
SUSTAINABLE RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN HAITI

Haiti's economy was in a state of crisis long before the January earthquake, particularly in the rural area. Haiti is one of the few countries in the hemisphere where the majority of people live in the rural sector. Prior to the earthquake rural population estimates ranged from 60% to 80% of the total Haitian population. The rural sector employs an estimated 69% yet unemployment is as high as 70% nationwide. Nevertheless 86% of the rural population earns less than \$2 per day.

The rural population and economy have been sorely neglected due to the preference for building urban employment and an export oriented economy. Disinvestment in the rural sector and other pre-existing factors such as the devastation wrought by four hurricanes in 2008, an ongoing food-security crisis, a global economic crisis, severe environmental degradation, political instability, foreign interventions and unbalanced trade policies contribute to the challenges of rebuilding Haiti.

The international community has responded with a tremendous outpouring of compassion for the people of Haiti in terms of emergency relief and recovery. As Haitians and the international community move forward toward developing long-term plans, sustainable rural development and local food production should be prioritized.

Rebuilding and restoring rural Haiti is the primary ingredient in its future transformation and development post-earthquake. In the 1980s, Haiti was nearly self-sufficient in food and agricultural production. Most of its farmers could earn a living and the Haitian population could purchase locally produced food. Today, at least 57% of Haiti's food is imported and Haiti's agriculture remains in shambles due to economic and trade policies that have debilitated local food production and rural development.

The international community should support Haitians in determining their own food security strategies and needs. In 2008, the Haitian government consulted and approved its National Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (DSNCRP). It names rural and agricultural development as one of its key pillars. In order for the Haitian government to provide sustainable livelihoods and food security for its people, the new priority of the DSNCRP and additional funds must support and rebuild local agricultural production in the following ways.

1. Invest in participatory, farmer-led research and knowledge transfer among small-scale farmers to support agroecological technologies and approaches as a viable strategy to sustainably improve production, food security and environmental regeneration. This can strengthen soil conservation and improvement, local seed systems, livestock management, market linkages, water management and reforestation. Knowledge sharing can be accomplished through farmer-to-farmer networks, exchanges, documentation, web-based platforms, radio and other media, both within Haiti and across other Caribbean and Latin American countries as appropriate.
2. Provide direct financial support to small scale farmers, including women farmers, and their organizations through international grants and increase funding for the Haitian Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development in order to provide access to credit, technical assistance and other resources for smallholders. This will help strengthen rural communities' ability to produce enough to meet their food needs and sell surpluses to consumers. Increased food production and stronger local markets will promote food security and resilience for rural communities and all of Haiti.

3. Emphasize sourcing food locally to the degree possible in the short term, and eliminate the need for food aid by increasing domestic production of tubers, pulses and grains that are traditionally important in the Haitian diet in the long term. The short term food distribution should be monitored for its impact on prices of locally produced food.
4. Enable the Haitian government to regulate food imports in order to strengthen and build local markets. Haiti's import tariffs are the lowest in the Caribbean sub-region, depressing prices for Haitian producers. The Haitian government's ability to regulate markets on rice and other imports, for example, will help protect and support local agricultural production.
5. Repair and improve agricultural infrastructure including roads, water systems, and soils management.
6. Support a comprehensive agrarian reform that includes both traditional allocation of land rights and individual land titles. Agrarian reform should guarantee credit and technical assistance. The legal system must ensure that traditional practices are preserved along with measures that protect against corruption and bias. Ensure that land titling and land dispute settlement is conducted in Haitian Kreyol as well as in French, as language exclusion is a violation of human rights.
7. Strengthen local seeds systems. Haitian small scale farmers depend on their own seed production and storage, and this can be strengthened through training and support (e.g., a seed selection process that farmers manage). Actively support current South-South seed exchanges such as those with other countries in the region. Support Haitian's in promoting open dialogue on appropriate agricultural technologies in order to determine the best way forward to develop the agricultural sector.

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