



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Winter 2020

Sudden Currency Revaluation Causes Chaos, Benefits Imports, Threatens Exports



items such as annual school fees and rents remained high.

The exchange rate for one US dollar went from 120 gourdes in August to 60 gourdes in October. The gourde's value increase was a windfall for businesses that must pay for imported goods in dollars but a disaster for almost everybody else. The fluctuation caused widespread economic chaos and severe hardship for Haitian families who depend on "remittances" – financial support coming from family members living outside Haiti – and for Haitians working in the assembly industry, particularly women who sew garments for export mainly to the US. Many families saw their overall purchasing power cut in half. While the prices for some imported consumer goods – such as rice – showed decreases other "high ticket"

The sudden and spectacular appreciation in Haiti's national currency was caused, in part, by actions of Haiti's central bank, Banque de Republique d'Haiti (BRH) – aimed at controlling what it called speculation in the currency exchange market. Dollars had become increasingly scarce in Haiti due to the lack of tourism, the departure of U.N. peacekeepers, and the curtailment of operations of many foreign charities following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between August and October the BRH injected US \$150 million into the economy to buy back gourdes and increase the amount of available dollars.

Operation Hummingbird Environmental Center Pioneers Efforts to Rebuild Food Systems



The "Operation Hummingbird" environmental experimentation and learning center, supported by **Rich in Mercy** and many generous benefactors, aims to revolutionize community food systems in rural Haiti.

The center is pioneering an innovative system of soil regeneration in areas of heavily-compacted, clay soils. Long trenches are dug out by hand – to a depth of four feet – and then refilled with a mixture of sugar cane waste ("bagasse"), fungus-rich, partially decomposed organic matter, worm compost, available animal manure and some of the removed soil. The combined action of bacteria, fungus, and worms produces an extremely rich and fertile growing medium. The

strategy has the potential to transform marginally productive land into high-yield "mini farms".

The results obtained have been spectacular. Watermelons weighing more than 60 lbs. attract the attention and arouse the curiosity of even the most skeptical farmers. Curiosity leads to inquiry. **Lamothe Lormier**, visionary founder of the "Operation Hummingbird" center, seizes every such opportunity to freely share the knowledge he has painstakingly gained in the five years since the center was launched and he accepted invitations to provide intensive trainings in many different parts of Haiti.

Piloting innovative, low-input, high-yield strategies for increasing food production and enhancing food sovereignty in Haiti is **Lormier's** passion. He is currently experimenting with Black Soldier Flies and Green Flies. Their larvae can convert waste organic matter to fertile soil faster and more efficiently than the worms used in "vermi-composting". In addition the larvae can reduce pathogens present in waste and are rich in protein, fats, and minerals. They can be used as supplemental food for fish farms and animal husbandry. The center intends to pilot a Black Fly larva production project early in 2021.



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“Odds-Defying” Medical Students Pursue Career Dreams Preparing to “Give Back”



Education is the necessary foundation for all positive social change. Rich in Mercy provides elementary and secondary school scholarship based on merit and need to scores of children and youth. Some of these young people demonstrate exceptional ability and determination to “defy the odds” in pursuit of their dreams and their desire to “give back” to their communities.

Traditional gender roles limit educational opportunities for girls and women in Haiti. As a child **Dieunica Moneus**, showed both a hunger and an aptitude for learning as well as a strong desire to “help people”. A **Rich in Mercy** merit-based scholarship for women at the faculty of medicine at the **Université Notre Dame d’Haïti** (UNDH) is helping her achieve her dream of becoming a medical doctor. She is currently completing her second year of medical school and hopes eventually to become a cardiologist.

Forced to drop out of school after his father died in the massive 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti and his mother died of illness and lack of access to adequate medical care, Peterson Alcius returned to school on a Rich in Mercy scholarship and graduated first in his secondary school class! He was awarded a full scholarship to study medicine in Santiago (Cuba). He continues to excel academically and will return to Haiti after completing two more years of medical school. Recalling his mother’s death from lack of medical care, he is committed to using his knowledge and skill to “save lives” and create educational opportunities for youth in order to “give back” and as a way of investing in Haiti’s future!



Pandemic Response: Aid to Vulnerable Families and Covid-19 “Mask Production”



The COVID-19 pandemic shut down much of the economy in Haiti. Food prices rose and gang violence increased. Support for families from family members living outside of Haiti decreased by 30% leaving many families financially desperate.

Through collaboration with Catholic parishes and religious congregations, **Rich in Mercy** provided food aid and direct support to scores of vulnerable families in the communities of **Furcy, Bokozel, Pon Sonde, Kotplaj** and **Fondwa**. Additional funding from **Rich in**

Mercy empowered women entrepreneurs in rural Fondwa and urban Port au Prince to launch a “Covid-19 Mask” making business in time to supply school children in several communities with the masks they are required to wear in crowded classrooms.

COVID-19 relief funding came from a generous grant by the **Bozzone Family Foundation**.



Datcha Village Elementary School Construction Builds on Successful Collaboration



Datcha is a small village in Togo (W. Africa) – one of the poorest countries in the world – where **Rich in Mercy** has provided fiscal sponsorship for several infrastructure projects including a well to provide clean water and composting toilets to provide sanitation at the local elementary school and for the community at large. **Dr. Kimberly Baker** has raised all the necessary funds and **Fr. Odilon Kofi, SMA** has provided both visionary leadership and outstanding financial transparency and accountability.

Building on this success the community launched a plan to construct a new elementary school, replacing an existing building that is in total disrepair. The roof leaks during the rainy season. The crowded classrooms lack side walls, leaving the children and their materials vulnerable to dust as well as distractions from the outside. With Dr. Baker securing the funds work on the new classroom building began in early November and should be completed by the end of the year!

