

## Project E.M.P.O.W.E.R: Uplifting Communities Through Collaboration and Immediate Action

by Zuri Trice

When we were young, playing outside was something we all found exciting. While we went outside to play with our neighbors down the street, our parents were inside talking about the new renovations they were doing to their in-law's kitchen. We would spend all day planning how we would ask our parents if we could spend the night. Everything changed when those gray clouds started to roll in. The distant rumbling meant playtime was over. That first cold, heavy drop on our noses started the countdown; we would tempt fate, challenging its timing. It was always one more game, one more round, one more song, then a torrential downpour. We would sprint into the house soaking wet, yet another example of mother nature outsmarting us. Getting mud on the newly cleaned carpets, we would make our parents chase us through the house, knowing that night we would be dreaming of all the good things that could happen the next day. We would wake up the following day, excited because the days after a thunderstorm were the best days to play outside. Not because the dewy smell reminded us of summer mornings at our grandparent's house but because of the way the rain made all of the dirt into the perfect consistency for mud pies. Mud pies we would decorate with leaves and flowers to then serve our parents. Mud pies we would quickly get bored of and throw at our friends. Mudpies served as make-believe food and were a gateway into a pretend world of goods and services. Now, imagine it was all a dream. Only it had rained the night before, and the mud was the perfect consistency for mud pies. However, in this reality, we did have to eat them because we were so hungry that the awful taste of the mud would pale in comparison to the agonizing pain of not eating for days. The unassailable people of Haiti have found ways to maintain a sustainable agriculture system

despite the poor conditions of their environment. Due to inadequate government and low resources, agriculture in Haiti has taken a significant hit. Struggling agriculture is a big reason why hunger is such a prominent issue on the island. To combat starvation, starving women and children on the island use mud cookies to fill their stomachs. They gather dirt, usually from crumbling buildings or roads, and put it into a large vat filled with water, the ratios being around two to one, dirt to water. They add salt, butter, and, if they can afford it, sugar to the muddy mixture, which is then spread on a thin cloth to dry in the blistering Haitian sun (Hambleton).

Jean Cadet Dor conducted a study in which he interviewed 15 small-scale farmers from Gonave, Haiti. All of the farmers used the same method of traditional labor-intensive farming, using tools such as hoes and machetes rather than machinery (Dor). They all reported running into the same problems when it came to production and distribution. Recent droughts made field irrigation incredibly difficult. None of the participants had cars. A few of them walked to the market but most used donkeys. Lack of infrastructure, resources, and government support made it extremely difficult for local farmers to sell their goods. Replaced by flashy, cheap, foreign products, farmers had to sell their crops to their neighbors for meager prices (Dor).

Since the Haitian Slave revolt in 1801, the people of Haiti have been living off little support. While they were under French rule, Haiti, formerly known as the French colony of Saint-Domingue, was the most prominent French colony. Believed to be the wealthiest colony in the world, Saint-Domingue imported almost twice as many enslaved people as the United States. It was notorious for its violence against enslaved people and indentured servants (Remembrance). After the slave revolt of 1801, Haiti's economy collapsed. They fell victim to

several natural disasters and illnesses that would chip away at the country's foundation for centuries. Still seeing the after-effects of that today, the people of Haiti have come up with creative solutions to battle their hardships. Their understanding of capitalism is reflected in the entrepreneurialism of their practices. Their practices are so sustainable that many researchers, such as Jean Cadet Dor, believe that the new generation of farmers should continue the ways of their predecessors (Dor). As leaders, our mission should be to learn from Haitians and offer them the resources they need to continue their methods on a larger scale and for a more extended period until their agriculture system is self-sustaining.

In Haiti, municipal services are a rarity. Organizations for any "special services" such as schools and paved roads are privatized. Because of this, there is little support for those in crisis. When issues such as food shortages arise, there are minimal ways for the people of Haiti to lean on their government. Close to 5 million people make \$1 or less each day, meaning that 44.4% of people in Haiti will only eat one meal every other day (Schuller). After the 2010 earthquake, roughly 250,000 individuals lost their lives, and 300,000 more were injured. Americans donated a record-breaking \$2 billion through private organizations after the earthquake. These donations were proof that funding for such a project can come from international and privatized aid (Kahn). Project E.M.P.O.W.E.R, a movement I created, is designed to uplift the people of Haiti and break down the barriers that hold them back from being successful. E.M.P.O.W.E.R stands for **EM**Powering through **O**utreach **W**ith **E**quitable **R**esources. The people of Haiti have already come up with the solutions that work best for them; the goal is to implement their solutions using the resources we can give them. The first phase will consist of sending BioProcessing, Food/Structural, Irrigation, and Software Engineers to the ten departments of Haiti. Their job

will be to assess what can be done by a machine that is being done with manpower. They will discover ways Haitian farmers can use heavy-duty machinery that is not harmful to their environment. In phase 2, we will send Government Advisers, Agriculture Lawyers, and Agriculture Policy Analysts, to the ten departments of Haiti to learn what makes their practices so sustainable. Their job will be to encourage and maintain that sustainability and produce monetary profit through facets like trade, distribution, and large-scale production. They will also work to create laws and policies that protect the farmer's and consumer's rights. Both groups will record what resources and funding they will need from private corporations and individuals to build new machinery, revitalize farming lands, manage product distribution, and other functions that are needed to help sustain the system. Through donations, hard work, and collaboration from these organizations, the United States government, and the Haitian government, we can make Haiti's agriculture system self-sustaining and profitable for all citizens.

While carrying out these action plans, we will have two main focus points. The first is to get the community involved. As stated before, it is not our job to move into foreign countries and force our solutions on them. Getting community members involved and passionate about rebuilding their agriculture system will be the driving force behind our efforts. That means educating children, teenagers, and adults on the importance of healthy eating and ethical farming. It means encouraging them to plant their own fruits and vegetables for personal consumption, which is a practice that nutritionists are already trying to normalize in the United States. Our second focus point will be to minimize government influence without approval from citizens or like powers. That means we work not only to establish their agricultural rights, but we fight to maintain them, and we call on the government only when we need to. This will help prevent authoritative

powers from using their influence to steal profits from farmers through excessive and unnecessary taxing.

The purpose of the project is to focus on the needs of the people and how we can support them. The world around us is changing; we are discovering new technology and new planets every day. However, the poor people of Haiti live in a constant state of never enough. Forced to adapt to appalling living conditions, the people of Haiti go with little to no government support. While the demand for goods and services such as health care and fresh foods goes up, and the supply goes down. Haiti's fall from grace is still visible today in the broken infrastructure surrounding the impoverished nation. While the sting of the Haitian slave revolt lingers on centuries after its occurrence, its institutions are a reflection of a negligent government that values its wealthy patrons over the suffering of the poor. Evidence of this is painted throughout their inequitable health care system and struggling financial state as they fail to support the citizens who need it the most. Haitian people have lived under an oppressive regime for over two centuries. They will continue to suffer unless immediate and continued action takes place. Project E.M.P.O.W.E.R will strive to uplift those left in the dust by their government. We will listen to the needs of the people and take whatever action is necessary. "Agriculture was the first occupation of man, and as it embraces the whole earth, it is the foundation of all other industries." - E. W. Stewart.

#### Works Cited

Dor, Jean Cadet. "Exploring Agricultural Practices and Production Among SMALL-SCALE Farmers in Haiti." *Exploring Agricultural Practices and Production Among Small-Scale Farmers in Haiti*, Northcentral University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2016,

[www.proquest.com/openview/31f67849b4683e9b218d4ff8f971f679/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750](http://www.proquest.com/openview/31f67849b4683e9b218d4ff8f971f679/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750).

Girault, Christian Antoine. "Haiti." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 8 July 2021, [www.britannica.com/place/Haiti](http://www.britannica.com/place/Haiti).

Hambleton, Brittany. "Haiti's Poor Eats Mud to Avoid Starvation." *The Premier Daily*, The Premier Daily Inc., 26 July 2021, [thepremierdaily.com/haitis-poor-eats-mud-to-avoid-starvation/](http://thepremierdaily.com/haitis-poor-eats-mud-to-avoid-starvation/).

Painter, Sally. "List of Agriculture Careers." *LoveToKnow*, LoveToKnow Corp, [jobs.lovetoknow.com/career-fields/list-agriculture-careers](http://jobs.lovetoknow.com/career-fields/list-agriculture-careers).

Schuller, Mark. "Haiti's Disaster after the Disaster: The IDP Camps and Cholera." *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, 13 Dec. 2010, [sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/869](http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/869).

Simon, Scott. "How Haiti's Aid Money Is Being Spent." *Weekend Addition Saturday*, performance by Carrie Kahn, NPR, 8 Jan. 2011.

Tetrattech, Unknown. "Local Government Capacity Building, Haiti." *Tetra Tech*, Tetra Tech, Inc., [www.tetrattech.com/en/projects/local-government-capacity-building-haiti](http://www.tetrattech.com/en/projects/local-government-capacity-building-haiti).

Unknown. "Haiti (Saint-Domingue)." *Slavery and Remembrance*, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, n.d., [slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/?id=A0111](http://slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/?id=A0111).