

For an appropriate public agricultural policy in Haiti

STATEMENT

For an effective agrarian government policy, capable of contributing to the strengthening of food sovereignty, to the reduction of food imports, environmental protection and the improvement of living conditions of farmers, both men and women

We, organisations active in agriculture and animal husbandry in Haiti, either as peasant organisations or as accompanying institutions and organisations promoting the right to food, are following with a lot of interest the actions of the new government since coming to power. We have taken note of the declaration of Mr Jovenel Moïse, president of Haiti, and of his intention to revive the national agrarian production. However, we remain very sceptic when it comes to the ways in which this revival is supposed to take place, because so far nothing has been said about reactivating agriculture among peasant families, which is the backbone of the Haitian agrarian system. The Moïse Lafontant government is not clear about which agriculture it will support and nothing is being said about plots of land situated in the mountains, which represents 70% of the country's surface area. Neither what has been planned for the plains of the Artibonite is addressing the core problems of the farmers in that region.

The president has talked much about farming but not about farmers. Nevertheless, no agrarian development is possible without the participation of the main actors, which are the men and women farmers who work the land, weeding, taking care of the plants, harvesting and transporting the agrarian products to market, to feed the entire population.

In fact, we have noticed that the president is commandeering and mobilizing many tractors and heavy machinery to clean the drainage channels in the Artibonite. We understand that he is moving large amounts of money for the "*caravane du changement*", the "change caravan" which he has mounted. However, these actions don't belong to a stated strategy of a general policy for the country's agriculture. What the president is claiming to do on the plains is not connected to the reality of the mountains and hills where the peasant families are working with the means available. Are these highly selective implementations aimed at pleasing agribusiness, with the goal of grabbing state land and peasant land to install new forms of agrarian production enterprises completely focussing on export? Or does government intend to strengthen the productive capacities of the country to satisfy the food requirements of the population, and if possible to sell abroad? The Moïse/Lafontant government must take a clear stand explaining which kind of agriculture it wants to promote. According to us, the little resources available should first be used to strengthen agriculture among peasant families, the core of the Haitian agrarian system.

A reminder about the importance and the role played by agriculture among peasant families in Haiti

The agriculture among peasant families is the Haitian agrarian system in which over a million peasant families in the hills and sometimes on the plains and lowlands work to produce food for their families and providing the local, regional, national and even export markets. It's a very diverse agriculture, meaning that it produces different kinds of products. Most of its farmers use little chemical pesticides that can be harmful to humans. It takes place in countless small farms, mostly without adequate tools nor financial or technical support.

Presently, the agriculture among peasant families is in crisis. But despite everything it remains the major source of income for almost all peasant families. It is the most important breadwinner in the country and it satisfies 40% of nation's food requirements, representing 23% of the GDP.¹

¹ Cf, Ralph L. Beauvoir, *La relance du secteur agricole : entre défis et opportunités*, Publié le 2015-07-28 :

<http://lenouvelliste.com/lenouvelliste/article/147898/La-relance-du-secteur-agricole-entre-defis-et-opportunités#sthash.0MmimqJ.dpuf>

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Certain critics who never appreciated the agriculture among peasant families are taking advantage of this situation by simply recommending its complete destruction, without proposing any alternatives for either the peasants or the country in general. For the record, we should recall the important role the Haitian peasants and their agriculture played in the country's history:

For more than 170 years, from Haiti's independence in 1804 until the 1980s, the peasantry has sustained the national agricultural production and continued to develop, thus satisfying the food requirements of the population. From Haiti's independence up until today, the state has always allied with the economic elites trying to establish an economy of large agrarian plantations geared at export, without any success.

- With their farms (commonly called gardens) and the practice of animal husbandry and fishery the small farmers have satisfied, for over 170 years, the food requirements of more than 80% of the population and produced for the export.
- During more than 170 years, almost all national wealth was based on the agriculture among peasant families and almost all jobs have been created because of this activity.
- During more than 170 years, the export of national agrarian products has enabled the generation of foreign exchange for the import of most of the goods not produced in Haiti. The so-called debt of the independence of Haiti to France has been paid back with the resources created by the labour of the Haitian peasantry.

According to the data of the 2009 agrarian census of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR), approximately 9,495 km², or 35% of the national territory, continues to be used for agrarian production or animal husbandry². Despite the environmental damage and the low productivity of the land, agriculture continues to be an important sector in Haiti. In every geographic department, you will find different specific micro-climates; Haiti has a wide variety of agrarian products, such as maize, *petit mil*, beans, fodder, vegetables, etc., and not only rice, that should be valued and grown as part of an effective recovery of our national agriculture.³

Despite its difficulties which caused a decline of its contribution towards the country's economy, the agriculture among peasant families can still be revitalized when the state leaders stop applying bad politics. It could become more efficient, more lucrative and could increase its part in feeding the population if the state and all other actors involved work with this goal in mind. Nowadays, in many countries either developed or developing attention for this form of agriculture is slowly growing again because it represents the future, according to experts, as it allows conservation of nature and environmental protection. Therefore, by no means agriculture among peasant families may disappear.

Why is the agriculture among peasant families today in such big crisis?

It is only since the years 1980 – 1990 that the peasantry is no longer able to play its historic role of most important provider of income as before, due to a large increase of the population combined with decreasing productivity of the crumbled and eroded family farmlands. Added to this can be phenomenon's such as powerful hurricanes, successive floods and the effects of climate change which continue to decapitalize the peasantry. But the most important attacks against the agriculture among peasant families is coming from the Haitian state itself. For a long time, the Haitian state has not done anything to sustain the labour of the men and women farmers. Yearly, less than 5% of the national budget has been designated to agriculture⁴. A good part of this small amount is being used to pay the salaries of the government employees and technicians, to whom most of the time no real responsibility is assigned towards the development of agriculture in the region of their posting, and with practically no means at their disposal. Instead of

² Ernst Mathurin, Gramir, Ekspoze IDHOSOC, 20 me 2016

³ PAPDA/GRAMIR, Out 2015, Kaye Revandikasyon òganizasyon Peyizan ak Peyizàn Rejyon Gran Sid, Depatman Grandans, Sid..

⁴ IDEM

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taking its responsibility the Haitian state prefers to take anti-peasant measures by introducing free trade and by encouraging uncontrolled imports at the expense of the peasants and the agrarian system of the country.

Today the agriculture among peasant families suffers the effects of bad political choices of Haitian leaders. Historically, instead of sustaining the national agriculture, the Haitian state preferred to undertake different agribusiness experiments, often slaughtering small planters by occupying their land and giving it to big investors to establish large plantations. We have known large plantations of sisal, of rubber trees and of other export products to satisfy foreign demands. In recent years, the Haitian state once again handed out agrarian lands to businessmen for them to establish large free trade zones, tourist areas, mining projects etc., as is the case in the North-east of Haiti, while the number of landless peasants is increasing. Once these opportunities fail, these second-hand agricultural investors always rapidly disappear, leaving behind irreparable damage. And each time, Haiti continues to survive thanks to the labour of the men and women peasants who, against all odds, continue their efforts to produce food supplies for their families and for national consumption.

In the early 1980s, forced by the United States of America, the Haitian state decided to exterminate the creole pigs, considered to be the principal form of savings of the Haitian peasant. Subsequently the country dove into the neoliberal politics, advocated by the large financial institutions. This would have a very negative impact on the peasant economy. During the final years, especially since 1996, the State has decided to abolish most custom duties which in certain cases passed from 50% to 0% for the import of food products that are competing unfairly with national food products. Nothing is done by the government to protect the national agrarian products against the arrival of foreign products, which for their part are subsidized. To the contrary, the foreign products are flooding the national markets while the peasantry is being abandoned and ignored by the State.

The unfair competition of imported agrarian products form together with the other facts mentioned above the most important factors which have contributed to the decline of the national agriculture and the loss of Haiti's food sovereignty. It has led to a process of accelerated impoverishment of the peasantry, which is hurrying to leave their small towns and join the slums or cross the border to settle down in the Dominican Republic or take the route by the sea (aboard fragile boats), to reach foreign coasts. Poverty is most extreme in rural areas (88% against 45% in Port-au-Prince and 76% in the other urban regions, according to a study of ACTED on the causes of food insecurity in Haiti.⁵

The destruction of the peasantry has its repercussions at all aspects of national life. One of the most recent and most visible impacts is the rapid growth of the slums which grow like mushrooms in the cities in an effort to provide shelter to all the people who arrive from the provinces escaping misery. Another result is the sad massive exodus of young people, many of them fleeing the peasantry, on their way to try their chances in South-American countries such as Brazil and Chile.

To get the national agriculture out of its current crisis a clear agrarian policy, considering the following objectives, must be adopted and applicated:

- The elimination of unfair competition between imported agrarian products benefitting from grants and subsidies in the countries where these products were manufactured with those of the Haitian peasants
- The transformation of the traditional gardens towards an agroecological system which will be more sustainable and profitable for the peasant.
- The safeguarding of agrarian lands, the provision of more land to peasants, of adequate technical support and other means of production such as good seeds, tools, water through irrigation, good livestock breeds, loans, etc. in order that men and women farmers may work better.

⁵ <http://www.acted.org/fr/causes-ins-curit-alimentaire-en-ha-ti>, P.13

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- The endorsement of agrarian labour and actions to encourage young people from rural areas to work the land.

To reach these objective, we, organisations operating in the agrarian domain and in animal husbandry, either as peasant groups, or as supporting institutions or as organisations promoting the right to food, have formulated the following proposals.

Proposal for an appropriate present-day public agrarian policy in Haiti

All appropriate present-day agrarian should first of all SUPPORT THE AGRICULTURE AMONG PEASANT FAMILIES. This policy should support the women and men farmers of the hills and the plains to improve their farmland (their gardens), to consolidate their lands, to have access to more land to cultivate and to receive the appropriate frameworks for a better usage of these lands. This agrarian policy should integrate basic services for women and men farmers, such as the availability of good schools, well-stocked and equipped health centres, access to suitable financial and technical, the construction of potable water systems, of roads to transport supplies and foodstuff to the markets. Such a policy based on the real needs of the peasantry and of the country in general will favour some stabilisation of women and men farmers who will be encouraged to stay on their land instead of migrating to the slums or trying to emigrate to the Dominican Republic or still further away. A real agrarian policy must support the strengthening of Haiti's national food sovereignty, in other words strengthening the national sovereign capacities to feed the population with what the people decide to eat. At the same time, such a policy should encourage the environmental protection and to improve the living conditions of the peasantry.

Here are the most important levers with which the Haitian state should act to revive the agrarian production and to revitalize the agriculture among peasant families.

1. Adopting economic policies in favour of the country and its production

To guarantee a true revival of the national agriculture, Haiti should change its economic policy. For some time, the Haitian state has based the country's revenues mainly on imports. We even import the goods that the country can produce itself. This economic policy, favouring a small group of importers, the Haitian state receives only a meagre sum of gourdes of custom duties, which don't even amount to cover the costs of the civil services. This import policy causes the country to dispose more funds (mainly American dollars) on a day-to-day basis to obtain the goods it needs. This reduces, again and again, the value of the gourde in relation to the American dollar. One of the expenses for which Haiti daily is spending thousands of dollars, is the import of food products. According to economist Leslie Péan, the country's spending in American dollars to buy food products abroad has doubled between 2001 and 2010.⁶ Consequently, each year Haiti needs 700 million American dollars to buy food abroad. According to a report of the European Commission, in 2015 Haiti imported five times the amount the country exported (909 million Euros).⁷ Nevertheless, Haiti can produce most of these imported food products herself. If the country could make good use of its land, the population would have access to healthier food while a good part of the revenues spent on imported food products would remain in the country. This would in turn reduce the exchange rate of the dollar to the gourde and contribute to lower prices of essential food products.

A policy that is favourable to the national agriculture also implies the adoption of several other institutional measures and steps to be taken, such as:

- Ending the actual policy of an uncontrolled national market, open to all kinds of foreign agrarian products. This rule would put a stop to the unfair competition of imported products versus national products. Because

⁶ Leslie Péan, « Une économie de simulacres » dans Le Nouvelliste, 25 janvier 2013, cité par Fréric Thomas dans Haïti : un modèle de développement anti-paysan / Cetri, Décembre 2014.

⁷ Cf, European Union, Trade in goods with Haiti, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113385.pdf, P. 8.

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even when the national food production would increase, nothing will be achieved if no institutional measures are taken against that policy of being open to an invasion on the national market by imported products.

- Providing the farmers with more land and with the necessary technical means to increase the quantity of available food. There is still an important amount of land not in use, by lack of irrigation or simply because peasants don't have access to these lands. The state should take steps to have all land apt for agriculture, be it in the hills or on the plains. These lands should be made available to women and men farmers; also, measures should be taken to irrigate all lands in places where this is possible.
- The state should also protect the agrarian land. By means of spatial planning firm steps should be taken to discourage urbanisation of agrarian regions.
- At the same time, the government should provide more technical assistance to farmers, facilitate their access to loans, and to agrarian tools apt to the work in hills as well as on the plains, and not only provide tractors.
- The state must improve the roads, the transport conditions of agrarian products, as well as the conservation and transformation processes of these products to prevent wastage.
- The national resources (financial resources, land, water, etc.) should first of all be used for food production for the people, before thinking of exporting food products.
- The government should take measures to amend the landholding laws, especially the law on land distribution, to prevent the endless fragmentation by families during which sharing should be accepted. Parliament should approve laws necessary to respond to modern day rural life.

2. Linking all land related activities to protection of the environment

Haiti is a very mountaineous country (70% mountains, 30% plains). The biggest part of the land is severely degraded. This situation explains floodings, landslides and immense damage after rains. The situation contributes to the fall in land productivity, both in the mountains and on the plains. Constructing dams and irrigation canals, and cleaning up canals cannot change that reality if nothing is done upstream to prevent further erosion of soils in the mountains. The challenge for today is to find the means to help famers to produce better and more, while protecting the environment and rehabilitating the degraded zones. A true agricultural policy for today's Haiti must associate agriculture with protection of the environment. The State must define and implement a policy for land management which also provides for water catchment areas, while encouraging male and female farmers to adopt methods that do not further destroy the environment.

The state must equally provide for the means to encourage farmers to adopt new, less erosive means of agricultural exploitation. It must adopt stimulating measures, like awarding grants and subsidies to enable farmers to implement such techniques. During the dry season, in zones where there are no means for agricultural production, the State must initiate public works for soil conservation, which can generate employment in the rural areas. This will provide farmers to dispose of cash, without having to resort to cutting down trees for survival. This alternative will enable farmers to face the dry season, by setting up small enterprises that will help them to overcome difficult periods without any concern for the future.

3. Taking measures to reduce progressively the use of wood

In the context of a coherent agricultural policy for Haiti, the State should urgently take measures which help to reduce the pressure on available woods, and which help to make a success of reforestation efforts. Such an agricultural policy should encourage and train interested farmers to set up small woodlands exclusively for the production of charcoal. In certain areas farmers already exploit such woodlands, but not in an appropriate way. The State, through the local offices of the Ministry for Agriculture, Environment and Territorial Collectivities (CASEC, Mairies) should indicate the best locations, or plant trees that could provide for future charcoal needs, while forbidding the cutting down of trees in areas where there is a risk of environmental damage. Parallel to that, the State should look for alternative to charcoal, the use of wood for sailboats, for dry cleaning and for construction (e.g. hardwood for sheeting). The State should promote reforestation, in such a way that it contributes to a larger quantity of trees on the national territory. We need a program for effective reforestation, which also guarantees the protection of watersheds.

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4. Taking measures to enhance and improve basic services in the rural areas

A coherent agricultural policy presupposes the set-up of activities which will enhance and improve basic services in the rural areas, esp. education and health services. This is the only precondition for farmers to get out of the poverty cycle, and to encourage young people, who otherwise are inclined to leave the agricultural sector, to again take pleasure in working on the fields. The State should adopt strategies to relieve the burden of the expenses for education and health which are currently on the shoulders of poor smallholder farmers. It should take responsibility for the necessary expenses for those services, which now hinder farmers to find sufficient means to reinvest in agriculture. The State should provide small producers with insurances to cover the largest risks (adverse weather, attacks by insects etc.) for their agricultural activities.

5. Upgrading agriculture: Encourage young people to work as a farmer and familiarize young children with agriculture

In Haiti, agriculture is not considered as a profession and this type of work is not appreciated. The State should set up programmes in the schools, to familiarize children with notions of agriculture, to make them love the land and encourage them to protect the environment. It should encourage at all levels in society, but particularly in public and private administration, an attitude of respect for farmers and their work. Parallel to that, the State should recognize agriculture as a full profession and encourage public and private vocational schools to educate young girls and boys so that they may become farmers. This strategy will provide for newly educated people, who will reinforce and modernize the agricultural sector with new knowledge and techniques. For such a perspective, the State should provide young girls and boys who want to start a career in agriculture, with the means of production, like land, credit, seeds etc.

6. Appreciating the work of women farmers and providing them with the means of production

Haitian women play a very important role in the agricultural system of the country. You will find them ploughing the land, at seeding time, at harvesting time, but also in the process of transforming and selling produce. They are the ones, who primarily transport the products to the markets, who prepare the food for the family, who are busy with conserving the products etc. But female farmers also have their needs: land to work on, agricultural training, credit to buy livestock in order to transport the harvest to the market, or to acquire stocks for reselling. In many cases, the hygienic conditions in the market places where they handle the products are not up to standard. The women need markets where hygienic norms are respected, so that they can sell their produce in all dignity. They need good roads and safe means of transport, to circulate the products through the whole country. A relevant agricultural policy, which gives priority to family agriculture, should account for the needs of female farmers and traders.

7. Good practices in Haiti from which a relevant agricultural policy could benefit

Several experiences which have already been realised at the national territory, have developed models which link techniques for food production and cattle breeding to the protection of the environment. Agro-ecology or agro-forestry is the name which is used for these good practices. These experiences have delivered promising results for the rural economy, for families with a permanent need for food, for livestock and for the environment. In Haiti there are farmers' organisations, institutions that operate in the rural areas, which are well equipped to practice these agro-ecological and agro-forestry techniques. In this context, we recommend the State to adopt these models as systems to be implemented throughout the national territory of Haiti, because they resemble those already in use by Haitian farmers and could be better appropriated. With good training methods, these models will help farmers to better cultivate their lands, to upgrade their cattle breeding, to produce the necessary food items, while rehabilitating the soils and protecting the environment. The Ministry for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR), together with the Ministry for the Environment and the National Institute for Vocational Training (INFP) should educate quickly young women and men in agroecology and agroforestry and enable them to serve the farmers in the mountains, to apply those techniques on their lands. In the context of this grand project of setting up a large number of vocational schools throughout the country, we ask the government to use a good part of the budget for

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this training for young women and men in agroecology and agroforestry. We also demand those young, newly trained people to be sent as soon as possible to farmers, to accompany them in the process of improving agricultural practices and rehabilitating the environment.

The actors which are needed for a renewed agricultural policy in Haiti

1. The female and male farmers of Haiti, which have grown to over one million of family farms, spread throughout the whole country, both in the mountains and on the plains, and the organisations which they have set up. The organisations active in cattle breeding and fisheries are the primary actors for each public policy which Haiti could put in place to help its agriculture out of the crisis in which it finds itself currently. These female and male farmers, cattle breeders and fishermen are, in many situations and in many places, members of collectives, whether traditional (like the koumbites and the raras) or more modern (like cooperatives). In many regions, these actors have formed much larger associations, communal regional and in some instances even national federations. All these structures should contribute in the context of a public policy for the agricultural sector.
2. A second group of fundamental stakeholders are the Small and Medium Enterprises, which operate individually or collectively. They contribute with technical equipment and with significant investments to agriculture, cattle breeding, fisheries, the transformation of agricultural produce, the acquisition of adapted equipments etc., to improve the conditions for producing and selling numerous agricultural products and related products.
3. A third group are the transporters, who facilitate the circulation of productions over all the markets in the country. Among them we find many women transporters who ensure the to-and-fro of one market to the other, carrying the agricultural products on their heads, on a donkey's back, or on big trucks. A good agricultural policy can not leave them aside.
4. The agricultural technicians and all public and private institutions, NGO sets, who struggle to provide in one form or another, to provide direct support and technical training to farmers and their organisations, in the areas of education, credit provision, transformation and commercialization of produce, etc.
5. Young people coming from the rural areas, those who have studied in agricultural technical schools and are interested more and more in agriculture as an economic sector where they can work in to earn a living.
6. Vocational schools and universities who train the trainers who can coach farmers and advise business leaders.
7. We should not forget the public institutions, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, and its communal offices, the Ministry for the Environment which should decentralize more, and collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture, the territorial collectivities (Mairies, CASEC) and specialized institutions like ODVA, BCA, CNSA, INARA, and the Service de Nutrition au Ministère de la Santé publique, etc.
8. The Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP) should play a fundamental role in instilling the pupils of public and private schools with the knowledge of the country's agriculture, in order to encourage them to love nature, to protect the environment and to appreciate the farmers' work. In this context, the Ministry should work together with numerous educational institutions, which have already initiated the process of education in agriculture and environment, like the networks of green schools and those who have adopted a programme for Disaster Risk Reduction. With the same goal in mind, the Ministry of Education could work together with institutions like the churches, who have started a process of raising awareness on the protection of nature as a public heritage.

All these actors represent a strong force and a great opportunity for the Haitian agricultural sector. If the country would use all its resources in an adequate way, through actions which are well coordinated by a State which supports and defends its peasantry, we will succeed in getting Haitian agriculture out of its difficulties. In this perspective, we propose that in each territorial collectivity (section communale and/or Mairie) spaces will be created where all actors interested in strengthening family agriculture will come together to define priorities and strategies for action.

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The implementation of any coherent agricultural policy in Haiti should have as its overall objective to do justice to the farmers of Haiti, because of their substantial contribution to the daily life of the nation, and not to destroy them. This presupposed a recognition of the farmer as a human being, a full citizen who contributes to the economy of the country and who deserves respect.

A relevant national agricultural policy should recognize the need to reform the system of smallholder farmers which is currently in crisis, and to let farmers participate in this reform as the primary actors. A good agricultural policy should help agricultural producers to set up strategic alliances with other sectors of the national economy, like those involved in the conservation, transformation, commercialization and transport of agricultural products, technical and vocational training, research etc., in order to get them out of their current isolated position.

Finally, we declare loud and strong that Haitian family agriculture, which constitutes a pillar of the national agricultural system, should not disappear. For a long time this agriculture has supported the country, and even today it continues to feed millions of people. It is due to bad political decisions, that Haitian family agriculture is now in such a bad state. It is the responsibility of the State to adopt new policies in order to revive family agriculture, which constitutes the basis of the national agricultural system.

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Haiti, 11 October 2017

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The present declaration is open to endorsement by any organisation, institution or person, in Haiti or abroad, who supports its content and decides to contribute to the adoption and implementation of an agricultural policy which favours Haitian family agriculture.