard, Lambi Fund’s Haiti Director, “For Haitians a meal is just not complete if it does not include boiled or fried green or ripe plantains”. She adds that when rice becomes unaffordable many turn to the plantain as the main source of carbohydrates.

AGPGM proposed that the Lambi Fund partner with them on a project to increase plantain production using the PIF method. Lambi Fund staff was very familiar with the Sigatoka crisis, having attended several seminars offered by an agronomist from Cameroon where the much lauded PIF method (Plants Issus de Fragments) had been developed.

The Lambi Fund and AGPGM agreed to create a center in Gwo Mon exclusively dedicated to the production of healthy, disease resistant plantain trees. The project would offer educational seminars to AGPGM farmers covering the PIF method and supply them with healthy plantain and banana trees. The Lambi Fund acquired a piece of land in Gwo Mon where they built a seed germinator and a nursery. Lambi Fund has also started construction of a Center

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for Plantain Propagation which will house a training center and provide office space for Lambi Fund field staff. The Center leased a neighboring field where plantain trees are planted and tested. More funds are needed to complete the construction of the Center for Plantain Propagation. If you want to make a difference helping local Haitians raise food sustainably, make a donation to complete the construction of the Center for Plantain Propagation.

The PIF Method

The PIF Method or the technique of “seedlings resulting from stem fragments” was developed in Cameroon to promote the rapid production of banana and plantain trees. This technique involves harvesting offshoots from healthy plantain trees, the activation of their latent buds and the quick production of large quantities of healthy seedlings in a germinator (a small warm greenhouse). The PIF method does not call for the addition of any hormones, chemicals or artificial fertilizers.

Plantain offshoots are taken from healthy trees, their central bud is distressed with several cuttings, placed in wood chips and left to incubate in a seed germinator for about 40 days. The PIF method makes it possible to produce 15-40 seedlings from one offshoot. Seedlings are then placed in a plastic bag and placed in the tree nursery. Once the seedlings have matured into young trees, they are either planted in the Center’s testing field or are distributed to neighboring farmers.

PIF Seminars

Multiple training seminars have been offered to local farmers to promote the PIF method. AGPGM members were the first to undergo the training and there is a waiting list of other community organizations who want to take the training. Participants are also encouraged to experiment with smaller “homemade” germinators to allow for flexibility and sustainability. An agronomist works at the Center to advise the farmers on cultivation.

Healthy trees

One of the major obstacles faced by the partnership involved securing healthy trees resistant to Sigatoka. The first batch of trees acquired from a private nursery did not work because the trees had the fungus. The Lambi Fund staff then secured a healthy disease resistant tree from the Organization for the Rehabilitation of the Environment (ORE). ORE focuses on the protection of the environment and is staffed by botanists and environmental scientist working arduously to produce disease resistant trees.

Impact

The project has had great impact on the region. The farmers who have been trained in the PIF method have been given healthy and disease resistant trees and have not had to endure the hardships of their less fortunate counterparts in the South and in the North. The Center has become a destination for individuals and organizations interested in the PIF method and its application. AGPGM members are now ready to train other farmers and have become extremely knowledgeable about plantain cultivation and plant diversity.

Center for Plantain Propagation - a best practices model

Haiti’s violent protests against the rising cost of basic food commodities have compelled government officials and international donors to reexamine the failed policies which have led to this crisis. As they articulate their visions for a revived agricultural sector, the Lambi Fund of Haiti’s Center for Plantain Propagation offers a successful model which supports and secures grassroots rural efforts to promote the production of healthy plantains.

The Lambi Fund’s objectives for the Center of Plantain Propagation include the completion of the center and the expansion of the training and tree distribution components to include farmers from local and regional organizations. Donate now to make a difference in the lives of Haitians who are trying to live locally and sustainably. *
Member Profile: Senterez Villefranc
Member Famn Tet Kole -NW (United Women of the North West)

Name: Senterez Villefranc
Age: 50
Occupation: Market Vendor
Family: Mother of 8 children

How long have you been a member of FTK-NW?
I joined because the name of the organization was very powerful to me. It was about women putting their heads together to make things happen. What I loved about the organization was that it offered me the opportunity for action and reflection. As members of FTK-KW we were challenged to be active and engaged, but we were also encouraged to think about our conditions, to talk about the root causes of our problems and to discuss strategies to improve our lives.

What have you learned from working on these projects?
Working on these projects has forced us to deal differently with each other. As members of a women’s organization, we have collaborated on many activities, protests, marches and meetings. As private citizens we run our own businesses, cultivate our fields and take care of our families. As Lambi Fund partners we have to work together to manage, build and sustain our projects. The work is collective and it takes special efforts to make it work. We are now working on water cisterns and the work is very demanding. As an organization, we had to contribute construction materials found locally. My job was to carry gravel to the spots where the water cisterns were going to be built. I worked really hard, and it was a great feeling that my labor was going to benefit the community in a very concrete and significant manner.

Lambi Fund Attains Highest Rating Again

Lambi Fund attained the highest rating from Charity Navigator for the second year in a row. The Four Star rating indicates that Lambi Fund excels in allocating and growing finances in the most fiscally responsible way possible, according to America’s largest independent evaluator of charities and NGO’s. This gives you confidence in knowing that most of your donation goes directly to programs in Haiti.
Organization Profile: Community, Water and Trees

The Organization for the Development of Rivye Blanch (ODEPERIB) was founded in October 2000. Today, it has 897 members and enjoys a strong reputation in the Artibonite Valley. The goals of the organization are to improve the economic situation of ODEPERIB members, provide assistance to members engaged in agricultural production and improve the health conditions of the population of Rivye Blanch. ODEPERIB members were extremely concerned about their community’s access to water, because they had become increasingly dependent on untreated drinking water from the nearby river. Water from the river placed all villagers, particularly its children, at risk. Polluted water can cause diseases such as diarrhea, which can be fatal in Haiti if left untreated. The organization decided to partner with the Lambi Fund on the construction of the 10 cisterns.

The project was launched with a day long meeting between Lambi Fund staff and ODEPERIB’s general membership. This meeting offered all involved the opportunity to review the plans and revise the strategies needed to coordinate construction of the cisterns and the reforestation efforts for the community. It was agreed that there would be two phases to the project, with 5 cisterns built in the first phase and five more during the second phase.

Management Committee
A project management committee was appointed. This committee’s role is to manage all phases of the project including the preparation of reports, fiscal management, procurement of construction materials and the coordination of volunteer activities.

Members of the management committee were invited to participate in a 3-day training workshop on fiscal management, project reporting, and construction management provided by the Lambi Fund. Once the training was completed, ODEPERIB’s leadership met jointly with Lambi Fund’s staff to discuss the project.

Training Seminars
In addition to the management workshop, ODEPERIB members also participated in other training. Women members attended Lambi Fund’s regional women’s leadership seminar, where they met with women from other community groups to discuss gender specific issues. The women returned from these workshops with a greater sense of empowerment. They have become more organized and have successfully challenged their male counterparts for the organization’s leadership. Currently more than half of the elected members ODEPERIB’s Executive Committee are women.

ODEPERIB members also participated in the environmental seminars, where they acquired much needed information about nursery construction, seedling production, organic farming and agroforestry.

Cistern Construction
The Lambi Fund disbursed funds to the Management Committee which in turn was responsible for the acquisition of construction materials, such as steel rods, gravel, cement etc. Additionally, the Management Committee organized multiple konbits (cooperative peasant work teams) to collect local building materials and to dig holes at designated sites. Many ODEPERIB members as well as residents volunteered with the work teams at different phases of construction. It took approximately six months to complete the first phase of the project. The second phase has now commenced.

Reforestation Project
The Lambi Fund of Haiti supports all partner organizations’ efforts to become more engaged in reforestation initiatives. The Lambi Fund offered training and resources needed to build nurseries, distribute seedlings and coordinate tree planting activities.

ODEPERIB members surveyed mountainous areas in Rivye Blanche to identify those in need of reforestation. They engaged their members in multiple work groups to plant seedlings in selected areas. Seedlings were also distributed to members and non-members who also planted them in their fields.

Project Impact
The project has had multiple impacts on the organization and on the community by:

- Building the organization’s capacity to manage construction projects
- Building members’ skills to prepare project reports, including narrative and financial
reports and record keeping

- Engaging more women in leadership roles and activities
- Providing community access to potable drinking water
- Involving the community in reforestation efforts
- Building a stronger community organization which enjoys support from members and non-members alike
- Creating local leadership seeking greater political representation and platforms for their community building agenda

Conclusion and Recommendation

The water cistern project is considered a total success on many levels. In addition to bringing safe drinking water to the community, it has given the community a great sense of project ownership. The reforestation project also provides members with the resources and the knowledge they needed to transform their community and address the area’s state of environmental degradation.

New Projects

Your Donation will help bring these projects to life.

Ox Plowing Service – the 36 members of ROJETAT-Federation of Organizations of Young Technicians of Taivant raise corn, peas, millet, peppers, and spinach. They plan to operate an ox plowing service to cultivate the land better and to generate income by renting out the services to other members of the community. Lambi Fund will purchase three plows, six oxen, tools and veterinary care. Lambi Fund will provide training on project management techniques, ox plow use and maintenance, and sustainable agriculture. Non-members will rent the service at full price and ROJETAT members will be able to rent to service at a 20% discount.

Seed Bank – The 500 members of AJPB - Association of Young Peasants from Belfonten want to improve the peas, corn, millet, and peanut crops with the establishment of a seed bank, which will provide farmers access to inexpensive seeds of good quality around the planting season. Lambi Fund will provide seeds, tools and training. AJPB will sell seeds at a cost that will be affordable to Belfonten’s farmers.

Center for Plantain Propagation - This is a groundbreaking project not only in size but also in quality. The Center will be a training space for community organizations for plantain cultivation using the cutting edge PIF method, as well as a source where healthy plantain trees can be purchased by local community groups. Lambi Fund is supplying the plantains, seed germinator, tree nursery, training and meeting space.

Quote from Roseme, a member of the organization:

“There are no words to describe how thankful we are for the cisterns, the tree nurseries and the women’s seminar we attended. We have to say “Thank you Lambi Fund, Thank You!” The benefits of the cisterns are priceless. They give us access to clean water, and we are no longer forced to get our drinking water straight from the river. The women from ODEPERIB have also benefited a lot. We attended Lambi Fund’s women seminar and learned a lot about our need to be heard and to be leaders in our organization. Some of the men felt threatened by the progress we made, but we are not going back to the way things were. We are proud to be women leaders of ODEPERIB!”
NEW BOARD MEMBERS
Lambi Fund welcomes two new board members:

Jay Schoenberger holds a B.S. from Vanderbilt University where he double majored in Human & Organizational Development and Spanish. He develops utility-scale wind energy farms throughout the Eastern United States for independent power producer, Invenergy LLC. Prior to Invenergy, he worked in business development for REC Solar, a California-based solar electricity integrator. Jay first became involved with the Lambi Fund when he and a classmate successfully founded and chaired a campus-wide fundraiser called “Fast for Hunger” aimed at raising both awareness and funds for Lambi Fund’s projects. At Vanderbilt, Jay served as president of Hillel, the Jewish student organization, and served on Hillel’s board the three previous years. While in college, he also studied in Santiago, Chile. Jay has a passion for the sustainable development that the Lambi Fund advances, development that is strategic, community driven, and continuously effective. Jay currently lives in Washington D.C.

Anouk Shambrook has a PhD in Astrophysics and is a Program Manager at the Insight Center for Community Economic Development. She manages a grants program and has created a network of experts across multiple fields working to close the racial wealth gap in the U.S. Anouk has researched and highlighted innovative asset programs to improve policies. While at ICCED, Anouk has been the primary author of a number of reports on saving and investment strategies to increase economic well-being and security. She currently serves on the Board of Building Diversity in Science and resides in Oakland, California.

Anouk Shambrook, Oakland, CA

Why the Lambi Fund of Haiti Works

The Lambi Fund of Haiti works because of its unique bottom-up collaborative approach that is different from the top-down approach of many charities. The Lambi Fund’s original, grassroots development model succeeds because it relies on Haitians themselves to determine the needs and the most effective solutions in each community. The Lambi Fund’s emphasis on democracy, a community’s actual needs, and peasant-led solutions ensures more successful outcomes.

As a result, we hear positive feedback from peasants. Here is a quote from a member of an organization that developed a community solution to economic sustainability: “This project has taught us how to protect our fields and the surrounding mountains so that we have more crops, cleaner water and less erosion in the future.” —Member of organization with sustainable agriculture project.

Our Programs
- Alternative sustainable development
- Environment
- Organizational and leadership training
- Community micro-credit
- Animal Husbandry

Our Principles
Lambi Fund supports peasant led community organizations in Haiti that promote:
- Non-violence
- Gender equity
- Self-sustainability
- Non-partisanship
- Grassroots democracy

Our Future
- Improved economic conditions
- Increased food availability
- Increase in potable water
- Improved environment
- Increased gender equity
- Improved democratic functioning

Travel to Haiti!
Join us on the next delegation to Haiti this fall. See firsthand some of the projects run by grassroots organizations partnering with Lambi Fund. Email us at info@lambifund.org to get a delegation application.
AWOZAM, an incredibly talented peasant musical group from Northwest Haiti, performs dynamic and politically engaging music. The lyrics are in Kreyol and call for everyone to pull together and work for empowerment of all. Even if you do not understand Kreyol, the music, vocals and drumming will get you moving! Go to http://www.lambifund.org/support_help.htm to order a CD for $23 ($20 for CD plus $3 shipping and handling). In the comments section, write “Purchase AWOZAM CD”.

by Nancy Felix

Why do I give to the Lambi Fund of Haiti? I give because I am wired to give. Growing up, my parents, who were much less blessed financially than I am today, gave every chance they got. The spirit of giving is something that is embedded in my genes and that I am trying to carry forward with my children.

I give personally because as an engineering manager for a major technology company, my family and I are blessed, and it’s important to share that blessing and give to those others who may be less fortunate and in need. I give because it’s the right thing to do. In this global economy we are all neighbors, and when we can, if we can, however we can, we should help one another. I give because as a successful Haitian American woman living in America, I feel that I have an obligation to help not only other Haitians, but anyone else who might be in need. In my eyes, Lambi Fund is one of the best ways to make a difference helping other Haitians become self-sufficient.

Check enclosed for $ ___________________

(make check payable to the Lambi Fund of Haiti)

I want to help grassroots organizations in Haiti on a regular basis.
I pledge to contribute $ _____ on a monthly/quarterly basis (circle one)

Please charge my (circle one):
Mastercard   Visa   AmEx

Card number Exp. Date

Signature   Today’s Date

Name: ___________________________________________
Address: ___________________________________________
City, State, Zip:___________________________________________
E-mail address: ___________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________________________

For more information about the Lambi Fund or to make an online donation, go to www.lambifund.org

Return to: Lambi Fund of Haiti, PO Box 18955, Washington DC 20036   Or email us at info@lambifund.org
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MISSION STATEMENT
The Lambi Fund’s mission is to assist the popular, democratic movement in Haiti. The Lambi Fund provides financial resources, training and technical assistance to peasant-led community organizations that promote the social and economic empowerment of the Haitian people.