Building an Equitable Haiti From the Grassroots Up

Annual 4-day Conference Convenes

By Sarah Leavitt

They traveled by dusty dirt roads, through the mountains, on the back of a moto-taxi, crammed into the back of a colorful tap-tap and many walked a good part of the journey. In all, 36 leaders of grassroots organizations arrived in Ennery, Haiti eager and excited - albeit a bit tired - but ready to begin their training. Nine partner organizations with the Lambi Fund of Haiti were present and the participants were young and old, male and female - 20 women and 16 men in all.

These grassroots leaders are Haiti’s hardworking farmers, enterprising female merchants and upcoming youth that are pouring their blood and sweat into changing Haiti for the better – and they came to attend Lambi Fund’s 2013 conference for the Artibonite region on civic education, gender equity and how to lead more democratic organizations.

Clearly, this was quite an ambitious agenda for just four days. So, early on September 9th, after sitting down for a communal meal of eggs, bananas, piping hot coffee and bread rolls, Lambi Fund’s facilitators got straight to work.

Civic Education & Human Rights:
Day one had the task of providing an introductory course on civic education in Haiti. This included a brief history on slavery, Haiti’s independence, and democracy today. Discussions of what it means to be a citizen, a citizen’s role in society and the rights of a citizen were all covered. For most, this was their first formal discussion about what it meant to be a citizen of Haiti and what rights and responsibilities accompany being a citizen. Voting and participating in Haiti’s democracy and advocating for certain changes in their community are all part of being an engaged citizen. There was a lot of talk about participating, speaking up when things are going wrong and being proud of Haiti and its flag.

Grassroots leaders discussing civic duty, gender equity and how to lead democratic organizations

Continued on Page 2

Insights From a Lambi Fund Field Monitor

Joseph “Tidjo” Dorsainvil is a Field Monitor for the Lambi Fund of Haiti in the Artibonite region of Haiti. For 15 years, he has been a passionate steward of Lambi Fund’s work. Here, Sarah Leavitt sat down with Tidjo to talk about his work, the organizations we partner with and the current state of Haiti.

What is your role within Lambi Fund?
The first thing that we [myself and the Program Directors] do is investigate the [potential] projects after organizations send the proposals to Lambi Fund. Second, I do follow-up and monitor the projects and support the organizations in their efforts so that the project can be successful.

What makes your work difficult?
My work is difficult because the projects are so spread out across the region and some of them are difficult to get to. Depending on the weather, rain and water block the road and if the roads aren’t good, we can’t get to where we need to go. Also, the political state of the country [makes things difficult] because a lot of times politics and different situations are going on that make it so that we cannot travel to where we need to go to do follow-up on projects.

Continued on Page 3
Addressing Gender Equity Head On

Part of this included discussing each person’s human and civil rights – the right to food, a home, safety, health and an education. An engaged young man and member of OPMO, emphatically stated, “This training is working us up so that we can go home and change things.” After discussing Haitians’ rights and responsibilities as citizens, another responded, “The development should come from us. Only this will happen when we step forward.” A woman from APEAG said, “Before this education, I didn’t know anything about these topics at all. Now I know much more and understand how we should strive to live and the type of life we can have and should be.”

Gender Equity: Next on the agenda was discussing the imbalance of men and women in society. By default, many participants assumed that their homes and organizations are models of equality, yet as the trainers delved deeper into what it means to have equality, several interesting topics arose. From the get-go, there was a consensus that women are just as good as men and that they should have the same rights. Once trainers explored this a bit more and teased out what equality means within the context of society, interesting discussions emerged.

For instance, there was a lot of discussion about the unfair burden of work that falls on a Haitian woman’s shoulders. She must cook, clean the house, fetch water, watch after the children, tend the fields, wash clothes, go to the mill to have their grains milled, and then find time to go to market to sell all the goods. Participants recognized that a man, however, will come home, say he is hungry and demand that dinner be ready. He never offers to help with the meal if she is overwhelmed with work that is “woman’s work.” Many laughed at the thought of a man helping his wife prepare a meal, but when it was shared that women often eat the remaining scraps in another room or forgo meals altogether to feed their husbands and boys, many nodded as they acknowledged the unspoken practice. Throughout Haiti, women face much higher rates of malnutrition. One woman from APEAG was especially inspired with this discussion. She stated, “Before this training, I didn’t know what gender equity was. I used to hear people talk about it, but I never quite understood what they meant. Now I know that it’s not about just holding the organizations to this standard. Although I have more boys than girls, four boys and one girl, I used to put all the weight of the chores on my girl and me. She had to carry the water, help with cooking and cleaning and now I know I can spread out the chores more evenly.”

Solange Michelle from OPMO declared, “From now on, when I cook for my husband, I’m going to make two plates – one for me and one for him. I’m not going to eat scraps out of the bowl in the corner anymore… and if there aren’t two pieces we both won’t eat or we’ll share.”

The discussion then moved past the home to discuss women’s place in society – the clothes they are expected to wear, how their hair should look, the tendency to send boys to school over girls, and how women are represented in society. Clearly these are diverse topics with deeply embedded social undertones, yet most participants agreed that women should look, act, and behave in a way that is “feminine,” while males are expected to be “strong” and “brave.” One of the older men in the group said, “Women are taking big and

Continued from Page 1

The workshop facilitators continued from Page 1

changes you have seen in a community as a result of a partnership with Lambi Fund?
I would say APS. It was a grain mill project and one of the first projects that Lambi Fund worked on. If you look at it up until now, over 14 years or so, you can look at their bookkeeping and their records are flawless. Even though we don’t actively work with them anymore and we don’t monitor them anymore, they still stay right on top of their game and still do everything so flawlessly.

They’ve advanced so much and have used them to benefit the organization. APS even bought a truck [with their profits] to transport the women back and forth to sell their grains. The mill motor at one point broke down. They didn’t wait for help to get another motor. They were able to get another motor to replace the one that was broken.

What would you say, in your opinion, are the current priorities of what Lambi Fund should be working on today?
Right now, I think that there are three projects that are very important to the [Haitian] peasants. The first or number one most important, are the agricultural projects. The grain mills, irrigation pumps to get water, the plantain and coffee farms, and anything that has to do with agriculture is most important for providing food for the peasants. The next one I would say is the animal husbandry projects. Haitians do not have a lot of means to take care of animals themselves. Those animal husbandry projects are very important because it provides members with a way to make a little bit of money to send their children to school and to feed their families. The last priority I would say are the credit and community credit. This allows the female merchants to not only

Continued on Page 4

Member Profile

Naldia Odes
Association of Women for Action in Gwomon, AFAGM

I am the coordinator of AFAGM, a women’s association in the Gwomon area that fights against all sources of discrimination against women and that strives for their advancement on social and economic levels.

We were founded in 2007 and have 250 members. [Our partnership with Lambi Fund came about after] we looked at the needs of the women in our community and decided to propose a community credit fund project.

While this project has not helped me personally, it has helped the organization and many of our members. This is a women’s organization and within it, there are different branches and a lot of them did not have the means or opportunity to conduct their business.

Thanks to the project with Lambi Fund, these women received loans which allowed them to get on their feet and purchase merchandise to sell and to make their businesses move forward. Also, we have seen a growth in the number of members thanks to this partnership.

My hope for the AFAGM is to see more women join the organization and become members and for more women to actually gain professions and to have the means to operate their own businesses, so that they can operate firmly on their own.

I had the opportunity to attend Lambi Fund’s Gender Equity and Civic Education training and I would say that the gender equity training was great. This is what we work on in our association, so it was important to get this reinforcement.

The civic education [was important] as well. Seeing and learning about our past heroes, our history, what we have been through and what makes us what we are as a nation today, was very interesting and important. This brought everything back home, so to say.

Continued on Page 5

Conference attendees participating in a breakout session

The workshop facilitators

because that is “woman’s work.”

[Before this training,] I didn’t know what gender equity was. I used to hear people talk about it, but I never quite understood what they meant.

…………………important posts [in society and the government] and this is something we need to continue to work on for the next 5, 10, 55, years so that we see more of this.

By no means does Lambi Fund think that the few days set aside to discuss the imbalance of women in society will radically transform or magically create communities throughout Haiti that are equitable for both men and women, but one can be certain that seeds of change were planted and some social norms that had never before been questioned are now being

Working Hands-On with Partners

Can you tell me a story about a certain organization or project that was having problems getting off the ground and what was done to help them along?
There was an organization named AFKB (the Association of Peasants of Katô Bayone). They had a grain mill project. It was a strong organization, but it didn’t quite meet all of Lambi Fund’s criteria.

Instead of it being an organization, it was more of a cooperative. Yet because the project was a good project and it was a strong project to support, even though it took us a while, we took the time to work with the organization and to form it as an organization. It took us a lot of time to do that, to restructure AFKB and to provide training so that they could become a strong organization.

Can you clarify what the difference between an organization and a cooperative would be?
An organization is a group of people in a specific area that looks at all of their problems and carries them on their back. They try to address all of the community’s issues - they look at social, political, economic and all other types of issues in a community might suffer from and try to address them. A cooperative’s primary goal, on the other hand, is the economic component. What is one of the most rewarding projects you’ve worked on and one of the biggest

The last priority I would say are the credit and community credit. This allows the female merchants to not only

Continued on Page 4

Member Profile

Naldia Odes
Association of Women for Action in Gwomon, AFAGM

I am the coordinator of AFAGM, a women’s association in the Gwomon area that fights against all sources of discrimination against women and that strives for their advancement on social and economic levels.

We were founded in 2007 and have 250 members. [Our partnership with Lambi Fund came about after] we looked at the needs of the women in our community and decided to propose a community credit fund project.

While this project has not helped me personally, it has helped the organization and many of our members. This is a women’s organization and within it, there are different branches and a lot of them did not have the means or opportunity to conduct their business.

Thanks to the project with Lambi Fund, these women received loans which allowed them to get on their feet and purchase merchandise to sell and to make their businesses move forward. Also, we have seen a growth in the number of members thanks to this partnership.

My hope for the AFAGM is to see more women join the organization and become members and for more women to actually gain professions and to have the means to operate their own businesses, so that they can operate firmly on their own.

I had the opportunity to attend Lambi Fund’s Gender Equity and Civic Education training and I would say that the gender equity training was great. This is what we work on in our association, so it was important to get this reinforcement.

The civic education [was important] as well. Seeing and learning about our past heroes, our history, what we have been through and what makes us what we are as a nation today, was very interesting and important. This brought everything back home, so to say.
**Making Deep Impacts**

Continued from Page 3

get beat over the head by the bigger organizations or bigger financial institutions when they need to borrow money. It helps them to continue on with their work, to continue on with their sales and merchandising, and to make some profits so that they can continue to make a better life for themselves. Is there a story that you feel shows an impact that we don’t necessarily think of when we talk about our projects?

I would say the sugarcane mills. These are very important because before, it used to be animals that farmers would use to break down the sugarcane. The time that they used to spend overnight, husbands and wives boiling the syrup and going through the whole process to transform it into syrup, they didn’t want to spend. Things that used to take five days to do can now be done in a couple hours’ time. This is something that we don’t really see on a regular basis. Another thing with the sugarcane mills that people don’t necessarily realize is the safety aspect. With ACHVRO and the benefits they have explained, is when it used to be late and it took so much time to use the wooden mills, when they were feeding the cane into the machines, sometimes if they were too tired their fingers would get caught. Once their fingers got caught, their arm would go right into it. So, it has only diminished the amount of time that people would spend [making syrup], it is also a much safer way to go and it has lowered the number of accidents. Members also make more money and in making more money, they can plant more and produce more sugarcane. Of course, this making more money does not only help their pockets, but it helps their organization to fund other projects that they may need to [or want to do] in the future. I am hoping that you can try and clarify something. A lot of people see Lambi Fund’s projects and think it is as simple as buying a goat or building a grain mill, but there is an essential part of our work where an organization is required. Can you talk about why this is the case?

What is good about working with organizations and what is important, is that organizations are a group of people that have gotten together and are already members of a group. They have already identified what their issues are and what their solutions could be.

Most of the time, organizations just don’t have the technical or financial capacity to make these projects a reality. So, by the time organizations come to Lambi Fund, they’re really just asking for that financial backing and technical support. Of course, we throw into this, monitoring and follow-up as well. Working with groups makes it easier to follow-up and see what the results of the project are too. If we were just to fund individuals who made a request for money, after that person gets their money and they don’t know how they have got to do, they’ll probably never see that person again. There is no follow-up. There is no way for us to test the feasibility, to test the potential success a project might have.

Can you talk about what makes Lambi Fund different from big NGOs’?

The difference or the main difference, between Lambi Fund and the larger NGO’s is that the large non-profits come in and identify what they think the problems are and decide in what way they will intervene. They might look and say, this person needs a house – we’ll build a house. Or they might look and say this region needs water, let us find a source of water and give them some clean water. But Lambi Fund doesn’t work that way. It is the people in a community that identify and prioritize their problems. [NGOs] come to do something that they decide is for the good of the people, but it might not be the highest priority for that community.

The difference with Lambi Fund is that the organizations have identified their own problems and have come to us. We are not just stepping in and intervening and saying that this is what we think the problem is, because half the time what NGO’s think the problem is, isn’t the bigger problem for that person or community.

Any last comments?

Within the way that Lambi Fund works as well, and another important aspect of organizations coming up with the projects and identifying their problems, is the fact that members do the work themselves. They have identified the problem, and while Lambi Fund accompanies the organizations in reaching their goals, they are the ones that execute it – it is not Lambi Fund that does the work. The people know that they are the ones who grow the blood and sweat into it… and they have a vested interest in assuring that the project is completed and that it succeeds.

**Working Through the Ups and Downs**

Continued from Page 2

The Partnership for Change in Ravin Olyann

The 89 members of the Partnership for Change in Ravin Olyann (ACHVRO), partnered with the Lambi Fund of Haiti in 2011 to build a sugarcane mill in their community. This mill is now fully operational and has been providing farmers in the area with an affordable and high-quality option for transforming their sugarcane into the more lucrative product, syrup. As with most of Lambi Fund’s projects, ACHVRO has encountered many ups and downs throughout the launch and implementation of this project. By and large, ACHVRO members and farmers in the area report being satisfied with the opening of the mill. It has greatly lessened the burden of having to process syrup at home by hand (which requires days of work) and they no longer have to travel long distances to visit other mills.

One difficulty ACHVRO encountered early on was when heavy rainfall hit in the fourth quarter. It destroyed a sizeable portion of sugarcane crops in the area and left the mill idle often. Finally, many customers complained that they were not able to process their cane when they needed to due to a combination of long lines and a lack of staff at the facility. These struggles exemplify why Lambi Fund continues its partnership with organizations long after the mill has opened or the project has launched. Working through issues that arise and learning how to run the mill as effectively and efficiently as possible is part of the learning process. Like all new businesses, members of ACHVRO have had to learn what works and does not work for its business model.

For Lambi Fund, being there to provide support and offer reflections is an essential part of working to strengthen the day-to-day functioning of the project and to ensuring it remains operational for the long-term.

Vita, one of the trainers, taught participants new songs and showed them the grassroot leaders how to educate and share certain topics through animation. In addition, a great deal of time was spent covering what makes a leader democratic and what makes a leader authoritarian. In that same regard, members shared what kind of practices within organizations actively include and exclude its members.

Both the trainers and participants also reflected on what made the training a truly inclusive and democratic organization and they shared with one another how to lead meetings that are efficient and productive. It is hoped, that as a result of this training, these participants who are leaders of organizations in their communities will return home with a newfound sense of motivation. Beyond acquiring some tools and techniques for making their organizations stronger, hopefully, these leaders will relay some of the concepts discussed.

Quite possibly they will become advocates for certain rights and issues in their communities, use the network of leaders they met at the training as resources and allies and maybe, just maybe, these grassroot organizations will begin to see the strength in working collectively and in valuing each person as an equal. Here’s to the next chapter in Haiti.

**Final Project Update:**

The Partnership for Change in Ravin Olyann

The 89 members of the Partnership for Change in Ravin Olyann (ACHVRO), partnered with the Lambi Fund of Haiti in 2011 to build a sugarcane mill in their community. This mill is now fully operational and has been providing farmers in the area with an affordable and high-quality option for transforming their sugarcane into the more lucrative product, syrup. As with most of Lambi Fund’s projects, ACHVRO has encountered many ups and downs throughout the launch and implementation of this project. By and large, ACHVRO members and farmers in the area report being satisfied with the opening of the mill. It has greatly lessened the burden of having to process syrup at home by hand (which requires days of work) and they no longer have to travel long distances to visit other mills.

One difficulty ACHVRO encountered early on was when heavy rainfall produced bagasse (the fibrous byproduct of milled sugarcane that is used to fuel the mill) that was too wet to use. Then, not enough pans were purchased to make enough syrup. It is hoped, that as a result of this training, these participants who are leaders of organizations in their communities will return home with a newfound sense of motivation. Beyond acquiring some tools and techniques for making their organizations stronger, hopefully, these leaders will relay some of the concepts discussed.

Quite possibly they will become advocates for certain rights and issues in their communities, use the network of leaders they met at the training as resources and allies and maybe, just maybe, these grassroot organizations will begin to see the strength in working collectively and in valuing each person as an equal. Here’s to the next chapter in Haiti.

**Members of ACHVRO operating the mill**

ACHVRO is actively working to solve issues that are depressing its ability to meet the demand for market services - such as procuring three more pans to enable a larger amount of syrup production.

In another instance, the organization’s leadership purchased a plot of land using mill profits to increase sugarcane production following Hurricane Sandy. There were some problems in this, however, because this was not done in consultation with all of its members. As a result, Lambi Fund staff discussed with ACHVRO how this was not a democratic way to make decisions. Members agreed and have been working to include the entire membership of ACHVRO on large decisions such as this.

Fortunately, the land purchase has continued due to its benefits.

**Farmers caring for their crops**

**Continued from Page 2**

The Partnership for Change in Ravin Olyann

The 89 members of the Partnership for Change in Ravin Olyann (ACHVRO), partnered with the Lambi Fund of Haiti in 2011 to build a sugarcane mill in their community. This mill is now fully operational and has been providing farmers in the area with an affordable and high-quality option for transforming their sugarcane into the more lucrative product, syrup. As with most of Lambi Fund’s projects, ACHVRO has encountered many ups and downs throughout the launch and implementation of this project. By and large, ACHVRO members and farmers in the area report being satisfied with the opening of the mill. It has greatly lessened the burden of having to process syrup at home by hand (which requires days of work) and they no longer have to travel long distances to visit other mills.

One difficulty ACHVRO encountered early on was when heavy rainfall produced bagasse (the fibrous byproduct of milled sugarcane that is used to fuel the mill) that was too wet to use. Then, not enough pans were purchased to make enough syrup. It is hoped, that as a result of this training, these participants who are leaders of organizations in their communities will return home with a newfound sense of motivation. Beyond acquiring some tools and techniques for making their organizations stronger, hopefully, these leaders will relay some of the concepts discussed.

 Quite possibly they will become advocates for certain rights and issues in their communities, use the network of leaders they met at the training as resources and allies and maybe, just maybe, these grassroot organizations will begin to see the strength in working collectively and in valuing each person as an equal. Here’s to the next chapter in Haiti.

**Members of ACHVRO operating the mill**

ACHVRO is actively working to solve issues that are depressing its ability to meet the demand for market services - such as procuring three more pans to enable a larger amount of syrup production.

In another instance, the organization’s leadership purchased a plot of land using mill profits to increase sugarcane production following Hurricane Sandy. There were some problems in this, however, because this was not done in consultation with all of its members. As a result, Lambi Fund staff discussed with ACHVRO how this was not a democratic way to make decisions. Members agreed and have been working to include the entire membership of ACHVRO on large decisions such as this.

Fortunately, the land purchase has continued due to its benefits.
New Staff Member Joins the Lambi Fund Team

The Lambi Fund of Haiti is very happy to announce a new member has joined the team – Mr. Franck Sylvain!

Mr. Sylvain is an agronomist who has worked throughout Haiti for over 20 years with grassroots organizations and in support of sustainable local development. He will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating Lambi Fund’s projects – which will be a great asset in trying to determine the impacts and outcomes made for each program.

Franck Sylvain, who is Haitian born and speaks Kreyol, comes to Lambi Fund with a great deal of experience. Most notably, he worked in the Office of Development of the Artibonite Valley in agricultural research where he also supported farmers’ associations.

He oversaw the recruitment and training at the National Association of Agro-Haitian Professionals for environmental education and grain storage activities. In addition, Mr. Sylvain worked for over 10 years in Helvetas, Haiti with grassroots organizations in support of the collective management of natural resources and sustainable local development.

The Lambi Fund family could not be more excited about the promising work that lies ahead and would like to wish Mr. Franck Sylvain a very warm welcome. Bienvenue!

In Solidarity

The Lambi Fund of Haiti has long received support from MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger and Share Our Strength. For years, they have been steadfast partners in Lambi Fund’s work.

Unfortunately, because of recent changes to each of these organizations’ grantmaking strategies, Lambi Fund recently learned that we will no longer be eligible to receive funding from them. While this is tough news, we are proud to count them among our historic allies in the fight for social and economic justice in Haiti. From everyone at Lambi Fund - thank you for walking side-by-side with the Haitian people for so many years!

Despite current uncertainties and shifts in funding priorities, Lambi Fund is fortunate to have you, a group of generous and conscientious individual donors in the US and other parts of the globe, who have always been a significant source of funding for our partners in Haiti.

We thank you for your sustained support as we navigate these difficult times. Together, we will continue to empower grassroots organizations in Haiti to fight poverty in their communities. ☑

In The News

Online at www.lambifund.org/news.shtml

Keep Up With Lambi Fund News

I want to make a difference for a rural Haitian community!

- [ ] Check enclosed for $ (make check payable to the Lambi Fund of Haiti)
- [ ] I would like to make this donation on a monthly basis.
- [ ] I would like information on how to include the Lambi Fund in my estate plans.
- [ ] Please charge my (circle one) for $

Mastercard    Visa    AmEx

Card number     Exp. Date

Signature     Today’s Date

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

Return to: Lambi Fund of Haiti, 1050 Connecticut Ave. NW, 10th Floor Washington DC 20036    Or email us at info@lambifund.org

Why I Give

By Johanna Gaspard

The Lambi Fund of Haiti is not merely another foundation that assists impoverished Haitians by building a home or providing food and water. Although that is helpful, this does not allow for the people to achieve self-sufficiency. With the initiatives that Lambi Fund presents - individuals, communities, and prayerfully, the entire nation will one day be able to sustain itself through its own efforts. Lambi Fund is about empowerment. Knowing this, the decision to support the organization is simple.

I grew up surrounded by people who love to give, support, and see others thrive. So, I suppose I inherited these attributes. My thought was, “If just $25 equates to a significant contribution to an aspiring Haitian entrepreneur, then why not?” It is the least I can do... Most of us spend that on a week’s worth of coffee anyhow. And after all, I myself am Haitian! ☑
Lambi Fund’s mission is to assist the popular, democratic movement in Haiti. 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.

CONTACT INFO
Lambi Fund of Haiti
1050 Connecticut Ave. NW
10th Floor
Washington DC 20036
202-772-2372
info@lambifund.org
www.lambifund.org