

NORTH HAITI

Environment and Economic Empowerment Initiative >>>



Photographer: Drew Hood
Brunet Robert leads one of this Initiative's implementing organizations, which teaches farmers to grow plants that enrich soil, prevent erosion and provide nutrition and income for farmers' families

Initiative Profile

Sector priority
Economic
Empowerment

Year-one investment*
\$1,000,000
£504,910
€742,402

Duration
3 years

Lives to be impacted
25,400

* Conversions to non-U.S. currencies are based on rates in effect on Aug. 20, 2007. Actual purchase amounts will be determined by conversion rates in effect at the time of purchase.

Once prosperous and heavily wooded, Haiti now stands stripped of the forests that fueled its lumber industry decades ago. Deforestation created a cycle of poverty and illness: Storms and floods wash away fertile soil, unprotected by trees. Depleted croplands and poor farming methods produce less food, leaving rural families impoverished, hungry and vulnerable to disease. Poor people scour the countryside, felling trees to sell for firewood.

This Initiative works to break that cycle by attacking its causes as well as its effects:

- Farmers will learn to protect their croplands from erosion and depletion, while producing more food for their families and crops for sale
- Female entrepreneurs will grow their businesses and better provide for their families with the help of business loans and training
- In 10 rural communities, disease and infant mortality will be reduced as a result of health education, new latrines, clean water supplies and improved health services such as immunization – letting thousands of people live healthier, more productive lives

These complementary programs work to restore a damaged ecology, while improving health and quality of life in rural Haiti.

Wide-ranging effects of ecological disaster

With 96 percent of Haiti now deforested, the environmental impacts reach far beyond the depletion of farmland. Valleys suffer landslides from treeless mountain slopes. Eroded highways restrict travel, limiting crop exports. Some parts of Haiti can only be reached on foot.

Silt and boulders choke natural waterways and strain the country's tottering irrigation system. Only 30 percent of Haitians have safe drinking water and sanitation – the lowest of any country in the Western Hemisphere.

Environmental catastrophe shatters families among rural Haitians, 70 percent of the country's people. As farm yields fall because of depleted soil, men migrate to cities for work. Up to a third of rural families are headed by women, many of whom have developed cottage industries such as making charcoal or selling vegetables.

This Initiative focuses on northern Haiti's once-fertile Limbe Valley – a main supplier of the nation's produce 50 years ago. The valley has the potential to rebound as a center of Haitian organic farming, providing fresh local produce as an alternative to costly imports.

Why we recommend this Initiative

Overpopulation, political corruption and a failing agriculture sector converged to make Haiti the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Between 1980 and 2006, per-capita production slumped by 30 percent. Today, an estimated 80 percent of Haitians live in poverty. Nearly half are undernourished.

Millions of dollars in aid have flowed into Haiti over the past 30 years, with little to show in results. Political instability and corruption caused many humanitarian organizations, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), to stop funding Haitian projects in 2001. But Haiti finally inaugurated a democratically elected government in May 2006.

In part, the poor results of previous aid efforts in Haiti stem from failure to coordinate implementers for greatest impact. This three-year Initiative integrates work by four local implementers. Each brings its own proven approach to the complex problem of Haiti's widespread environmental destruction and the resulting poverty and disease.

Haiti

Population

8.5 million

Average annual population growth rate

1.3% (vs. 0.2% in the U.K. and 0.8% in the U.S.)

Gross national income per capita

\$450 (vs. \$37,740 in the U.K. and \$43,560 in the U.S.)

Corruption rank (2006)

163 of 163 countries
(Transparency International)

U.N. Human Development Index rank

154 of 177 countries

Sources: World Bank, unless otherwise noted. Corruption rank is calculated from surveys of business people and national analysts, with 1 being the least corrupt. Copyright 2007 Geneva Global Inc. All rights reserved. Published Oct. 8, 2007.



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Changing lives

Jean Marie Forvil is a farmer with five children in Moren, Haiti. In 1997, one of the implementers involved in this Initiative organized a group of farmers for training in sustainable agriculture. Forvil was the first president of the Moren group. Before he joined, he had less than \$3 in savings, and no understanding of how to protect his hillside farm from erosion. Through training, Forvil learned soil conservation, grafting, composting and reforestation techniques. He also learned to manage his local credit cooperative. Forvil taught his older children many of the farming techniques he learned, and showed a neighbor how to compost. He also modified some of the techniques to suit his situation. For example, he used rock barrier technology he learned to partially enclose his land – not only marking the boundary, but providing soil protection as well. "The Moren group has grown because others have observed how the various techniques benefit the members, and also the economic benefits," Forvil says. "For example, the group members are able to put their children through school and purchase seeds for their farms." Thanks to improved farming techniques and increased income, Forvil now has more than \$54 in savings.