



Christian Operation for Health, Education and Development (COFHED)

2008 Ministry Report by Nick and Madeleine Avignon

Introduction

We would like to seize this opportunity to thank all of you sitting on the board of COFHED for your faithful prayers, personal service and involvement, and financial support to the mission of our organization throughout 2008 and before. We are grateful to Almighty God for His sustaining grace and mercy as we continue to serve Him in humility and thanksgiving.

Summary Update on 2008 Activities

The past year ended for COFHED operations in Haiti on a good note. In partnership with the community, we have achieved some of the goals and objectives we set for ourselves. At the community level, we continue to foster a relationship based on their time table and at the same time motivate them to work on their identified priorities. Many unforeseen events hinder the progress in the area of project planning and writing as a means to help meet the stated and prioritized needs of the village of Lougou. However, some attention was given to the following issues.

Field Coordination

We continue with ongoing training for Ginette and Menes on project coordination. They are doing great work and becoming more independent in many areas. They have provided us with monthly and sometimes bi-weekly reports and help with monitoring and reporting on activities and budgets. Field directors and coordinators continue to provide ongoing training to Lougou residents in all aspects of community development.

Working with the LDC

We were pleased to witness **Election Day** in Lougou this past November. Deb Krueger was also there to share with us the joy of watching such an event. With new elected LDC members, including four active young people, they pledge to take Lougou to a new level of leadership. We have registered some challenges last year working with the Lougou Development Committee (LDC). We were able to meet and discuss these issues. Sometimes, fear of voodoo spells creates division, dishonesty, passivity, and apprehension in the community at large and even within the ranks of the LDC itself. Nevertheless, three members of the LDC worked tirelessly to provide the much needed leadership in the community.

Lougou Youth

The new vibrant force in Lougou is the young people. With coaching from Nick and Menes, they run the goat program successfully. Hear the words of Senmati, a village resident, on the running of the goat program: *“I am so proud of the goat committee, they work so hard and sometimes on an empty stomach to make sure the kids receive the best goats from the market.”* We are so pleased that the young people in Lougou are very involved in community life, and we feel that they are on the right path to take back their village to a better future.

Water and Sanitation

Water

Due to various reasons cited by the LDC and our field coordinators, the project committees had suffered some setback throughout the year due to a surge in food cost, four hurricanes, a non-stop rainy season and crop devastations. Despite these hindrances, the water committee and the latrine committee aided by two LDC members and Menes attempted several times to lay the ground work for the water and latrine projects for Lougou. Some important contact names have been provided such as Protos, a local organization working to provide the town of Camp-Perrin with drinking water and a gentleman by the name of Herve, who helps manage the nearby Marceline drinking water system.

A technician from Protos went to Lougou and conducted a feasibility study. The study is now being studied by a Protos engineer awaiting his recommendation for the village. The plan is to tap from the water source in Marceline and bring to Lougou via a pipeline.

Latrines

In the area of latrines building, the LDC and the latrine committee are getting ready with the help of Menes to work on an opportunity for latrines in Lougou. Terre des Hommes is a foreign organization with a base in Les Cayes, Haiti. Their focus is on children's health and wellbeing. Terre des Hommes has just begun to launch a latrine program to help provide sanitation to some rural residents in a neighborhood village near Lougou. Some contact has been already made between the LDC and Terre des Hommes, and two latrines for two families are currently being built in the area of Moko in Lougou. Menes is making plans to accompany some members from the LDC and the latrine committee on a trip to visit Terre des Hommes in Cayes. The goal is to inquire more about the program and find out if or when more Lougou residents could benefit from it.

Community Health

In February 2008, a medical team in partnership with WHC and COFHED went down to Lougou and offered care and healing to hundreds of patients from Lougou and surrounding areas. Upon the completion of their mission, the team left funds for medical follow-up care for the residents of Lougou. Many people received meaningful benefits from the health fund. Goiter surgeries and even mastectomies for breast cancer were successfully performed in Cayes and Port-au-Prince.

After the mission team left, the Lougou health committee got energized and wanted to keep the momentum for health. The committee is made entirely of young people in high school. They lacked in

life experience and leadership, even though they tried to lead the way. When I (Nick) was in Haiti last summer, I saw that this group of young people needed to have one or two adults with them on the committee. I shared my feelings with the LDC and Menes and Ginette, and they thought it would be beneficial to the group to have someone with more life experience on their side. The LDC reached out to some adult members in the village and two of them agreed to join the health committee.

The latest addition is **Mislène** who recently graduated from nursing school in Port-au-Prince. She was sponsored by COFHED while going to school. The villagers are happy to have Mislène back in the community, and she already has been contacted for health services. Mislène will be able to engage the youth and others in the village on matters that relate to health and healthcare in the years to come.

Education

Education is the one area where the Lougou village has gained the most. The majority of residents get really excited about what has been taking place right before their eyes. In addition to gifts from individual donors, grants have been received from Providence Ministries and The Vista Hermosa Foundation. These funds have been used to support seven areas of activities that make up the education program in Lougou:

- Tuition sponsorship (primary/secondary/college)
- Breakfast feeding
- Uniforms
- Books and school supplies
- Teacher salaries
- Goat project (for education sustainability)
- Construction

Tuition Sponsorship

About 382 kids and young people have been benefiting from tuition payments at 14 area schools including La Petite Académie de Lougou and Académie Préparatoire de Lougou. Payments have been made on time and school principals are very happy to have Lougou students in their classrooms. They have claimed that because of the Lougou student sponsorship program, they are in a better position to survive financially. Many parents do not pay their dues for their kids, which is a major problem for school principals. If the teachers do not get their salaries, they tend to get discouraged and not do their best for the students they teach. We must say, however, that some teachers are still motivated to do the best they can for their students, regardless of whether or not they get paid on time or at all for many months into the year. We are also very happy to say that the teachers at La Petite Académie received last summer good training in Montessori Method, a tool that most grade and kindergarten teachers in Haiti do not have in their bags. Liz Colwell and Myra Arnold both experienced teachers from St Paul, MN accompanied by Madeleine, to Camp-Perrin and Lougou on a short-term mission trip. They did a very good job teaching the Lougou teachers about the Montessori Method. They also brought down

teaching materials and provided financial support to build some furniture for the classrooms.

It is also encouraging to point to the fact that Lougou has now seven of its young people in higher education training. Three are in elementary education in Cayes, with one of them graduating in the summer of 2009; two in business management and agricultural training school in Cayes; and one in medical school in Port-au-Prince.

It is noteworthy to mention Melicile. She is Lougou's first medical student. She is doing her second year at Quisqueya University in Port-au-Prince. One major difficulty she tends to have is continuous support for food and transportation. The problem came to our attention in the last months of 2008. We quickly voiced it on her behalf. Some friends of ours jumped to her aid and sent some support for her. She was able to finish the year, not having to worry so much for food and transportation to and from the university.

Breakfast Feeding

The Lougou students have also been enjoying a warm and nutritious breakfast meal on each school day. The menu consists of beans, rice, corn, vegetables, herring, and some goat. For drinks, it's either water or fruit juices of whatever is in season (oranges or grapefruit). Goat meat is now served once a week due to major increases in the price of goat meat and food in general. The Lougou feeding committee spends an average of \$650.00 USD per week to feed the Lougou students.

Uniforms

Most schools use uniforms in Haiti. The Lougou students wear uniforms on each school day. The Lougou education committee and the LDC use local tailors to make the kids' uniforms. This practice helps the local artisans. But the first graders of Académie Préparatoire de Lougou, their uniforms were purchased in MN and brought down to Haiti because the material is much superior and would last much longer. It was also cheaper to bring down this particular uniform as opposed to having them made in Lougou.

Books and Supplies

Providing all students with all the books and materials required can be a daunting task in Haiti. The simple reason is that what's required may not be even available on the market in Haiti. But this school year is much better than previous ones. Nevertheless, it's an ongoing process to provide books to students. Sometimes, some materials become available late in the school year, like in February or March, while the school year starts in October. Liz and Madeleine have found some good resources for the first grade class. We can say that the first graders are on a good path to becoming good readers.

Lougou Teachers

There are a total of 5 teachers for 80 kindergarteners and first graders. They receive a salary from the Lougou Education fund. Four of them teach the kindergartners and one teaches the first graders. All except one are either from Lougou or a nearby village. They are doing their best to make sure the kids receive a good education.

Kindergarten and Other Graduations

The highlight of the year in Lougou was the kindergarten graduation last June. Parents were overjoyed and stated that they would never forget that day. This class of 2019 are already calling themselves 12th graders! According to the teachers and Ginette, they are eager to learn and they feel so proud to be part of Académie Préparatoire de Lougou.

Other graduates in 2008 include Banès in Mechanics, Gressier in Electricity, Mislène in Nursing, and Nicolette and Masseur with a certificate in English. Gressier came back to the village last fall and installed the electrical system in one of the school building structures.

Goat project

The Lougou Goat Project for Education has come into the village at a time when we and our assistants stressed the importance of sustainability in community development planning. We are very grateful to a generous Minnesota family that has taken great joy in supporting not only the current Lougou education program but also the sustainable aspect of the project. More than 200 kids and young people have already received their female goat. Each family is required to build a goat shelter (with sticks) by their home and turn in 25 gourdes (about 60 cents) for veterinary insurance for one year from the date of goat purchase. The shelter is aimed at protecting the kid's goat from hungry dogs at night. On a sad note, the community lost 3 goats in all. The deaths were caused by illness.

Last fall, Madeleine accompanied these donors to Haiti and Lougou, where they were able to see for themselves the progress that has been made in Lougou. They were touched by the warm hospitality of the villagers and expressed their joy and humbleness for the opportunity to partner with them for a more hopeful future.

Community Infrastructure

Road

Back in March 2008, the LDC and Menes worked together with the road committee to mobilize the community residents on getting some help from a woman named Oglie. She is a house representative for the entire commune of Camp-Perrin at the Haitian Congress in Port-au-Prince. The LDC and Menes and Oglie managed to secure only for 4 days for the use of the only bulldozer assigned for road construction in the entire south of Haiti. Lougou had received grant money that was designated toward their road project. They have used those funds to provide fuel and lubricants and maintenance for the road, which was cut open a little more than half of the way through Lougou. According to a report from Menes, this event brought so much jubilation in Lougou. The road began to be used immediately by most villagers as a main route which they took to bring their produce market.

With the heavy rains brought on by the four hurricanes of last summer, much of the dirt road was destroyed, making it impassable to 4-wheel vehicles. For a dirt road to endure heavy rains, it would need to be compacted with gravel and have proper draining trenches on its side where needed. Nevertheless, the main goal of the Lougou residents was to have that road opening cut into Lougou, which is still being used today but only as a route to pedestrians.

Construction

Let's remember that many kids and young people in Lougou walk to and from school an average of three hours. The rough terrain is even hardest on the very young, the preschoolers and kindergarteners. The community hopes to have one day a full primary school operating in Lougou. But for right now, they are grateful if a classroom can be added each year to the La Petite Académie de Lougou. A generous grant was received which was designated for school construction. The LDC and Menes and the Lougou builders started construction work to add a classroom for 1st grade. The community took pride in the fact that Lougou poured its first concrete floor last fall. The Lougou builders gave the LDC and us assurance that the school structures are safe and solid. However, we plan to have a third independent party check on the buildings to make sure they pose no danger to anyone.

After the concrete floor was poured, Lougou's sand and cement supplier failed to deliver on his agreement to continue to provide materials needed for construction. As a result, building activities stopped. Yet, the community continued to do their part by scheduling community work days in which residents -- women, men, and even children --hailed in rocks from the nearby river bed for future use.

Women Activities and Issues

It is encouraging to point out that other interests of similar importance are also at play in the village of Lougou. Women are a powerful force that keeps both their families and the community moving. They are there at every meeting. They offer themselves in voluntary service to the community in many capacities. They are the pillars of hope and courage, endurance and strength, love and sacrifice. Without them, the village would go nowhere. Men in Haiti would often say, "If women stop, everything stops."

The women's committee, assisted by Ginette, has tried to encourage Lougou women to reach out to something new within themselves. The odds are really difficult, for most of them are heavy-laden with responsibilities as illiterate mothers and breadwinners. However, Deb Krueger and her daughter Corissa Krueger, assisted by Madeleine, see something positive in the lives of these women. They visited the village again last fall. Through SetFree International, they seek to encourage and support interested Lougou women to acquire new skills in appliqué that can help them produce quality work, which can be sold in the United States at the highest markup possible. Profits would then be returned to the workers as a means to help them improve the living standard of their families.

Another tool that has been presented to the Lougou women is micro-credit. Women are largely responsible for trade and commerce in Haiti. Last summer, Nick started to offer micro-credit training sessions to those who are interested. More than 60 women showed up in the first three sessions of work. An exhibition of photos taken by Lougou women was held last summer at SetFree International's office building in Stillwater, MN. The money earned at this event is being held in an account and will eventually be used as seed money for a Lougou micro-credit program.

We are very hopeful about our partnership with the women in the community, and we hope to create real opportunities they can take advantage of so that they can lift themselves out of the misery they face every day of their lives.

Faith in God, Worship, and Prayer

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." Jesus preached the good news to the poor, to those that went bankrupt economically, financially, emotionally and spiritually. In Haiti, many people qualify in all four areas to be candidates for God's grace and mercy. Lougou's home worship and prayer services (boukan) are places and opportunities where people sincerely pour out their souls before God; they voice all kinds of concerns and sufferings they are going through, from having difficulty to put food on the table to the problem of demon possession in the family. The needy that gather at those services would at times forget about their own problems for a while to pray for others, even for those of us that live in the United States, because we too have our own kind of bankruptcy and neediness before the Lord.

Last summer, Johny and Carmie Maceno spent a month at the mission house. They went to Lougou several times each week to work with the children and youth. They did Bible studies, songs, games, and a lot of hanging out together. They had brought many good books down for them and offered training to the youth on how to run a small library. But because we do not have yet a locale to house the library, the books are not being used at this point.

Ginette and Menes kept up with the interests of the kids and young people, and nineteen of them received Jesus-Christ in their lives. Nick, Menes and Ginette contacted the parents regarding their kids' choice to walk with Christ. To our big surprise, those parents -- many of them Voodoo believers -- expressed their happiness over the fact that their kids had chosen a new course for their lives. They really felt proud of them.

Report Conclusion

Mission work can never be the work of only one person, couple, or family. It demands prayer, support, and personal involvement of many individuals. We as COFHED representatives to Haiti are constantly aware of the importance of all of our contributors for all the community development progress that has been realized in many areas in Lougou. The people are grateful, for we hear it from them every time we set foot in the village; the witness of a loving and merciful God has been placed in front of their eyes, despite the struggles they face every day, for we hear them praise and thank God that He did not forget about them. But none of this could have been done if you did not believe with us. Thank you for your love and dedication.

Nick and Madeleine Avignon

Project and Program Directors