

THE PRICE OF FAILED STEWARDSHIP

INTRODUCTION:

The human face of environmental stress is often lost in the maze of numbers and statistics used to describe development. In the real world, human needs and environmental stress are problems confronted by real people in real places. In this jigsaw activity, students will read accounts of people dealing with the daily struggle of survival in Haiti, a small Caribbean country only two hours away from the United States by airplane. Drawing on a variety of resources, they will develop a profile of Haiti and assess the ways in which basic human needs are being met.

Grade Level:

8-12

Time Required:

One to two class periods

Standards Addressed:

Geography standards

14.

Knows and understands how human actions modify the physical environment

Science standards

F, grades 5-8

Populations, resources, and environments and Science and technology in society

F, grades 9-12

Natural resources, Environmental quality, and Science and technology in local, national, and global challenges

Skills:

This learning activity requires students to:

- ask geographic questions
- acquire geographic information
- organize geographic information
- analyze geographic information
- answer geographic questions

Vocabulary/Concepts:

basic needs, foreign assistance, nongovernmental agency (NGO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Objectives:

As a result of completing this learning activity, students will:

- relate basic needs concepts to a case study.
- develop a basic needs profile of a country.
- work collaboratively to analyze problems of meeting basic human needs.
- identify sources of assistance in addressing human needs.
- consider shared responsibility for meeting human needs.

Materials:

- Copies of readings on Haiti:
 “Real Lives: Haiti”
 “The Women Water Masters of Haiti”
 “What Hope for Haiti”
 “In Haiti, Reforestation...”
- Copies of Handout 1, “Basic Needs Profile of Haiti”
- *World Population and the Environment Data Sheet*
- Almanacs
- Copies of Handout 2, “Foreign Assistance in Haiti”

THE LEARNING ACTIVITY:

Background:

Haiti is among the world’s poorest countries. Its poverty is both a result and cause of the environmental degradation that has left the Haitian people unable to meet their basic human needs. Haiti is a prime example of the consequences of failed environmental stewardship, and as such may be a harbinger of the future of other countries that fail to care for the environment as they attempt to meet the needs of their people.

THE PRICE OF FAILED STEWARDSHIP *continued*

As is pointed out in "What Hope for Haiti," solutions ultimately must lie within the Haitian people. But at the same time, Haiti must also be helped from outside. The international community must accept some responsibility for the welfare of all people not only for humanitarian reasons, but also because at least some of the environmental problems facing countries such as Haiti are the result of resource exploitation that has fueled development in the industrial countries. Foreign assistance takes many different forms, (1) country-to-country unilateral aid, (2) multilateral aid channeled through international development agencies like the United Nations and (3) programs sponsored by various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). No single agency is likely to be able to meet such needs alone; it takes the combined efforts of many groups.

Foreign assistance benefits those who receive it as well as the countries who provide it. Aid money often circulates throughout the global economy as goods and services are purchased to bring assistance to the target country. Furthermore, helping people meet their basic needs means that these people are less likely to become economic or ecological refugees fleeing to other countries.

Preparing for the Activity:

Divide the class into four groups. **As homework**, assign each group one of the four readings on Haiti. Each member of the group will need a copy of the group's assigned article. Have students read their article, marking or highlighting indicators of unmet human needs or of environmental stress.

Introducing the Activity:

Call students' attention to the eight maps posted from Lesson 2, "Mapping Human Stress." Point out the frequency with which Haiti appears on these maps. Ask students if this is what they would expect, based on the homework readings.

Executing the Activity:

1. Divide the class into groups, making sure that each reading is represented by at least one student. Provide each group with a copy of the chart, "Basic Needs Profile of Haiti"; *World Population and the Environment Data Sheets*; and an almanac. (The only variable not included in the readings or data sheet is the literacy rate. If an almanac is not readily available, the teacher should provide students with the literacy rate, which is 53 percent.)
2. Instruct each group to draw on information from the *World Population and the Environment Data Sheet*, the almanac, and the articles they have read to complete a profile of Haiti's basic needs.
3. When the profiles have been completed, ask students how they think Haiti measures up against countries such as the United States. If time permits, have students review the definitions of the various indicators on the profile to determine global benchmarks that have been set by various groups, e.g., by 2000, child mortality should be no higher than 70/1000.
4. Now provide each group with a copy of the chart, "Foreign Assistance in Haiti." Direct students to use the articles read for homework to complete the chart, identifying examples of unmet human needs and environmental stress, aid projects, and sources of aid. In the final column, students should indicate who is/should be responsible for the problems facing Haiti.

Concluding the Activity:

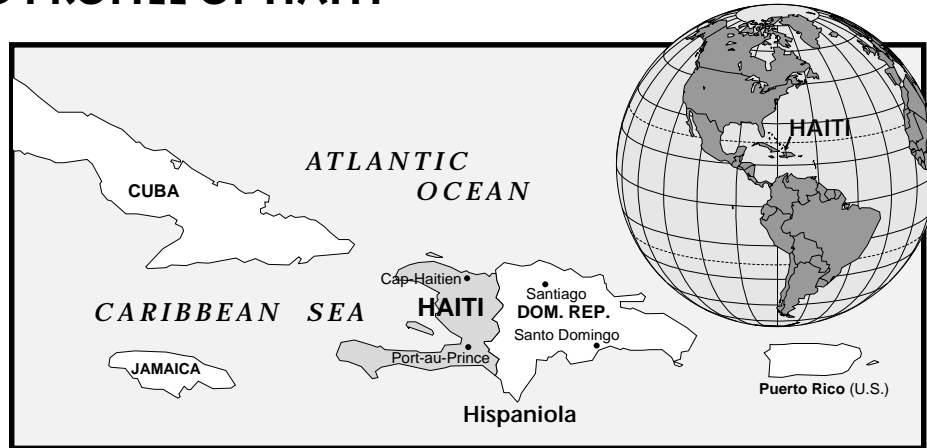
On the chalkboard write the heading "responsibility." In separate columns, write the words "individual," "family," "country," and "international community." Encourage students to expand their thinking beyond Haiti and discuss the many different levels of responsibility for addressing the problems of meeting basic human needs.

Extensions & Variations

1. To allow country comparison, students could make a series of "Basic Needs Profiles," including countries representing a variety of development levels.
2. The format of the activity could be used as the basis to study human needs in a different country for which the teacher has appropriate materials.
3. To incorporate math skills, students could use information in the *World Population and the Environment Data Sheet* and in the data sheet notes to prepare graphs comparing Haiti with other countries and with the global benchmarks for the various indicators of human needs.

CASE STUDY 1, HANDOUT 1

BASIC NEEDS PROFILE OF HAITI



Demographics

Population: _____

Natural Increase (%): _____

Projected Population (2025): _____

Education

Literacy Rate: _____

Economy

GNP per Capita Adjusted for PPP: _____

Health

Children <5 underweight (%): _____

Child Mortality rate (/000): _____

Access to Safe Water (%): _____

Access to Sanitation (%): _____

Environment

Water Availability (/capita), 1990: _____

Water Availability (/capita), 2025: _____

Cropland Availability (/capita), 1990: _____

Cropland Availability (/capita), 2025: _____

Forest Cover (%), 15th Century: _____

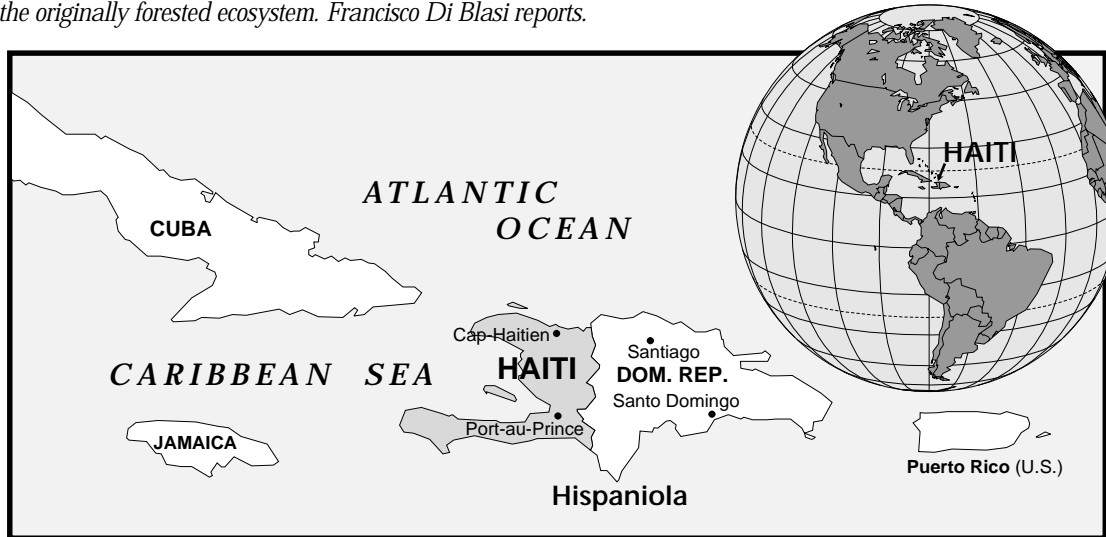
Forest Cover (%), 20th Century: _____

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN HAITI

What are the problems?	What is being done?	Who is helping?	Who is responsible?

WHAT HOPE FOR HAITI?

Reading 1 December 6th, 1992 marks the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing on an island he named Hispaniola. Its indigenous inhabitants, no more than 300,000 at the time, called it *Haiti*—the mountainous land. Columbus's landing should also be remembered as the starting point for the process of environmental degradation of the originally forested ecosystem. Francisco Di Blasi reports.



Until the Conquest, the natives of Hispaniola lived in harmony with their environment. Since their cultivation patterns were oriented to meet sustenance needs they did not exhaust the soil. But as European domination became established, cultivation became specialized and exploitative of both natural and human resources. Disease and malnutrition, added to the hardship of forced labour, drove the natives to virtual extinction and paved the way for the importation of African slaves.

When the French took the western third of Hispaniola, they carved out Saint-Domingue, a true gem among all the colonies in the world. By 1789, the colony accounted for one-third of France's foreign trade and produced one-third of all the sugar consumed in what was considered the civilized world. The seeds of freedom planted during the Age of Enlightenment produced the French Revolution and also inspired the revolt of 500,000 blacks and 30,000 freemen of colour against 28,000 French colonials in Haiti.

In 1804, Haiti (from the Amerindian *Ayiti*, meaning 'land of high mountains'), the first nation of self-liberated slaves in the history of mankind, was born. There is no doubt that Haiti's complex contemporary developmental and environmental issues are unique and deeply rooted in its past. Its problems can hardly be blamed on the majority of its 6.4 million inhabit-

ants. But, as a well-known politician admits, the few privileged Haitians who have dominated politics since 1804 have not been taking care of the country at all.

Since the fall of Baby Doc Duvalier in February 1986, Haiti has acquired a new profile in the international media. Most recently, world attention has focused on its abject poverty, the boat people, deforestation, total environmental degradation, civil liberty abuses, and the struggle for democracy, all of which exist in this small country less than two hours away from the United States.

Some of the issues have been presented as if they were the sole reason for the emigration of Haitians not only to the United States, Canada, and France, but to all the other islands of the Caribbean basin as well. In reality, net population growth, despite death, hunger, and disease, is a built-in factor, although not the origin of all those problems.

Magaly Caram, the executive director of PROFAMILIA Dominicana, views the issues affecting the quality of life in Haiti as similar to those of the Dominican population. Furthermore, the 13.9 million people who share this insular ecosystem of 76,000 km² and their problems cannot be kept totally separated with a political

WHAT HOPE FOR HAITI? *continued*

frontier. The plight of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican sugar cane plantations speaks of both the porous borders, and are related to quality of life in both countries.

Serge Pinto, Caram's counterpart in Haiti, is the executive director of the Haitian Family Planning Association (PROFAMIL) and also sees the similarities but is very concerned about the advanced degree of deterioration in the quality of life in Haiti. He looks at the degradation of the urban environment in Port-au-Prince, directly caused by the destruction of the rural environment, as a sort of cascade effect that ultimately will affect the whole country.

Since more than one-third of Haiti's territory has become totally unfit for human survival, the ensuing process of urban migration has created several urban nightmares. Cité Soleil, on the Bay of Port-au-Prince, is one of the worst slum areas in the world. Deemed Haiti's own Calcutta, the borough already has an extremely high population density of 25,000 people/km². The physical site of the slum is in itself an ecologically irreversible area. Its soil, which is virtually unable to support any vegetation due to the infiltration of sea water, is a symbol of one of the most serious impending disasters in Haiti. The management of the borough's human waste, the provision of water, and overall public health conditions confirm a quality of life that is below any standards of human dignity.

Helena Pierre is a sugar merchant and long-time resident of Cité Soleil. Her business grosses no more than \$40 a month. She is also a grandmother and head of a household and must take care of the orphans left behind by her daughter, who died of pregnancy-related causes. She speaks of charcoal, water, sugar, and the health of her daughter as central to her life experience. Obviously, she has the entrepreneurship it takes to survive but she does not have any chance for the empowerment needed to provide a better future for her and her grandchildren. The lack of family planning deprived her daughter of any future at all.

But, whose fault is it anyway? Who must assume the responsibility and the leadership to solve Haiti's inextricably linked population, developmental, and environmental problems? Is there any hope?

The answers to all those questions are anywhere we can find traces of Haiti's mahogany and its people. The environmental degradation of Haiti was started by the North. The lessons of history should not be ignored. The past must be understood and taken into account in the design and implementation of the solutions for the future. Haiti must be unequivocally helped from the outside.

The environmental degradation of Haiti was started by the North.

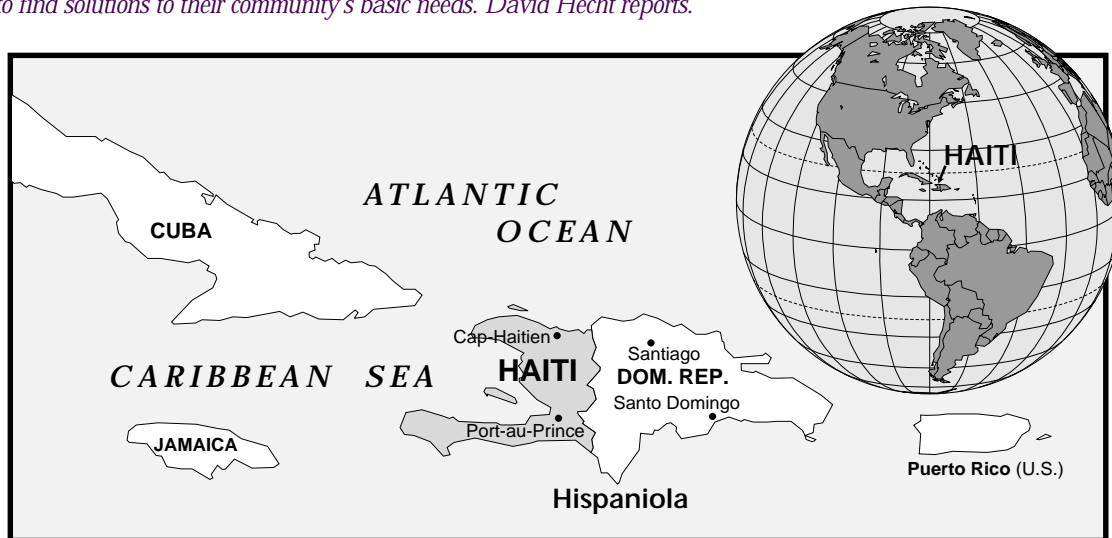
The Haitians also must realize that the key to their survival is within themselves, not in those who will provide the funding. The problems are not partisan issues but the solutions must be worked out in the sociopolitical reality of the country. Haiti has to undergo a national change of attitude so that everyone assumes responsibility. At the individual level, each child must be a wanted child; at the collective level, society must think only in terms of sustainable development with a sense of urgency second to no other consideration.

The international community has its own share of responsibility in supporting the process, if not out of a sense of justice and reparation, at least as a recognition that a vast majority of the Haitians, ultimately ecological migrants, will have to leave their environment once it has become irreversibly unable to sustain human life.

This article was condensed from People & The Planet Vol. 1, No. 4 (1992). Francisco Di Blasi is senior programme adviser in the IPPF Western Hemisphere Regional Office, New York.

THE WOMEN WATER MASTERS OF HAITI

Reading 2 In a tense political climate and complex social structure, women leaders helped negotiate water rights and continue to find solutions to their community's basic needs. David Hecht reports.



Of all the voodoo gods in Haiti—Catholic saints blended with Africa’s Yoruba and Fon spirits and Congo cosmology—Met’do received the most praise when potable water flowed into Chantel recently for the first time. The Protestants of the village say they only praise the grace of God Almighty. But the peasants, who are of all religious persuasions, worked together to dig the trenches and lay the pipes from a natural spring over a mile away.

“Now we no longer have to walk for hours every day with buckets of water on our head,” says Mrs. George, standing with other women leaders near the shiny new water fountain at the intersection of three dirt roads, which forms the hub of her village. “We women are the ones that do the cooking, the washing and the cleaning,” she adds, “and having water close by is a big help.” With the extra time for farming, yields of Congo peas, bananas, and sweet potatoes have noticeably increased.

The new fountain is just one small part of a water rehabilitation programme for the valley designed and executed by the development wing of the Albert Schweitzer Missionary Hospital. The project was funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and undertaken in the tumultuous period after the ousting of President Aristide by the military in 1991. UNDP was able to support the project despite a United Nations embargo because it fell under

“humanitarian” rather than “development” assistance, and because it was implemented by various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

But water may never have flowed to Chantel if it were not for local women leaders. The project was designed to rehabilitate existing water lines, which Chantel never had to begin with. However, the women convinced the Schweitzer mission that it should also extend a new line to them, since in neighboring villages the work included rebuilding lines from scratch. “It was only fair,” says Mona Charles, one of Mrs. George’s fellow co-workers. “And we were prepared to do whatever it took to get it done.”

What was needed was manual labor, for which the mission was unable to pay. The women organized work details and ensured that everyone in their village did their share. They also carried out the delicate task of forging a consensus on issues such as where the fountain was to be located. Eric Cole, director of the water division at the mission, says his colleagues were amazed when the work was finished ahead of schedule. “From sun-up to sundown, they were all out there,” he says.

It did not happen easily. Extensive negotiation and compromise among various groups had to occur first. “The Lakous [basic social units composed largely of extended families] like to argue about things,” says Mrs. Charles. The women

THE WOMEN WATER MASTERS OF HAITI *continued*

not only had to deal with this internal friction, they had to take care not to infringe on the authority of local leaders, particularly the *chefs de sections* (local district officers).

The programme began in 1991, when a nutrition project for infants was started. The mission asked villagers to elect women from the community who they thought could best track the health of the children. The women were trained to study market prices and recommend to the village the best foodstuffs to buy in relation to nutritional value. Since then their roles have expanded. They collect data on disease in their villages, register births and deaths, and recently took part in a literacy programme.

According to the mission, overall health and nutrition levels for the 185,000 people in the valley have stabilized or even improved in some areas, despite the increased stresses of political violence and the UN embargo. However, for Cole, their importance is as liaisons. "The women know what the problems are in their villages and they know how to explain them to all sides," he says.

Quite frequently, what the problems boil down to is water. Sonia Dieutel tells how the incidence of water-borne maladies such as typhoid, and diarrheal diseases caused by giardia and other parasites, have increased in her area. "When we were children the water was safer and we rarely had these sicknesses. Now, they kill us far more frequently..."

Juan Salazar, a UNDP officer in charge of the programme in Haiti, says that providing assistance under Haiti's successive governments has certainly had its problems, but that there is also

"a downside" to funding NGOs. "We have had to be very careful with whom we deal," he says, explaining that such groups have occasionally been fronts for various political or other factions. But he adds that Haiti has an extraordinarily large number of NGOs, and that, "overall, they are a key development resource."

With the return of President Aristide and a legitimate government, the policy of UNDP and the Haitian government is to "diversify cooperation." Says Salazar, "Our idea is to involve more and more actors—local governments and local leaders, the private sector, NGOs—in general, all of civil society."

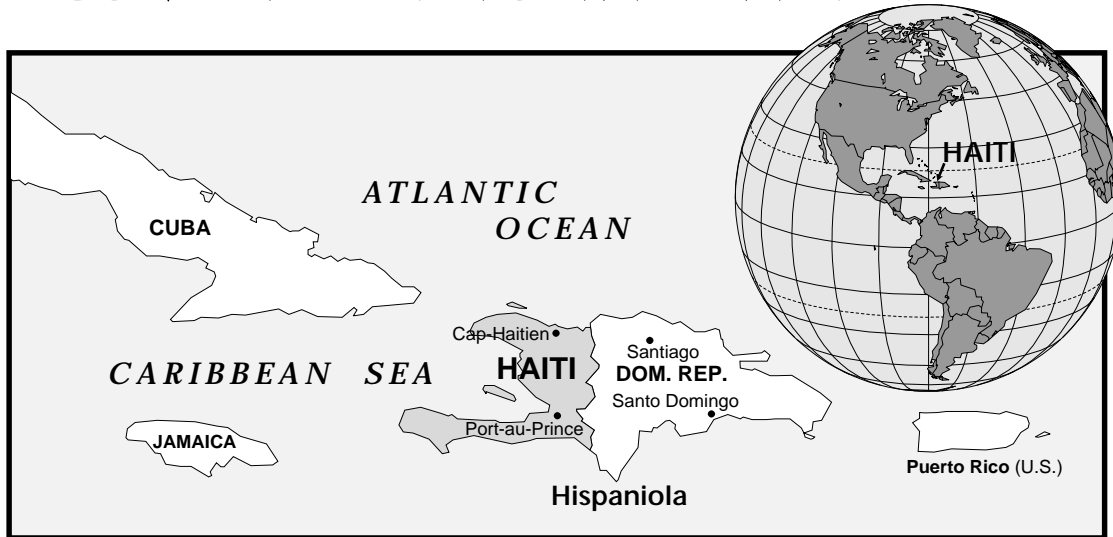
"When we were children the water was safer and we rarely had these sicknesses. Now, they kill us far more frequently..."

Before this latest project, the Albert Schweitzer mission had never received any multilateral funding. The amount from UNDP totaled only US\$34,000, but this was enough to rehabilitate two gravity spring systems, extend new lines to several villages, and rehabilitate over 75 of the wells in the 1,500 km² valley. Now a further \$200,000 has been requested for a project that will include building reservoirs at the natural springs of Coquillot and Deslandes as well as several irrigation systems.

This article was condensed from CHOICES (August 1995). CHOICES is published by the United Nations Development Programme.

IN HAITI, REFORESTATION IS KEY TO RECOVERY IN RURAL LANDS

Reading 3



A 30-acre swatch of old-growth trees, cloistered in the middle of one of the city’s biggest slums, has become a symbol of Haiti’s budding conservation movement and its seemingly overwhelming challenges. Amid the forest are the ruins of a historic estate and luxury resort first built in the early 19th century. Once an opulent paradise for the very wealthy, it is now a gathering place for residents of the nearby slums.

For 50 years, Habitation LeClerc has been the residence of the renowned Haitian dancer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham. She is determined to make its botanical garden and surrounding forest another of her legacies. But, the property has recently caught the attention of commercial developers keen on rebuilding the resort into a lucrative hotel, says Cameron Brohman, a Canadian anthropologist who is working to preserve the enclave as Haiti’s first botanical garden.

That would be harmful, not only for the forest, but for nearby residents who rely on an artesian spring underneath it for water, he says. It’s a scenario that has been repeated all too often in Haiti, where forests cover only 3 percent of the land, compared with 80 percent when Columbus visited here in the late 15th century.

“If the forest is cut down, that spring will go back down, will descend into the earth,” says Mr. Brohman. “Haiti has a water problem because it has a deforestation problem. So, an ecological

disaster begins with the cutting of trees, especially in a country like this, which is mountainous. Cut the trees, the topsoil washes away. This has disastrous economic effects.”

The effects of deforestation here, especially on agriculture, have been severe. Nevertheless, while President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s latest reforestation initiatives have been slowed by economic concerns, fuel shortages and political infighting, Haiti’s growing conservation movement makes small steps of progress. It has been a slow process. One reason, the president says, is that environmental protection and agricultural development are inseparable in Haiti.

“Haiti has a water problem because it has a deforestation problem.”

“If we don’t develop our agriculture, how can we protect our ecology?” President Aristide said during a recent interview at the National Palace in Port-au-Prince. “Because otherwise, people will not be motivated to plant trees. And we have to plant trees. . . Nobody, if that person has good sense, can be against this move.”

Fuel shortages caused by the international trade embargo against the military regime that ousted Aristide in 1991 intensified an already vigorous Haitian tradition of cutting

IN HAITI, REFORESTATION IS KEY TO RECOVERY IN RURAL LANDS *continued*

down trees for charcoal. For many Haitians, especially those in rural areas without electricity, charcoal has been the cooking fuel of choice for decades.

“During the embargo we saw trees with fruits being cut down, because the farmers did not have a market or the means to transport their product to a local market,” says mango exporter Jean Buteau. As unpicked fruit rotted on the branches, fruit trees became attractive as fuel trees. To stop the cutting, Mr. Buteau got permission under the embargo’s humanitarian provisions to keep exporting mangoes, and he helped set up a transport network to pick up fruit from farmers, often in remote areas.

“...young people don’t even know what a forest is because there are so few now.”

But as the embargo wore on, Buteau was forced to close down his processing plant, which is located near the Port-au-Prince airport, and he had to turn away fruit growers. “They came to the plant and they asked, ‘What is going to happen to the fruit?’ It was very difficult to tell them we just cannot take it,” he says.

The links between farming and trees are the basis for the biggest reforestation project in Haiti, led by the U.S. Agency for International Development, CARE, and the Pan American Development Foundation. Under the project, millions of mango, citrus, and avocado trees have been planted to give farmers a new source of income, increase local food production, as well as to expand tree cover. The strategy includes planting large numbers of fast-growing indigenous trees that can be used for lumber and posts.

The project “intensifies land use on a portion of people’s land, so that they don’t have to use it all for agriculture and so they leave some of it for trees,” says Andy White, a Haitian-based forestry expert for the World Bank.

International agencies came to the realization several years ago that reforestation efforts in

Haiti would be futile unless, at the same time, they removed the financial incentive to cut down trees for fuel. And now, an economic windfall has helped to promote the project. Kerosene has recently become cheaper than charcoal in Haiti, which should spare more trees from the hands of rural residents.

But because the Haitian landscape is now almost entirely carved into farms of myriad shapes and sizes, it will be an uphill struggle to restore anything but a fraction of the “closed canopy” forest that once covered Haiti. What is possible over the next 50 years is that by planting trees in “degraded forests” that have undergone extensive cutting, 30 percent of Haiti’s mountainous terrain could return to forest cover, from the current 3 percent, Mr. White says.

In addition to the economic realities, reforestation in Haiti must be also carried out on the slippery slope of Haitian politics. Parliamentary debate over a new budget has delayed funding for Haiti’s environment and agriculture ministries. Many lawmakers oppose conditions placed on the 40 percent of the budget that comes from foreign leaders—including the United States government, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund—who insist that Haiti privatize its state-owned industries.

A fluid political situation could further bog down reforestation efforts. The new prime minister, Claudette Werleigh, was sworn in earlier this month, replacing Smarck Michel, who resigned after Aristide refused to publicly back privatization plans.

These obstacles are one reason the organizers of another major initiative called Forêt Solidairé, or Solidarity Forest Project, decided to rely on grassroots support and independent funding. The project’s goal is to designate and preserve a national forest in each of Haiti’s nine provinces. Currently, only three small national forests are in the country.

“What’s become clear in the dire circumstances here in Haiti is that multiple efforts on many fronts are needed,” says Rev. Tracy Bruce, an Episcopal priest from Cincinnati, who is one of the directors of Solidarity Forest Project.

IN HAITI, REFORESTATION IS KEY TO RECOVERY IN RURAL LANDS *continued*

The project, officially launched in a pine forest ceremony outside Port-au-Prince today, is modeled after a successful reforestation effort in Israel earlier this century, which attracted contributions from millions of Jews living outside Israel. Similarly, Mr. Bruce is hoping to enlist many Haitian émigrés in a sponsor-a-tree program here. It is estimated that as many Haitians reside outside Haiti as within the country.

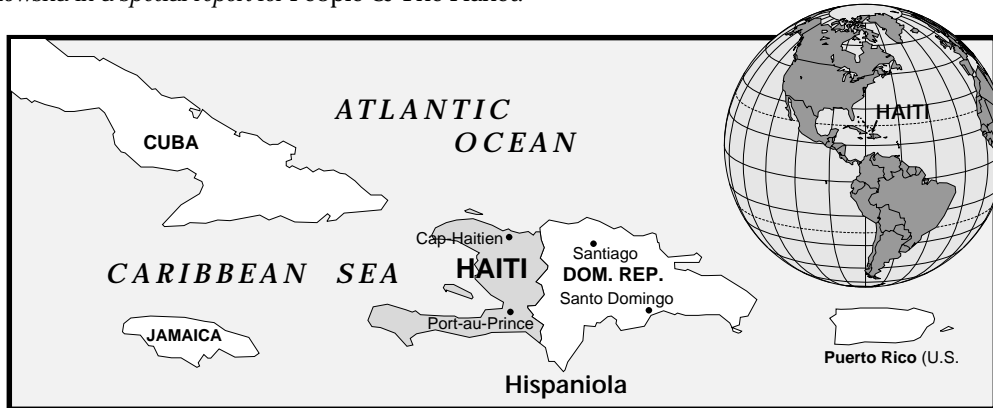
The Solidarity Forest Project also involves a plan to teach school children about conservation.

“The whole idea of forests is still in the memory of those who are the oldest here in Haiti and they. . . lament that the young people don’t even know what a forest is because there are so few now,” says Bruce. “So it’s almost like reinventing the dream and bringing back the possibility.”

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REAL LIVES: HAITI

Reading 4 *Haiti is an island of environmental refugees. Its once dense forests now cover only 2 percent of the land. With two-thirds of the farmlands sloping more than 20 degrees and a population density of over 270 per km², erosion is severe. Arable land has declined by two-fifths since 1950 and per capita grain production has been halved. Repression and gross maldistribution of land have not helped (4 percent of the farmers own more than half of the land). As a result, more than 1.3 million Haitians—or one in five of the populace—have left their homelands, many for other Caribbean islands, and some 180,00 for the United States or Canada. Others have moved to city slums. The personal stories of these migrants from a devastated land are told here by American anthropologist Catherine Maternowska in a special report for People & The Planet.*



The paths to the river in Ouananminthe, a small village in Haiti’s northeastern countryside, are narrow and thick with cactus bush. When she was six years old, Ginette would rise at 5 a.m. with her three older sisters, walk to the river and fill their large oval calabash gourds, perfectly balanced over their heads. The cool water gathered from “the spring,” as it was referred to by locals, was essential to the household for drinking, cooking the day’s meal, washing the dishes, and for coveted sponge baths.

During the dry season, with the extra hands of her five brothers, they would make several trips a day to the river, filling endless containers with water to moisten the parched earth on her family’s land. The water, flushed through the long bamboo tubes, would nourish rows of tiny corn plants.

As Ginette grew older, she learned to prepare the day’s meal and serve it to the *conbit*, or large group of planters hired by her parents. For 40 cents a day, men from the village would work the earth from 6 a.m. to 12 noon, racing to plant the grains before the growing season. Planting too late would mean missing the markets.

As she recounts her life—where she grew up and how she came to find herself struggling to

survive in a shanty town in Port-au-Prince—her memory is jogged by seasons. “During my fifth mango season,” she recounts, “I slipped and broke my arm.” The cost of the accident, including paying the bone setter, finding antibiotics, and praying with offerings to ancestors for renewed health, drained the household that year. The next rice season was, as a result, 30 percent less productive. A single sickness can ruin a household’s economy in rural Haiti.

**“We were skinny
and so too was our land.”**

Desperate for income, with 10 hungry children to feed, Ginette’s parents sold the family’s cow and pig to buy seed, fertilizer, and a new sickle for the upcoming season. With an aching arm that healed improperly, Ginette would bend over in the fields, machete in hand, clearing the shrubs from the ground. After the corn was planted, the rains failed to come, and an already precarious household plummeted further into poverty. With the sweet potato season on the way, the only recourse was to sell some land and hope the potatoes would grow on the remaining soil.

REAL LIVES: HAITI *continued*

The year before Ginette was sent to Port-au-Prince, the size of her family's land was halved. "We were skinny and so too was our land." Many of her brothers and sisters had already left for larger, more prosperous villages, hoping to find odd jobs or the chance to go to school. Ginette, it was decided, would go to the capital city. With the smaller plot of land, there was no room for extra hands. The city might lead to work and food.

In Port-au-Prince, Ginette joined her aunt, who lived in Cité Soleil—the densest slum in the Western Hemisphere. Covering 5 km² on the northern edge of capital, it is home to some 300,000 Haitians. It is here where the drama of survival unfolds.

Living conditions are appalling, characterized by small homes made of cardboard packing cases, boards, and abandoned metal sheeting. Inside the homes, walls are decorated with brightly colored pages from *Paris-Match*, *El Nacional*, *Sports Illustrated*, and Sears catalogues. Beds are typically raised four cinder blocks high above the ground, since the rain water mixed with sewage gushes thigh-high into homes during the rainy season.

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Unemployment is high, reaching 70 percent in 1993. Residents in Cité Soleil usually try to link into a highly active informal economy. Protected from the sun by plastic tarpaulins, charcoal vendors and women selling imported plastic wares or big pots of goat head stew crowd the tiny passageways of the slum. Profits of US\$1 a day are considered generous in a country where 61 percent of the people earn less than US\$100 a year.

Water, contaminated rubbish, and fecal matter are the origins of epidemics including malaria, typhoid, chronic diarrhea, and intestinal infections. Infants are especially vulnerable to these diseases, accounting for the deaths of up to one-third of all children before the age of five. It

is common to see people washing, bathing, and scrubbing clothes in the filthy canals that twist through the community.

Poor housing, precarious health standards, and intermittent meals decrease the odds of surviving life as an environmental refugee. Yet there is always hope that one child can be sent to school or that another might find temporary income—ensuring the family's survival for another week. Deprived of their land, rural migrants want jobs, food for their families, and a future for their children.

And so it has been for Ginette. She is now 29 years old and has five children. She lives in a minute tin shack on the marshy edges of the Bay of Port-au-Prince. At one time, she sold produce in the markets of Port-au-Prince. She would travel between her city dwelling and her home in Ounaminthe filling large baskets with fruits and tubers to sell in the city. Dwindling crop production and high transportation costs made the journey increasingly difficult.

Her toothless mother, who recently joined Ginette in Port-au-Prince, says, "the spring where my child would find the water is dry now." Shaking her head, she continued, "It's because there are no trees and so the sun took our river. . . but we had no choice." Choked by poverty, Ginette's mother had cut dozens of trees by the river to make charcoal for cooking fires. In the market, sacks of charcoal replace sacks of potatoes.

Ginette's father died when he was 52 years old, just over the life expectancy for men in Haiti. Before his death, more of the family land was sold to pay for his lingering illness and to buy food for the household. When he died, the last parcel of land was sold to pay for the funeral, a ceremony of great importance in Haiti. Soon after, Ginette's mother moved to Cité Soleil and joined the ranks of Haiti's impoverished, landless peasants.

Celeste, Ginette's neighbor, was born in Les Cayes in southwest Haiti. She too fetched water and helped on the family's land as a young girl. "We were always planting or harvesting our crops—rice, corn, manioc, beans, mangos, and avocados. We worked 24 hours on the hour." She crosses her arms and sighs, "we planted but this does not mean we did not suffer."

REAL LIVES: HAITI *continued*

Her worn face is sad: "We were always in combat with the water. There is plenty of land in Haiti, but our basins are dry. The plants can't push through the dry earth." When the harvest failed to produce, wood became the only resource. Her father would chop the trees and with her mother would dig deep pits in the sides of Haiti's mountains, slowly treating and burning the wood in preparation for sale. "When the trees are finished," she wonders today, "what will there be?" "More hunger," she responds to herself.

"Long ago, even when there was water, we small peasants never had roads." Without roads, rural women walk for days, carrying goods on their heads to the nearest market town. Peasant families who own a donkey have a slightly less daunting trek over Haiti's steep hills en route to the marketplace. "If there were roads and water in our country," Celeste claims, "our children would not leave the countryside. We could sell our produce, eat well, build schools, and live as a peasant deserves to live."

Celeste left Les Cayes for Port-au-Prince when neither crops nor charcoal could provide enough income. She was uneducated and only 17 years old. One year later, she had her first child and has since had seven children. Three of them have died. She constructed her own home in Cité Soleil from metal oil barrels pounded into thin walls.

In the city, Celeste found work as a domestic with a wealthy family. Their home was perched high over the hills of Port-au-Prince. She worked from sunrise to sunset: shopping for meals, cooking, scouring pans, washing clothes, and cleaning the home. Her salary was US\$25 per month. In the evening, when she returned to Cité Soleil, there were still more chores to be completed.

With great outrage, she tells me: "When you work the land there is no humiliation. Your body aches, scorched and feverish from the sun but you never feel humiliation. The food and the land belong to us and we have great respect for this." Life in the capital city has left its painful scars on Celeste. "When I worked in the home of the family," she continues, "I worked until my body hurt. I was forced to continue, against nature, without stopping—for pennies! This is humiliation."

Celeste looks at me and says in Haitian creole, "*Chache lave, detwi lavi*": "Searching for life,

destroys the essence of life." Ginette nods in agreement. Neither of these women have improved their status through migration to Port-au-Prince. As they so poignantly express, everything they have learned, accomplished, and believed in has been destroyed. "There's not a cup of water to drink in the countryside—and here, if there is water, our children become sick from it. . . sometimes they die."

"Searching for life, destroys the essence of life."

A reversal of rural to urban migration, a trend that has yielded inferior lives in Cité Soleil, seems to hold little hope, "What will save Haiti," Ginette and Celeste say, "is water and roads. Then our crops could grow again and we could sell produce in every corner of our country."

They smile as they list the things they wish for most in rural Haiti: "Schools for our beautiful children, clinics for the ill, water pipes that descend into the rocks underneath the earth."

"What about trees?" I ask. "Does Haiti need trees?" They slap their knees, laughing. "Heeey! Yes! We need trees and engineers to help us plant them, and roads to bring them to us and water to help them grow."

In April 1986, a national march in favor of reforestation and conservation of natural resources marked the start of concerted efforts to protect Haiti's ecosystem. National and international organizations established themselves; tree planting and water projects took on increased importance. But with the fall of democracy, most notable since President Aristide was ousted in a violent coup, the impetus to protect the environment and empower those who live in it all but died.

Ginette and Celeste would be the first to say that it is the new chance for democracy, not dictatorship, that is the true hope for returning Haiti to the earthly paradise it once was.

This article was condensed from People & The Planet Vol. 3, No. 4, 1994. Catherine Maternowska is an anthropologist.