

STARFYSHNEWS

NEWS FROM STARFYSH.ORG

SUMMER 2023

STARFYSH IS WORKING TO BRING HOLISTIC, SUSTAINABLE TRANSFORMATION

TO THE ISLAND OF LA GONAVE, HAITI



Practicing Goodness

Dear Friends,

As conditions on Haiti's mainland continue to deteriorate, our work out on the island of La Gonave continues to move forward.

We have always been saddened by La Gonave's moniker as "The Forgotten Haiti." Remoteness makes life even more difficult than for those living on the mainland. The cost of shipping across the sea adds to the prices of everything (food, fuel, cement, etc.). During these tumultuous times, however, we are seeing a silver lining to being "forgotten," when you see ruthless gangs terrorizing the rest of the country. While mainland businesses, hospitals, and schools are shut down, life on the island goes on, seemingly unaffected. Unlike the mainland, children on La Gonave are able to walk to school without fear of being kidnapped. Parents on La Gonave are able to go to and from church and market without fear of being robbed or shot. For these things we are thankful.

We cannot ignore the effects that all of the gang influence is having on us, and we feel it's important to report it to you. But we refuse to believe that evil will have the final say. In evil's face, we choose goodness. We practice goodness even when it's hard and when it costs. We practice goodness when it might be easier to just ignore it and move on to something else. Goodness gets attention because it's countercultural. For our part, we choose to respond to suffering and evil, not through social- or political-activism, but by actually entering the lives and homes of those who suffer. By providing them family-supporting employment. By building a latrine with them. By helping them get clean water. By helping their gardens to flourish. And providing a safe school where their children can learn and play and eat.

Thank you, my good friends, for joining the counterculture of goodness in a world that is seeing all too much of the opposite.



Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Edmondson".

Steve Edmondson

President, Starfysh



Current Conditions in Haiti

Events on the ground in Haiti are likely not reaching your news feed. Following are the unsugar-coated realities...

SECURITY

- There are currently 200 individual armed groups operating in Haiti
- 80 percent of the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area is under the control or influence of armed gangs.***
- Kidnappings for ransom are now part of Haitians' daily lives.**

MOVEMENT

Many of the main roads on the mainland are under gang control who extort money from people in exchange for letting them pass by. Robberies (ie, of transported supplies, like food and other goods) occur with regularity. We have even heard reports of piracy on the sea of ferries transporting food to the island.

HUNGER

- 4.9 million people (nearly half the population) are currently experiencing high ("crisis" or "emergency") levels of food insecurity.* The entire island of La Gonave falls in the "emergency" category.
- Key Drivers*
 - Inflation: Depreciation of Haitian currency against the US dollar
 - Low agricultural production
 - Lack of humanitarian food support (shut down by gangs)
 - Armed gang violence: threatened safety affects accessibility of agricultural products
- Haiti is among the ten countries in the world worst-affected by food-price inflation**
- Number of Haitians dying daily due to starvation: 562*
- Yearly food inflation rate is currently 53%

* Integrated Food Security Acute Food insecurity Snapshot, March 23, 2023

** World Bank data

*** UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)-Haiti, March 30, 2023

No longer just on "the brink," Haiti has fallen over the edge as a nation. No elected officials remain in office. The Haitian National Police force is down to 9,000 officers, 1/3 of which are currently applying for emigration. National famine lurks as a distinct possibility if things continue to deteriorate. Sadly, there currently appears to be no appetite in the international community to deploy a country-stabilizing force.



(Above) Photo-op with Zachary in March.

MAF Suspends Operations

With gangs now controlling the roads between Port-au-Prince and the boat wharf, our only access back and forth from PAP and La Gonave has been by plane. For years we have relied on Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) to fly us to and from the island safely. Deteriorating conditions on the ground (gang control of roads, burning of small planes at remote airstrips) have now forced MAF to suspend their flight operations for the time being, out of safety concerns for their pilots and staff in traveling to and from work. Understandable. But this definitely impacts our ability to make personal visits to the island. During our most recent visit, Zachary, a young man who recently returned to Haiti to work at MAF following his training at School of Missionary Aviation Technology (SMAT) in Ionia, Michigan, confirmed his extreme nervousness and fear. It was sad to hear him say to us that when he returns home at the end of the day, he tells his wife that "I guess today wasn't my day to die."

Starfysh has established an affiliation with the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) who for now can get us to and from the island.



Life Garden Coffee to Back Burner

Gang control has shut down the ability to move coffee from our co-op growers in the mountains down to Port-au-Prince so, for now at least, we are simply not able to export Haiti's delicious coffee to the States. Hurts Haiti. Hurts us. For the time being, our lifegardencoffee.com site has gone offline.



Shipments on Hold

For the time being, we are forced to hold all shipments here at our warehouse in Grand Rapids until the security situation in Haiti improves. Thanks to a generous supporter we have ample warehouse space to receive and stage the tools, equipment, school furniture, etc. needed to improve our ability to serve the people of La Gonave.



Cholera

You will remember that ten months after Haiti's devastating earthquake in 2010, an outbreak of cholera claimed yet another 9,000 lives. No cases of cholera were reported over the past three years for which we were relieved. Now, however, cholera is raising its ugly head again. It showed up in March, in the seaside village of Gros Mangles, just a few miles up the coast from Starfysh's base in Anse-a-Galets. We notified the public health director at the hospital who confirmed the cases and sent treatment supplies. Starfysh responded by installing 63 biosand water filters and also providing supplies for the construction of 82 family latrines. Nationwide, only 28% of households in Haiti have a latrine. Stats for rural regions are lower. We ask... what would it mean if every home on the island of La Gonave had a family latrine?



(Left) Staging for installation of biosand water filters in Gros Mangles.
 (Right) A family latrine under construction for this Gros Mangles family.

Farms and Gardens

We are thankful that Spring rains arrived on time this year. Gardens across the land are looking pretty good right now, with the promise of good harvests, so long as the rains keep up. Life Garden is having its busiest year ever, as farmers from all over have been lining up every day to get tree seedlings and vegetable seeds. In March and April alone we supplied farmers with 4,700 tree seedlings along with millions of vegetable seeds (some 135 lbs) divvied up in Ziplocks and distributed just as rains arrived.



Schools

In the face of national turmoil, Starfysh's five schools have been able to meet without interruption, after a delayed start last Fall. We increased the school meal stipends in order to keep up with higher food prices. Our 800+ school kids are healthy, high-energy, and happy! One area of concern right now is that we are having difficulty securing vitamins and anti-parasitic medications from our normal sources on the mainland. In addition to the obvious value that it provides in kids' social and educational formation, school also serves as a critical framework for preventive health measures: nutrition, periodic medical assessments, vitamins, and the twice-yearly intestinal parasite treatments.



(Above) Makochon School staff and students send greetings!

Smart Box

(Below) Sous Saline School students discover a whole new world of learning.



Thanks to a generous partnership this year, Starfysh has brought computer-enhanced learning to the school in one of the most impoverished areas of Haiti, the salt flats of La Gonave. Twenty Chromebook laptops loaded with French-language educational resources including textbooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries, beginning readers, Khan Academy, Bible movies, and more. Learn more about Smart Box - Instant Wireless Classroom at smartbox.net As a beta-test... so far so good! Children (and their teachers!) have embraced this non-internet technology and we are hopeful that we can expand it to more schools in the future. Starfysh has multiple schools and finding ways to provide quality literature and educational tools to each location is key. If you have an interest in bringing technology to a remote school in Haiti, please reach out to us to discuss!



6757 Cascade Rd. SE #207
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

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