

Young Progressive Organization of Valere (OJPV), Valere



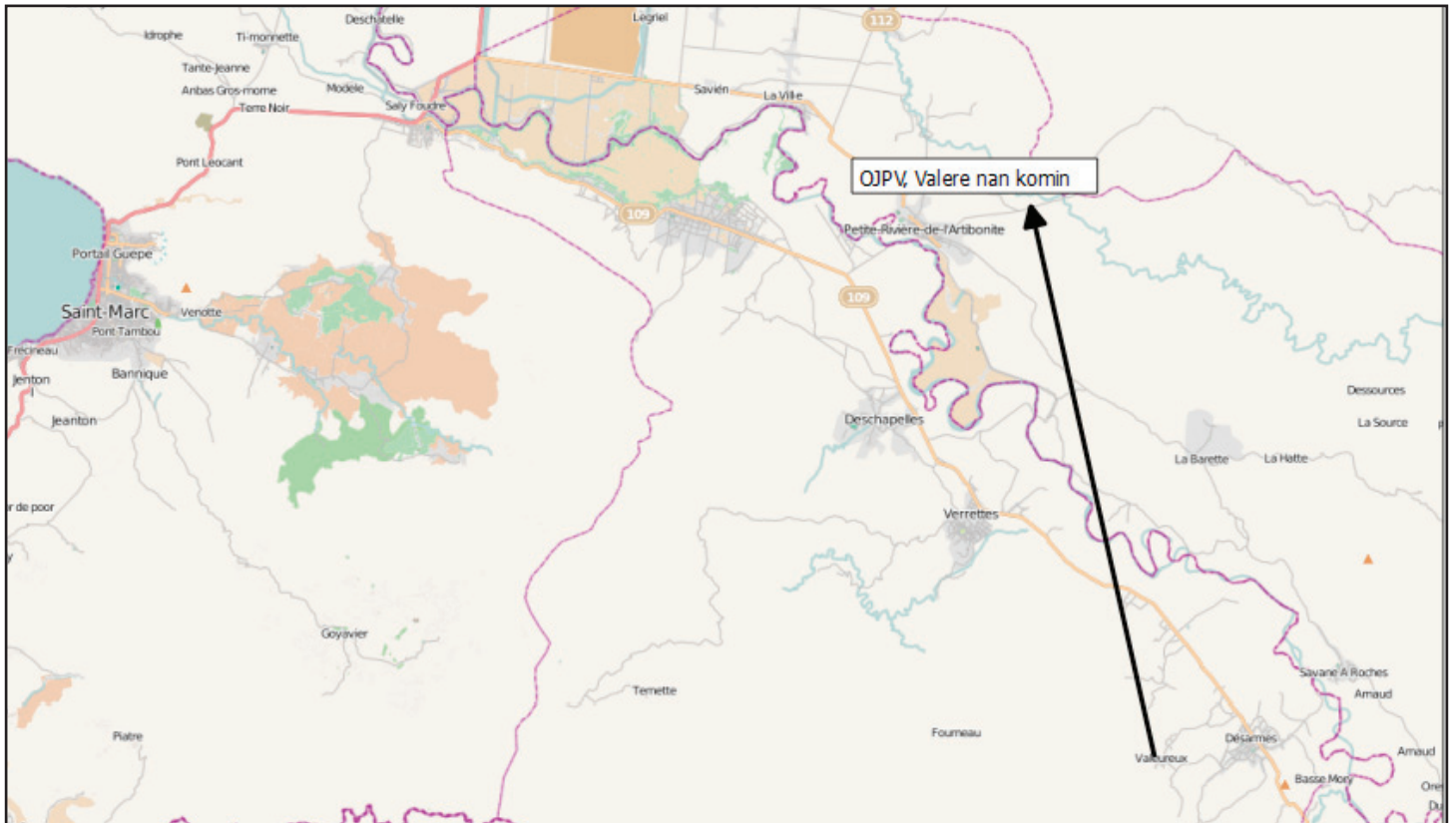
Department: Artibonite

Valere is a rural community in the commune of Verette, between St. Marc and Mirbalais. Once a severely deforested area, Valere is once again covered with trees as a result of the efforts of a local organization called Young Progressive Organization of Valere (OJPV) promoting forestry management.



What can other communities learn from OJPV and Valere?

- * Tree nursery management, reforestation, and compost production
- * Improved forest management mixing crop and tree production



History of the organization

In the early 1980s the community of Valere, in the section communale of Desarmes, began suffering from a severe deforestation problem. The Duvalier regime had carried out a country-wide campaign to exterminate the creole pig (a local breed of pig that was a critical element of the community's livelihood) in the name of stopping a sort of swine flu, driving farmers to resort to charcoal making. Furthermore, in response to the community's opposition to the Duvalier regime, the Tontons Macoutes (Duvalier's secret police) cleared an important portion of vegetation and trees so that the perceived "rebels" had nowhere to hide. Anyone being seen to plant trees was labeled a "communist" by the Tontons Macoute and risked being beaten or imprisoned.

Summary of the work

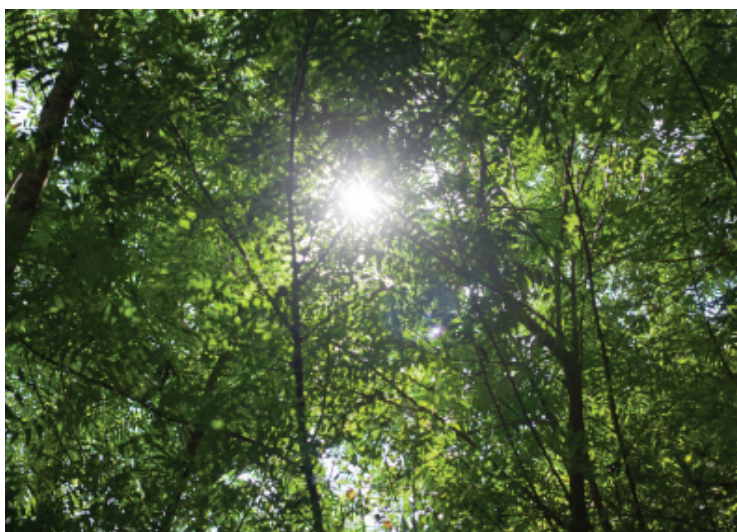
In this context, by the late 1980s, the severe deforestation in Valere gave way to erosion and diminishing agricultural productivity. However, a group of youth in Valere decided this was unsustainable and founded an organization called the Organisation de Jeune Progressiste de Valere (OJPV). OJPV and the Kasek, the local authority, drew inspiration from reforestation programs in other communities such as Camp Perrin and Limbe. In close partnership with the Menonite Central Committee Organization, OJPV received training on tree nursery management and reforestation, and supplies needed to start their first nursery.

In the early days, the organization's efforts saw modest results: it distributed thousands of tree saplings, but found that many people didn't plant them. This led OJPV to begin education campaigns on the importance of trees through churches and temples and educating the community on the importance. OJPV also changed the way it was communicating about the importance trees. Instead of concentrating solely on the environmental benefits of trees, they talked about trees and forest management as a practical way of earning a living.



Thus, people began seeing the practical economic sense to embrace trees, in addition to its environmental value. It was this critical change of message that began changing perceptions in the community, and before long, the trees distributed by OJPV were planted and taken care of by the community. People began to replace the garden with the forest. Today in Valere, instead of referring to their garden, people refer to their forest.

Now Valere is heavily forested, the river has returned to its former size, and every member of the community is involved in planting trees.





What can other communities learn from OJPV?

Clearly, OJPV is experienced in tree nursery management and reforestation. But what is particularly unique is perhaps its particular strategy on communication about the environmental and practical benefits of trees. It has a great deal of expertise in growing *Accacia* trees, which has been their favorite tool of reforestation.

They have also developed methods of what they called “improved forests”, which are combinations of agro-forestry and traditional gardens that diversify a farmer’s options and ensure there is always something to be harvested.

OJPV is also an expert at making organic compost for tree nurseries out of local materials.

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