

PACNE projects in Haiti

November 2022 update

PACNE (Action contre la pauvreté du nord-est – Association against poverty in the North-East), the legal association that brings together all the Focolare Movement's projects in Haiti, was started out of the need to bring humanitarian relief to some communities who are suffering deeply from the effects of the deteriorating economic, social and political situation, also due to the lack of security in the country.

Over the past three years, the different projects that are part of PACNE have progressed well, thanks to the dedication and courage, the generosity and the mutual support lived out by the people of the community.

Below is a highlight of the progress.

The agricultural cooperative

The agricultural cooperative has operated for about ten years and brings together some 350 small farmers from the region. Its members cultivate a 10.5-hectare plot of land, lent to PACNE by an owner. Assisted by qualified technicians, who sometimes are our scholarship recipients (see section on Scholarships further down), they learn better methods to cultivate their own plot of land to increase production. The cooperative continues to grow; more and more people want to be part of it.

Several current activities started within the cooperative, such as the cassava and rice mill, the microloans office and, recently, the cattle enclosure.



Cassava and rice mill

A cassava mill, belonging to the agricultural cooperative, is now in full operation. It allows the cassava farmers to transform their product into flour directly on the spot, instead of selling the cassava mostly to people in the Dominican Republic. The cassava flour is used for the planters' own needs or to be sold at the markets.



There is also a rice mill that prepares the rice produced in the region and then sells it directly to the local people.



Microloans

Another initiative started recently by the cooperative has been the creation of a small fund at the disposal of the members. Its aim is to provide microloans at low interest rates to allow the members to set up small enterprises, such as: buying consumer products in bulk and selling them at retail; starting a chicken or goat farm; building a pond for fish farming; buying a cow; producing honey ... What is often missing is a small capital to start. All these initiatives have been successful and after a short period, the loans have been repaid.



Construction of a cattle enclosure

Some time ago, the community of the Focolare Movement received a gift of a cow, which made everyone happy. The cow was able to produce milk, used to feed the poor people housed in our 'center for the abandoned and destitute'. What started with one cow has now increased to about ten. To protect them from thieves, they were kept during the night in the courtyard of the center, but the situation became unhealthy for the people who lived there and the plan was to sell them. However, the calves

born from these cows represent a unique opportunity to earn some income.



It was decided to build a cattle enclosure to keep them overnight, which would be paid for with the calves that will be born in the future. This enclosure is also used by other cattle owners who, for a fee, keep their cows in it for safety. The enclosure now houses 27 heads of cattle.

Reassessment of our schools

Together we considered how to make our three schools more efficient and in the long run self-sufficient. The families of the children in our schools are mostly poor families who cannot afford to send their children to the more expensive parish schools.

One way to achieve our goal would be to encourage the children who are recipients of the "Supporting children at a distance" program to attend one of our schools. This process will take time, but we are planning to start it little by little.

Scholarships

For the past fifteen years, we have had a small university scholarship program. Some talented young people, lacking the economic means, but aware of the need to improve the agriculture and business opportunities in their country, have had access to university studies. Now, after several cycles, we see the results of these efforts in the involvement of these young people in the development of their community.



Developments in Carice

In Carice, Mont-Organisé's neighbouring township, the community of the Focolare Movement has begun to establish a cooperative similar to the one in Savanette. They have started by cultivating a piece of land where the farmers can learn better production methods.

Plans for a medical center

A partially-built structure, started by the municipality but later abandoned, was given to PACNE in exchange for another building that was not suitable for us. A medical center would be of great value for the population of Savanette.

However, for the time being it is a beautiful desire until the community has the funds to start the project!



PACNE projects in Haiti

The news about Haiti reaching us through the press and television networks is rather alarming. One wonders how the Focolare movement's community is living through this difficult situation. There are security problems and inflation is so high that the price of food, as we hear from people living there, has risen by 600%.

One encouraging piece of news is that the community, drawing strength from the spirituality of unity they are trying to live, has been taking steps over the years to improve their situation. The PACNE Association has continued its work and has proved to be a providential tool, because it brings together and coordinates all the projects, from the school project to the adoptions at a distance, the center for the poor and destitute, and university scholarships.

All the projects are going ahead; below are some highlights on the progress, shared by our Haitian friends.

Update on the agricultural cooperative

The number of farmers has increased to 360 and recently we started planting plots of sugar cane, manioc, rice, corn, and millet, enabling each farmer to earn a small income.

The profits from the cooperative help provide one meal a day for the community's schoolchildren who are not included in the parish school program.

Community life

The community finds support in their commitment to live the Gospel. In different places, people come together every Saturday at 6:30 am, to receive some spiritual enrichment and share the Word of Life, a Scripture passage offered monthly as a guide and inspiration for daily living. As of now, there are 9 weekly gatherings going on.

On February 14, a formation day was organized for all these groups. Four hundred young people showed up from many localities. Many set off at 6:30 in the morning, on foot – some of them walked 5 or 6 km – to get to the Domenico Savio school in Mont-Organisé for the meeting.

After breakfast, the program included a presentation on the Word of Life for the month of February. The young people were then divided into 2 age groups, who separately explored "How to commit your life to God".

There was also time for games and cultural presentations. Lunch for all, prepared by 4 cooks who had been at work since the day before.

At the end of the day, there was great joy among all. It was the third of this kind of meetings, and it was agreed to continue to have it every year on February 14.



Group picture of the Formation Day participants, age 12 and up