

# Water is Life

## Environmental Justice in Rural Haiti

### Objective:

Students will explore the role of water access in shaping health, food systems, and equity, and critically examine how environmental injustice disproportionately affects communities – especial in rural Haiti.

### Materials Needed:

- Overview of MFOH Programs with corresponding images – see below
- [Infographic](#) Water Use Around the World
- [Infographic](#) Haiti Crisis in Numbers
- World Map
- Whiteboard or shared digital workspace
- Student journals or laptops

## Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

### 1. Opening Prompt: Water & Inequity (5 min)

Ask: “What happens when water is not freely or safely available—like in rural Haiti?”  
List responses.

### 2. Mini-Lecture: Water, Agriculture & Injustice in Gros Morne (10 min)

Use slides or a short lecture to introduce:

- Environmental challenges in rural Haiti (deforestation, soil erosion, drought)
- Overview of MFOH programs: rainwater harvesting, soil conservation, yard gardens

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### 4. Group Reflection: Justice & Ecology (10 min)

Facilitator asks:

- What does stewardship of the Earth mean in this context?
- How is this environmental justice?

### 5. Design Challenge: Just Earth, Just Water (20 min)

In small groups, students design an environmental justice initiative focused on clean water or sustainable agriculture in a Black, Indigenous, or marginalized community (can be in Haiti or anywhere globally).

Each initiative should address:

- Who is being served (community context)?
- What specific water or food challenge is being tackled?
- How will it uplift the local community's dignity, agency, and environment?
- How is the Earth being respected, restored, or protected?
- Bonus: Include a name/slogan and short impact statement

Groups prepare a 30 second pitch or quick presentation.

### **Optional Extensions:**

- Research project: Compare Gros Morne to a similar U.S. or global community (e.g., Jackson, Mississippi; rural Kenya; Navajo Nation)
- Guest speaker: Invite a member of the Mercy Focus on Haiti team

## **MFOH's Care for the Earth Program description with corresponding images**

### **Rainwater Harvesting**

Mercy Focus on Haiti launched a Rainwater Harvesting program in Gros Morne Haiti in 2020, training 19 masons to build ferrocement cisterns, using locally available materials. The cisterns collect and store the water needed by families, farmers, schools, and churches throughout the region. The water is used for drinking, cooking, hygiene, livestock, and gardens.

MFOH-sponsored masons are currently constructing 20 cisterns per month, each holding 500 to 2,000 gallons.

Local community leaders collaborate to identify families and areas in greatest need for a cistern. Demand for the cisterns far exceeds the supply ... and continues to grow.

A key component of the program is the creation of fruit and vegetable yard gardens. Another MFOH-supported community leader trains families on soil preparation and gardening fundamentals, shares seeds, delivers seedlings/saplings, and supports crop diversification.

Many gardens have been so successful that families not only have met their family's food needs, but they have had surplus crops to sell, enabling them to fund their children's tuition or meet emergency expenses.

Our objective is to combat food and water insecurity in Haiti by expanding rainwater harvesting and yard gardens, empowering local leaders to increase their communities' resilience.

708 cisterns and 257 yard gardens are operational as of May 28, 2026.

## Agriculture

### Reforestation

In past years, the mountains of Gros Morne were stripped of trees, which led to mudslides and avalanches during the annual heavy rainy seasons. The Agriculture program has planted hundreds of thousands of saplings on the mountains. The agronomists continue to guide large crews to plant saplings throughout the area. In lieu of the centralized tree nursery at Grepen Center, MFOH now supports multiple satellite tree nurseries that bring the saplings closer to the farmers in the region. In FY 2026, four new satellite nurseries were put in place, employing 40 farmers each. With a commitment of 5,000 plants per nursery, a total of 13 hectares of land will soon be covered with new vegetation—a vital step in restoring the forests of Gros Morne and building resilience against climate change.

### Soil Conservation

To protect the steep hillsides of Gros Morne from devastating top-soil loss, our agronomy team is working with local farmers to implement soil conservation techniques. By constructing dry-stone walls and planting hedgerows, we are trapping silt and preserving moisture, ensuring the land remains fertile for future generations.

### Seed Bank

MFOH-supported agronomists have also shifted to decentralized seed banks. At the seed banks, bulk purchases of good quality, biodiverse seed are made when seeds are cheaper and then distributed to farmers, who then return a certain quantity to the seed bank after they harvest their crop. The seed bank has been a significant source of support for farmers in difficult situations, such as drought.

### Sweet Potato Weevil Eradication

The agronomists work closely with local farmers on techniques for growing hearty crops. One of their goals has been to bring sweet potato production back to the high levels attained before weevils began damaging crops. Sweet potatoes are an especially

important crop as they are a staple in the diet of most Haitians. The agronomists provide participating farmers with weevil-free shoots for the sweet potatoes, pheromone traps, and training to boost productivity.

### Food Crops

MFOH-supported agronomists teach families how to plant and maintain productive vegetable plots for family food and marketable income. The climate—alternating between seasons that are very dry and then marked by heavy rains—necessitates instruction in water collection systems and management. The current focus is on yams – a very nutritious crop that can be grown without impacting other harvests – and weevil-free sweet potatoes.

### Animal Breeding / Family Enterprise Program

Our agronomists work side by side with families in Gros Morne who want to improve their lives through initiatives such as chicken and goat breeding. In Haiti, livestock serves as a “living bank account.” Our partners in Gros Morne recently established four new goat-breeding groups, providing 40 local growers with training and the immediate economic security of animal ownership. As these goats are bred, the future economic return allows families to grow their “savings,” providing a critical safety net for medical emergencies and other expenses. The team provides extensive training to the family in breeding, care, and shelter of the animals. In return, families give back some of the new offspring to distribute to the next set of families in the program.























