

## What's good for a Haitian farmer is also good for a US family farmer: Lessons learned on sustainable agriculture and climate resilience

Moderator: **Marc Cohen**, *Oxfam America*

Speakers: **Kelly Geoghegan**, *Environmental Justice Initiative for Haiti*

**Ricot Jean Pierre**, *Haitian Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development (PAPDA)*

**Doudou Pierre Festile**, *National Haitian Network for Food Sovereignty and Food Security RENHASSA/Je Nan Je*

**Marie Yvette Michaud**, *National Congress of Papaye Peasant Movement (MPKNP)/Je Nan Je*

**Eugene Philhower**, *U.S. Department of Agriculture*

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Access the full presentation [here](#)

### Description

The Agriculture briefing around the third commemoration presented itself as an opportunity to better understand how investments have helped improve food security, nutrition and health for Haitians. It was also an opportunity to understand the impact of post-reconstruction policies and programs on the 60% of the Haitian population living in rural areas who depend on agriculture for income.

The timing of this briefing was particularly appropriate, as 2012 marked yet another year of natural disasters in Haiti. An intense drought and two tropical storms decimated Haitian harvests, while demonstrators marched throughout the country protesting sharp food price increases that threaten to topple the fragile progress that has been achieved to date. Peasant organizations and their allies took the opportunity to demonstrate that reconstruction

and sustainable agriculture centered on food sovereignty and food security are not mutually incompatible, and discussed the challenges and possibilities of sustainable agriculture in Haiti. Throughout the panel, the Agriculture subgroup (AG subgroup) of the Haiti Advocacy Working Group (HAWG) and their Haitian grassroots partners highlighted the fact that structural factors continue to impede long-term agricultural development in Haiti, including competition from subsidized imports from the US and Brazil; inadequate public investment in agriculture; poor maintenance of the existing, limited irrigation infrastructure; severe degradation of natural resources; and lack of coordination among the many actors in the agricultural sector; and land tenure insecurity.



From left to right: Hyppolite Pierre (translator), Marc Cohen (Oxfam America), Eugene Philhower (USDA), Marie Yvette Michaud (MKNKP/Je Nan Je), Doudou Pierre Festile (RENHASSA/Je Nan Je)



Organizations active in the HAWG Agriculture Subgroup

## Analysis

The panel’s conversations were framed around the importance of the agricultural sector to Haiti’s development. Sixty percent of Haitians rely on agriculture for food and income, and spend 60-70% of their income on food. However, as Marc Cohen pointed out, 75% of Haiti’s rice is grown outside of Haiti in places like Arkansas, USA. Marc also brought the audience closer to home with some important comparisons between Haitian farmers and family farmers in the US: farm subsidies mostly benefit the wealthiest producers and do little for small and medium-sized family farmers; support for agricultural development in Haiti would stimulate overall development in the country, leading to greater prosperity and demand for US goods (including farm products); a more prosperous and stable Haiti would mean less need for US taxpayers (including farmers) to invest in MINUSTAH, the United Nations Stabilization force in Haiti; and the current US fiscal climate offers the opportunity to reform the subsidy system. The conclusion of the opening remarks helped bolster the need to act now, noting that as the

Obama administration is prioritizing food security as a cornerstone of national security, a more food secure Haiti will also become more stable and require less support from the US government and the donor community.

Kelly Geoghegan then introduced the Haiti Agricultural Donor Scorecard, which is an ongoing research project of the AG subgroup. The project was undertaken by organizations working on food security and agriculture in Haiti, in coordination with local grassroots communities, to ascertain the impact and effectiveness of donor interventions in the agricultural sector in Haiti, given the vital role of agriculture in the country. The scorecard hopes to guide and unify agricultural policies.

*“75% of Haiti’s rice is not grown in Haiti but in such places as Arkansas”*

**Marc Cohen (Oxfam America)**

Kelly began her presentation by highlighting the current situation in Haiti: according to the January 2013 report of the National Committee on Food Security in Haiti (CNFA), the 2010 earthquake, a subsequent drought and two hurricanes in 2012 have left six million people at risk and 1.14 million are at high risk of hunger in Haiti.

The state of agriculture in Haiti is also a gender issue as almost half of smallholder farmers are women, and they produce over half of Haiti's household food.

The US is slated to play a key role in this situation as it remains a major donor to the agriculture sector in Haiti (after the Inter-American Development Bank), with \$236 million in aid planned for 2009-2016 under the Feed the Future program.

Marc Cohen subsequently introduced the preliminary findings for the Agricultural scorecard, which were based on the policy and programmatic interventions of the US government. The AG subgroup would be rating the major donors to the agriculture sector in Haiti, based on seven indicators chosen as a



Marc Cohen (Oxfam America)

result of their connection to Haiti's found both positive and negative results of the US interventions in Haiti. With regards to first indicator, **Access to Land**, the US has funded major studies on land and land tenure, but has put little focus on land reform or land rights of farmers around the Caracol Northern Industrial Park.

In the area of **Accountability and Transparency**, information about US funding to the agricultural sector is publicly available (online), but mainly in English. In addition, one has to go through many 'clicks' to find information on the website.

Some direct funding did go to cooperatives and producer NGOs, but there were few **Consultations with Civil Society** networks and grassroots coalitions. There is a very narrow set of consultations with the beneficiary farmer groups, which does not compensate for the need to consult with the communities themselves to get their input on how development should occur.

Under the **Country Ownership** indicator, the subgroup found that US-funded agriculture programs were in line with the plans of the Haitian Government Ministry of Agriculture and the US Department of Agriculture has provided some technical and capacity-building support to the Ministry. However, there is no direct budget support to the Agriculture Ministry and all funds to implement programs go directly to international NGOs and consulting firms.

Other positives were mentioned, such as in the area of **Food Security**, where the US has supported greater production of food for Haitian consumption, has piloted the agro-

ecological system of rice intensification, and has emphasized rehabilitation of degrade watersheds through WINNER/Feed the Future West. On the other hand, 67% of US food aid was 'in-kind aid', and subsidized US rice exports account for 75% of Haitian consumption.

A positive in the **Gender** arena, is that the US has produced major studies on gender in rural Haiti, and the Haiti Hope Project, which focuses on export crops such as mangoes, provides 40% of the benefits to women. This is positive because export crop production is mostly carried out by men; hence a focus on women provides more economic opportunities to women farmers. On the other hand, only 27% of master farmers trained by the WINNER/Feed the Future West are women, indicating a very low gender empowerment impact.

Doudou Pierre Festile, a leader of the Mouvement Paysan Acul-du-Nord (MPA), the National Haitian Network for Food Sovereignty and Food Security (RENHASSA), and the Je Nan Je platform, focused on the challenges caused by the construction of the Caracol Northern Industrial Park. His organization, MPA, has worked with and surveyed farmers from the Caracol area, who were impacted by the creation of the park. He recognized the need for job creation in Haiti, but raised concerns about the poor consultation process leading to the creation of the park, and in designing agricultural projects that impact smallholder farmers. He decried the increased reliance of the northern region on food imports from nearby Dominican Republic, as well as the promotion of hybrid seeds in Haitian agricultural production, which increased Haitian farmers' dependence on annual seed

purchases, rather than the use of saved seeds and farmer-to-farmer seed exchanges.

Doudou pointed out, however, that some US-funded projects were positive and cited the Inter-American Foundation as a model for stronger consultations with Haitian grassroots communities.

Ricot Jean Pierre, a leader of the Haitian Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development (PAPDA), an organization that has advocated with peasant communities in Haiti for decades, decried the fact that Haiti imports the majority of the food it consumes, and remains dependent on donors to feed its people.

*"If it all depended on money alone, we would have developed the agricultural sector by now. Something somewhere is missing. And what is it? It's a clear vision and public policies that focus on peasant work, peasant agriculture, with the objective of reaching food sovereignty, which is fundamental to develop a country"*

**Ricot Jean Pierre (PAPDA)**

A major concern of grassroots organizations in Haiti is the construction of free trade zones on fertile agricultural lands, which has pushed farmers out of the land needed to bolster Haitian agricultural production. One of his



**Marie Yvette Michaud (MPNKP/Je Nan Je)**

suggestions was to look at the Haitian Central Bank as a pressure point to provide credit to smallholder farmers.

Marie Yvette Michaud is a member of National Congress of Papaye Peasant Movement (MPNKP) and the Je Nan Je platform. She pointed that women’s land tenure should be a main priority in Haitian agriculture, and that addressing women’s needs was a complex issue. For example, although 40% of those benefitting from the Haiti Hope Project were woman, the project was not very scalable or sustainable as the ‘Francisque’ mangoes used in the project are very rare in Haiti, and not easily accessible to poor Haitian women farmers.

*“When people feel they’re not invested in the land, they do not protect it as easily”*

**Marie Yvette Michaud (MPNKP/Je Nan Je)**

As her Haitian grassroots counterparts, she recommended that fertile agricultural land is protected from land grabs for free trade zones, and that agrarian reform focused on secured land tenure for farmers working the land. Farmers, especially women, need to own their land. Marie Yvette asserted that agricultural policies and programs must be less focused on exportation and more on local consumption to address Haiti’s food sovereignty needs. One effective way to help Haitian farmers produce is to create new irrigation routes for them. Finally, she expressed concerns about farmers being pushed off their land for mine exploitation in Haiti.

A central theme in the Haitian speakers’ presentations was the concept of food sovereignty, which advocates for local communities’ rights to healthy and culturally



**Eugene Philhower - USDA**

appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, as well as their right to define their own food and agricultural systems.

Eugene Philhower, from USDA, announced that the Haitian Agriculture Minister will be in Washington DC in March to talk at a public event about how the Government of Haiti (GOH) has been implementing its agriculture plan. Philhower believes a main priority for the US government is to increase agricultural production in Haiti, and cited a fertilizer program to support Haiti.

He also mentioned the Food for Progress program, which supports the efforts of FINCA International to expand micro credit financing for Haitian farmers; as well as a project with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture and the GOH to implement an island-wide system of plant and animal

*“The challenges for agriculture and development in Haiti are absolutely daunting and despite all of our differences of opinions and views on some of the issues, we really need to work together”*

**Eugene Philhower (USDA)**

inspection and quarantine to help bolster imports and exports. Philhower further highlighted the US-funded mango exports project and mentioned that Haiti exported US \$10 million worth of mangos to the US last year, an amount that is slated to increase this year. He also brought up the USDA-funded institutional capacity-building program with the Ministry of Agriculture, helping the ministry provide better services to the Haitian population, such as the National Coordination for Food Security (CNSA), training for Ministry staff, and technical training to Haitian farmers. Congresswoman Maxine Waters returned to the audience to introduce Representative Lacy Clay, ranking member of the House Financial Services Committee, which has oversight over funds allocated to the World Bank. Congressman Clay expressed his interest to support the people of Haiti, and offered his office as ally to gain accountability from donors.



*Representative Lacy Clay*

## Conclusion

The preliminary results from the scorecard indicate that US aid to agriculture has a mixed record; the deficiencies need to be corrected in such areas as consulting rural Haitians, gender equality, support for land tenure security, and providing resources to the Ministry of

Agriculture and Haitian organizations rather than international NGOs and consulting firms.

Partners felt strongly that US aid needed to have a much greater emphasis on consultation with rural people, and to avoid support for efforts that take agricultural land out of production in favor of manufacturing and mining development.

Although some US aid is supporting increased production of food for consumption in Haiti, it needs to place greater emphasis on food self-reliance.

The US government is taking some steps to boost food crop production in Haiti for Haitian consumption, and is working to enhance the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture to play a lead role in agricultural development.

Haitian farmers need access to credit, more irrigation infrastructure, and land tenure security, and donors can support this.