



MEMO FOR DISCUSSION

TO: USAID Haiti Mission

FROM: Faith in Action International/Organisation Peuple Œcuménique pour le Développement du Nord-Est

RE: How USAID's Haiti Strategic Framework can support Haitian-led efforts to help small-scale farmers adapt to climate change and meet local food needs

DATE: December 3, 2021

USAID's Haiti Strategic Framework 2020-2022 has the potential to be a valuable resource for sustainable, community-led development in Haiti. The Framework could be especially beneficial to Haitian-led efforts to strengthen small-scale family and communal agriculture, the primary source of employment, income, and survival for half of all Haitians.

The Framework calls for a strategic and tactical change in how USAID works in Haiti, focusing on "more inclusive, locally-driven economic growth," local governance responsive to community demands, and engaging local organizations up-front in project design. If applied to agriculture, and the needs of small-scale farmers, these principles could alleviate poverty among the most vulnerable families in Haiti and make the country more resilient to external shocks by increasing the ability of Haitians to meet their own food needs.

This memo offers preliminary ideas for applying the Strategic Framework to one sector, in one region, to change how USAID approaches agriculture in Northeast Haiti. We draw on the experience of Organisation Peuple Œcuménique pour le Développement du Nord-Est (OPODNE), which has worked over the past seven years with small-scale farmers in communities across the Northeast, and on publicly available analysis of USAID's AVANSE, a seven-year \$85.8 million project to increase agricultural incomes in Haiti's Northern Corridor that concluded in 2020.¹

Background on OPODNE

OPODNE is a locally-led Haitian organization founded in 2014 with support from the Haitian Catholic Church and Faith in Action International. OPODNE organizes teams of residents in 21 local communities across Northeast Haiti. These teams participate in leadership training, go door-to-door to listen to the concerns and ideas of their neighbors, vote on community priorities, design improvement projects, and negotiate with local officials. OPODNE's successes include road-building, tree planting, teacher-training, micro-lending, and the development of a dozen new agricultural and animal husbandry cooperatives. Faith in Action supports OPODNE through consulting, training and fundraising, and *A Way Forward in Haiti*, an initiative to build Haitian

¹ USAID's Final Report on AVANSE, OXFAM's 2019 Research Report on AVANSE, and the Office of Inspector General's 2015 Audit reach very different conclusions about the program that cannot be resolved without an independent impact assessment. Nonetheless, these three reports point to some similar implications for the design of future agricultural interventions in North and Northeast Haiti.

diaspora support for changes in U.S. policy toward Haiti. The Haiti Development Institute also provides technical assistance to OPODNE to strengthen its organizational and financial capacity.

Engaging small-scale farmers and their organizations in strategy and program design

The Strategic Framework emphasizes the need to work with local stakeholders to "jointly identify and prioritize development needs." Applied to the agricultural sector in Northeast Haiti, this would mean organizing meetings with local organizations, like OPODNE's community-based leadership teams, to learn about their work and their ideas for helping small-scale farmers adapt to drought and climate change. This stakeholder consultation process could include conducting listening sessions with farmers across the North and Northeast, setting a goal for the number of farmers consulted at the front-end of project design. USAID could use a co-creation process to gather input from people meant to benefit from project to decide critical questions about goals, strategy, and program design. This could include jointly deciding what crops to focus on and what interventions are likely to be most effective, which would be a shift from how USAID and DAI designed AVANSE. OXFAM's independent 2019 analysis of AVANSE found no evidence that local officials, farmer organizations, or stakeholders participated in decisions or discussions about the design and direction of the project. OXFAM did note that "the project [was] a bit more participatory in the implementation and operation stage than in the design stage." As the leader of one local organization told OXFAM, "We were just told that we had to accept the project. Since we have enormous needs, and since the project represented something tangible, we accepted." USAID's final report similarly alludes to the need for more farmer involvement, including participation in decisions about crop focus, in future projects.

Supporting existing Haitian-led efforts

The Strategic Framework and Administrator Powers' focus on localization both recognize that sustainability of USAID initiatives depends on the capacity of citizens to demand accountability from their governments and mobilize domestic resources. Localizing aid is not simply replacing international contractors with locally-based organizations to meet USAID-designed deliverables. Localization requires stepping back and asking what local leaders and organizations are already doing to advance objectives identified in the Strategic Framework and how USAID can support and amplify that work. This requires mapping existing efforts to increase the incomes and resilience of small-scale farmers. USAID could meet with Inter-American Foundation-funded organizations, which have already demonstrated capacity to manage development projects, albeit at a smaller scale than typical USAID projects. If existing efforts are smaller than USAID envisions, the answer is not to contract with international firms but to find ways to increase the scale and capacity of local initiatives. Making existing local work the point of departure for USAID's agricultural initiatives would be a critical shift. While the design of the AVANSE project envisioned that it would be handed over to Haitian organizations, it remained in the hands of DAI during the entire life of the project, and local ownership goals were abandoned.

Reinforcing local government

The tendency to work around government institutions in Haiti creates a vicious cycle, given their dysfunction and lack of resources. In contrast, the Strategic Framework "adopts the perspective

that meaningful and lasting institutional reform in Haiti must be demand-driven" and that the "goal of bolstering governance that is more responsive to citizens' needs is intimately tied to improved resilience and locally-driven economic growth." The Framework calls on USAID to "focus on local authorities that have demonstrated the political will to work collaboratively with USAID, civil society, and the private sector to promote development in Haiti." This emphasis is important to the work that OPODNE and other grassroots organizations are doing to hold their local government accountable. It creates incentives for those governments to be responsive to community demands. Applying these principles to agricultural interventions would mean including department-level ministry officials in project design and prioritizing building the ongoing capacity and resources of the local government staff to support small-scale farmers.

Focus on interventions that promote self-sufficiency

Based on our work with OPODNE over the past seven years, we would offer these initial priorities for any new agricultural initiative in the Northeast and North Departments.

- a. Focus on subsistence crops that small-scale farmer currently grow and Haitians rely on to feed their families.
- b. Make available full-time Haitian agronomists who can teach and coach new farming techniques that help small-scale farmers increase their productivity and adapt to drought and climate change
- c. Place greater emphasis on irrigation systems, tool-banks, and other equipment that farmers can use to make their crops more successful.
- d. Provide training to support and encourage people to join together into cooperatives
- e. Support efforts to strengthen land ownership through improvements to Haiti's cadaster system so that farmers have more ability to form cooperatives and invest in their land
- f. Create new systems for crop insurance and financing, including the potential to create an agricultural bank for small loans

Thorough listening to local farmers would surface these and other ideas based on local wisdom that could ultimately be included in program design. These ideas are also consistent with analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the AVANSE project, including the need for a greater focus on irrigation and more crop diversity.

Sustainable systems change

The Strategic Framework emphasizes systems thinking. It specifically calls for "system level activities...including increasing access to finance and credit and improving land tenure and property rights." Helene Kiremidjian, a Global Practice Specialist for Inclusive Economic Growth at DAI emphasizes that one lesson from the AVANSE project was that farmers' decisions to take risks and adapt their farming practices often hinge on the need for structural reforms.² She writes "The AVANSE Political Economy Analysis surfaced at least three concrete examples where beneficial reforms were stymied by the farmers' perception of risk, highlighting the need for broader interventions in the agricultural system to address those perceptions and

² <https://www.marketlinks.org/blogs/political-economy-analysis-sheds-light-farmer-behavior-northern-haiti>

provide an environment more conducive to farmer investment and the adoption of new technologies." These structural reforms track priorities identified by local farmers and their grassroots organizations. Achieving these reforms requires investing in the leadership of local actors who can develop community consensus, build alliances, and press for changes in public policy. Support for these civic organizing efforts needs to be built into any strategy to promote sustainable change in the agricultural sector in Haiti.

Questions for further discussion

- What independent evaluations and impact assessments of AVANSE and other agricultural projects are USAID relying on to design future initiatives?
- What are the most important lessons from AVANSE and other agricultural projects that USAID is drawing on for future planning?
- How is USAID adapting to the political, security, hunger, and transportation crises facing Haiti? For example, how is USAID adapting its stakeholder consultation processes to assure that people meant to benefit from its programming have a say in the design?
- Has the Mission developed a stakeholder map of grassroots Haitian organizations working to strengthen the agricultural sector? Does the Mission have the capacity to conduct stakeholder interviews and focus groups?
- What tools is the Mission planning to use, for example, co-creation, stakeholder mapping, listening sessions with farmers, surveys of organizations working on agricultural issues to align USAID's agricultural and economic development plans with the emphasis on localization and systems change in the Strategic Framework?

We look forward to discussing these questions, the ideas in this memo, and the Mission's plans for Northeast Haiti.