PROGRESS AMID THE CHAOS:
Lambi Fund Responds to the Earthquake Disaster in Haiti

By Leonie Hermantin and Sarah Leavitt

On January 12 the ground shook. It trembled like never before. In just a few horrifying moments, a massive earthquake destroyed Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital, and major provincial cities like Jacmel, Léogâne, and Petit-Goâve. The world watched in horror as the toll on human life unfolded. Never before, declared UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, has a natural disaster been so devastating.

The Presidential Palace crumbled, UN headquarters was destroyed, building after building collapsed like pancakes.

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After the earthquake, more than a half million people fled Port au Prince and relocated to rural areas.
How Improving Domestic Agricultural Production in Haiti Could Turn Around Many of the Country's Key Problems

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The age of Haiti’s citizens who remain farmers span from 60.5% (UN, 2006) to 80% (the figure used by peasant groups).

Despite that, food imports currently constitute 57% of what Haitians consume (World Bank, 2008). It didn’t used to be that way; policy choices made it so. In the 1980s, the U.S. and international financial institutions pressured Haiti to lower tariffs on food imports, leading to a flood of cheap food with which Haitian farmers could not compete. At the same time, U.S.A.I.D. and others pressured Haiti to orient its production toward export, leaving farmers vulnerable to shifting costs of sugar and coffee on the world market.

Because of the poor state of their production and marketing as well as the lack of basic services, 88% of the rural population lives in poverty, 67% in extreme poverty (UNDP, 2004). Things have grown worse for them since the 2008 hurricane season, when four storms battered Haiti in three weeks, destroying more than 70% of agriculture and most rural roads, bridges, and other infrastructure needed for production and marketing. At least during the earthquake, only one farming area, around Jacmel, was badly damaged.

There is a direct relationship between the state of agriculture and the earthquake’s high toll in deaths, injuries, and homelessness. The quake was so destructive because more than three million people were jammed into a city meant for populations of 200,000 to 250,000-most were living in extremely precarious and overcrowded housing.

This is partly due to the demise of peasant agriculture over the past three decades, which has forced small producers to move to the capital to enter the ranks of sweatshop and informal sectors.

If reinforced, agriculture could help feed the nation, which is currently suffering a dire food crisis.

It is also due, in part, to the fact that government services effectively do not exist for those in the countryside. ID cards, universities, specialized health care, and much else is available exclusively, or almost exclusively, in what Haitians call the Republic of Port-au-Prince, forcing many to visit or live there to meet their needs.

“It’s not houses which will rebuild

In our Spring 2009 newsletter, we wrote about the launch of a grain mill project in Gilgo, a town in the South province of Haiti.

Now a mature project, its continued development illustrates the important relationship between the Lambi Fund of Haiti and community organizations. Lambi Fund’s relationship with the God is All Powerful Organization of Gilgo (ODTPG) actually began several years ago with an ox plowing project, where the Lambi Fund helped ODTPG replace hoes and shovels with oxen and plows.

Thanks to the oxen, community members in Gilgo were able to produce far more rice. As rice production grew, so did the need for milling. Gilgo residents had been taking the four to six hour walk to the nearest rice mill when they came to the Lambi Fund for support in erecting their own.

The Lambi Fund assessed the request, and when the project was deemed feasible, a new partnership was born. Once the land was bought, the building for the mill was built, the mill was installed, the training was completed, and ODTPG opened the doors to its mill. They charged fair market rates for their service, and community members flocked to the mill in its initial months.

Once the season for milling rice had passed, however, business fell sharply. The members of ODTPG met to consider ways to increase business, ultimately deciding to buy a corn mill as well.

Because corn and rice are milled at different times throughout the year, having both a corn and rice mill has allowed ODTPG to maintain a steady source of income year round, and provided the community with both services locally. Local solutions for local problems.

See AGRICULTURE on Page 6
For the last hour, I have heard the hardened sound of the rain against the metal roof of a pool house that has been my home for the last few days.

I traveled to Haiti with a medical team consisting of two doctors, a public health manager and a nurse. We all came to Haiti in the aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince and its surrounding communities with a common purpose: to serve those in need.

As the President of the Lambi Fund’s Board of Directors, I came to visit and assess the growing needs of our rural partners.

In light of what I witnessed in Port-au-Prince and Leogane, it did not feel appropriate for me to seek the comfort of a hotel. It would have been extremely difficult for me to reconcile the images forever seared in my psyche with the banality of cable television offered to foreign travelers. As I traveled to the North and to the South, I did not want to watch network news reports as I processed the images of Haiti’s new realities.

I am grateful to those who welcomed me and offered me a home, a much better one than the flimsy tents erected in makeshift refugee camps.

Our hosts’ five bedroom house was totally damaged and rendered uninhabitable by the earthquake, so they removed doors and mattresses, and placed them by the pool house for night use.

This is where we all laid side by side after each exhausting day, huddled together, horrified by what we had witnessed, but steeled in our resolve to honor the spirit of our people’s resiliency.

While I was grateful to be so well received, I could not stop thinking about the people I had met.

What are those women of the tents doing right now in the middle of the night while the rain progresses and their make-shift shelters become waterlogged?

I found some solace in witnessing what happens when communities organize.

her toes in the tattered sandals she was wearing?

I cannot yet sleep nor can I be grateful for the relief efforts. No, I cannot feel grateful amid the pain. I am wondering if this man in Mon Laza did the right thing. Having lost seven members of his immediate family he poisoned himself to join them, so he said. Who gave him hope at any point of his journey?

As I visited rural campsites on behalf of the Lambi Fund of Haiti, I found some solace in witnessing what happens when communities organize. We attended a meeting in Kan Peren, where I heard the voices of Haitian men and women, peasants and farmers who had become overnight the care givers of thousands of stranded friends and relatives.

They met first to share with us the training we have received from Lambi Fund’s work saying, “The Lambi Fund of Haiti gives great support to our organization, and helps us build the skills that we need to solve our own problems. I really appreciate the training we have received from Lambi Fund for the past six years. They have helped us increase our knowledge about the project and about our role in society.”

What will happen to the woman with the baby under the coconut hut covered with sheets?

What about this young man who was supposed to be on the flight that was canceled today? Without his legs, who will move him from the tent to a secure place with his meds and a pillow to support the stump?

And this woman with both legs burned, will she be high enough from the floor to avoid mud getting between her toes in the tattered sandals she was wearing?

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Claurène Belony is a member of the Peasant Association of Gwomon (AGPGM) in the Artibonite. AGPGM members are farmers and the organization is made up of many smaller grassroots organizations.

Claurène attended the Gender Equity Workshops offered for her organization. In addition, the organization has provided a leadership role in Lambi Fund’s Center for Plantain Propagation (CPP) program and trainings.

Claurène lives in Saint Cecile, close to Gwomon in the Artibonite, and has been a member of AGPGM for 15 years. She lives with her partner and has 8 children: 4 girls and 4 boys. She did not have the opportunity to go to school.

Claurène joined AGPGM to work with others to address some of the problems in the community, and she is a member of the AGPGM Management Committee.

Thanks to support from AGPGM, she states, “We have a clearer understanding about the problems which touch our lives, and understand that it is only by joining forces that we will conquer them. I know that with AGPGM I am better equipped to improve my children’s lives and to have an impact on my country.”

Claurène appreciates and believes in Lambi Fund’s work saying, “The Lambi Fund of Haiti gives great support to our organization, and helps us build the skills that we need to solve our own problems. I really appreciate the training we have received from Lambi Fund for the past six years. They have helped us increase our knowledge about the project and about our role in society.”

See REFLECTIONS, Page 6
Unbelievably, 250,000 residences were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable. The horrible stench of death lurked in the city for weeks afterwards. Over 200,000 people were killed. More than 150,000 individuals injured and left to live life as amputees. In the blink of an eye, nearly 2 million Haitians were rendered homeless.

Responding to such a catastrophe has not been easy. Through the rubble, roads were impossible to navigate and trying to coordinate the influx of international donor agencies was declared a logistical nightmare. Earthquake survivors left with no homes, no food, and no jobs quickly realized that aid distribution would be slow and unreliable.

Thus over 500,000 affected residents caught the first bus they could find to live with family members and friends in the rural provinces of Haiti.

This massive migration of internally displaced persons has wreaked havoc on already impoverished rural communities, where the average person still survives on less than $2 a day. Some rural populations (so much as) doubled overnight.

Keeping with the Haitian tradition of peasant solidarity, rural communities have been quick to take in quake survivors and have shared with them everything they have. The 80-year-old mother of the field monitor for Fon Lanbi Pou Ayiti has taken in 39 people in her small house.

Christiane Adrien, a street vendor, and her husband Ilson, a farmer, took in 18 members of her extended family. “If it were for the money, we would never have done it.”

They, along with thousands of peasants throughout Haiti have spent what little they have on clean water, medical supplies, clothing, bags of rice, and cans of beans for their new neighbors. Peasants have slaughtered precious cows to bring meat to patients at local hospitals.

Christiane continues, “We did this because we wanted them to have a life. If God saved the life of some people from a catastrophe of that size, it’s so that we can protect the life of others. People have to live; you have to receive them.”

It is here, through fellow Haitians and local grassroots networks that earthquake survivors are receiving the aid that they so desperately need. Resources are tight, but the spirit of sharing stays strong.

**LAMBI FUND OF HAITI RELIEF EFFORTS**

Clearly, the earthquake has touched each and every Lambi Fund of Haiti staff member who along with their fellow citizens sustained damages and suffered personal losses. In spite of these hardships, Lambi Fund staff members sprang into action to help address the urgent needs of 43 rural communities impacted greatly by the massive exodus out of the capital.

In collaboration with our grassroots partners, Lambi Fund convened regional assemblies of local peasants to define immediate needs and prioritize rebuilding efforts.

In the first phase, Lambi Fund focused on the delivery of food and other essentials to rural communities to meet the immediate needs of earthquake survivors who had resettled to these communities.

With the help of regional committees and other partners, the Lambi Fund was able to distribute the following:

**Done (wired $712k)**

- Grants to 22 grassroots groups in Artibonite, which has received over 162,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Port au Prince - to buy clothes, food, meds, and other essentials and infuse the local economy
- Cash disbursements to cover losses of Fon Lanbi Pou Ayiti staff members in Port au Prince
- Grants to two grassroots women’s groups in Port au Prince who lost everything in the quake - to buy clothes, food, meds, and other essentials and infuse the local economy
- Grants to four grassroots groups in the Northwest, which has received over 45,000 IDPs - to buy clothes, food, meds, and other essentials and infuse the local economy
- Grants to 17 grassroots groups in the South, which has received over 25,000 IDPs - to buy clothes, food, meds, and other essentials and infuse the local economy
- Distributed medications (value $8K, donated by UUSC) to hospital in Gwomon
- Distributed tents and basic supplies to 17 grassroots groups in South (donated by Hope for Haiti)
- Grants to 42 peasant organizations for Farmers Credit Funds so that 1,260 farmers in the Artibonite, South, West and Northwest departments can plant increased crops to feed themselves and IDPs with locally grown food.

Next steps in rebuilding Haiti include focusing on sustaining and strengthening development in rural areas including:

**Mid and long term ($1M)**

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**Mid and long term ($1M)**
...And Advocating for Haiti in the U.S.

- Increase micro-enterprises with additional community microcredit funds
- Increase organic, locally-grown food and clean water with expanded sustainable agriculture, reforestation and water access projects
- Increase livelihoods with expanded sustainable development projects, such as pig and goat breeding, grain mills and sugar cane mills
- Build 880 latrines to prevent spread of disease and increase sanitation in rural areas, as a result of rapidly growing population from IDPs
- Distribute 100 wheelchairs to the large number of amputees whose limbs were crushed in the earthquake.
- Expand women’s programs to address the special needs of women (who are more vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual assault in tent cities but several organized women’s groups are standing up for the rights of women and children)

**ADVOCACY EFFORTS**

Supporting Policy Advocacy to express the voice of the Haitian people in rebuilding Haiti will be an important component of long-term rebuilding plans. Lambi Fund is committed to taking a leadership role in advocacy by speaking out on behalf of rural communities, by creating strong partnerships with a coalition of like-minded groups working together to rebuild Haiti, and by supporting

the needs of women, particularly within the context of the rebuilding effort now underway. As foreign corporations and governments jockey for rebuilding contracts, the Haitian voice has been neglected. This cannot continue; the voice of the majority must be heard.

In order to incorporate Haitians and their perspectives, Lambi Fund has developed a five point plan for prioritizing rebuilding in Haiti:

1. **National sovereignty.** The ownership of rebuilding Haiti must come from the Haitian people. Real change must come from the majority poor. Not from politicians. Not from the elite. And not from foreign governments. Haitians must be the change agents through participatory democracy.

2. **Decentralization.** The migration of over 500,000 earthquake survivors from the rubble of Port-au-Prince to rural Haiti offers the opportunity to create a decentralized infrastructure that can lead to regional centers for economic development, better roads, public education, health care, social services and access to potable water and sanitation.

3. **Stimulate local economy.** The earthquake offers a unique opportunity for the international community to work in partnership with Haitian peasant groups to increase our capacity to feed the country and support the local economy.

4. **Rebuild Haiti right.** In addition to true land reform, Port au Prince and other damaged towns must be rebuilt with disaster resistant building codes that are rigorously monitored. Rebuilding must be done by Haitians, who are desperately in need of a boost in fair and equitable employment opportunities.

5. **Environment must be at the center of restoring Haiti.** Deforestation represents one of the greatest threats to Haiti’s food security. Restoration of the environment is crucial to sustaining a functioning economy and productive agricultural sector, providing sufficient employment, and recreating natural buffers against inevitable environmental challenges, which include climate change.

Lambi Fund recognizes the critical role that will be played by women and farmers in the rebuilding of Haiti, and will continue to advocate for their inclusion in the creation of a plan and a new vision for Haiti. 

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Lambi Fund Responds To Women's Needs In Port au Prince

Recovering from the earthquake is particularly difficult for women in Haiti. Thousands have been relegated to tent cities in Port-au-Prince, using sheets and scrap wood as makeshift shelters. Under these harsh circumstances, women are more vulnerable to rape and violence, while the struggle to secure food for their families is never-ending.

Recognizing this immense need, The Lambi Fund of Haiti has partnered with two women’s groups in Port-au-Prince to help ease the plight of women who are struggling to survive after the earthquake.

In the short term, Lambi Fund is providing emergency food and supplies to group members of FAMAB (The Organization of Brave Women) and KOFAVIV, (Coordination of Women Victims of Violence). While in the long run, Lambi Fund will help these organizations rebuild their programs, who lost nearly everything in the earthquake.

FAMAB focuses on providing micro-credit to poor women so that they can start their own small businesses. Most members are merchants with business enterprises in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods like Bel Air and Cite Soleil.

FAMAB lost many members, homes, and small businesses in the earthquake- leaving the organization with virtually no capacity to help its surviving members.

Following the earthquake, Lambi Fund staff visited members of FAMAB and saw the terrible conditions under which they were living. Members

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Lambi Fund Staffer Attends White House Meeting on Haiti

Early in March of this year, the Lambi Fund of Haiti’s Deputy Director, Leonie Hermantin, was invited to the White House to hear statements given by U.S. President Barack Obama and Haitian President Rene Preval.

One of President Preval’s focus areas was the importance of strengthening the rural infrastructure of Haiti, which has been at the core of the Lambi Fund’s work from the beginning. President Preval proposed the decentralization of Haiti, and discussed the importance of restoring Haiti’s environment.

President Obama pledged the United States’ long-term solidarity and support in rebuilding efforts in Haiti.

Lambi Fund Board President Urges Women’s Voice Be Included In Rebuilding Plans

Lambi Fund Board President Marie Marthe St. Cyr spoke on March 31 at a gathering of grassroots organizations in New York.

This meeting was at the same time the Haitian government, the United Nations and members of the international donor community gathered at the United Nations, to commit pledges of support to Haiti’s reconstruction efforts.

Thanks To Everyone For Your Support Since the Earthquake

It would be impossible to list all of those who have stepped up to support the Lambi Fund of Haiti’s response to the earthquake in Haiti.

The outpouring of solidarity since the earthquake – from those who have supported us for years to those who have just found us – has been truly inspiring.

From concerts to plays to wine tastings to ping pong tournaments, our supporters have shown incredible ingenuity in their efforts to help the people of Haiti.

For all those who have taken part in supporting our work, we can’t begin to thank you enough!

Agriculture, cont’d from Page 2

Haiti, it’s investing in the agriculture sector,” says Rosnel Jean-Baptiste of Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan Ayisyen (Heads Together Small Peasant Farmers of Haiti).

Those interviewed for this article, including dozens of peasant farmers from five organizations as well as economists and development experts, agree that the current moment offers opportunities for secure employment for the majority, rural development, diminished hunger, and resettlement with employment of those displaced from earthquake-hit areas.

If reinforced, agriculture could help feed the nation, which is currently suffering a dire food crisis. More than 2.4 million Haitians are estimated to be food-insecure. Acute malnutrition among children under the age 5 is 9% and chronic malnutrition for that age group is 24% (World Food Programme, 2010).

Agriculture could also offer a solution for the hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people now residing in rural areas. In interviews with dozens of Port-au-Prince residents who are taking refuge in the provinces, most say they would stay there if they could find a way to sustain themselves.

If they could be given the land and resources necessary to begin farming, they would not need to return to city sweatshops, with their lack of living wage, job security, or health or safety protections.

By investing in agriculture, and strengthening the very foundation of Haiti, Port-au-Prince could become a livable city, without its overcrowded and inhumane conditions, without more than eight out of ten people residing in slums (as suggested by UN Human Settlements Program reports).

Beverly Bell is one of the founding members of the Lambi Fund of Haiti.

Reflections, cont’d from Page 3

Fact that many young refugees had no access to the institutions of higher learning they had been attending in Port-au-Prince.

In addition to explaining the depth of their problems, our peasant partners also offered viable solutions, proffering emergency relief strategies to lay the foundation for more sustainable communities.

In the midst of my despair, I was so inspired by our partners’ clear articulation of their needs and the formulation of their strategies for relief and recovery.

It became clear to me that the reconstruction of our beloved Haiti must include the voice of all its people.

I was moved that in spite of this cataclysmic occurrence Haitians will continue to demand their right to education, health care, and a government that represents them and their needs…needs that they define every day in their own words.
Why I Give

By Jamie and Nicole Odzer

We are sisters who live in Miami. A few months ago, we had an idea: we wanted to help the earth and people at the same time, but being only in middle school we were unsure how we could help.

After doing some searching on the internet, we discovered Lambi Fund’s project to plant trees in Haiti. It was perfect!

Our bat mitzvah was quickly approaching and it's customary to do a mitzvah project - some sort of good deed, as part of the process.

After setting up the fundraising page, we set a goal of raising $5,000 and started emailing all of our friends and every adult on our bat mitzvah invitation list. We sent solicitations out on January 9th- just three days before the earthquake.

Of course, after seeing the devastation of the earthquake on television we were heartbroken. Immediately, we re-wrote our email solicitation and sent it out again.

The response was tremendous, and by the time of our bat mitzvah ceremony on February 13th, we had nearly reached our goal- raising more than $4,000!

Once we each make our own contributions, the total will be closer to $6,000. At our bat mitzvah ceremony we mentioned the Lambi Fund of Haiti in our speech to the nearly 300 guests, and the web address of our fund was included in the program handed out to every guest.

We, Jamie and Nicole, feel tremendously proud to be able to help Haiti. The entire experience has been truly humbling, and the thought that our work may actually help some people live better lives is truly a blessing.

How Two Students Took Action for Haiti

By Jamie and Nicole Odzer

were staying in a refugee camp located in an old airport, and they had difficulty accessing even basic things like shelter, food, and water.

In spite of these abysmal living conditions, members continue to meet every Saturday to analyze their situation and work in solidarity with one another.

The other women's group, KOFA-VIV provides services to women who have been victims of sexual abuse and other forms of violence. These women are also working hard to prevent newly orphaned children from becoming child slaves.

Every single member in KOFA-VIV lost their homes and are now living in the crowded camps of Port-au-Prince. Their downtown office was destroyed and several members did not make it through the earthquake alive.

All projects that were started before the earthquake have been destroyed or disrupted: a safe center for women and children who were victims of violence, a health center, mental health counseling, and a place to help children.

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