



SSRC

Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum

Starting from the Ground Up

Engagement in Haiti's Agricultural Sector

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Paper prepared for the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF)

Social Science Research Council,

December 9, 2010.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect those of the CPPF or the Social Science Research Council.

Executive Summary

Although donors have been slow to engage in agricultural development, it seems like this is about to change. The Ministry of Agriculture (MARNDR) has developed a strategic plan and key donors are lining up to support it. How much funding actually reaches the sector and how that aid is deployed remains to be seen. This paper provides an analysis of the approach donors are likely to take vis-à-vis the sector, as well as where the gaps appear to be at the moment.

The National Agriculture Investment Plan 2011-2016 (NAIP) is the MARNDR's "battle-plan" and the road map that donors will be using to plan their programs. It is a US\$772 million plan aimed at boosting productivity and competitiveness; increasing national food production by 25 percent; cutting in half the number of people who suffer from food insecurity in the next five years; improving the health and nutrition of the poorest and most vulnerable groups; and increasing the income of at least 500,000 rural households.

In order to support these goals, the Ministry plans to make investments in three areas: (1) rural infrastructure (watersheds, forestry, irrigation and drainage); (2) production and value chain support (rural finance, seeds and agricultural tools, storage and marketing opportunities); and (3) public services (research, capacity building, and training in order to improve agricultural practices). It is worth noting that funding to strengthen the country's Cadastre Office is also a priority for the government.

The donors that have endorsed the NAIP form part of a roundtable on agriculture that includes: the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); the United States (through USAID, the US Department of Agriculture and the State Department); the European Union (EU), France, the World Bank, Canada, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO).

Taking their cue from the government, donors plan to roll-out their aid region by region: starting with the North/North East, then the Artibonite, followed by the South. Their interventions will focus on smallholders that produce for the national market and for export and on bringing those farmers into the market more effectively. Unlike the past, donors do see a role for the state (the Ministry of Agriculture) in this process.

Two longstanding problems that both the government and donors will have to deal with are weak/lacking land tenure security and the shortage of credit for agricultural activities.

1. Tenure security is considered essential to agricultural development for a number of reasons but the main one is that without clear titles farmers tend to invest very little in boosting their production and protecting the land they cultivate. Land titles can also be used as collateral for productivity-enhancing loans. Donors will be supporting the government's plans in this area but success will require a broad

approach that not only focuses on secure land titles but convinces farmers that have tended to avoid registering the land (because of prohibitive costs, excessive red tape and corruption) that they should do so.

2. Credit exists in Haiti; it is just not suited to the needs of agricultural producers. The terms of repayment are too short for agricultural activities and interest rates are too high. Haiti's largest microfinance provider, Fonkozé, is considering devising a product that would be suited to smallholders' needs but the organization is still studying the problem at this point. According to the IDB, finding a solution to the credit problem will be difficult until conditions in the sector improve, that is, until lending becomes less risky. This could take five years or so. In the meantime, the agency is considering financing credit programs until the banks or other credit providers can take over. In the medium term donors should consider funding a government-supported loan guarantee scheme, also a demand of the country's small and medium-sized businesses.

Areas that have been accorded less attention include: the tensions associated with supporting two objectives simultaneously, food security and export agriculture; the working conditions of agricultural labourers; and trade policy.

1. Haiti's agricultural policy documents have devoted little attention to the tensions inherent in supporting two sectors (national and export production) given the shortage of good farming land in Haiti, the enormous resources that are required to support rural development, and following from this, the need to set priorities. While the priority at this point should be to boost national production, the inevitable trade-offs need to be discussed and debated with all stakeholders in an open, participatory and transparent fashion as the sector develops.
2. Although it is known that large numbers of agricultural labourers will continue to be part of Haiti's rural landscape, policy documents have devoted little space to this group. We know that unregulated (or under-regulated) rural labour markets are a problem because they allow employers and contractors to take advantage of casual rural labour by deducting commissions; holding back wages; imposing debt bondage; overcharging for transportation, housing, and food; among other strategies. Failure to improve the conditions of this vulnerable rural group lessens the poverty reducing quotient of any rural development strategy. One priority would be to help develop the organizational capacities of rural wagedworkers so that they can more ably defend their legal rights in labour markets. The establishment of rural legal aid centers would support this objective.
3. The few references in policy documents to trade indicate a continued belief in the benefits of full trade liberalization. Trade liberalization policies and the resulting decreases in national production have intensified the country's dependency and its vulnerability to speculation, supply disruptions, and price fluctuation. Given Haiti's overall fragility and the past impact of imports on national rice production, tariff protection should be considered – particularly given the strong lobbying efforts of Haiti's peasant associations to protect food staples from the subsidized commodities on world markets.

Introduction

According to most observers, there has not been a coherent approach to economic growth based on the promotion of agriculture since President Henri Christophe used forced labor to re-establish plantations (Weintein and Segal 1992, 141).¹ This is a surprising disconnect given that agriculture has always played a dominant role in the country's economy, holding particular importance for the largest segment of Haiti's poor who depend on it directly or indirectly for their survival.² Moreover, despite its considerable livelihood footprint, the sector has consistently received a disproportionately small proportion of the national budget and of outside aid dollars (Government of Haiti 2010).³ This relative neglect at the national level, coupled with the international donor community's general underinvestment in agriculture and rural development over the last 40 years, have contributed to the sector's steady decline.⁴ In short, there are no heroic figures in this story. Both the Haitian state and international donors have habitually sidestepped the rural hinterland.

Today, however, there finally seems to be agreement in donor circles regarding the pivotal role of agriculture in the country's development. Furthermore, given that the sector is viewed as a primary contributor to hunger and poverty reduction, both the government and donors agree on the need for an agricultural strategy that will help reduce hunger, achieve food security⁵, improve health and nutrition and increase environmental sustainability. The emerging consensus about the need to increase support to agriculture and rural development is a welcome change and urgently needed.

The purpose of this paper is three-fold: to briefly lay out conditions in the sector and to provide a brief account of how the government and donors have grappled with

¹ A leader of the Haitian Revolution, Christophe was President (then later Emperor of a short-lived "empire" in the north) of Haiti from 1807-1820.

² Today, it accounts for between 28-32% of the country's GNP and for over 50 percent of overall employment.

³ This is still the case today. Before the earthquake, Haiti's government earmarked 7% of its 2009-2010 budget for agricultural development. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had suggested that figure should be at least 12 percent (Bruemmer 2010).

⁴ At various moments, through their financial clout, international aid agencies have obstructed progress and even caused significant damage to the sector, not to mention to those who depend on it for their livelihoods. The story of foreign intervention in this sector is too long to detail here. For a discussion of these events see: (Dupuy 1997, 1997, 1989; McGuigan 2006)

⁵ Experts agree that food security involves ensuring enough food (through a country's own production and trade) and access by the population to that supply. Researchers have also pointed to the need for complementary investments in health facilities and clean water so that those who are hungry can actually use the food available to them (Staatz and Eicher 1998). It is worth noting that the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights delineates a state's responsibility to provide food security, clean water and adequate health care. Unfortunately, Haiti has yet to ratify this treaty. Doing so should be a high priority for the new President and legislature in 2011.

agricultural development in the past; to review the government of Haiti's (GoH) current plans for agricultural and rural development; and to examine how donors plan to support this plan.

The Agricultural Sector: Conditions and Constraints

If we go back as far as the dictatorships of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier, we see that both governments failed to develop an integrated approach to rural development. The few resources directed to the rural hinterland were aimed at road building, reforestation projects, and a few farm schools. The Aristide administrations (1990-1; 1994-5; and 2000-4) were more inclined to be “rural friendly” but in the end a potent mix of political turmoil and donor acrimony, combined with an adverse economic policy environment, prevented progress on the rural front (Dupuy 1997, 93-113).

It is important to note that the ascendancy of the neoliberal model of market-led development also undermined the country's agricultural sector (Dupuy 2007; Oxfam 2010; IDB 2010 interview), as it did in many countries of the global South. Adherence to structural adjustment conditionality during the 1980s and 1990s led the government to scale back what few subsidies there were to staple foods, agricultural credit, fertilizer, and water and to remove tariffs, opening Haiti's markets to global production.⁶ The reduction in support to farmers resulted in a sharp drop in agricultural exports while trade liberalization policies encouraged a massive surge in cheaper subsidized food imports from the US. Food imports⁷ increased from about US\$80 million per year during the mid-1980s to the early 1990s to more than US\$350 million by 2007 (Damais 2008). It is not surprising that, against this unfavourable background, many farmers were forced off the land.⁸

The little agricultural development that took place during the 1990s was episodic and shallow. Although international donors pledged significant sums of aid following the

⁶ Donors advocated the lowering of protective tariffs on rice, the country's most basic staple. This was surprising given that, in 1995, a USAID report had concluded that tariff reductions of between three and ten percent would threaten the very existence of the Haitian rice farmer (ABT Associates 1995 cited in McGowan 1997, 25). Even more surprising is that this conclusion was not novel since as far back as 1987 authors of another USAID report had warned that these policies would most likely bring a loss of income to rice-growing peasants of about US\$15 million a year, further reducing their already poor standard of living. Rice tariffs were eventually reduced in 1995 from 35 percent to 3 percent, with pernicious consequences for the majority of Haiti's rice farmers and the country's more than 200 small rice mills.

⁷ The top imported agricultural commodities in terms of value are: rice, wheat, palm oil, sugar, chicken meat, oil of soya beans, evaporated milk, and dried beans.

⁸ Rice farmers were not the only casualties, those who raised chickens, goats and cows were also displaced by cheaper US poultry imports (Dupuy 2007, 49).

return to constitutional rule in 1994, few resources were directed to the sector or its small producers (Weisbrot 1997, 35). The new millennium did not improve the situation. Between 2000 and 2004 (the last Aristide-led Administration) budget support to agriculture decreased from almost 10% in 2000-2001 to less than 3% in 2002-2003 (Government of Haiti 2007, chapter 2, para. 30). For the period of 2004 – 2007, the Interim Cooperation Framework (ICF), which took the country through the period between President Aristide’s forced exile and presidential and legislative elections in 2006, did not include a strategic plan to reinvigorate agriculture. Between 2003 and 2005 productive investments in agriculture remained meagre.

The release of the 2007 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (known by its French acronym as the DSNRP) marks the beginning of a policy shift. Unlike the ICF, it identified agriculture as one of four growth vectors, along with tourism, infrastructure, and science and technology (Government of Haiti, 2007). It also made food security a cross-cutting strategic area of intervention. Still, new aid to the sector was not pledged right away. As is often the case in politics, external events produced the shift in priorities. Global commodity prices shot up in 2008 hammering Haiti’s population which is acutely dependent on imported food. Demonstrators took to the streets in several cities paralyzing the capital for a week.⁹ The Senate responded by passing a non-confidence vote forcing Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis to resign, leading to a political crisis. Suddenly, the rural sector became a priority. The GoH reacted by boosting its support to national production, particularly rice production in the Artibonite Valley. Although the tropical storms of that same year undermined much of what the government tried to do, the resolve of both donors and the government to finally address agricultural and rural neglect was strengthened (Maguire 2009).

Since the earthquake of January 2010, signs of new engagement in the sector are promising. As will be discussed below, sizable aid resources are being pledged to assist the sector. Moreover, the government’s post-earthquake recovery strategy, the March 2010 *Action Plan for National Recovery and Development (PARDN)*, confirms agriculture’s strategic position, referring to it as “one of the pillars of the country’s stability” and “an essential axis of its development” (Government of Haiti 2010, 9). This mind-set will be vital because, as the snapshot of current conditions below reveals, transforming the sector will be a mighty challenge requiring unwavering commitment from the top national and international political actors.¹⁰

⁹ The sense of frustration and desperation that Haitians felt was also a product of circumstances at that time: high unemployment and underemployment; a decline in production in the agricultural sector; increases in costs of fuel leading to higher transportation costs; and the high-profile presence of the international community, which had boosted expectations for improved living conditions.

¹⁰ Scholars continue to debate the causes of poor performance in Haiti’s agricultural sector. See Dupuy (Latin American Research Review) and Lundahl (The Haitian Economy) for differing views on the topic. If one pulls

In Haiti, farming takes place for the most part on small plots of land (1.8 ha average) and is carried out by small producers with little access to capital (Mathurin and Bayard 2008). The fertile plains that exist are farmed by share croppers (a worker that receives a share of the crops), tenant farmers (a worker that pays rent to the landowner) or by landless workers (who are paid a wage by the landlord) (Rights & Democracy 2008, 47). Farmers tend to use rudimentary tools and little or no machinery. Rural infrastructure is in a woeful state with only 12 percent of arable lands being irrigated, forcing most producers to depend on rainfall as a source of water. Where irrigation systems are in place, large sections are in disrepair. Rural areas have little if any electric power, feeder roads are in extremely poor condition¹¹ and there is a lack of conservation and processing facilities, which regularly leads to sizeable post-harvest losses (PARDN 2010, 9). Producers of fruits, vegetables, tubers as well as export crops, not to mention fishermen and livestock farmers, are all affected by the absence of food processing and conserving, especially refrigeration, opportunities. Finally, there are few extension services (*centres agricoles*) in operation, that is, agents responsible for transferring information and knowledge to farmers on issues of soil management, seeds, animal health, and market trends.

Overall, the agricultural sector was not severely impacted by the earthquake.¹² The parts of rural Haiti affected were those closest to the capital. According to the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), direct damages to the sector are estimated at over US\$31 million affecting irrigation channels, storage and transformation facilities, farmers' houses and the administrative and technical facilities of the Ministry of Agriculture (Government of Haiti 2010, 96). The disaster also caused a wave of migration of some 600,000 people from the capital to rural areas, creating financial and food pressures on rural families (Oxfam 2010, 5). Some seed intended for planting was used to feed family members arriving from Port-au-Prince, leading to capital losses for some farmers. Luckily, this did not severely hurt the planting season.¹³

Plans for Development of the Agricultural Sector

As noted above, although international donors were slow to dedicate funds to agriculture (the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) being a notable exception), there

together the causes outlined by both authors, we find the following explanatory factors: lack of credit, soil erosion, exploitation by landlords, middle men and a predatory state; inappropriate technologies, insecure land tenure; economic policies such as a growing population, poor infrastructure; and unjust global markets.

¹¹ Only 5% of the population has access to asphalt roads, and only 32.8% has access to dirt roads (Rights & Democracy 2008).

¹² Indeed, one interviewee suggested that the post-earthquake creation of an "agricultural cluster" was not needed. Twelve clusters were set up for the relief effort.

¹³ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

has been a flurry of activity on this front since 2004. Indeed, an important number of policy documents were rolled out:

- (i) a National Agricultural Policy paper published in 2004 by the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development (MARNDR)¹⁴;
- (ii) a 2006 analysis of rural supply chains also undertaken by the MARNDR and financed by the IDB;
- (iii) a 2008 Agriculture Public Expenditure Review (PEMFAR) conducted by the government with support from the IDB and the World Bank, which will help the government track and coordinate the funds coming into the Ministry;
- (iv) a National Agriculture Investment Plan 2011-2016 (NAIP) presented after the earthquake;
- (v) an April 2010 Agricultural Policy Document -- 2010-2025, which outlines a broad vision for the sector's long term development.

In the 2010-2025 Plan, the government lays out its intention to build a modern agricultural sector that includes both family farms and a healthy agribusiness component. Food security is a priority as is environmental sustainability. All the above plans are consistent with the country's 2007 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (DSNCRP) which, as noted earlier, made agriculture a major economic growth pillar.

The National Agriculture Investment Plan 2011-2016 (NAIP) is the MARNDR's "battle-plan" vis-à-vis a battered sector and the road map that donors will be using to plan their programs. It was developed gradually over time prior to the earthquake, with assistance from donors¹⁵, particularly the IDB, the FAO, the World Bank and the US. After January 12, the Plan was amended to incorporate the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment's (PDNA) findings.

The NAIP is an important milestone in Haiti's efforts to mobilize development aid for A&RD. It is a US\$772 million plan with ambitious objectives: boosting productivity and competitiveness; increasing national food production by 25 percent; cutting in half the number of people who suffer from food insecurity in the next five years; improving the health and nutrition of the poorest and most vulnerable groups; and increasing the income of at least 500,000 rural households. In order to support these goals, the Ministry is asking for funding to cover investments in three areas: (1) rural infrastructure (watersheds, forestry, irrigation and drainage); (2) production and value chain support (rural finance, seeds and agricultural tools, storage and marketing opportunities); (3) and public services

¹⁴ The MARNDR is in charge of elaborating agricultural policy, directing and coordinating public investments in the sector, coordinating the interventions of outside actors (including NGOs), and ensuring a minimum of basic agriculture public services – particularly agricultural research and extension, sanitary protection, training, and information in the sector.

¹⁵ According to the Ministry, input was also received from other key stakeholders including private sector groups, international organizations with technical expertise, civil society, and NGOs involved in the rural sector. Interview with Jean Marie Robert chery, Ministry of Agriculture, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

(research, capacity building, and training in order to improve agricultural practices). It is worth noting that funding to strengthen the country's Cadastre Office is also a priority for the government.

Donors supporting the NAIP form part of a roundtable on agriculture that includes: the IDB; the United States (through USAID, the US Department of Agriculture and the State Department); the European Union (EU), France, the World Bank, Canada, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO). Meetings with the Ministry are held on a monthly basis in order to coordinate interventions among this large group of actors and to minimize duplication.

The IDB is pledging to bring the most money to the table. The Bank has the longest track record in the sector and, as one of its officials notes, has always viewed agriculture as the sector with the greatest potential to promote medium and long term growth in Haiti.¹⁶ It plans to spend US\$200 million a year over the next decade to support Haiti's reconstruction efforts – a good part of which will be devoted to agriculture and rural-related infrastructure. It also recently forgave Haiti's debts, converting its undisbursed loans into grants. Given its economic weight in the sector, it will be doing much of the heavy lifting concentrating on two of the three areas of intervention outlined in the NAIP: development of rural infrastructure and support to production and value chain development. In short, the IDB plans to ramp up an already relatively strong and sustained intervention in the rural sector.

A more recent convert to A&RD is the United States, with a major push coming from the State Department. This shift to agriculture was in the works prior to the earthquake but the near destruction of Port-au-Prince provided an added impetus for a stronger rural focus. According to the Ministry, the US will be investing US\$110 million in the sector for the 2010-2011 period alone.¹⁷ Although agriculture has become a top priority for USAID, it is not yet clear where the agency will be directing its substantial funding. To date it has focused on watershed management, support to farmer associations, and the provision of seeds, fertilizers, credit and tools.¹⁸ There are indications one of its priorities will be to contribute to the NAIP's third area of intervention (strengthening agricultural services and institutional support). Plans are in the work to help train young agrarian professionals and technicians.

Although the EU is a key donor, agriculture is not one of its priorities. It is funding infrastructure, governance (related to decentralization and regional development) and

¹⁶ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

¹⁷ Interview with Jean Marie Robert Chery, Ministry of Agriculture, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

¹⁸ Interview with Anthony Chan, USAID, Port-au-Prince, November 2, 2010.

budget support. Still, it considers its investments in infrastructure (roads in particular) an important contribution to the sector's rehabilitation and development.¹⁹ The UNDP is another key actor on the development front but since the earthquake, it has concentrated its interventions on the country's short term needs. Currently, it has a few smaller projects aimed at rural development but it has not developed a program for the sector.²⁰

The World Bank is very supportive of the A&RD but is a relatively minor player since it can only fund projects through its limited granting facility.²¹ To date, the Canadian government has not been a major funder in this sector; however it recently helped finance repairs and renovations to the Ministry of Agriculture's administrative buildings following the earthquake. Taiwan, Brazil, Spain, and Cuba²² are also supporting some important projects related to agriculture.

The Donor Approach in A&RD

Given we know there will be an increase in aid to the sector, the next critical question becomes how will that aid be deployed? Although still early, it is possible to discern some general tendencies in the approach donors will adopt in the coming years. For instance, drawing on the NAIP, there will be a regional concentration of aid (*pôles de croissance*). Whether related to inputs, infrastructure, or research and development, donors will proceed region by region: starting with the North/North East, then the Artibonite (Haiti's leading agricultural region), followed by the South. Simply put, rather than sprinkling aid here and there, they plan to invest massively in one region at a time. Donor support for "*deconcentration*" will also inform aid to agriculture and rural development. The French term *deconcentration* refers to the notion of bringing the government closer to the people, for instance supporting local development and governance. It should not be

¹⁹ Interviews with Giovanni Rusciani and Aude Guignard, EU delegation, Port-au-Prince, October 26, 2010.

²⁰ Interview with Claude Beauboeuf, UNDP, Port-au-Prince, November 23, 2010. I am grateful to Isabelle Fortin for conducting this interview.

²¹ The Bank no longer provides Haiti with loans. It, however, administers the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) which was created to provide a flexible source of medium and long-term financing for projects aimed at improving food security. Haiti has been granted US\$35 million from this fund to raise the productivity of smallholder farmers through improved access to agricultural inputs, technology, and supply chains. Donors to the GAFSP fund include the United States, Canada, Spain, South Korea and the Gates Foundation.

²² Haiti is benefiting from Cuba's pioneering work on urban gardening. Cuba is also helping Haiti to develop its potential in the area of fisheries. Another organic gardening initiative has been inspired by Argentina's well-known Pro-Huerta Program (known in English as the "Self-Sufficient Fresh Vegetable Programme"). The program promotes organic gardens in both cities and rural areas and operates in six of Haiti's ten departments or provinces: Artibonite, Centre, Northeast, North, West and South. A new branch will be launched in the Northwest department, with support from the governments of Colombia and Barbados. National authorities are hoping to reach one million people by 2013. Spain, IICA and Canada provide funding to the program.

confused with decentralization, which involves a transfer of both resources and authority to the local level. This is not likely to happen for some time still, according to donors.²³

There is also shared thinking on four key issues: the purpose of agriculture; the object of intervention; the role of the state; and the role of markets. First, there is agreement on the notion that agriculture is a means to an end. In other words, donors want to identify ways that the sector can act as an engine to promote economic growth and poverty reduction. They are not so much interested in “agriculture and rural development” *tout court* but “agriculture-for-development”. This mindset is not unexpected. However, it has been critiqued by some for being overly instrumental. A more holistic approach, one that would develop agriculture “as an end in its own right”, it is argued, is more likely to ensure that the social and environmental spheres (areas such as biodiversity, worship, food habits, community relations, etc.) that are intimately linked to agriculture – albeit difficult to quantify -- are addressed in policy prescriptions (Murphy and Santarius 2007, 8-9).

Second, donors will be rolling-out a pro-small-farmer approach to agricultural development. This will certainly be the case for the IDB and USAID’s programs. The focus on smallholder agriculture dovetails with the recommendations of the World Bank’s *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development* (henceforth the *WDR08*) (as well as past World Bank approaches to this sector for that matter) (World Bank 2007). We can, therefore, expect to see significant amounts of aid aimed at improving the productivity and competitiveness of smallholders and at facilitating their entry into new food chain markets.

Following from this, the third point is that the centrality of the market holds as the chief operating principle of interventions in the sector. Programs and projects developed by donors will be based on the belief that markets are critical to improving farm production and productivity. Simply put, donors will be trying to bring smallholders into the market more effectively. While market failures (like concentrated market power) are acknowledged, the feeling is that these can be resolved by strengthening small and medium sized farming enterprises, supporting public-private partnerships, and promoting corporate social responsibility initiatives.²⁴ It is worth noting that many NGOs involved in rural development believe that the sizeable power imbalances in global supply chains cannot be so easily rectified. Oxfam has argued that the only winners in today’s free market tend to be better-resourced farmers and agri-business rather than smallholders producing for local consumption.²⁵

²³ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

²⁴ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

²⁵ Interview with Cécile Béruit, Director CICDA-AVSF and Cohen, *Oxfam Report* 2010. This perspective has been supported by academic authors as well. For recent analyses, see (Amanor and Moyo 2008; Amanor 2009; McMichael 2009; Rizzo 2009).

The last point on which there is agreement is the role of the state. Donors see it mainly as a supplier of “core public goods”: rural roads, property rights, and the enforcement of rules and contracts. Nevertheless, they are planning to help boost the capacity of the MARNDR although there is still some fuzziness in this area. It is not clear whether the Ministry is being strengthened so that it can better cooperate with the other ministries implicated in rural development (finance, trade, and public works) or if donors view the Ministry as a key agent of development charged with kick-starting rural markets. The MARNDR has received little funding in the past and has lost many of its best staff over the years to international NGOs. Its capacity has therefore traditionally been among the weakest of Haitian ministries. If agriculture is expected to become a central element in reconstruction and development, the MARNDR will need significant and sustained support from international donors (Government of Haiti 2010).

What is clear is that the IDB and World Bank seem to have set aside a purely free market approach to the sector, that can be summarized as: complete structural adjustment reforms and rely on private sector development; accord a very limited role to the ministry of agriculture and rely instead on the ministries of trade and finance (Cabral and Scoones no date, 2). In Haiti’s case, we are seeing instead a more heterodox approach. For instance, the IDB states that its principal focus in the short term is on crops destined to the national market – rather than export promotion. It also supports the policy of targeted input and credit subsidies to smallholders. USAID’s program is still in development but, as noted earlier, it will be supporting the state’s role in the sector by restarting the *écoles moyennes d’agriculture* aimed at training technicians and midlevel agricultural agents, which are in short supply and desperately needed according to the Ministry.²⁶

Finally, while the approach envisaged by donors is informed by the findings and recommendations of the *WDR08*²⁷, Haiti is perceived by many donors as a special case requiring a creative and flexible approach. In short, conventional analyses and prescriptions could be sidestepped or adjusted to fit Haiti’s circumstances as programs take shape. Also, while donors may draw on the Bank’s *WDR08* analysis, development agencies and governments work from their own institutional logic and reading of conditions on the ground, which also suggests Haiti could have room to manoeuvre on some policy issues.

²⁶ Interview with Jean Marie Robert Chery, Ministry of Agriculture, October 25, 2010.

²⁷ The Bank refers to its model as “the new agriculture”, a model that is “led by private entrepreneurs in extensive value chains linking producers and consumers and including many entrepreneurial smallholders supported by their organizations” (*WDR08*, 2007, 8). In short, “The private sector drives the organization of value chains that bring the market to smallholders and commercial farms” (*ibid.*)

Long-standing Problems

There is also agreement on the stubborn problems associated with Haiti's agricultural sector. Two stand out in particular: land tenure and credit.

Land tenure

Donors favor a focus on tenure security rather than agrarian reform.²⁸ Nevertheless, some civil society groups and observers have called on the government to put agrarian reform back on the agenda. At the moment the Haitian state is the largest landowner, followed by the Catholic Church. There are also large absentee landlords who rent out their land. The problem with this situation, according to advocates of agrarian reform, is that tenant farmers will never be as productive as those who own their own land. Hence, as a general rule, tenancy should be discouraged and ownership promoted. The second related issue, according to supporters of agrarian reform, is that currently too much land is not being farmed. Believing that food security could be well served by agrarian reform, the FAO proposed a study on the topic but was turned down by the government (Costantini 2010).

The NAIP has sidestepped agrarian reform identifying weak/lacking land tenure security as a major problem for the sector's development. As noted above, tenure security is considered essential because without clear titles farmers invest very little in boosting their production and protecting the land they cultivate. For instance, they are less likely to engage in terracing, planting trees, and growing perennial crops, focusing instead on annual crops (Dupuy 1997, 37). With respect to productivity, we know that "Haiti farmers with titles to their land earn 19 percent more than their peers with no title" (Verner 2008, 21). Regarding conservation, a recent regional study found that insecure tenure coupled with plenty of unused land has fuelled deforestation (Dolisca 2005).

A second reason land titling and land administration projects are considered essential is that a proper cadastre and national land registry are a precondition for effective land taxation. Haiti's political and economic decentralization project will depend on the government's ability to raise revenues and land taxation is one way to contribute to this goal.

A third argument in favour of supporting secure land titles is that they will lead to an increased supply of credit since titles can be used as collateral. This assertion is less clear cut, however. Baranyi, Deere and Morales (2004, 38) note that the "credit response

²⁸ In the 1990s, successive governments championed land reform, although with few results. One observer has noted that the focus on land reform stemmed from the fact that many of Haiti's government officials were trained in Latin America at a time when there was a pressing need to break up large landed estates. Interview with Michèle Oriol, *Commission Interministérielle pour l'Aménagement du Territoire*, Port-au-Prince, November 3, 2010.

effect in Latin America suggest that this effect is negligible for small farmers; that is, the benefits of titling with respect to enhanced access to credit go disproportionately to the wealthy” (2004, 38). This indicates that under certain circumstances “land titling may have an adverse impact on equity”. The GoH and donors, therefore, need to be mindful of this to ensure that inequality is not widened and that the titling project has the greatest pro-poor outcome possible.

Finally, it is worth noting that Haiti’s farmers have tended to avoid registering their land. The costs related to notary fees, surveys, taxes, and other charges can be prohibitive for the poor. Moreover, by avoiding surveys, a peasant “diminishes the risk of land loss due to the high cost of surveying and revising current plot lines to conform to old master deeds” (Dolisca 2005, 25). In other words, there will have to be incentives to persuade farmers to buy into the more regularized formal system.

Credit

A 1996 study of credit schemes to the rural poor astutely notes that credit is much more than just another input like fertilizer or seeds. “It is a command over resources; an instrument which enables a person to obtain access to or extend control over resources”(Tilakaratna 1996, 1). Because it can improve the bargaining power of the poor vis-à-vis other groups in society, credit is also considered “an important factor in development approaches that seek to empower the poor” (Tilakaratna 1996, 1).

Both the March 2010 *Action Plan (PARDN)* and the NAIP identify the need to deal with the scarcity of credit for agriculture. According to the director of the MARNDR’s Southern department, there is enormous agricultural potential in the region but the absence of credit is a huge constraint on that potential.²⁹ Moreover, as noted in the previous section on land tenure, research shows that small producers are unlikely to benefit from formal land titling programs unless they have access to credit (Baranyi, Deere and Morales 2004, 38).

To be sure, there are financial institutions in Haiti that provide credit. The problem is that the products offered are not suited to poor farmers.³⁰ The terms of repayment are too short for agricultural activities and interest rates are too high. In October 2010, the *Caisses Populaires* (Savings and Credit Cooperatives), known for their stringency on the

²⁹ Two other constraints identified were the lack of storage facilities and the impact of hurricanes. Interview with Débalio Jean Jacques, Director of the Department of the South, Ministry of Agriculture Les Cayes, October 29, 2010. According to the FAO’s head agronomist, “15-40 percent of harvests are lost before they can be sold” (Costantini 2010).

³⁰ Peasant associations are borrowing but not for agricultural purposes. They tend to borrow to start up small services and commerce. For example, taxi services on motorcycles are a booming new business in the South. Interview with Débalio Jean Jacques, Director of the Department of the South, Ministry of Agriculture Les Cayes, October 29, 2010.

collateral front, were lending at around 24%, private banks at between 30-32 % , and microcredit institutions at 48-60%. The high interest rates reflect the inherently risky business of lending to agriculture (high default rates and delays in payment) and the costliness of lending to poor smallholders in particular (loans are expensive to administer).³¹

In addition, because loans from commercial institutions are accompanied by strict collateral requirements, the rural poor are often marginalized.³² In fact, it is important to note that not all farmers experience the same level of difficulty in accessing credit. Mainstream financial institutions prefer to lend larger sums (creating a preference for large and medium enterprises), to higher income households (instead of poor households) and to bigger farmers (as opposed to small and marginal farmers and landless workers). Indeed, in Haiti access to credit has traditionally been “a sign of class difference in rural areas” (Weintein and Segal 1992, 85)

Although access to credit has never been easy, since the earthquake, competition for scarce capital has intensified, making it even more difficult to obtain.³³ Given formal financial institutions have failed to reach peasant producers and that there are limitations to the informal sources of credit on which the poor largely rely (local moneylenders), special credit schemes are being considered. Haiti's largest microfinance provider, Fonkozé, is considering devising a product that would be suited to smallholders needs but it is still studying the problem at this point.³⁴ It is worth highlighting that one reason for Fonkozé's striking success is that borrowers feel a responsibility and pressure to repay their loans in a timely fashion. According to an agronomist with many years experience, this is in part because the state is not a player in this scheme. As soon as producers know the government is the lender, the duty to repay seems to diminish.³⁵ This indicates the government should allocate funds to credit schemes but avoid administering them.

According to the IDB, finding a solution to the credit problem will be difficult until conditions in the sector improve, that is, until lending becomes less risky. The agency thinks this could take five years or so. In the meantime, it is considering financing credit programs until the banks or other credit providers can take over.³⁶ Donors should also

³¹ Interview with Karine Roennen, Fonkosé, Port-au-Prince, November 3, 2010.

³² Interview with Débalio Jean Jacques, Director of the Department of the South, Ministry of Agriculture Les Cayes, October 29, 2010.

³³ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

³⁴ Interview with Karine Roennen, Fonkosé, Port-au-Prince, November 3, 2010.

³⁵ Interview with Agronomist Magloire, Organisation pour la Rehabilitation de l'Environnement (ORE), Camp Perrin, November 1, 2010.

³⁶ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

consider funding a government-supported loan guarantee scheme, also a demand of the country's small and medium-sized businesses.

What appears to be absent from the Mix

Trade offs?

Food Security and Export promotion

Haiti's agricultural policy documents have devoted less attention than one would expect to the tensions associated with promoting both food security and export agriculture, particularly given the shortage of good farming land in Haiti, exploding population growth with restricted emigration options, the enormous resources that are required to support rural development, and following from this, the need to set priorities.

There is acknowledgment that non-traditional exports account for only a small share of Haiti's economy and that policies need to address food security. However, documents also argue there is considerable scope for expanding export agriculture and that these crops must be a priority.³⁷ For instance, some donors have pointed to the possibility of building an economy based around mangoes, biofuels (Moringa, Jatropha) and luxury goods, pointing to the citrus fruits that flavour the famous liqueur Grand Marnier, and expensive essential oils (vetivert) used in fine French perfumes.

As noted earlier, the government and donors plan to target smallholders, some involved in food production for the local market and others engaged in export crop production. Since both categories of producers are slated to receive support, conflicts over resources are not anticipated. However, if past experience is any guide, rarely are investments allocated evenly and even more rarely do they affect sectors, social groups, or regions equally. We know, for instance, that there are food security costs associated with planting perennial crops like coffee, cacao, and other high-value cash crops. Moreover, we also know that the investments needed to promote exports (such as port terminals and main roads to get produce to terminals) have often come at the expense of regional rural infrastructure related to domestic demand. Finally, productive resources such as land and water are scarce and finite. One should not assume that they are exempt from competition (Murphy and Santarius 2007).

Given the diversity of actors in the agricultural system it seems overly hopeful to suggest investments can be made in a way to yield benefits for all. Without suggesting a simple zero-sum distribution, it is clear that policy will necessarily favour certain actors and sectors over others. This short passage is useful since it reflects the conflicting interests inherent in the rural milieu:

³⁷ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-Prince, October 25, 2010.

“rich farmers could be the oppressors of farm workers; land reform is an issue to be resisted by rich farmers; high price for food products is a good policy for food surplus-producing farmers, bad news for food-deficit rural households; credit facilities and trade issues may not be a critical issue for landless subsistence rural workers who do not have significant farm surplus to sell anyway; wages are not favoured issues by the middle and rich farmers but a fundamental issue for rural workers, and so on...” (Borras 2008, 276, cited in Rizzo 2009).

Although the Ministry has outlined several objectives in its National Plan, food security and support to national production must be accorded the highest priority at this point. At any rate, how the government and donors will support national food self-sufficiency and exports simultaneously should be discussed at regular intervals with all stakeholders in an open, participatory and transparent fashion. In this way, actors can explore and debate the inevitable trade offs that will emerge as the sector develops.

Conditions for Rural Labourers: A secondary consideration

Although it is known that large numbers of agricultural labourers will continue to be part of Haiti’s rural landscape, policy documents have devoted little space to this group. Haiti’s rural world is made up subsistence farmers and landless agricultural workers, but even farmers who own land often have to depend on selling their labour to survive. While the average farmer usually relies on the extended family for unpaid labour and on occasional and informal reciprocal agreements between neighbours (Weinstein and Segal 1992 p. 84), casual labourers are hired as well. Employers tend to be more prosperous peasants, those who own six or more acres of land.³⁸

We know that unregulated (or under-regulated) rural labour markets are a problem because they allow employers and contractors to take advantage of casual rural labour by deducting commissions; holding back wages; imposing debt bondage; overcharging for transportation, housing, and food; among other strategies (Hurst, Termine, and Karl 2007 cited in Rizzo 2009, 283; World Bank 2007, 208). When policy documents are silent about labour regulation in the rural sector, it usually signals greater concern for how regulations (higher wages, for instance) might hurt workers by discouraging job creation, than ensuring that a larger share of the sector’s workers benefit from better working conditions. The old maxim that when it comes to less skilled workers, any job (formal or informal) is a good job, tends to inform this position (Rizzo 2009). Yet, failure to improve the conditions of this vulnerable rural group lessens the poverty reducing quotient of any rural development strategy. According to experts, one priority would be to help develop the organizational capacities of rural wagedworkers so that they can more ably defend their

³⁸ The vast majority of land owners have 2 hectares or less. Data reveals that 78 percent of the farmers own 2 hectares or less, 19 percent own 2-7 hectares, and 4 percent own 7 or more hectares (Verner 2008), page 17.

legal rights in labour markets (Sender, Oya, and Cramer 2006, cited in Rizzo, 2009:284). Funding for rural legal aid clinics would also assist this group.

Vigilance regarding the living and working conditions of these workers will become even more necessary if Haiti's export farmers begin to engage in fresh vegetable production for export. A recent study of Mexican vegetable production for North American markets found that agricultural modernization technologies, which are environment-friendly and healthier for Northern consumers, have gone hand in hand with the worsening of working and living conditions of labourers. The authors conclude that: "the living and working conditions of agricultural workers are worsening and are far from those described by 'decent work'. Undoubtedly, the impressive success of agro-food systems worldwide is accompanied by deepening poverty of their labourers" (De Grammont and Flores 2010; Klein 2009)³⁹.

Trade liberalization and re-regulation?

It is noteworthy that while the UN's Special Envoy to Haiti, Bill Clinton, recently admitted that US trade policy undermined Haiti's agricultural sector in the 1990s, donor policy documents have little to say about how this policy set might be re-shaped. As noted earlier, trade liberalization and the resulting decreases in national production have intensified the country's dependency and its vulnerability to speculation, supply disruptions, and price fluctuation (Rights & Democracy 2008, 42).

At the same time, there appears to be some disagreement among donors about the impact trade policy had on the ability of Haiti to feed itself. The IDB is of the opinion that trade liberalization policies harmed the agricultural sector and caused greater food insecurity.⁴⁰ The IMF, on the other hand, attributes Haiti's 2008 food crisis to the country's political instability, which discouraged investment in agriculture and prevented the efficient provision of healthcare and education services in rural spaces. Trade liberalization was a contributing factor to agricultural decline, according to the Fund, but only a minor one (Rights & Democracy 2008, 43).⁴¹ This divergence might help explain to some degree the absence movement on trade.

The lack of attention to trade policy is particularly problematic given that both the government and donors have made a commitment to enhancing food security and that the association between trade policy and food security is not disputed. Indeed, it was

³⁹ The authors show how enterprises have modified the organization of work and modes of hiring to the detriment of their workers in order to meet the quality standards mandated by the US market through the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Customs Service.

⁴⁰ Interview with senior IDB official, Port-au-prince, October 25, 2010.

⁴¹ Despite this analysis, the IMF did not oppose the government's decision to apply subsidies to imported rice during the crisis.

highlighted in a report commissioned by the World Bank as far back as two decades ago. The 1991 report argued that “the exposure of domestic food production to competition from subsidized imports would, in our view, destroy the most valuable asset of the country which is the culture of independence, initiative, dignity and co-operation of its working people. Decades of economic development have proven that it is not poverty but dependence which has destroyed the capacity of societies to provide an improving standard of living for the masses of the population” (cited in Dupuy 1997, 44).

The few references in policy documents to trade indicate a continued belief in the benefits of full trade liberalization. Indeed, this fits with the vigorous support for linking up smallholders to high-value supply chains -- in a liberalised world, this becomes a logical approach. Given Haiti’s overall fragility and the past impact of imports on national rice production, tariff protection should be considered – particularly given the strong lobbying efforts of Haiti’s peasant associations to protect food staples from the subsidized commodities on world markets.

Conclusion

Haiti’s donors seem to have reversed course on agriculture. A number of factors have driven what can only be described as a striking shift in policy priorities. First, the rigid adherence to structural adjustment principles, which had recommended the withdrawal of state support to agricultural development, has been relaxed, sanctioning the kind of policy tools that are necessary to make a difference in the sector. Second, the release of the World Bank’s 2008 *World Development Report* devoted to agriculture, and which hailed the role of smallholders as critical to development and poverty reduction, seems to have generated more confidence in the sector’s potential. Third, the 2008 global food crisis’ impact on Haiti and the country’s fragile social peace was a wake up call for many donors. And, finally, the terrible devastation caused by the earthquake has given renewed impetus to programs aimed at reversing the flow of migration from the rural areas to the urban shantytowns of the capital. Decentralisation, revitalizing the provinces, and invigorating the agricultural sector are now considered key objectives in an effort to “rebalance” Haiti and reverse the decades of urbanization and rural environmental destruction. All of these have boosted the sector’s profile.

While the GoH has developed an integrated plan for the sector and donors are planning to support it, thus far we are still in the “promises” stage of things. The funds need to be delivered and the projects need to be successfully implemented. In addition, as one official noted, there is always a risk that not all of the Ministry’s priorities will receive the same level of support from donors. This constitutes a looming problem given that success in the rural sector requires that action be taken on several fronts at once.

Rural development is a grand and expensive undertaking particularly given the constraints faced by Haiti's smallholders and rural labourers that were outlined in this paper: a lack of credit, poor access to government services (agricultural research and extension services as well as health and education) poor roads, tough environmental conditions, severe natural resource degradation and uncertain land tenure. In the not-so-distant past, the standard response regarding why no aid was being directed to agriculture, was that interventions were extremely complicated and fraught with difficulties. While undoubtedly true, this sort of response fuels paralysis. Moreover, it constitutes an untenable position in Haiti's current context. Sustainable farming practices can be encouraged, better trade policies can be developed, and the production of adequate and healthy food can be promoted. Let's hope that the development of the NAIP, and donors' pledges to support it, mean that the gloom associated with Haiti's rural sector is finally dissipating.

Recommendations to the Government of Haiti

- Given there will be trade-offs between the needs of producers involved in local food production and those involved in export activities, the government should ensure that food security and boosting national production are prioritized. At the same time, it should encourage a wide-open transparent debate on these matters in order to build support for its overall strategy.
- The government should encourage the financial sector to offer a product that will provide credit suitable to the needs of smallholders. This has been a constant missing piece in the agricultural puzzle.
- Given the competition from commercial imports, the government should consider tariff protection for Haitian rice farmers, particularly in light of the significant support that farmers in the US receive. This would be one way of minimizing the risk and uncertainty in Haiti's agrarian sector.
- A rigorous analysis of how support to the export sector and to national production for local consumption affects rural women is needed. The differentiated impact of agricultural support policies on women deserves closer attention than what current policy documents provide.
- The government should ensure that the NAIP provides adequate attention to the working conditions of rural labourers. This could include programs aimed at developing the organizational capacities of waged workers as well as to educate rural workers regarding their labour rights and access to free legal assistance.
- Research indicates that under certain circumstances land titling may have an adverse impact on equity. The Government needs to be mindful of this in order to ensure that the titling project has the greatest pro-poor outcome possible.

The government should simplify the registration process (reduce red tape), decrease the fees involved and make the process more transparent in general. It should also consider what other incentives might be necessary to persuade farmers to buy into the more regularized formal system rather than assuming that technical fixes be sufficient to solve the problem.

Recommendations to International donors

- Regarding the NAIP, donors should work together to ensure that programming gaps are filled, if they emerge. This is essential given that a successful rural development strategy involves coordinated interventions on many fronts.
- The roles of rural women in the various value chains that donors plan to support needs to be given more attention. How policies that support each stage of chain development will affect women needs to be taken into account.
- The prevalence of under-priced imported commodities that undermine local markets needs to be addressed. It is crucial that donor trade and aid policies not undercut Haitian agriculture and the country's efforts to achieve food security.
- Donors should support programs aimed at boosting the organizational capacities of wagedworkers in rural areas, as well as education initiatives that would better enable them to defend their legal rights in labour markets.

Donors should support the creation of innovative credit products that suit farmers' needs. Loans need to be available at a reasonable price with flexible payback terms. A government-supported loan guarantee scheme should be considered.

- The success or failure of a policy often depends on the policy itself but also on how a government and its implementing agencies function. For this reason, donors should support the MARNDR by helping to build its capacity in a comprehensive and sustained way. This means helping develop technical expertise and also the management and administrative skills needed to run an effective government department (finance and budget oversight, personnel, procurement, logistics and communications).

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