

HAITI ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP (HAWG)

HAWG is a working group of international development, faith-based, human rights and social justice organizations advocating on issues related to U.S.-Haiti policy.

SUSTAINABLE RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN HAITI

BACKGROUND:

In the aftermath of the January 12, 2010 earthquake, both Haitian Civil Society and the Haitian Government have called for a renewed commitment to food and agricultural sovereignty within the country. Haiti is one of the few countries in the Western hemisphere where the vast majority of people live and work in the rural sector. Furthermore, 86% of the rural population earns less than \$2 per day. Hence, initiatives around rural and agricultural development - in which Haitian civil society are allowed to play a leading role - present one of the most crucial components of a comprehensive Haiti reconstruction plan.

In recent years, the rural population and economy of Haiti has experienced a dramatic decline due in part to unbalanced trade policies and the concentration of private and public investment in urban areas. Other factors such as the devastation wrought by four hurricanes in 2008, the global economic crisis, severe environmental degradation, and political instability have also contributed to the steady deterioration of the country's rural economy.

Haiti's agricultural sector was, until recently, fairly resilient and productive. In the 1980s, Haiti was nearly self-sufficient in food and agricultural production. Most of its farmers earned a sustainable income and the Haitian population could purchase locally produced food. Today, at least 57% of Haiti's food is imported and Haiti's agriculture remains in shambles due to economic and trade policies that have debilitated local food production and rural development. The international community should support Haitians in determining their own food security strategies and needs. The Haitian government's pre-earthquake National Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (DSNCRP) identifies rural and agricultural development as one of its key pillars. In addition, the newly designed National Agricultural Investment Plan calls for \$879 million in needed investments national support for this investment plan. However, it is civil society's vision and implementation that is urgently needed in order to ensure success.

Civil Society Platforms, such as the "Kat Je" and "PAPDA," have earned the trust and respect of rural agrarians and can offer strong, crucial recommendations for sustainable rural and agricultural development. For example, PAPDA presents detailed guidelines for Haitian food sovereignty that are "based on comprehensive agrarian reform (and) prioritizing agricultural investments that respect ecosystems, biodiversity, and the needs and culture of the majority."* In order for the Haitian government to provide sustainable livelihoods and food security for its people, the DSNCRP, National Agriculture Investment Plan and future agricultural funding vehicles must include the recommendations and implementation support of these Civil Society Platforms.

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Multiple organizations contribute on a case by case basis to issue or sector specific recommendations and positions expressed in HAWG materials. These materials are not designed to be consensus positions and have not been explicitly endorsed by each organization active in the HAWG.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Support a comprehensive agrarian reform that includes both traditional allocation of land rights and individual land titles. Agrarian reform should guarantee credit and technical assistance. The legal system must ensure that traditional practices are preserved along with measures that protect against corruption and bias. Ensure that land titling and land dispute settlement is conducted in Haitian Kreyol as well as French, as language exclusion is a violation of human rights.
2. Haitian civil society¹ and the government of Haiti² have called for the procurement of locally produced food whenever possible in order to avoid undermining Haitian agriculture with an excessive reliance on imports that compete directly with Haitian food products. Prioritizing local purchase of food aid would provide a direct boost to Haiti's small farmers and, in view of the benefits that it would bring to the rural economy, represents a relatively small expense. For instance, the cost of buying Haiti's rice crop for food aid over the next two years, would amount to between 1.8 and 2.3 percent of total aid funds pledged by foreign donors to Haiti³.
3. Provide direct financial support to small scale farmers, including women farmers, and their organizations through international grants and increase funding for the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development in order to provide access to credit, technical assistance and other resources for smallholders. This will help strengthen rural communities' ability to produce enough to meet their food needs and sell surpluses to consumers. Increased food production and stronger local markets will promote food security and resilience for rural communities and all of Haiti.
4. Enable the Haitian government to regulate food imports in order to strengthen and build local markets. Haiti's import tariffs are the lowest in the Caribbean sub-region, depressing prices for Haitian producers. The Haitian government's ability to regulate markets on rice and other imports, for example, will help protect and support local agricultural production.
5. Repair and improve agricultural infrastructure including roads, water systems, and soils management.
6. Invest in participatory, farmer-led research and knowledge transfer among small-scale farmers to support agroecological technologies and approaches as a viable strategy to sustainably improve production, food security and environmental regeneration. This can strengthen soil conservation and improvement, local seed systems, livestock management, market linkages, water management and reforestation. Knowledge sharing can be accomplished through farmer-to-farmer networks, exchanges, documentation, web-based platforms, radio and other media, both within Haiti and across other Caribbean and Latin American countries as appropriate.
7. Strengthen local seeds systems. Haitian small scale farmers depend on their own seed production and storage, and this can be strengthened through training and support (e.g., a seed selection process that farmers manage). Actively support current South-South seed exchanges such as those with other countries in the region. Support Haitians in promoting open dialogue on appropriate agricultural technologies in order to determine the best way forward to develop the agricultural sector.

¹ "We're not in favor just of food security (...) We need food sovereignty, which means that so that everyone can eat, we produce it here at home. We could produce here at least 80% of what we eat." - Doudou Pierre of the National Haitian Network for Food Sovereignty and Food Security (RENHASSA), quoted in Beverly Bell, "So that everyone can eat...", www.otherworldsarepossible.org

² *National Agricultural Investment Plan*, Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development, Government of the Republic of Haiti, May 2010, p. 46.

³ "Issue Brief: Using Food Aid to Support, Not Harm, Haitian Agriculture", Mark Weisbrot, Jake Johnston and Rebecca Ray, Center for Economic & Policy Research, April 2010.