



## Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Summer 2020

### Longterm Fragility, Corruption, Inflation, Hunger, Gang Violence, and COVID Plague Haiti



Against a backdrop of social fragility, government corruption, skyrocketing inflation, grinding hunger, and rising gang violence exacerbated by 18 months of civil unrest and institutional crisis the COVID-19 pandemic is stretching Haiti's already-shredded safety-net and driving families to increasing despair.

Because of the global pandemic, remittances – financial support coming from family members living outside Haiti – have decreased by 30% leaving many families financially desperate.

Criminal gangs terrorize major towns and thoroughfares. Linked to kidnappings for ransom, rapes and multiple massacres, the gangs are becoming “guns for hire” among rival political forces according to human rights reports.

Hunger rivals fighting and disease as causes of death. Reflecting the early stages of a global food crisis, everything has become more expensive. Some areas report food prices **10 times higher** than at this time last year. Haitian agriculture depends on a high number of low-producing smallholder farmers and, consequently, Haiti is a net importer of food (55-60%) and increasingly dependent on international food aid during times of crisis.

Many thousands of Haitians have likely already had COVID-19, but testing capacity is severely limited while fear and distrust of the government continue to obscure the impact of the pandemic. Officials now predict the pandemic could kill up to 20,000 Haitians. Those numbers do not take into account people who will die from hunger or from the inability to pay for drinking water or from the dramatic increase in gang violence.

### Drought, Hunger, Inflation, and Civil Unrest Accelerate Efforts to Rebuild Food Systems



The “**Operation Hummingbird**” learning center, supported by **Rich in Mercy** and many generous benefactors, aims to revolutionize community food systems in rural Haiti by creating low input strategies to increase food production such as bio-intensive gardening, rainwater harvesting, and worm composting. Because famine and food insecurity are currently more fatal to Haitians than COVID-19, this work takes on increased importance and greater urgency. The center is promoting a method of mini-sett yam production in conjunction with worm composting to promote increased viability and growth that promises to increase the supply of food while decreasing the risk to farmers.

Yam sweet potatoes are a food staple in Haiti and traditionally whole “seed yams” – selected from the previous harvest – are used to propagate new plants. Alternatively the “top”, “middle” and “bottom” portions (setts) of a “mother yam” can be planted. The **mini-sett technique**, introduced by the center, greatly increases the number of setts available by reducing the size of each tuber portion, allowing as many as 8-10 setts to be cut from a single yam and resulting in lower production costs. The enhanced soil fertility provided by **worm compost** assures greater viability of the smaller “mini setts” and results in greater yields with less risk to vulnerable, smallholder farmers.



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## **CAVH Marks Five Years of Eco-Social Solidarity with Vulnerable Women and Youth**

The **Centre Action Volontaire Haiti (CAVH)** marks five years of continuing commitment to education for local and sustainable development in Haiti. Focused on scholarship, leadership, and entrepreneurship the **CAVH** directs efforts towards street children, abused women, handicapped youth, and homeless families. Through its “eco-social” program the center helps vulnerable women and youth develop local production and small businesses through organizing, training, and a modest capital investment of about US \$25 per month.



Community organizing to confront the COVID-19 pandemic became a new focus once the disease made its way into Haiti with **Rich in Mercy** providing educational materials in Haitian Kreyol. Public health outreach, through posters, flyers, and creative cartoons for kids, informs and empowers individuals to take action to protect themselves and their communities. **CAVH** also sets up hand-washing stations and encourages mask-wearing and physical distancing where possible – practices known to help protect populations – especially those who are most vulnerable to the disease.

**Rich in Mercy** acts as fiscal sponsor for the CAVH in collaboration with the Boston-based **Ansara Foundation** and provides financial and technical support for its work. Congratulations to **CAVH** for five difficult years of making a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable women, children, and youth!

## **FEJ Container Addresses Urgent Need for Food, Medicines, Midwife Supplies and PPE**



A **Rich in Mercy** grant to the **Foundation Infant Jesus (FEJ)** helped make possible the shipment of much-needed food, medicines and supplies to FEJ centers in Port au Prince, Kenscoff, and LaMardelle (Haiti).

The “one of a kind” center in Port au Prince addresses challenging medical problems such as children with severe malnutrition and children who are HIV positive. The LaMardelle campus houses an elementary school and a community clinic that has become a center for public health education and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kenscoff facility cares for orphaned and abandoned children and provides legal adoption services. Each facility provides nutritional support to vulnerable mothers and children.

## **Economic Fallout of Covid Pandemic Threatens “Peace” for Mirembe Solidarity Group**



Measures to contain the covid pandemic in **Kampala** (Uganda) – such as the closing of businesses and schools – have had a severe impact on the local economy and people’s livelihoods. Domestic violence has spiked and food supplies are severely limited. The crisis threatens the women of the **Mirembe Project** who depend entirely on the informal economy to support their families.

**MIREMBE** is a Swahili word meaning peace and the **Mirembe Project** (initiated by **Bibian Thuguci**, a **Sister of Our Lady of Charity** shown left) with fiscal sponsorship from **Rich in Mercy** for a micro-business program enables 37 women – victims of sex-trafficking – to operate small businesses – mostly buying and selling fruits, vegetables, and prepared foods in the informal economy. Modest profits pay for food and medical care.

The economic collapse threatens the peace of mind, livelihoods, and lives of the women and their families. Some face eviction from their Katanga slum homes. In the absence of any social “safety net” the women depend on solidarity with each other and organizations like to survive. Support these “odds defying” women with an online donation at [www.rimin.org](http://www.rimin.org)!

