



NOUVEL FONDWA

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The Evolution of the Cooperative of Fondwa

In the face of endemic poverty, a traditional African solution was to create cooperatives to address their financial and service needs. Haitian peasants are discovering that adopting the same practice will help to improve their living conditions, given the precarious economic situation that prevails in Haiti. In that sense, cooperatives appear to be one of the principal alternatives for alleviating the miserable conditions under which they must operate.

The peasants of Fondwa have arrived at this same conclusion: for the past six years (since May 1990), they have implemented a Cooperative Credit Union, under the Kréyol acronym KÔF. Its main function is to provide the peasants with a refuge from their most pressing financial needs; in the past, they had to rely on borrowing money from wealthier people in the area, at usurious rates of interest. Sometimes, unable to repay these loans, they had to forfeit their ancestral parcel of land. Today, there are still many people who are being exploited in this manner, losing the land that had been passed on to them by their parents and grandparents.

KÔF seeks to provide the peasants of Fondwa (and the surrounding area) with an alternative to this exploitation. It is comprised of 155 members, and operates with a capital base of 18,350 gourdes—about \$1,200 U.S. During the course of the past 5 months, we have made loans to 64 of our members who presented us with commercial and

agricultural projects. To date, their repayment rate is 60%, the remaining 40% (those in arrears) being penalized according to the rules of the Cooperative.

During the month of May 1996, we implemented a large-scale purchase of dried beans (a staple of the Haitian diet) throughout the Fondwa area. This operation realized our goal of mobilizing, as much as possible, the region's resources to the profit of the local inhabitants. We now have a stock of 4,000–5,000 marmites of beans.

The Cooperative's organizational structure is made up of various committees, elected by the General Assembly. It includes an administrative board of 3 members, a credit committee of 3 members, a surveillance committee of 3 members, an educational committee, an administrator, and 3 treasurers. Working together, these representatives (culled from 14 localities within the district) take deposits and authorize loans and extensions to the Cooperative.

The biggest problem facing the Cooperative is the difficulty of maintaining a consistent organization, given the following conditions:

- most of the committee members are unemployed and very affected by the economic crisis in the country and therefore it is difficult for them to continue to work for the Cooperative as volunteers with no pay the dispersion of localities

- the difficulty of making the transition between the 'tontines' and the cooperative

- members' lack of training in the principles of cooperatives

- the influence of a previous (unsuccessful) attempt to operate a cooperative within the area, which has many people wary of investing their money.

Our goals for the next 6 months are:

- to offer training in the principles of cooperatives to the students of St. Antoine School (which the Fondwa Peasant Association supports financially), eventually integrating the students into Cooperative activities

- to study the feasibility of manufacturing various products, such as peanut butter, coffee, and grapefruit jam, using local crops

- to continue in the wide-scale purchase of beans in the area

- to elect new committee members

- to offer community training in how to run Cooperatives

- to encourage people to form small local cooperatives, to amalgamate into an areawide union

- to organize an audit and restructuring of the Cooperative

We are encouraged to continue in our work by the fact that, each month, at least 5 to 10 people have requested admission into the Cooperative.

— Guy Paraison

CEIPAL's Final Evaluation Of A Three-Year Grant

During the end of October, we had the privilege to welcome in Fondwa two representatives of CEIPAL—Christine Fauveau, a CEIPAL technician, and Alain Quaglino, a CEIPAL Board Member. They were here to conduct an evaluation of the impact of the CEIPAL grant to APF and to the community of Fondwa. They met with most of the APF members in their areas, individually and in groups. They met also a lot of people in the Fondwa area and traveled to other places in Haiti to visit with several other peasant associations, such as in the Central Plateau, Fond Verrettes, etc. That gave them an opportunity to compare the work of APF with the work of other peasant associations, which are older than APF, less well organized, and some which have suffered serious damage as a result of the coup d'état.

They were were, pleased with the progress APF has made during the 3 year grant. Now APF has another 3 year proposed program from January 1997 - 1999. As a sign of their willingness to continue to support APF, CEIPAL will help us to find several other sponsors. They have a great concern about being too small a program to accept the full responsibility, alone. Following their visit, they have invited the Assistant Coordinator of APF, Ag r o n o m e J a m e s Mathelier, to be part of a conference on deforestation in Montpelliers, sponsored by the United Nations. Our CEIPAL supporters are also looking for a scholarship for one of the students from Fondwa, who is going

Improving the Fondwa Road

Work has begun on the CEIPAL-funded road from Anba Tone I to the Fondwa Peasant Association Community Center. So far, 288 meters of canalization have been completed. "Canalization" involves digging narrow, rock-paved ditches on the sides of the roads, prior to grading it. The project will eventually total 1800 meters, involving the participation of 125 people.

With the little that has been done so far on the road, we have been able to begin two other building projects. The truck of APF can now transport building materials, such as sand, cement, gravel, iron, to add a third floor to the Community Center — space we will use to host guests to Fondwa for our ecotourism program. We are also building a silo to store and dry grains and a fish farm. The improvement of the road has also made it possible to continue work on our hydraulic turbine.

Reorganizing The Cooperative of Fondwa

The Cooperative of Fondwa has been a cooperative of multiple purposes: that is, it has a savings and loan program, a community store, and a grain storage program. The members have been contributing only for the savings and loans. The other investments are from APF activities.

Now we are in the process of transforming this Cooperative into a real Credit Union. We have called upon the BIT - Bureau International du Travail (a branch of the United Nations in Haiti)— to help us to implement a new structure for the Credit Union. They are going to perform an audit for us, especially because we are going to have a new manager for the Credit Union. We have also asked the BIT to control the investment of APF monies into the Cooperative of Fondwa and to help us get the necessary legal status for this Credit

Union. Finally, we expect them to help us in training our members and the members of our different committees. After a few meetings with the BIT and the submission of an official request for their assistance, we are now awaiting a formal response from them.

For the Community Store and the Grain Storage Program, we will ask the Credit Union to manage these programs on behalf of APF. As a matter of fact, APF will pay a fee for this management service.



Dear Friends,

We thank you for all your support and for helping us to be a sign of hope for the peasants who are involved in APF. As we approach the end of the year, we want to tell you how precious you are to us, and we want to take this opportunity to thank you in a special way once again and to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

There is still a lot to do, as you will see in this issue. You will read about the evolution of the Cooperative of Fondwa, the government's attempt to repair the damages to the Fondwa area during the attempted massacre in October 1995, the Inauguration of our Ecotourism Program, and a volunteer's thoughts on what it's like to be a Canadian woman working alongside the peasants in the soil conservation program.

Nouvel Fondwa remains for us the best connection so far to you and to our other friends around the world. We depend heavily on you to continue in this struggle. May we find more strength during this year to reinforce our solidarity, which is the new name of peace and love.

- Father Joseph Philippe

to learn how to transform pig meat in order to become a staff member of the vocational school we are planning.

Once again we thank CEIPAL and its members for their continuing support of APF, especially for this partnership between peasant and peasant.

A Government Attempt To Repair The Damages Done To APF During The Attempted Peasant Massacre In October 1995

A project of soil conservation and water control—financed by the Office of the Prime Minister (UCG), supervised by Ceci (a Canadian organization in Haiti), and executed by APF—has given APF the opportunity to hire about 2,800 people, both members and non members of APF, for a period of three months.

On August 26, 1996, the Fondwa Peasant Association inaugurated the project with a ceremony at the APF Community Center, attended by many APF members, organizers, and local government representatives.

Throughout the three months of its duration, several hundred people will take part in this heroic effort to combat not only the effects of erosion upon Haiti's mountainsides, but the erosion of the infrastructure of the Fondwa community itself following the 1994 attempted massacre at Fondwa, led by ALERTE. (For a full account of this event, see the Special Issue #8 of *Nouvel Fondwa* published in January 1996). This project represents an attempt to "patch

things up" in both the literal and figurative sense, to stop the calamitous washing away of the ground that people stand on.

The day workers are divided into teams of 20. Each team has a leader, and there is a supervisor for every 5 teams. The organizing and administrative staff includes:

- Project Director: Agronomist James Mathelier (APF)
- Technician/Supervisor: Agronomist Vernet (CECI)
- Technical Director: Agronomist Jean Mari Dè silus (APF)
- Agricultural Technician: Joinis Ojeroi (APF)

Some of the day-workers are APF members, some are students and teachers of L'Ecole Fraternité', and some are selected by the *kazèk* I., a branch of local government made up of 3 elected representatives. Every two weeks, the *kazèk* selects about 60 new people to

take part in the project. The supervisors and team leaders have been changed according to the needs. The workers earn 36 gourdes a day (for an 8 hour day), with 6 gourdes being held back to cover local government's part in financing the project.

This project has helped a few families to send their children to school and allowed some students to pay their school tuition. It has also helped them to renew their stock of cattle and to prepare in a better way for the planting season.

There are two main components of this project: controlling the flow of rain-water down the mountainsides so that less soil is washed away, and planting trees to help further retain soil. Water flow will be controlled by placing earth-filled sacks in selected spots in ravines, forming terraces where soil will accumulate after rainfall. A total of 93,000 trees will be planted in these terraces - 90,000 from the project and another 3,000 from the APF Reforestation Project.



Canadian Students Visit Fondwa To Inaugurate Ecotourism Program

During the month of July, seven high school students from the École Polyvalent Dominique Racine, in Chicoutimi, Quebec, visited Fondwa as guests of APF. They were accompanied by three teachers from their school, including their group director, Main Boilly. Following their arrival in Port-au-Prince on July 1, 1996, they stayed for a few days at the Solidarity Guest House in Port-au-Prince; the remainder of their visit was spent in Tombe-Gateau, in the Fondwa area, where they stayed until July 22.

As members of an international solidarity youth group, Jeunesse du Monde, the Quebecois students were interested in cross-cultural exchange. Their aims were to observe and participate in Haitian life and culture, and to incorporate these experiences into their efforts to educate their community about Haiti, when they return to Canada.

Their visit included activities such as meeting with members of APF and participating in an APF-directed tree-planting project, spending time at the APF Center in Fondwa, observing how the Cooperative works, visiting the Orphanage in Fondwa, and joining the parish of St. Antoine for Sunday service. While in Port-au-Prince, they forged links with the Californian-based university students' group, Tèt Ansanm, to join them in their efforts in community education. They were also able to enjoy Haiti's scenic variety when they spent days at the beach at Cayes Jacmel, as well as on their excursion to Petit Goave, to pick up mango trees for the tree-planting project. All in all, it was a memorable trip for the students and a good way to initiate our Ecotourism Project!

Building the Ecotourism Program

The same student Canadian group plans to come back for another month next summer. There are also two other groups who are making preparations for visits to Fondwa—a group from Philadelphia and a group from France (Operation Amos). The Canadian group will come in May, the Philadelphia group in July, and the group from France will come during the months of August and September.

The Canadian and Philadelphia groups are planning to work with the children at the orphanage and the students of the St. Antoine School. They will work with the children in planting trees and in developing their athletic skills.

The French group will be more involved in the maintenance of the road and the reforestation program. You may remember that APF is planning to plant 1,000,000 trees in just 3 years!

If you know of other groups of people—young or old—that might be interested in working with our Ecotourism Coordinator to design a program to suit their concerns and skills, please contact us. The cost is about \$20 per day, per person for food and lodging. We can also provide for visits to other sites, which might cost \$20 per person, per visit. Of course, we are open to tailoring the visits to suit the group's interests.

A Personal View Of The Soil Conservation Project

While many of the articles in *Nouvel Fondwa* are concerned with relaying *faits* and figures of APF projects, I would like to take this opportunity to give you a personal viewpoint of what it feels like to participate in one of those projects - in this case, the soil conservation project launched in Fondwa on August 26, 1996.

I have been working with Fr. Joseph Philippe and APF ever since I arrived at the beginning of July 1996, to work as a volunteer at the orphanage in Fondwa, run by Sr. Simone Schille and Sr. Carmelle Voltaire. I was very excited to be able to participate in the soil conservation project, since I had been part of the opening ceremonies for it, held under a canopy at the APF Center and attended by dozens of members of the Fondwa community. I knew that this project would entail the planting of 93,000 trees and the participation of about 300 APP members and some 2,000 other people from about 7 rural communities in the Fondwa area. At the beginning I had only a vague idea of what people would actually do. So when I arrived at 7 a.m. at the APP Center, my water bottle and sun hat in hand, I was prepared for anything.

I was assigned to work on one of the 15 teams, each with 20 workers - men and women, young and old. Our team's task was to squat around a pile of earth - a mixture of dense Fondwa soil and fertilizer - and carefully pack it (but not too tightly) into "sachets" (small black plastic bags), to be used later for seedlings, which will be planted on the mountainsides. The following week, we started going into ravines, carving out "shelves" and buttressing these with large soil-filled sacks, forming dike-like structures designed to prevent the mountains being washed away after one of Fondwa's frequent torrential downpours.

Although throughout my sojourn in Fondwa I have met dozens of people in the area (and was probably known to many more as "the white woman who is staying for at least a year"), none of the people in my group were people I had seen before, nor had they seen me. Nevertheless, they were very warm and welcoming, and our time passed pleasantly as we worked in the sun with picks and shovels, filling our sacks of earth while precariously balancing ourselves on the steep mountainsides. My Creole

is not fluent yet but I am able to talk with people a bit and follow conversations, and I found out from my fellow team-members that some of them - in outlying areas - had to leave at 5 a.m. to be there for 7 a.m. (we stopped for a 30 minute break at noon, and continued until 3 p.m. Each group member contributes one *gourde* (about 7 cents) of their pay towards buying lunch - a small piece of bread and a slice of avocado, along with some water. That's not much to eat during an 8-hour day in the hot sun' and some of the people told me that they had not even eaten before coming to work. It was this information which confirmed for me the other crucial benefit of this project, besides soil conservation: it provides desperately-needed employment.

Given their level of poverty, I find it all the more amazing that the people in my group were so friendly towards me, this foreign woman in their midst, awkwardly trying to help out. One woman in our group, Mirlande, was especially warm, as we exchanged information about our ages, families, etc. She was 23, and had four children, and, like many of the women I meet in Haiti, was raising her children on her own

(with her family's help, of course). Limited means obliged her to keep two of the children with other family members. As usual, my childless status was found to be quite puzzling, give my age (I am 28), but it fit with the other odd facts about me my being here alone, my wearing shorts, my need to drink inordinate amounts of water (although a few people accepted my proffered water-bottle, most waited until the noon break), not to mention the oddness of a "blan" doing "Haitian" work.

Since my stay in the region is by no means over, I look forward to seeing again the people I was so privileged to meet and work with. I also feel privileged in being able to observe the operation of a Haitian grassroots organization, and of being able to share, however briefly and tangentially, in the experience of the peasants of Fondwa.

— Louise Vis

Editor's Note: Louise Vis is a Canadian volunteer, sponsored by VICS (a Canadian international volunteer program), who is living in Fondwa and helping to promote and coordinate the APF Ecotourism Program.

The Literacy Project

The Fondwa Peasant Association's Literacy Project continues in its crucial task of teaching adults to read and write. There are now 13 Krèyol Literacy Centers (Sant Alfa) throughout the region, with a total of 14 instructors teaching an intensive six month course.

The Center's locations and instructors are as follows:

Kafoumi (2 centers): Iv Senefa & Ilèvil Pyè

Lasal: Wobè Womilis

Belvi I: Lyonèl Etyèn

Belvi II: Manase Sentijèn

Ka Anri (3 centers): Eraanyèl Bovè, Wisnè Cheri and Lorantis Jan

Micho: Jan Janson

Kawobe: Wozye Deseysis

Bèlok: Milo Etyèn

Tonmgato: Atilis Sejou u

A Letter From A Nouvel Fondwa Reader

On November 30, 1996, Cynthia Banas, from Vernon, N.Y., sent us the following letter:

Dear Father Phillippe,

Today is my birthday I am sending my 'birthday' money so that a student can buy a pig (U.S. \$25) and for 100 seedlings (\$30 U.S.).

It was good to read of all the good positive programs in Nouvel Fondwa.

Avek oné & respé, (With honor and respect)

Cynthia Banas

The projects Cynthia refers to were described in *Nouvel Fondwa* #9 (January - June 1996). We hope to receive many more letters like this, following the distribution of this newsletter!