

Planting Now

Agricultural challenges and opportunities for Haiti's reconstruction



After the earthquake on 12 January 2010, a huge influx of displaced people moved to Haiti's 'rice basket', the Artibonite Valley. Some have managed to find work as day labourers on farms. Credit: Oxfam America/Ami Vitale.

Even before the devastating January 2010 earthquake, Haiti was one of the poorest and most food-insecure countries on earth. A majority of Haitians live in rural areas and depend on agricultural livelihoods, but neither the government nor the international community has paid sufficient attention to agriculture, leaving the countryside increasingly marginalized. Trade liberalization has exposed farmers to competition from subsidized US rice exports and made consumers vulnerable to volatile global food prices. Agriculture must have a central place in post-earthquake reconstruction, with an emphasis on improving small-scale farmers' access to resources, so as to boost their incomes and productivity, particularly with regard to staple food crops. Urgent attention is also needed to reversing severe natural resource degradation. The Haitian government has devised a comprehensive agricultural reconstruction plan. It could be strengthened with additional attention to supporting the role of women in agriculture and food security, building the capacity of rural people's organizations, and decentralizing service provision. Donors need to quickly provide adequate resources to implement the plan, and should ensure greater coherence between their development assistance and trade policies. Increased attention to agriculture is vital to helping the Haitian people achieve their short- and long-term reconstruction goals.

Summary

The massive earthquake that struck Haiti on 12 January 2010 devastated rural areas as well as urban, destroying crops, farm buildings, equipment, and infrastructure. Indirect effects touched almost every corner of the nation, as 600,000 people migrated to the countryside, increasing pressure on already stretched food and fuel resources. Internal displacement worsened food insecurity, which affected six out of ten people even before the disaster.

There is wide agreement that reconstruction will have to focus substantially on agriculture. The majority of Haitians live in rural areas and depend on agricultural activities for their livelihoods. But agricultural development faces serious constraints: years of inattention from the government and donors, technological stagnation, severe natural resource degradation, the dominant position of subsidized US rice in Haiti's markets, lack of credit and extension services, poor infrastructure, insecurity of tenure and bias against rural poor people in the land tenure and legal systems, growing dependence on imported food and food aid, and little value-added agricultural processing.

The compact between the state and its citizens is weak; corruption, neglect, and favouritism towards the urban elite have left many rural Haitians distrustful of the government. Too often, decision-making forums have excluded the voices of rural poor people. However, since 2006, the government and donors have given greater attention to agriculture and listened more carefully to Haitian citizens' views.

The immediate humanitarian response to the earthquake had a degree of bias towards external food aid, although some donors emphasized procurement from Haitian farmers. Massive distribution of seeds, tools, and fertilisers in the earthquake zone and to those hosting displaced people bolstered prospects for 2010 harvests, although donors did not provide enough resources to assist all targeted households.

The Haitian government has developed an ambitious \$772m agricultural reconstruction plan, focusing on infrastructure, sustainable production increases, value chains development, and rural service delivery. In keeping with the aid effectiveness principle of *ownership*, donors should support national plans developed in consultation with citizens, but so far, the international community has not provided all of the requested resources.

The government should prioritize mobilization of the national resources that the plan requires. Implementation should emphasize boosting small-scale farmers' incomes and productivity, particularly with regard to staple food crops. The government should also:

1. Carry out administrative and fiscal decentralization, with representative government institutions at all levels;

2. Encourage establishment of committees composed of elected officials and civil society representatives to plan and manage local development initiatives;
3. Institutionalize an effective system of checks and balances to control corruption at all levels of government;
4. As a first step towards improving land tenure security, ensure that the legal system gives equal recognition to both of Haiti's official languages, and provide expanded legal assistance so that rural citizens can obtain access to justice in such matters as land disputes;
5. Support efforts of farmers, rural poor people, and rural women to develop robust, representative organizations;
6. Formulate agricultural policies and design programmes that take into account the gender division of labour and support women in their agricultural marketing roles;
7. Bring idle state land into production in transparent ways, through leasing and employment of wage labourers;
8. Revitalize the network of decentralized agricultural research, extension, and training centres, and provide services to farmers in a consultative manner;
9. Ensure that small-scale farmers have access to credit;
10. Rehabilitate and expand rural infrastructure, particularly roads and irrigation works;
11. Mainstream environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction; emphasize reforestation, agroforestry, integrated watershed management, and promotion of fuel-efficient stoves.

In addition, the government should make health care and education available in rural areas and facilitate creation of off-farm employment opportunities, making rural areas attractive places to live and work.

Over the long term, the government and civil society should engage in a dialogue to arrive at a trade policy that balances tariff protection for Haitian farmers and affordable food prices for consumers.

For their part, all donors (bilateral and multilateral) and the international financial institutions should:

1. Prioritize agriculture and food security, align strategies with Haiti's National Agricultural Investment Plan and the agricultural and rural development objectives outlined above, and provide the resources required to implement the plan;
2. Fund local food aid purchase whenever appropriate, based on rigorous assessment of need and local market conditions;
3. Provide assistance in the form of grants, not loans;
4. Create mechanisms to incorporate civil society into the debate about development strategies; and
5. Adopt an accountability framework that allows assessment of fulfilment of commitments and contribution to improved food security.

Bilateral donors should ensure coherence between aid and trade policies. To this end, the United States should:

1. Exempt Haiti from the 'Bumpers Amendment' that prohibits assistance to production of food crops considered 'competitive' with US exports;
2. Reform trade-distorting rice subsidies that lead to dumping and undermine Haitian producers; and
3. Provide full duty- and quota-free access to the US market for Haitian exports.

Successive governments and the donor community have long failed to pay sufficient attention to Haitian agriculture. Yet the majority of Haitians still live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Lack of policy attention to rural development has marginalized the countryside. Rural poverty and food insecurity rates are among the world's highest. Most farmers cultivate small plots and lack security of tenure. Rural poor people want for strong and representative organizations that can put their concerns on the table in policy debates and enhance their economic well-being.

Under pressure from donors, the Haitian government has lowered agricultural tariffs well below those of Caribbean neighbours. Trade liberalization has increased dependence on imported food and vulnerability to volatile global prices, while exposing Haitian farmers to stiff competition from subsidized US rice exports.

The massive earthquake that struck Haiti on 12 January 2010 had devastating effects on metropolitan Port-au-Prince and other cities. The tremor also demolished parts of rural Haiti, destroying crops, farm buildings, equipment, and infrastructure. The indirect effects touched almost every corner of the nation, as 600,000 people left the affected areas to stay with relatives or friends in the countryside, intensifying food insecurity and demand for fuel wood from Haiti's dwindling forests.

If post-earthquake reconstruction is to facilitate sustainable development, poverty reduction, and food security in both urban and rural areas, it must give high priority to agriculture. Efforts must redouble the emphasis on improving small-scale farmers' access to resources in order to boost their incomes and productivity, particularly with regard to staple food crops. Reconstruction must also focus on restoring Haiti's degraded natural resources.

The Haitian government has developed an ambitious \$772m agricultural reconstruction plan, focusing on improving infrastructure, sustainably boosting production, developing value chains, and enhancing rural services. So far, the international community has not yet agreed to provide all of the requested resources. If fully implemented, the plan could facilitate the scaling up of promising local initiatives to: economically empower farmers, including women; ensure voice and accountability in agricultural policy making; decentralize rural service provision to make services more responsive to farmers and other rural poor people; and create incentives for people to live and work in rural areas.

This paper explores the background of rural neglect that preceded the earthquake, the effects of the earthquake on rural areas and the humanitarian response, reconstruction plans, and promising rural development initiatives. It concludes with recommendations to both the Haitian government and donors to help ensure that agriculture becomes a higher policy priority, based on accountability to Haiti's citizens.

An agrarian legacy of disregard, decapitalization, and degradation

Agriculture has a paradoxical status in Haiti. On the one hand, as the World Bank notes, it is 'by far the most important economic and social activity'.¹ The majority of Haitians (55 per cent) live in rural areas,² and agriculture employs half the national workforce (including 75 per cent of low-income Haitians).³ Although its share of overall economic activity has declined from 50 per cent in the 1960s,⁴ agriculture still accounts for 28 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).⁵ But despite agriculture playing a central role in the lives of most Haitians, neither the government nor donors have made it a major priority over the past 50 years.

Extract and neglect

The Duvalier family, which ruled Haiti from 1957 to 1986, centralized political power and economic activity in Port-au-Prince, and subjected rural areas to repression and predatory taxation, with little public investment in agricultural development.⁶ The overthrow of Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986 did not reverse this lack of policy attention. Instead, the country faced a long period of political instability and rural decapitalization. When a military coup overthrew elected President Jean Bertrand Aristide in 1991, the international community imposed an embargo that lasted until 1994, which further exacerbated rural poverty. When Aristide returned to power with support from the US military, he faced severe pressure from donors – including the United States and the World Bank – to open Haiti's markets to the global economy.⁷

Trade liberalization: walking a tightrope without a net

Aristide acceded to donors' demands, and almost overnight, Haiti became one of the world's most open markets. The government reduced the tariff on imported rice from 50 per cent to just 3 per cent (compared with the Caribbean average of 38 per cent).⁸ However, this sharp policy shift failed to include any measures to cushion the blow for Haitian farmers, such as production support or a safety net programme to ease income losses.⁹

Trade liberalization has greatly reduced food self-reliance. Although consumers have benefited from access to less expensive imported rice, there is still a strong preference for local products.¹⁰ Between 1990 and 1999, Haitian rice production fell by nearly half; though it has recovered somewhat more recently, the average output of the late 2000s remains more than 6 per cent below the levels of the 1980s.¹¹ From virtual self-sufficiency in 1980, today Haiti imports 80 per cent of its

rice, and 60 per cent of the overall food supply comes from abroad.¹² Farm output has plummeted by 0.9 per cent per year since 1995.¹³

Bill Clinton – the US president who pressed Haiti to cut tariffs and who is now the UN Special Envoy for Haiti and Co-Chair of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission – recently acknowledged that his actions helped US farmers at the expense of Haitian cultivators:

*'It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake... I have to live every day with the consequences of the lost capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people, because of what I did.'*¹⁴

Benefits to Haitian consumers proved fleeting; when global rice prices ballooned fivefold during 2007 and 2008, Haiti's open market absorbed the increases. Protests broke out nationwide, and in politically polarized Port-au-Prince, turned violent.¹⁵

Haiti is the third largest market for US rice exports, after Japan and Mexico.¹⁷

In 2009, 611 US rice farmers received government subsidies totalling almost 20 times as much as the agricultural aid that the United States provided to Haiti, which has 1 million farming households.¹⁶ (See Box 1.)

Box 1: US aid to agriculture, at home and in Haiti, 2009

Total US aid to Haiti: \$353m
of which, aid to agriculture: \$22m (6 per cent of total)
of which, in-kind food aid: \$64m (18 per cent of total).¹⁸

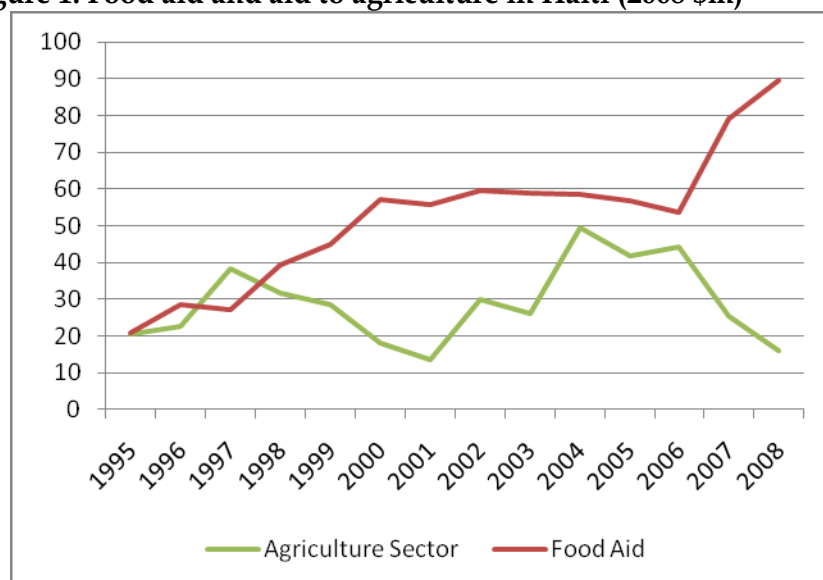
Total payments to US rice farmers: US\$434m.¹⁹

Subsidies have helped the United States – the world's fifth largest rice exporter – to capture a 16 per cent share of the \$11bn global rice market.

Unable to compete with cheap rice imports, many Haitian farmers joined the exodus from the countryside that began during the Duvalier era.²⁰ An estimated 75,000 people stream into Port-au-Prince each year. The city, designed for 250,000 residents, was home to nearly 3 million by the time of the 2010 earthquake. Many lived in sprawling slums such as Cité Soleil, without basic amenities like sewers and clean drinking water; the promise of jobs and education in the capital region has proved illusory for far too many of the migrants.²¹

Agriculture remained on the policy backburner as the new millennium dawned. Between 2000 and 2005, the Haitian government allocated just 4 per cent of its budget to the sector.²² During the same period, aid to agriculture accounted for a mere 2.5 per cent of the development assistance that Haiti received.²³ As Figure 1 indicates, since the late 1990s, food aid has regularly exceeded the amount of agricultural aid.

Figure 1: Food aid and aid to agriculture in Haiti (2008 \$m)²⁴



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Marginalizing the countryside

These factors have impoverished rural Haiti. Nearly 90 per cent of Haitians in the countryside live in poverty (on the equivalent of less than \$2 per day), with two-thirds considered extremely poor (on incomes below \$1 per day). This exceeds the rural poverty rate of extremely poor African countries such as Chad and Niger.²⁵ Almost 80 per cent of extremely poor Haitians live in rural areas.²⁶ The average farm size is 1.5 hectares.²⁷ A tradition of dividing land equally among children upon the landowner's death has contributed to land fragmentation, with many tiny plots called *mouchwa* (handkerchiefs). This trend is somewhat offset by steady outmigration and the custom whereby married women join their husbands' households and grant their inherited land to their brothers.²⁸

Haiti is one of the most food-insecure places on earth, with 58 per cent of the population lacking adequate access to food. Only Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea have a higher proportion of their citizens living in hunger.²⁹ Chronic malnutrition stunts one in every four Haitian preschool children; in rural areas, this figure rises to 28 per cent. Three in five preschool children and nearly half of all women are anaemic, usually as the result of iron-deficient diets. The rates are somewhat lower in rural areas, but still elevated.³⁰

Haiti is not just the poorest country in the Western hemisphere; it also has the most unequal distribution of income, with the poorest 40 per cent receiving just 6 per cent of national income and the richest 20 per cent enjoying a 68 per cent share. The richest 2 per cent alone claim 26 per cent of national income.³¹

Unlike many other countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region, Haiti does not have a dualistic land tenure system, where tiny subsistence farms coexist with large plantations. Instead, following

independence in 1804, a class of urban *rentiers* developed, content to live off rents from town and country real estate, leaving a large mass of poor farmers to try and eke out a living.³² Furthermore, today, the poorest Haitian cultivators do not produce for their own consumption, but instead, cultivate higher value crops, and use the earnings to buy cheap foods in local markets. It is only higher-income farmers who focus on producing for their own households.³³

Rural Haitians generally have access to land and livestock. Eighty per cent of rural households own, rent, or sharecrop land; 82 per cent of farms are owner-operated; and 70 per cent of rural households engage in cultivation. Nearly 80 per cent engage in animal husbandry, with livestock serving as a form of savings (sales are a key means of coping with shocks).³⁴

Technological stagnation is the hallmark of Haitian agriculture. Most farmers use hand tools, such as machetes and hoes. More than 90 per cent lack access to pesticides and fertilisers of any kind (including organic products), and even among better-off cultivators, 64 per cent do not use fertilisers and 87 per cent do not use pesticides. Lack of access to financial services contributes to farmers' inability to obtain off-farm inputs. Only 4 per cent of rural households have formal savings accounts, and only 11 per cent report receiving credit.³⁵

Just one farmer in ten has access to irrigation. Few farmers have access to agricultural research or extension services, despite high demand. Due to lack of government and donor support, a network of 50 decentralized agricultural research and training centres established in the 1980s had collapsed by the early 2000s. Today, only 20 remain, and not all provide high-quality services to farmers or receive routine oversight from Haiti's Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development (MARNDR).³⁶

Off the farm, there are few rural employment opportunities. There is little in the way of agricultural processing – the obvious source of non-farm rural employment – as the embargo of the early 1990s and subsequent sharp international competition depleted the ranks of the rural entrepreneurial class. What remains are small and undercapitalized enterprises.³⁷

The voices of poor rural Haitians are seldom heard in the policy-making process that affects whether or not they can fill their children's plates. There are some strong producer associations, especially in the irrigated Artibonite Valley, but most farmer organizations provide weak vehicles for either articulating farmers' views or improving their bargaining power in the market-place. A number of well-organized farmers' associations engage in advocacy activities, but policy making remains elite-dominated and biased against the countryside.³⁸ Haitian farmers perceive that the government does not want them to develop strong organizations. While Haitian law guarantees democracy and freedom of association, a rice farmer in the Artibonite Valley commented, 'Democracy starts with three meals a day. We only get one or two.'³⁹ Women's organizations allow members to ad-

vocate forcefully for their interests, but too often, men dominate mixed male-female organizations.⁴⁰ Strong organizations that represent rural people, including farmers' associations, cooperatives, and women's groups, can provide a key means for Haitian citizens to hold their government to account.

Government by and for the elite

Haiti's history is a tale of triumph and tragedy. It begins with enslaved and exiled Africans liberating themselves and driving out their colonial overlords. But almost immediately after the founding of the nation, a predatory, predominantly urban elite gained control of most of the country's wealth, and has used state institutions to maintain its privileged status.⁴¹

With governance biased against the countryside and poor citizens, most rural Haitians express a profound sense of mistrust in their rulers. Having the government run programmes 'is like washing your hands and then rubbing them in the dirt', according to one rural resident.⁴² Haitian farmers overwhelmingly avoid engagement with the formal institutions that govern their land – a network of notaries, surveyors, judges, and lawyers. Language reinforces the rift between the state and its rural citizens: French is the language of law and public policy, but around 90 per cent of the populace speak only Haitian Kreyòl. A 1997 government survey found that just 5 per cent of all rural land transactions were recorded under the formal legal system. However, formal land titles are much more common in the Artibonite Valley, where land values are high and ownership disputes are common.⁴³

To make matters worse, endemic corruption⁴⁴ usually deprives poor rural Haitians of justice in such disputes. Even when farmers can obtain the assistance of a French-speaking lawyer, judges are likely to award land titles not on the basis of who has tilled the soil, but whoever offers the biggest bribe. This non-transparent system creates insecurity of land tenure among Haitian cultivators.⁴⁵

The government owns significant tracts of rural land. A good deal remains idle, but 5 per cent of rural households lease state land, and such leases cover 10 per cent of all farmland. Notaries frequently facilitate the illegal sale of state land, thereby corruptly privatizing public resources. Recently, the government has permitted landless workers to cultivate some state land for wages.⁴⁶

Missing institutions keep governance from meeting rural needs. The post-Duvalier constitution of 1987 guarantees *every* Haitian the right to life, food, and respect, and provides for elected legislative and executive bodies (*collectivités territoriales*) at the national, *département* (provincial), *commune* (district), and local levels. With few exceptions, this democratic structure exists only on paper beyond the local level, with an unelected bureaucracy dominating at the top, and the intermediate bodies generally absent.⁴⁷ Telisme Dutelien, mayor of Anse-à-Veau, a desperately poor and remote area in the rural south-western

Département of Nippes, complains that the national government provides almost no resources. Yet in the first two months of 2010, the local population tripled, as people moved in from the earthquake zone, and then in late February, floods battered the area.⁴⁸

Given these institutional failures, it is not surprising that public goods and services are largely lacking in rural areas. Not only are key agricultural services, such as research, extension, irrigation, and natural resource management lacking, but public schools and clinics are also absent. Only 51 per cent of rural Haitians have access to safe drinking water (compared with 70 per cent of urban dwellers before the earthquake). Just 5 per cent live near a paved road, and two-thirds lack access even to dirt roads. Only one in ten can access electricity, and just 18 per cent have access to adequate sanitation.⁴⁹

Mining the soil and clearcutting the forests

Natural resource degradation severely impedes agricultural and rural development. The Duvalier dictatorship encouraged the systematic destruction of Haiti's forest cover in order to deprive political opponents of bases from which to conduct insurgencies, while also granting lucrative logging concessions to political allies. Today, 85 per cent of Haitian households and many small businesses rely on firewood and charcoal for energy, further contributing to deforestation. Charcoal-making offers desperately poor farmers a key means to eke out a living.⁵⁰ Haitians cut down 12 million trees annually, but there is no comprehensive national reforestation strategy to support this wood-based energy economy, leaving 25 of the country's 30 watersheds nearly totally deforested.⁵¹

The combination of deforestation and soil nutrient mining due to low fertiliser usage has devastated the fertility of Haiti's agricultural land. The loss of forest cover contributes to a topsoil erosion rate of 3 per cent per year. Haitian farmers of all income levels acknowledge that erosion is a major constraint, and there is high demand for agroforestry support, but little funding available to sustain the supply.⁵² The loss of tree cover also leaves rural Haiti highly exposed to tropical storms and hurricanes. In 2008, four consecutive hurricanes lashed the country, causing landslides that washed thousands of hectares of crops and hundreds of thousands of head of livestock into the Caribbean.⁵³ Without adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures such as reforestation and use of better building materials and practices, climate change will further exacerbate Haiti's vulnerability to extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent and intense.⁵⁴

Engendering the farm

Women head almost 40 per cent of Haiti's rural households⁵⁵ and are involved in all aspects of agriculture. They can and do own, buy, sell, and inherit land, and pass it on to their heirs, although as noted earlier, they do not enjoy fully equal inheritance rights in practice. There is a gendered division of labour in rural areas, and where men are present, they are always considered the head of the household. Men engage in heavy agricultural work such as clearing and tilling land, the produc-

tion of export crops (coffee, mangoes, etc.), tending large livestock, and wage labour. Women produce for local markets, plant and weed all crops, ensure household food security, and procure other household necessities through their earnings from what they sell. They are also the dominant actors in domestic food markets, at both the wholesale (*Madamn Sara*) and retail (*marchande*) levels. Both men and women harvest crops. Most Haitian farmers obtain seeds from local farm produce markets, so women provide and procure most seeds. Female-headed households are less likely than those headed by males to face extreme food insecurity, perhaps because they have earnings from petty commerce with which to buy food.⁵⁶

Haiti has a higher proportion of economically active women than any other developing country except Lesotho.⁵⁷ Women wage labourers tend to face pay discrimination.⁵⁸



Marie Camel Rubin, right, weeds her farm in Nippes *Département*, south-west Haiti, along with her eight-year-old son, Jolenz Noel. Credit: Oxfam America/Coco McCabe.

The start of a new era for agriculture?

In 2006, after two decades of political turmoil and economic decline, a new government assumed office and promised sweeping policy changes that would improve security, reduce poverty, and foster economic growth. A set of unprecedented multi-stakeholder consultations, including many local communities, as well as donors, preceded the adoption of the 2007 national poverty reduction strategy. It identifies agriculture as a key 'vector' for both economic growth and poverty reduction.⁵⁹ In 2008, in keeping with the identified priorities, and in an effort to gain from higher world rice prices, the government invested \$43m in improving infrastructure and subsidizing fertiliser in order to boost domestic production.⁶⁰ Donors provided \$27m in aid to agriculture, a fivefold increase on what they provided in 2006 and twice the level of their contributions in 2007.⁶¹ Although the tropical storms that year caused substantial agricultural losses, Haiti enjoyed a bumper crop in 2009,⁶² and it seemed as though the country was entering a new era, featuring greater attention to rural development and civil society voices.

Impact of the earthquake

The massive earthquake of 12 January 2010 had a severe impact on livelihoods, food security, and agriculture in Haiti. It killed 220,000 people and injured another 300,000 (these casualties account for over 5 per cent of the population). Economic losses of \$7.8bn exceeded the size of Haiti's economy. The tremor displaced 2.3 million people and left 4 million in need of assistance to access food, due to loss of employment. The death of up to 25 per cent of the civil service, and injuries among many surviving members, greatly impeded the government's capacity to respond.⁶³ In the urban parts of the earthquake zone, including Port-au-Prince and its suburbs, Léogâne, and Jacmel, many affected people had lived and worked in or near poorly constructed buildings. One and a half million displaced people settled in camps in and around the capital. The earthquake affected rural areas directly, and, more significantly, indirectly, via displacement of another 600,000 people to the countryside.⁶⁴

Within the quake zone, damage to roads, bridges, and the port and airport of Port-au-Prince hampered internal food marketing and delivery of external food and other assistance. The damage helped to drive up local food prices at a time when affected people had lost incomes.⁶⁵ The tremor affected 100,000 households (500,000 people) in the rural parts of the zone and 29 per cent of these lost their homes. There was widespread damage to tools, equipment, and storage and irrigation facilities. Thirty-two per cent of affected farmers lost seed stocks, delaying the spring planting season, while 4 per cent lost livestock. The massive international food aid 'surge' in February reduced food prices and eased access to food, both for those receiving direct distributions and the 1 million Haitians enrolled in emergency cash-for-work programmes. However, rapid price declines negatively affected rural Haitians who derived their incomes from sales of farm products.⁶⁶

The humanitarian response succeeded in providing emergency food and nutrition, shelter, drinking water, sanitation, health care, and education to the worst affected people.⁶⁷ The food aid provided – unquestionably a necessity, given the circumstances – came primarily from outside Haiti. For example, the United States provided \$173m in food assistance from the time the earthquake struck through to the end of July 2010. This accounted for nearly 60 per cent of all food aid provided, as well as 16 per cent of all US humanitarian assistance following the earthquake. Of this \$173m, 72 per cent (\$125m) consisted of US-produced food, provided mainly through the UN World Food Programme (WFP). The remainder of US food assistance was cash to support emergency food vouchers and cash transfers under the new US Emergency Food Security Program.⁶⁸ The United States – by far the largest global food aid donor – has finally begun moving slowly towards what is widely regarded as best practice, where food aid is not composed solely of donor commodities, but includes cash for the purchase of food in the recipient country or region when that makes the

most sense (i.e., when food is available locally or regionally, when markets are functioning, and when prices are not rising sharply), often by putting that cash directly into the hands of the people who need assistance.

Other donors put a much greater emphasis on local procurement of food aid. For example, Canada supported Oxfam in providing 'food kits' to 10,000 households (approximately 50,000 people), made up entirely of local foods (plantains, local rice, beans, maize meal, yams, cassava, peanut butter, and sweet potatoes), and valued at \$550,000.⁶⁹ France, which until recently provided most of its international food aid from its own harvests, granted funds to WFP to purchase maize from Haiti's North *Département* for use in school feeding programmes. The World Bank helped to finance government purchases of locally produced milk for school canteens. After 31 March, the government insisted that a higher proportion of food aid should come from Haitian farms, and that general food distribution should stop, with ongoing efforts targeted to vulnerable groups such as preschool and school-aged children. Such targeted feeding efforts continued to reach more than 1 million children.⁷⁰

Respondents to an Oxfam survey of people affected by the earthquake ranked support for local production among the four most important assistance interventions (along with job creation, education, and shelter).⁷¹

The earthquake's main effects on rural Haiti came not from collapsed buildings and impassable roads, but from the large-scale departure of people from the quake zone mainly to rural areas, frequently to stay with relatives. This put additional pressure on already stretched food and forest resources. In many cases, the host families themselves already suffered from food insecurity. This was especially true of families in the Artibonite and North West *Départements*, who took in relatives in their thousands. Virtually all of Haiti played host to displaced people. In many instances, the influx of people led host families to engage in last-resort coping strategies such as selling off livestock and other assets. Many households also resorted to consuming stored food and seeds intended for the planting season, eating less food or changing their diets, seeking wage labour opportunities, hiring in less labour, and increasing tree felling to make charcoal. About 160,000 people fled to the border with the Dominican Republic, mostly to extremely poor communities, putting considerable pressure on local services such as schools, clinics, and supplies of drinking water. Host households, typically composed of four or five people, tripled in size.⁷² A like number moved to Artibonite, with many going to areas with high rates of poverty and food insecurity.⁷³

By August, more than six months after the earthquake, at least 40 per cent of those who left the quake zone had returned to metropolitan Port-au-Prince, due to the inability of host communities to provide adequate support and particularly because of the lack of jobs and good-quality schooling in rural areas. Often, the breadwinner from a displaced family shuttles between the capital region and the place of refuge, checking on economic and educational opportunities, while the rest of the family remains displaced. Some emergency cash-for-work activities in areas hosting displaced people have targeted them for enrolment.⁷⁴ The lack of government social protection programmes in

Haiti has left both displaced people and their host families in very difficult straits.

The emergency Agriculture Cluster, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and MARNDR, and including 170 non-government organizations (NGOs) and international agencies, organized the distribution of seeds, tools, and fertiliser (see Table 1) to more than 74,000 farm households in the earthquake zone, as well as to 68,000 households outside the zone, benefiting more than 700,000 people in total.⁷⁵ Oxfam, working in partnership with the MARNDR-supported Salagnac Agricultural Research and Training Centre in the *Département* of Nippes, increased planned distribution of yam cuttings to farmers in four *départements*, thereby using an ongoing agricultural development project as a platform for emergency agricultural aid.⁷⁶ The emergency input distribution (along with good rainfall) has helped to bolster prospects for the 2010 harvest, albeit somewhat below 2009 levels.⁷⁷

However, donors only provided about half of the assistance requested in the emergency agricultural aid section of the UN humanitarian appeal for Haiti. This shortfall between the appeal and actual assistance left 26,000 rural households (about 130,000 people) in the earthquake zone without assistance.⁷⁸

Table 1: Emergency agricultural aid to Haiti, 12 January to 5 July 2010

Commodity	Quantity
<i>Rice, maize, and bean seeds</i>	1,874 tonnes
<i>Vegetable seeds</i>	14 tonnes
<i>Roots and tubers</i>	6 million cuttings
<i>Banana plants</i>	100,000
<i>Hand tools</i>	87,563
<i>Fertiliser</i>	9,345 tonnes
<i>Compost</i>	170 tonnes

Source: Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Geneva



Seed distribution in Desvarieux. Credit: Oxfam America/Ami Vitale.

Recovery and reconstruction plans

For the medium and long term, any reconstruction plan must prioritize agriculture. This is not only because of its central role in Haitian livelihoods and the overall economy, but also its potential to contribute to ensuring the realization of the right to food in such a highly food-insecure setting. In addition, in poor countries where there are large numbers of small-holder farmers, agricultural growth tends to have a much bigger poverty reducing effect than growth in other parts of the economy.⁷⁹ In recognition of the importance of the sector to Haiti's future, the government issued its *National Agricultural Investment Plan*⁸⁰ in May 2010, timed to coincide with a major donors' meeting and the G8/G20 meetings in June. The process of developing the plan included extensive consultation with the donor community and several public seminars in which civil society organizations participated. The short time available to prepare the plan and the disrupted environment limited the extent of public consultation, but there was considerable public debate and criticism in the sessions held.⁸¹

The plan calls for investments of \$772m over seven years, with a government commitment to provide 14 per cent of the total from national resources. It will seek an additional 14 per cent from private investors, and the remainder (\$552m) from the donor community. Table 2 shows the key priority sub-sectors and investment requirements for each.

On the positive side, agricultural development experts point out that the plan is the most detailed reconstruction blueprint prepared by any of Haiti's sectoral ministries.⁸² Also, it focuses on supporting small-scale farmers, sustainable natural resource management, and improved food security.

However, the plan does have a number of limitations:

- Although it calls for gender mainstreaming in policy and programmes, the plan does not adequately take the rural gender division of labour into account. It therefore does not analyse how its proposed interventions may disproportionately benefit men over women (e.g., support to export agriculture) or require the explicit engagement of women (e.g., enhancing access to seeds).
- The plan does not place as much emphasis as it could on building the capacity of farmers' associations as vehicles for economic empowerment and political voice.
- The plan does not sufficiently explore how to link agricultural extension with these associations, or address the tendency of NGOs to recruit the best extension workers, leaving the government with weak capacity. Nor does the plan target extension services to women.

- It does not adequately address decentralization of agricultural service delivery, the need to enhance intermediate levels of governance (between local and national levels), and the need for fiscal as well as administrative decentralization.
- With its strict sectoral focus on agriculture, the plan does not discuss nutrition as a key component of food security, non-farm rural development (e.g., provision of health, education, and clean drinking water in rural areas), or the creation of non-farm rural employment opportunities to provide incentives for people to live and work in the countryside.

Table 2: Priority sub-sectors and investment requirements, Haiti National Agricultural Investment Plan, May 2010

Sub-sector	Requirements
<i>Infrastructure</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watershed development • Reforestation • Irrigation 	\$361m
<i>Production and value chain development</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock • Aquaculture and fishing • Crops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Input provision ○ Credit ○ Value chain development • Urban and peri-urban agriculture • Local purchase of food aid 	\$346m
<i>Agricultural services and institutions</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension • Land access and tenure security • Research, training, plant health, institutional support 	\$62m

Source: MARNDR (2010), National Agricultural Investment Plan, Port-au-Prince: MARNDR

But agricultural development experts in Haiti emphasize that these limitations can be addressed in the plan's implementation process.⁸³ In the meantime, the very existence of the plan offers a touchstone against which to hold the government and donors to account for progress on agricultural development.

For their part, donors have moved slowly to provide resources to help implement the plan (see Table 3). Pledges thus far leave a gap of 16

per cent of the total donor support requested. The US government has offered support from its new global food security initiative, Feed the Future, and will emphasize agricultural services and institutional development, as well as links between agriculture and nutrition. The pledge includes \$102m for 2010 to 2011, and \$100m for later years. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) pledge is spread over 2010 to 2014. The Haitian government sought \$50m from the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP, a multi-donor trust fund), but received fast-track approval for a smaller amount, \$35m. Other donors, including Brazil, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Spain, FAO, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture have agreed to align agricultural programmes with the priorities in the national plan, but have yet to commit any resources⁸⁴ (although Canada and Spain have provided funding to the GAFSP⁸⁵). There are concerns that Canada, especially, is moving away from long-term support for agricultural development.⁸⁶ Nor has the European Commission, one of Haiti's main donors, pledged any new funds for agriculture.⁸⁷

Table 3: Donor pledges toward Haiti's agricultural reconstruction

Donor	Pledge (\$)
Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)	200m
United States	202m
Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP)	35m
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	21m
France	7m
Total	465m

Sources: OCHA (<http://www.reliefweb.int>, accessed 17 September 2010);

US government

(<http://www.feedthefuture.gov/documents/G8Muskokafoodsecurity-Haiti.pdf>,

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Donor pledges are only useful if they actually result in resource transfers. There is a long history of donors pledging funds to Haiti and then failing to deliver. For example, donors pledged \$400m following the devastating storms of 2008, but Haiti received less than 20 per cent of that amount.⁸⁸

Another problem is incoherent donor policies. Spain has announced that it will compensate the decline in grants with loans to support global food security (although it has not yet pledged new aid to Haitian agriculture specifically).⁸⁹ Haiti's public debt holders forgave most loans following the earthquake, and the country will have difficulty meeting debt obligations for some time to come. Also, the United States is a key trading partner as well as a major donor. US rice subsidies support exports and in-kind food aid that undercut Haitian farmers at the same time as the US government is investing in Haitian agricultural development. Moreover, US law precludes direct assistance to developing country production of crops such as rice that may compete globally with US exports.⁹⁰ If the United States fully eliminated quotas and tariffs on Haitian apparel exports to the US market – aimed at protecting the US textile industry – that would boost manufacturing employment in Haiti, indirectly contributing to food security.⁹¹

Promising initiatives

Despite the serious constraints facing agricultural development, there are some encouraging initiatives under way aimed at boosting farmers' incomes, improving sustainable natural resource management, and making sure that rural people, including women, have a seat at the table when policies that affect them are decided. Some examples, drawn from Oxfam's 30 years of experience of working with Haitian partners, are highlighted here.

- Nationally, MARNDR has deconcentrated service provision to the *Département* (i.e., provincial) level, and has deployed staff to departmental agricultural directorates. In addition, some *communes* (the next lowest administrative level) have their own agricultural offices. In St-Michel de l'Atalaye, on the central plateau, this agency has helped support the development of agroprocessing.⁹² Decentralized provision of agricultural development services is more likely to be responsive to local needs and aspirations than a highly centralized system, particularly if there are strong civil society organizations present. But capacity in local agencies needs to be strengthened, and there are sometimes problems of corruption.⁹³
- In the *Département* of Nippes, in south-west Haiti, the Canadian government is funding efforts by MARNDR and Oxfam to engage local government and civil society organizations in planning and managing sustainable agricultural development projects. The approach involves support to development committees composed of members of local elected councils and civil society organizations, with due attention to gender balance. The committees draw up a list of development priorities, and the project provides funds to help implement the top priorities (for instance, a grain mill, a food store, or poultry raising). At the same time, the project emphasizes agroforestry development – the integration of crops and trees, to help address deforestation and the coastal area's vulnerability to tropical storms.⁹⁴ The local development committees, as mixed bodies of elected officials and civil society representatives, can serve as vehicles for voice and accountability. Currently, there are committees in about half of Haiti's 144 *communes*. However, the government has yet to establish a legal framework to support the committees on a national basis.⁹⁵
- The Network of Associations and Agricultural Production Cooperatives of the Artibonite Valley (RAKPABA) is an umbrella association bringing together valley farmers' groups. Many of these associations are well organized and help farmers gain market power and engage in policy advocacy, particularly on rice-related issues. For example, members of the Agricultural Producers' Cooperative of Verrettes (KOPAV) have pooled their resources to open their own rice mill, and there are plans to obtain farm machinery. RAKPABA has also worked with fund transfer agencies to ensure that the Haitian Diaspora can use its remittances to purchase local rice for

relatives back home.⁹⁶ Organizations such as these offer potential models for farmers in other parts of the country.

- Solidarity for Haitian Women (SOFA) is a national organization that promotes women's rights (it has worked to improve laws against domestic violence, for example) and also seeks to improve the economic status of rural women in most of the country's *Départements*. In St-Michel de l'Atalaye, for example, SOFA and other women's organizations have helped to boost rural women's income by involving them in beekeeping and agricultural processing activities.⁹⁷
- Near the border with the Dominican Republic in the Centre *Département*, Oxfam is supporting a project that provides seeds and technical advice to help farmers increase production and use soil and water conservation techniques. Some local farmers had not previously received any extension advice.⁹⁸
- Households and businesses (such as cafés) that have adopted inexpensive, fuel-efficient stoves have decreased their charcoal consumption by 50 per cent or more. This not only benefits the environment and natural resource management, but also reduces household and enterprise fuel expenditures.

Scaling up initiatives like these from small, local-level projects could help to facilitate agricultural development. But doing so will require active support from the Haitian government, the donor community, and civil society.

If the reconstruction of Haiti is to facilitate sustainable development, poverty reduction, and food security in both urban and rural areas, it must give high priority to agricultural development. In addition to providing more resources to agriculture, reconstruction efforts must focus on: strengthening small-scale farmers' access to resources, services, and infrastructure, in order to boost their incomes and productivity, particularly with regard to staple food crops; sustainable natural resource management; and better integration of nutrition and agriculture to help tackle malnutrition. Although the National Agricultural Investment Plan has some limitations, it does provide the basic framework for achieving these goals, provided that the Haitian government and donors take the necessary steps to ensure effective implementation. The government should make mobilization of the national resources that the plan requires a major policy priority. It should also carry out key governance reforms:

1. Move towards more decentralized public administration, creating representative government institutions at all levels, and ensuring fiscal decentralization;
2. Scale up, with an appropriate legal framework, the model of local development committees, composed of elected officials and civil society representatives, to plan and manage local agricultural development activities;
3. Institutionalize an effective system of checks and balances to control corruption at all levels of government; this could include an independent auditing agency, enhanced parliamentary oversight, and an anti-corruption prosecution agency, as well as civil society monitoring; and
4. As a first step towards improving land tenure security, ensure that the legal system gives equal recognition to both of Haiti's official languages, and provide expanded legal assistance so that the vast majority of Haitians (around 90 per cent) who speak only Kreyòl can obtain access to justice in such matters as land disputes and obtaining recognition of land claims.

In addition, the government should implement the following agricultural development measures:

1. Support efforts of farmers, rural poor people, and rural women to develop robust, representative organizations that articulate their interests and improve their economic bargaining power;
2. Formulate agricultural policies and design programmes that take into account the gender division of labour, so that programmes do not disproportionately benefit men at the expense of women; policies should recognize the role of women in input and output marketing, and provide women with support to enhance their marketing roles;
3. Bring idle state land into production in transparent ways, through leasing and employment of wage labourers;

4. Revitalize the network of decentralized agricultural research, extension, and training centres, and provide services to farmers in a consultative manner that fully integrates farmers' own knowledge;
5. Ensure that small-scale farmers have access to credit on affordable terms;
6. Rehabilitate and expand rural infrastructure, particularly roads and irrigation works;
7. Mainstream environmental sustainability and disaster risk reduction in all agricultural and rural development policies and programmes, emphasizing such measures as reforestation, agroforestry, integrated watershed management, and promotion of fuel-efficient stoves.

With regard to non-farm rural development, the government should increase the availability of health care and education in rural areas and facilitate creation of off-farm employment opportunities – for example, in agricultural processing – to provide incentives for people to remain in the countryside.

Over the long term, the government and civil society should engage in a dialogue to arrive at a trade policy that balances tariff protection for Haitian farmers and affordable food prices for consumers.

For their part, all donors (bilateral and multilateral) and the international financial institutions should:

1. Prioritize agriculture and food security in their development assistance, align strategies with the National Agricultural Investment Plan and the agricultural and rural development objectives outlined above, and provide the resources required to implement the plan;
2. Fund local purchase of food aid whenever appropriate, based on rigorous assessment of need and local market conditions;
3. Provide assistance in the form of grants, not loans;
4. Create mechanisms to incorporate civil society into the debate about development strategies; and
5. Adopt an accountability framework that allows assessment of fulfilment of commitments and contribution to improved food security.

Bilateral donors should ensure coherence between aid and trade policies. To this end, the United States should:

1. Exempt Haiti from the 'Bumpers Amendment' that prohibits assistance to production of staple foods (such as rice, maize, and beans) considered 'competitive' with US exports;
2. Reform trade distorting rice subsidies that lead to dumping and undermine Haitian producers; and
3. Provide full duty- and quota-free access to the US market for Haitian exports.

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