

Solidarity toward Self-Reliance —Japanese NGO Assistance for Haiti—



Mr. Kumagai putting on a picture-story show for sanitation education for elementary school children (Photo: Mr. Kumagai)

Haiti was the first country to gain independence in Latin America and the Caribbean in 1804, and initially, was a major sugar producer in the world. Today, the land has thinned out, and the economy relies on agricultural exports, including coffee and mangoes. In addition, because forests are cleared to make charcoal to supplement small cash earnings, environmental destruction is worsening and agricultural land is declining.

It was 2004 when Mr. Yuichi Kumagai, project manager for a Japanese NGO Haiti no Kai or Society of Haiti, first visited Haiti. In the household survey he conducted, the responses show that many households only eat one meal a day. He even heard someone responding that he had only drunk coffee that day.

Mr. Kumagai graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture, Gifu University. Before joining Society of Haiti, he assisted vegetable farming as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV) in Burkina Faso, Africa. When he finished his term, he wanted to keep on assisting developing countries. That is when an NGO in his home prefecture of Aichi invited him to join Society of Haiti. This is how he came to be involved in assistance for Haiti.

Society of Haiti was established in 1986, and its activities began with support for Sister Sachiko Hongo who is engaged in education activities in Hinche, which is located in central Haiti. In 2004, it began providing assistance to the rural area in the same city^(*).

The project was borne from Mr. Kumagai's concept of, "Let's begin by securing food for ourselves by self-reliance." Under this project, residents jointly operate the farmland.

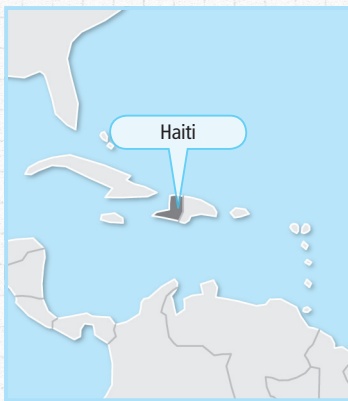
The main actor of the project is a group called "Consortium of Residents and Families." Its central figure is a Haitian, Mr. Exile. He has previously received one-

year agricultural training in Japan with support from Society of Haiti.

After returning home, he established the Consortium of Residents and Families, based on the idea of fighting poverty through solidarity. Through the partnership between Mr. Kumagai who has experience and Mr. Exile, who has strong convictions, the project gradually became more active.

Six years have passed since the project started, and the number of participating members increased from initial 30 to over 200 households. Coupled with the increase of participating members, the project has expanded its activities from joint operation of seven hectare farmland to the construction of a well, the installation of a solar panel and the establishment of a school attended by 330 children. One of the members, Mr. Florida, noted, "This community has become more vibrant since the Consortium of Residents and Families started its activities."

Also, with a view to promoting sustainable economic growth in Haiti, the project launched trainings for a forestation program in order to restore destroyed forests. It was while this training was going on, in January 2010, when a large earthquake hit Haiti, which left more than 220,000 people dead or missing. In response to the earthquake disaster, Society of Haiti provided emergency assistance to the affected areas, including food distribution. Haiti suffered tremendously, and Society of Haiti consistently supports them to be self-reliant, having newly constructed a cassava bread factory to secure enough funds to cover the operation costs of the Consortium of Residents and Families. The people of Haiti, who are overcoming difficulties, are taking one step at a time towards self-reliance, with everybody sharing the many tangible and intangible outcomes of the project.



Members of the Consortium of Residents and Families (front row, second from left, Mr. Exile) (Photo: Mr. Kumagai)

*1 Project name: General Farming Development Project (2004–present)