

Centre D'Intervention Jeunesse Deslandes, Artibonite

Toronto
December 4, 2008

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Dear Friend of CIJ,

As you can imagine, Deslandes and the surrounding communities have been hard hit by the economic crisis and storm events experienced in Haiti this past year. The Centre d'Intervention Jeunesse (CIJ), with support of its many friends and partners, is leading the response to these recent challenges and is more determined than ever to realize their long-term vision of sustainable development.



Deslandes

On behalf of the CIJ board, I wish to thank everyone who has supported us this past year and provide a brief update of CIJ's major initiatives. I would also like to invite your continued partnership with CIJ and the community of Deslandes in working to create a more sustainable future.

During the last few years we have struggled to both keep our school open and feed our 450 school children. Dramatic increases of 60% or more in the cost of staple foods (rice, beans, corn, and cooking oil.) in the last year have pushed many rural families in the region to starvation. A succession of hurricanes to hit Haiti this fall, has uprooted fruit trees, destroyed crops, drowned hundreds of livestock, and further degraded soil resources. It is estimated that 80% of the fall crops were lost in Deslandes. Community leaders and farmers are anticipating famine conditions in Deslandes and surrounding communities by the winter of 2009.



Despite the severity and urgency of these challenges, we are moving towards the next steps of the Deslandes vision: construction of a school using sustainable building methods, a soil conservation and food security initiative based out of the CIJ farm, and a micro credit lending program.

First, we want to give a special thank you to three women—the mothers of CIJ—who have unconditionally supported the idea and philosophy of CIJ from the beginning: Mable Settlage, Dorothy Herrera Settlage and Sylvie Charest. Thank you very much for your continuing unconditional help and trust. The confidence you have shown since the beginning of this adventure has brought confidence to the CIJ Board and the Community in our capacity to move forward. The realizations of the last decade may seem like an overnight success. However, it has taken patience, perseverance and unity in order to get where we are today. By uniting ideas for change with the experience and energy of the Deslandes Community Elders, we are moving forward holistically.

Below we update you on the major accomplishments of the Community through its partnership with CIJ:

The CIJ School Construction Project

Open since the early 1990's, the CIJ School has become the largest school in the village of 8,000 inhabitants. The School also produces the best regional results for National Exams; 95% of its graduates achieve the Country's official exams. School fees amount to US\$28 per year per child. About 50% of children attending are subsidized due to their parent's lack of ability to pay. In light of the fall 2008 hurricanes and the devastation caused to individual properties and farms, about 20% of children have not registered for the current school year.



The CIJ School is made up of dedicated teachers, children that are more than willing to learn and parents who are devoted for their children to learn.



The school has received recorders and guitars. Unfortunately, the children do not benefit from these in an organized manner since the school does not yet have the means to hire a music teacher.



The CIJ School has the best sports program of the area. Two coaches help children with running and general physical exercises. Thanks to Ms Janet Laughton-Mackay and Ms Christine Croucher, soccer is thriving at the school with 4 teams (3 for boys and one for girls).

The School building has not been the priority up to now. However, this is changing. CIJ is advocating for a School building that is modern, adapted to the local environment and made with materials found locally.

As such, members of the Community went to Mexico to learn to make earth blocks and use them for the construction of buildings. They studied at The Tierra y Cal Institute that has expertise in the fabrication of earth blocks and the construction of buildings (in Mexico and Africa) using this eco-friendly material. Since then, Radiant Life Plus Ministries, Partners in Progress, and Mr. Michael Neumann facilitated the purchase and transportation of a mobile compressed earth block machine (Multi-Mould Manual Press—Auram Press). This machine is now in the Community.



The Tierra y Cal Institute has committed to transfer technology to the CIJ team and to train trainers in Deslandes for the benefit of the larger community.

At the local level, the next steps are to make blocks, test them for their resistance to the local conditions and start the construction of the School building!



Foreign-based schools in Haiti do not teach children to be proud of their heritage and history. The CIJ School which is locally based, decided after discussions with the larger Community, to remedy the situation. After years of research and preparation, children from the School together with teachers and administrators visited various Haitian historical sites over a one-week period last summer, during which various vignettes were filmed. “Nou la Toujou”—We are still there—is a movie that is based on these vignettes, supplemented by historical facts relating the Haitian history. The movie will be released later on in 2008. Mabie Settlage and I produced the film. The Deslandes children who were part of this trip have learned about their history and literally have become proud ambassadors for their history. This is quite an accomplishment. It is believed that through a broad release of the film in Haiti, many more children and adults will renew with their pride in their country history. It is also hoped that the film will be a source of much-needed funds in the short term.

Deslandes Soil Conservation and Food Security Initiative

Elders, farmers, CIJ board members and volunteers are completing preparation and planning for a four year initiative that will support farmer led innovation in soil management aimed at rebuilding soil resources while increasing availability of nutritious food and promoting economic development in rural Haiti.



Various indigenous-based soil conservation methods—including integration of native trees and shrubs and traditional food crops—will be tested on trial plots located in three different villages. The success of soil conservation methods will be measured by analyzing soil fertility, yield and nutritional value of food produced, and economic opportunities created from value-added food and forest products.

The initiative is a global collaborative effort coordinated by the Centre d’Intervention Jeunesse, a local grassroots organization in Deslandes and Partners in Progress (PIP), a Pennsylvania based non-profit with 14 years experience promoting sustainable development in Haiti. Other local, regional and international groups will partner, contributing technical, organizational and other resources based on the evolution of the project and as determined by farmers.

Key components of the project include: 1) participatory project planning; 2) farmer designed and managed trials of indigenous-based soil conservation; 3) annual peasant farming conference; 4) multi-purpose endemic tree and shrub nurseries; 5) experiential learning opportunities in environmental science for primary school students; and 6) continuous research and innovation. The impact of soil conservation methods will be

measured by analyzing soil fertility, yield and nutritional value of foods grown, and economic opportunities created from value-added food and forest products.

The next step is a workshop scheduled for March 2009 at which konbit farmers will receive training in soil analysis and determine soil conservation methods and tree and food crop species for trial plots.

The CIJ Farm

A piece of land has been leased and farmed since 2002. Proceeds from the cash crops are the only sustainable local source of funds and the means by which the teachers are paid. Over the years, a variety of crops have been experimented with in order to optimize the field. Thanks to a water pump donated by Unlimited Master Peace in 2006, the land farmed has been expanded, experimentations have increased and land productivity has improved.



2008 was going to be a very productive year, after many tryouts combining various crops (including corn, eggplant, bananas, cassava, peanuts, sweet potatoes and various varieties of peas). The numerous hurricanes of the fall of 2008 have completely destroyed the farm. This means we need to start over again.

Since the farm is a source of funds and a source of food for the Community, in response to the devastation, CIJ and the Counsel of Elders decided to start an agro-reforestation program with the following goals:

- Plant fast-growing crops as a stop gap measure to feed the community on a short term basis;
- Replenish endangered species in order to restore balance in the environment;
- Accelerate nursery planting in order to increase tree planting and slow down erosion.



In order to speed-up the execution of this agro-reforestation program, 3 agricultural technicians and 1 agronomist are needed.

The CIJ Farm has also been a catalyst for a seed sharing program with farmers all around. Due to the devastating hurricanes this program is now on hold.

Micro Credit

Very recently, CIJ received a substantial donation from a long-standing supporter. Initially, the idea was to use the funds to feed the children three times a week for a duration of 3 months, in light of the very difficult conditions brought about by the recent hurricanes. Instead, the CIJ team and the Counsel of Elders have decided to use the funds for long-term sustainability. Indeed, the funds are being used to support the women's cooperative in Deslandes (AKOFA—Aksyon Koze Fam¹) through micro lending. This will enable better and more effective commerce by women, benefiting the community at large, for some time to come. The legal entity has been created; the lending rules for micro credit are being developed.

All these initiatives could not have happened without the involvement of the Community Elders, the WAW cooperative, the farmers (kombit), the parents, the children, the CIJ team and the numerous supporters (through funds, ideas, counsel, etc), including you. Over the last decade, CIJ has worked hand in hand with the grass root organizations in the Village. This has fostered the development of comprehensive and efficient local community projects, enabling us to engage and motivate villagers towards sustainable local improvements affecting their lives. Together, we can be credited with the above-noted accomplishments. Again, thank you for your support.

We ask for your continued support of funds or expertise to help us move forward initiatives that will promote sustainable development, reduce vulnerability to crisis of rural peoples, and build capacity of rural peoples to affect change.

We have a critical need for funding to support:

- 1) CIJ School Feeding Program,
- 2) CIJ Construction Project – Materials and supplies for construction of the foundation
- 3) Deslandes Soil Conservation and Food Security Initiative – Tree seedlings and seed for tree nurseries and expenses for March 2009 workshop.

From now on, we ask that any person or organization that wants to support CIJ financially should do it exclusively through one of the following organizations:

- In Canada: through Radiant Life Plus Ministries,
c/o Dr. Helen E. Norris,
18 Deerfield Road, Scarborough, Ontario
Canada, M1K 4W9
norrisb@radiantlifeplus.org
Charity Registration 832233548 RR0001

¹ Aksyon Koze Fam can be translated as “Women’s Actions Work” or WAW.

CIJ 2008 Update

- In the USA: through Partners in Progress,
c/o Mr. Michael Neumann
329 Fairfield Street, Ligonier, PA 15658
info@PIPHaiti.org
Tax ID #: 25-2896636

Please be kind enough to advise your contacts of the above-noted change. For more information, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Neumann, the consultant to the Board or myself.

With warmest regards and best wishes for the holiday season,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Osprival Descommes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "O" and "D".

Osprival Descommes