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PLANTING NOW (2ND EDITION)

Revitalizing agriculture for reconstruction and development in Haiti

Agriculture in Haiti has suffered three decades of crisis and institutional neglect. Nevertheless, almost 60 percent of Haitians live in rural areas and rely on farming for their livelihoods.

For that reason, agriculture must play a central role in post-earthquake reconstruction. However, the plans and programs of the Haitian government and the international community have proven insufficient to revitalize the sector and improve conditions for small-scale farmers, and have failed to recognize the important roles of women in agriculture.

The Haitian government and the main actors in agriculture should continue to prioritize agricultural development, while putting greater emphasis on long-term programs to assist Haitians to get back on their feet and improve their living conditions with dignity.

SUMMARY

The devastating earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010 exacerbated the country's grinding poverty and serious development problems, while at the same time worsening Haitian living conditions. The tremor killed over 250,000 people and injured 300,000. It crippled the economy, causing losses estimated at almost 120 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Nevertheless, economic growth is expected to rise between 7 and 9 percent in 2012,¹ largely owing to reconstruction efforts. The population in internally displaced persons camps has decreased from 1.5 million to around 390,000 (according to the June 2012 report of the International Organization for Migration),² and the country's hurricane preparedness capacity has increased.

Nevertheless, it is ever more difficult for Haitian farmers to earn a living and to meet the needs of their families. Agricultural trade liberalization, which former President Jean-Claude Duvalier introduced in 1983, and which his successors all supported to varying degrees, has heavily contributed to stagnant farm production, falling exports, the upsurge in food imports, reduced support for domestic food production, and cutbacks in public investment and technical assistance. All of which has led to reduced productivity, national production, and farm incomes. Land tenure insecurity and increasing dependence on imported food and food aid complete an already bleak portrait of the challenges facing Haitian agriculture.

However, over 90 percent of the people interviewed for this report (including representatives of the Haitian government, the international community, and Haitian civil society organizations) continue to stress that agriculture is the country's main production sector.

Yet the current approaches to agricultural development in Haiti are problematic. The greatest challenges lie, on the one hand, in the failure to implement an agricultural policy that responds to real needs and the limited funding allocated to the sector; and, on the other hand, in a methodology that favors a project approach over a program approach to development. The program approach emphasizes the long-term organization and development of the sector, and could have positive impacts, provided that the Haitian state demonstrates responsible leadership. In contrast, the project approach has a palliative effect, but fails to provide lasting solutions to the various problems facing agriculture.

Both aid donors and the government have made considerable efforts to develop Haitian agriculture, but they need to redouble these with more substantial investment using a better framework for their actions.

In implementing the National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP), and in accordance with the aid-effectiveness principle of ownership, donors should continue to support national plans established in collaboration with the Haitian people.

Although it contains some inherent design weaknesses, the NAIP has the potential to reenergize agriculture, as the sector requires additional resources to strengthen and democratize access to services, agricultural inputs, and infrastructure. These are the main levers to improve productivity, national production, and farmers' quality of life, with a high probability of significantly boosting rural incomes. The Haitian government and donors must take all necessary steps to ensure the NAIP's effective implementation.

To accomplish this, the government should:

- Prioritize the NAIP and take the appropriate measures to ensure its implementation;
- Establish coherence between “Aba Grangou” (the presidential anti-hunger initiative) and agricultural policy based on the NAIP, under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture;
- Strengthen decentralized governance bodies, such as departmental agricultural directorates (DDAs) and the communal agricultural offices, to better coordinate actions and implement the general agricultural policy guidelines on the ground;
- Put into operation the local development model provided for in the 1987 Constitution, and employ a legal framework for the decentralization and deconcentration of state services provision for all local and regional authorities, in order to improve local agricultural planning and management;
- Put land tenure security high on the agricultural policy agenda. The Haitian judicial system should operate in the two official languages, both French and Creole, and provide farmers with legal assistance for resolving land disputes;
- Establish mechanisms to strengthen farmers’ organizations so that small-scale farmers—women as well as men—can assert their rights in negotiations that concern them, particularly in the implementation of a trade policy that balances the interests of both farmers and consumers;
- Ensure that agricultural policy enhances women’s roles in marketing farm inputs and products. Moreover, agricultural policy must recognize the gender division of labor, in order to promote gender justice;³
- Promote agro-ecology, which requires fewer external inputs, and at the same time subsidize fertilizers (without providing them completely free of charge) to make them available at an affordable price to farmers nationwide, while avoiding any suspicion of corruption in their distribution;
- Put unused farmland into production, and strengthen farm productivity through research and experimentation;
- Prioritize the program approach to agricultural development, in order to strengthen the sector’s long-term development. Emphasize agricultural entrepreneurship (agroprocessing) and deconcentrated service provision (job creation, education, health, etc.) to promote rural development and stem outmigration from the countryside;
- Create a national environmental service corps in all schools that will carry out reforestation and soil and water conservation projects and foster awareness of the need for environmental protection; and
- Make increased national production the centerpiece of agricultural policy and progressively establish tariffs to protect Haitian farmers.

Donors should:

- Work to strengthen civil society by including local organizations in program design and management. This will build organizations’ capacity to demand effective and efficient programs and engage in long-term program monitoring;
- Work to strengthen the Ministries of Agriculture and the Environment so that they can play leading roles in agricultural development;
- Continue to prioritize good agricultural governance and food security in their development aid, while aligning their strategies with the NAIP and providing financial resources for its implementation;

- Establish a monitoring mechanism that will not only ensure the evaluation of the effectiveness of their aid, but also compliance with their commitments to funding the NAIP made at Punta Cana;
- Focus on financing locally procured food aid, while taking into account the reality of local markets;
- Ensure coherence between aid and trade policies; and
- Reform rice subsidies in exporting countries in order to eliminate dumping that harms Haitian producers.

NGOs should:

- Invest more in strengthening civil society organizations so that they can influence other agricultural development stakeholders;
- Focus on gender justice in their interventions, in order to reduce glaring social inequalities;
- Establish partnerships with national universities to promote research and ensure its application in the agricultural sector; and
- Increase awareness among all actors in the sector of the need to protect the environment and adapt to climate change.

NOTES

¹ G. Conille (2011) "Statement on General Policy by the Prime Minister at the National Assembly of the Haitian Parliament," October 2011.

² According to the June 2012 report of the International Organization for Migration; see <http://iomhaitidataportal.info/dtm/>.

³ Full equality and equity between women and men in all areas of life. Focus efforts toward gender equality in the context of a rights-based approach. Results in the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in defining policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society, according to their interests and priorities as women. Integrate a gender perspective in the definition and application of civil, political, economic, and social rights.

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This paper was written by Tonny Joseph. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of all those who have contributed including Gabriela Alcaraz, Angela Bruce-Raeburn, Constantino Cassabuenas, Peleg Charles, Marc Cohen, Amélie Gauthier, Maura Hart, Lina Holguin, Christine Laliberté, Philippe Mathieu, Jon Mazliah, Yasmine Shamsie, Francisco Yermo, and many other Oxfam colleagues in Haiti, Québec, the United States, and Spain. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-183-0 in October 2012. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

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