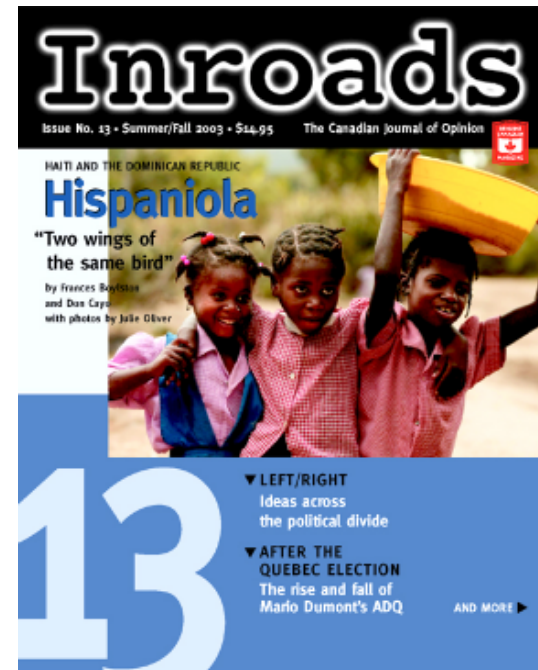


It is our pleasure to make this article from Inroads 13 available to you free of charge.

Please consider a subscription (or a small donation) to help us to continue to provide timely, thought-provoking articles in print – and often on-line – to readers across Canada and beyond.



On the last page, you will find information about subscribing. You can print it out or just send us an email or give us a call. Or you can subscribe on-line.

www.inroadsjournal.ca

Check out our website to find out more about Inroads 12, and our back issues.

Congratulations!

Vancouver Sun editor Don Cayo wrote this article on Haiti in Inroads 13. An earlier version of his article appeared in the Vancouver Sun. Based on both versions, the Washington-based Population Institute has declared him the winner in the population/environment category. Don will receive his award at a ceremony in Sri Lanka.



Looking from north to south, it is far too easy to tell Haiti, to the right of the dirt road known as "the International Highway," from the Dominican Republic. Massive deforestation has stripped Haiti to rock and clay.

Hispaniola

Two wings of the same bird

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND HAITI SHARE THE ISLAND OF HISPANIOLA, AND are thus condemned by geography to share a common destiny. Yet their history has been one of conflict rather than cooperation. Currently necessity – and prodding from outsiders – are bringing halting steps toward real cooperation. Among those doing the prodding are Canadians.

The eight million Dominicans have twice as much land and many times more jobs than the eight million Haitians, whose economy is going nowhere. Though poor, the Dominican Republic has been making progress, in part because of cheap Haitian labour. Having risen steadily over the last decades, it is now ranked 86th (of 174 countries) on the United Nations Human Development Index, while Haiti is mired in 134th place. But the Dominican economy has been faltering recently, a victim of ill times besetting the tourist industry.

In all the Caribbean and Latin America, it is in Hispaniola that Canada's influence is greatest. That influence is economic, with tourism and investment concentrated in the Dominican Republic and development aid in Haiti, which receives up to \$40 million a year from the Canadian government. It is thus appropriate that a Canadian journal investigating the economics of development should focus on Hispaniola.



Inroads is proud to publish two complementary, up-to-date and in-depth articles, by Frances Boylston and Don Cayo, regular visitors to these fascinating countries. Don Cayo was accompanied by Julie Oliver, whose wonderful photographs are also featured on the cover.

— Henry Milner

— Henry Milner

Haiti

The island's wounded wing

by Don Cayo

If YOU HAD FLOWN ALONG THE BORDER THAT DIVIDES HAITI AND THE Dominican Republic 20 or 30 years ago, the landscape would have looked like a map coloured by a child. The division was marked by a sharp change in hue – solid green for the Dominican side to the east, splotchy brown and grey for Haiti to the west.

A bird's-eye view of that frontier still calls to mind a school project. But now it's one done by a kid who can't stay between the lines. Haiti's dun colours slop into the verdant Dominican landscape again and again. In one place near the middle, a raggedy ribbon of green strays all the way across Haiti to the Gulf of Gonave.

That green slash is the trees and fields of the Artibonite valley, one of the few lush places left in a land where the jungles of

yore have been stripped to a core of rock and clay. And that green slash is in jeopardy. Its very life relies on a river that is under siege from the grey and brown splotches that each year stab deeper into the Dominican side. These are scars, marks of deforestation. And if no trees are left on the valley slopes to sop up runoff from the rains and slow its flow, a tropical river will wither and die. More than 400 little rivers have already run dry on Hispaniola, the New Brunswick-sized island the two nations share, and dozens more have wizened to a



The Artibonite not only irrigates Haiti's richest farm land; it's also a meeting place for people who live along its banks. Women gather there in convivial groups to do their laundry, and kids to play.

trickle. The land along a dead river soon dies with it. After a big rain, a rush of water down nude valley hills scours away the topsoil.

The Artibonite, Haiti's most vital river, is the only one on the island to be born on one side of the border and reach the sea on the other. Saving it need not be hard. But it will cost money, which neither country has to spare. And it will take a joint effort – just as rare in the island's sad history.

Haiti is mired in the worst kind of poverty, spinning its wheels. Billions in aid – up to \$40 million a year just from the Canadian government – may ease a woe here and there, but the dismal quality of life is stalled or slipping back. The Dominican Republic is not nearly as poor, and its economic

growth has led the Western Hemisphere for a decade. This boom is being built at least in part on the backs of Haitian labour – a source of both promise and problems.

Each country has eight million people. But the Dominicans have twice as much land and many times more jobs, and they need Haitians to work on their farms and construction sites. As many as a million Haitians live and work there – most of them illegally. Most are limited to doing physical labour because of their low levels of education and their language – Haitians speak French-based Creole, not Spanish. Some of the migrants want to make a new home in a place with steady work, and some stay only for a few weeks, just long enough to take back 800 or 1,000 gourdes (\$50 to \$62).

Don Cayo is editorial page editor of the Vancouver Sun. He “gets out of the office to do real work” once or twice a year, and has worked with photographer Julie Oliver on half a dozen foreign assignments. This is an excerpt from an article that ran in the Vancouver Sun.

There are big human rights issues at stake. They range from rough, arbitrary deportations when the army rounds up busloads and sends them back to Haiti, to the lack of political rights for long-term residents (even Dominican-born second- or third-generation Haitians), to migrants stiffed for their pay by crooked bosses. These stresses could grow worse. A lot of Dominicans fear the human tide washing over the border will soon be a flood. If the Haitian economy tanks any worse – if, for example, the Artibonite dries and its banks wither, forcing out the farmers who eke an existence there – more and more Haitians will flee next door.

But their neighbours won't be able to handle the flood, warns Ruben Silie, a Dominican sociologist who works with Haitians and on border issues: "The Dominican Republic just can't deal with any more. We're a poor country. Trying to cope with any more could overwhelm the progress we're making."

Silie deplures what he sees as a xenophobic streak in many of his compatriots – a deep distrust of Haitians and, at times, discrimination. But he shares with a lot of others a sinking feeling that the world, by not really helping Haiti, is leaving his country to carry the can.

Dominican president Hipolito Mejia has made Haiti – and its impact on his country – a priority. The day he took power two years ago he named a new director of border affairs, Ignacio Caraballo, and told him to work out solutions with the Haitians. "Barriers don't work," Caraballo says. "We've seen that. Only with development and jobs in Haiti will it be possible to moderate the Haitian migration into our country. We think joint projects could work. The idea is to make the border area, the poorest part of our country as well as a very needy part of theirs, a focus for development. Then it could fan out from there on both sides. But we can't do this alone. We need help from richer countries."



Many Haitians can't afford school, but those who can invariably look their best in neat, simple uniforms. Most schools are in crude and ill-equipped buildings.

WIDMY MERVILUS PERSONIFIES ALL THAT has been wrong and that could be right between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Ten years ago he was an illegal migrant, a farmhand and cane cutter, the lowest of the low. Today he teaches French and English in the town of San Juan, on the Dominican side. He's married to a Dominican woman, and they have five kids. He speaks Spanish so well that most neighbours don't know he's not a native.

It wasn't easy for him to get that far. A man he bribed to smuggle him across the border got into a fight with, and then shot, a soldier who tried to stop them. Mervilus ran away. He was caught, but instead of being sent back to Haiti, he was put to work for another soldier. In his two years at that job, Mervilus says, his employer gave him barely enough money to eat and buy a few clothes, holding back the rest of his pay. When he at last left to go home to Haiti, the man refused to give him any more money. Scared, broke, sick at heart and trying to make his way home, he ran into rare good luck when some American missionaries took

him under their wing. They helped him begin his spiritual and temporal education.

Aside from the ending – happier than most – his story is all too common. From the *bateyes* (hamlets of huts, mostly rude and shabby, built by companies to house migrant workers) at the edge of cane fields in the east to the mucky rice paddies and mountainside coffee groves of the west, a lot of Haitians have horror stories to tell. Most are told in the third person, however. While many migrants bemoan long hours and sporadic work, the really bad stuff seems to happen to someone else. In a paddy near the border town of Elias Pina, Eli Laguerre, 54, and Bertony Monarch, 25, spend the day in muck and water up to their knees. Laguerre and Monarch tell compelling stories of how Haitian labourers are often robbed on the way back home with their pay. Many are even killed for their paltry wages, they say. But they cite no specifics. And nothing violent has happened to them, though Laguerre says he has been stiffed for his wages more than once in 20 years of going back and forth.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

In a decade as a shooter, first for small papers in Ontario and New Brunswick and since 1997 for the Ottawa Citizen, Julie Oliver has won a wall-full of honours, including two National Newspaper Awards. Several of these prizes have been for work on poverty issues in Africa, Asia or the Americas. Judges commenting on her work often note her ability to capture all aspects of life among the very poor – the joys and the dignity, as well as the grit and despair.

Julie Oliver is on maternity leave from her job as a staff photographer for the Citizen.



If they fear things are so bad, why keep coming back? “I have to,” Laguerre says. “There’s no work in Haiti.”

And that, says Silie, is the crux of the matter: “Haitians work very hard. And they live in very bad conditions here. On construction sites, to save money they often just sleep in a corner of the structure they’re building. They cook over open fires. To understand

Saving the Artibonite, Haiti’s most vital river, need not be hard. But it will cost money, which neither country has to spare. And it will take a joint effort – just as rare in the island’s sad history.

how they put up with this, you have to see how they live at home.” At home in Haiti, a typical peasant house looks crude beside even a shabby *batey*. Even in the many places where the houses are poor, Dominicans usually have, at the least, a concrete floor and a tin roof. In Haiti it’s often dirt and leaky thatch.



Many illegal Haitian immigrants hustle wares on Dominican streets.

In theory, migrants can take advantage of the free schooling and basic health care offered in the Dominican Republic, but they don’t have transportation to get to the right place, the time to wait in line or the language

to follow what’s going on, so most don’t ever go. Still, Haitians get paid the same as Dominicans, though they don’t get benefits like a state pension plan, says Manuel Baez, a Dominican who grew up in a *batey* and went on to become head of the State Sugar Consortium: “In the sugar fields a good cutter in good cane can make \$5 to \$12 US a day.” The top end, \$12, is as much as a teacher in rural Haiti makes in a month.

The money migrant workers take or send home is, in fact, one of the few pluses on Haiti’s ledger sheets. Remittances – not all from the Dominican Republic, though far more Haitians work there than anywhere else – make up 20 per cent of Haiti’s GDP. That’s more than the country earns from all of its exports. And trade is a two-way street. Haitians import a lot of food and other goods in an endless convoy of trucks that creak and creep across the frontier at the handful of legal crossing points. Twice a week – when border restrictions are lifted and Haitians may cross freely – tens of thousands of them stream into border-town markets. Roads to and from the border swell into rivers of people, some with improbably laden scooters or bicycles, most on foot with great bundles on their heads or overflowing wheelbarrows.

Together the formal imports and the informal sales make Haiti the Dominicans’ second-best foreign customer, after the U.S. This trade seems to trump the tensions. Both countries’ leaders are starting to see a lot of self-interest in the fate of the other. Plain-speaking President Mejia says his country and Haiti are embraced in “a marriage without divorce.” Or, to the more fanciful Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, they are “two wings of the same bird.” And the two presidents have begun meeting often.



Dominican farms tend to be much more productive than those in Haiti, and Haitians bring home tonnes of food and other goods on the one or two days a week when border crossings are open to unrestricted foot traffic.



Haitian kids, like those diving in an irrigation canal, are as keen to play as youngsters anywhere. But many also work hard, like the boy burdened with a load of charcoal his family hopes to sell.

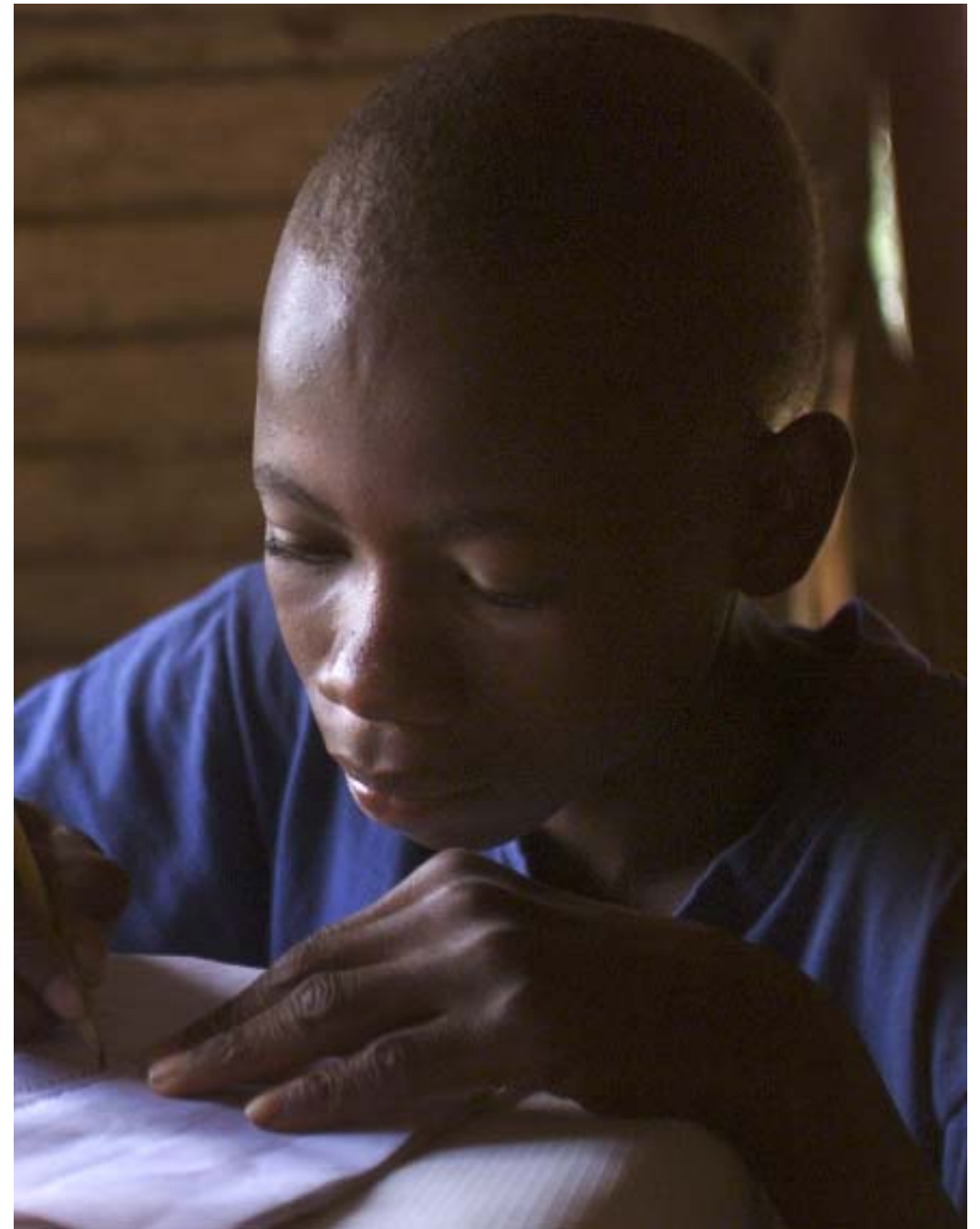
Guy Alexandre, Haiti's ambassador to Santo Domingo, was *chef de mission* at the embassy a decade ago. He has been back in his new post for two years now, and he sees a lot of change: "Now we have two flights a day from Port-au-Prince to Santo Domingo, plus buses every hour. Ten years ago, it was two flights a week. When I came to Santo Domingo the first time, I had to fly via Miami. I couldn't get a direct flight. Ten years ago, only a little information ever came from Port-au-Prince to Santo Domingo. And nothing went back. Now technical information, political information – it all goes back and forth all the time."

WHETHER OR NOT COOPERATION CAN BE made to work matters not only to the 16 million residents of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, but also to countries like

Canada that spend millions and billions, with too few good results, on the world's poorer places.

It would fly in the face of every trading nation's interests to sit back and let the weight of Haitian poverty crush the Dominican progress. The world doesn't need two desperate countries where now there is just one. It would be rash beyond belief to let this fragile friendship fail and risk reigniting old hostilities between the two countries. As long as economic relations are seen as zero-sum, one side can win only if the other loses. But if prosperity can spill across borders – if a lagging nation can learn from and be dragged up by a progressing one – new ways to tackle poverty open up.

Studies by the World Bank and others leave no doubt – aid to countries that have good economic policies is well spent and does a lot of good. But aid to a badly run



He takes it seriously, but Frandy Raphael's homework is just basic numbers and letters. He's 15 years old and only in Grade Two because he was too poor to go to school until he was 13 and became a sponsored child under Foster Parents Plan.

country is wasted. At best it changes nothing. At worst, most or all of it sticks to the fingers of corrupt officials and their cronies. Then it increases, not eases, the disparities that make life so miserable for the masses. By that measure, the Dominican Republic is a far better investment than Haiti.

Studies like one done a couple of years ago by Isaac Erlich of New York State University and Francis Lui of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology document a link between the degree of government corruption and depths of economic underperformance. The authors single out Haiti as a “notorious” example of corruption that proves their point. A World Bank report underscores the link:

“Corruption and misuse of public funds have resulted in a decline in the quality of

ible. He concedes that Canada has given up its big push of the late 1990s to help reform Haitian justice and train its police – a temporary success, but obviously a long-term failure given the breakdown of law and order that plagues the country today. But he sees the seeds of progress in the area of fostering civil society. “Many more people are involved in small groups,” he says. “They’re people who have never had any voice in how things are run. Now they’re organizing and talking directly to public institutions.”

The Dominican government has been urging international donors, including CIDA, the agency that doles out Canada’s aid, to support the kinds of joint projects that Ignacio Caraballo and his border affairs officials have been promoting. Eduardo Fernandez, the Dominican ambassador to

Canada, says there had been interest but no commitments until last November when President Mejia visited Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

Fernandez had sent copies of an extensively illustrated version of this story that appeared in the Vancouver Sun in September in advance of the meeting, and he says Chrétien appeared struck by the visible contrast between the two countries. The Prime Minister instructed his officials to come up with a \$35-million project over the next several years to ad-

dress conservation and economic development issues in the Artibonite valley. Chrétien visited the Dominican Republic in April, and signed a formal deal for the first \$10 million. Fernandez says his government hopes Canada’s involvement will entice other countries to support similar projects.



Haitians do most of the grunt work in the vast Dominican rice paddies as well as in the country’s sugar cane fields, on its coffee plantations and at its construction sites.

THE URGENT VERSUS THE IMPORTANT – IT will boil down to that, says José Mesa, a Jesuit whose duties take him at times from his home in the neat, well-paved border town of Dajabon to drab, dusty Ounaminthe across the river in Haiti. Haiti is a land where it’s almost impossible to save for a rainy day. People cut and burned valuable coffee trees in the early 1990s, for example. An embargo against the military junta of the day meant they couldn’t sell the coffee right away, but they still needed firewood to cook. “How do you talk to people about the future when they don’t know what they’re going to eat tonight?” Mesa asks. “How do you help them out in the short term and not make them dependent?”

It can be done, says Tom Braak, who runs Faith in Action, a small environmental NGO, from the Artibonite valley town of Verrettes. And it can be done fairly fast. Braak, at first working alone and on foot and now with truck and a motor scooter

and three Haitian staff, is teaching and organizing farmers in the mountains just south of Verrettes. The town, on the valley floor, is a lot greener and looks better off than most in Haiti. But when Braak first arrived five years ago, the surrounding hills

Remittances – not all from the Dominican Republic, though far more Haitians work there than anywhere else – make up 20 per cent of Haiti’s GDP. That’s more than the country earns from all of its exports.

were as sere and brown as everywhere else. Today, a lot of ugly, desiccated hills still ring Verrettes, but the area where Braak and his team work has grown much greener. That is thanks to just two low-cost, low-tech techniques – trees and terraces.

The idea of terracing – creating, in effect, broad steps on steep hills – is new to most of Haiti. The peasants tend to credit



Rural women wear their best to take their goods to village markets.

all public services, including such fundamental areas of traditional governmental responsibility as the police, the justice system, and the provision of basic infrastructure.”

Yet, says Yves Petillion, the chief of Canadian cooperation in Port-au-Prince, there may be some successes that are not yet vis-

the sun and the rain for making crops grow, and they don't always value their soil. That view changed when Braak's first few farmers tried a terrace or two. Their jaws dropped when they saw their yields triple. And then they started telling neighbours.

It's hard work, but it costs nothing to build a terrace. Rocks from the stony soil are piled into a rough low wall that cuts across a hill. Over time, the sloping ground above the wall levels off as it fills in with soil washed down by runoff. And over time the farmer builds row after row of terraces

Aid to countries with good economic policies is well spent. But aid to a badly run country is wasted. At best it changes nothing. At worst, most or all sticks to the fingers of corrupt officials and their cronies.

a few metres apart all the way down his sloping field. As word of the results spread, more people began to build terraces. A few have experimented enough to find that carefully placed trees help keep the terrace walls from breaching and hold the soil in place.

And trees themselves are a boon to their owners. They grow fast. They provide shade and hold water in the soil. Some have leaves that farm animals can graze on. And in just three or four years they start to yield a valuable crop – branches that can be trimmed for wood to build with or to make charcoal, or fruit that can be eaten or sold.

In one area where Braak's team works, scores of families had long counted on a small spring to provide cool, clean water. But when the hills above it were stripped of trees, the spring began to dry up, slowing to a trickle and then running not at all for part of the year. The farmers who needed

the water decided to plant seedlings on the slopes above the spring. Now, two years later, the spring runs year round again.

So good farming practices have become a hot topic in the mountains south of Verrettes. When a group of women find themselves heading together down the rutted switchback road to the town, they sing about how trees help life, the joy of soil conservation, the value of education. And the region's peasants have just drawn up their own 10-year vision statement. It sets out for themselves the task of blanketing their half of their mountainsides in trees, most of them fruit-bearing, within a decade.

Braak thinks they will pull it off. But a much larger-scale plan will be needed to deal with the whole Artibonite watershed and to boost the Haitian economy in any real way. Education and local control are key, says Braak, who has learned the hard way that things don't work if people don't decide for themselves what they want. Democracy, local decision-making, education, better farming – they are all tied together.

TO TREAD IN THE COOL OF THE DAWN A web of little footpaths-cum-dikes that ring a sea of rice paddies where sinewy workers stoop to a long day's toil. To stroll in the harsh sun on a bank where washerwomen gather to pound their clothes clean on the rocks, and drape them in multihued fans on the grassy banks to dry. To see naked boys and bare-breasted girls splash and romp and fill the air with hoots and hollers that kids in any land would understand. To dabble your toes and let the cool water rinse away the sweat and the dust. To lounge on a patch of sand as the shadows grow long and a parade of greatly laden men and women and



The hills that flank the Artibonite River were green with trees when Madame Gerard d'Meza was young. Now, at age 60, she's planting seedlings to try to save the topsoil eroding from her tiny hillside farm.

beasts plod past on their way home.

To a visitor immersed in this timeless world, it is hard to conceive of life in the Artibonite valley with no river to make it vibrant and green. And to those who live on its banks, those who have always known the river, it is unimaginable that some day it might not exist. The very idea is met with stunned silence.

In spite of the threat it faces, the Artibonite is still a river of heft and character. Even in the dry season, it maintains a stately flow. At its lowest ebb, the lower river is too wide to throw a rock from one shore to the other. And the water-etched scars high up on its banks speak of a torrent each spring when rains deluge the land. The irrigated shores of the Artibonite grow nearly all of Haiti's rice, a sta-

ple for all who can afford it. The rich bottomland also sustains fruit trees and all kinds of vegetables. From a small dam near the border Haiti gets most of its erratic electricity supply, though a lot of customers – the well-off minority – have backup generators to get them through the frequent failures.

Madame Gerard d'Meza, a 60-year-old peasant whose family scrapes a living from the soil, recalls how trees once cloaked the hills of the Artibonite when she came to the region as a young bride. She and her family are now planting all they can on their small plot of land to bring back some of the green. "If our river died, we couldn't find any food to eat. There would be no agriculture," she says. "If our river died, we might die with it. This is our world." ■