

The Heller School of Social Policy and Management

Brandeis University

*Haiti's Potomitan:
The Role of Peasant Women in Haitian Society*

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A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree
in
Sustainable International Development**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women throughout the world are poorer, more exploited, more dominated, and more illiterate than men. They have less access to power, to systems of education, to credit, and to formal work. They provide a higher percentage of the world's work yet possess a mere fraction of the world's wealth.

In Haiti, women are occupying a central economic role within the Haitian family and engaging in community development. As the *potomitan* (center pillar) of Haitian society, peasant women support their families through work in the agriculture sector, the informal economy, and domestic economy within a constraining environment in which they lack access to fundamental human needs and vital resources that are necessary to create financial security. In response to increasing economic insecurity, Haitian peasants are organizing to improve their situation and women again occupy a central role as women's organized groups address the unique development problems facing women and advance women's empowerment in Haitian society.

Examining the economic role of Haitian peasant women this paper attempts to situate women's insecurity within the context of globalization and structural adjustment policies, as well as examining how Haitian peasant women are becoming empowered to challenge this globalization through organizing and popular education. Research was carried out through living and working in a rural community with the women of the Mouvman Peyizan Papay, participating in community and organization activities, and completing informal discussions and interviews with individuals in the community.

PROBLEM/ ISSUE

The global picture of poverty has a woman's face. The world possesses 1.3 billion people who live in extreme poverty and only 30 percent of those individuals are male (Rai, 2002 p.120). The feminization of poverty is a well-recognized development issue. Women throughout the world are poorer, more exploited, more dominated, and more illiterate than men. They have less access to power, to systems of education, to credit, and to formal work. They provide a higher percentage of the world's work yet possess a mere fraction of the world's wealth.

HAITIAN DEVELOPMENT SITUATION

As the world's first independent black nation and only country in the world able to boast of a successful slave-revolt, Haiti should be a model nation as it is celebrating 200 years of independence in the year 2004. Instead of a shining example of success, Haiti has become known as the Western Hemisphere's poorest country and champion to a host of negative development indicators.

Haiti is a country that possesses a myriad of serious developmental concerns interrelated in a network of vicious poverty. According to the United Nations 2003 Human Development Report, Haiti's Human Development Index value is 0.467 and its rank is 150. Its Human Poverty Index value is 41.6 and its rank is 68. Haitians have a life expectancy at birth of 49.1 years. The infant mortality rate is 79 and under-five mortality rate is 123 per every 1000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is 520 for every 100,000 live births. The adult literacy (age 15 and above) rate is 50.8 percent and the youth (age 15-24) rate is 54.8 percent. Only 46 percent of the Haitian population lives with sustainable access to a superior water source; and a mere 28 percent lives with access to improved sanitation (Human Development Reports, 2003).

GENDERED DEVELOPMENT SITUATION

"Haitian women in general are poorer, less educated, more malnourished, more overworked, less represented politically, and less protected by the law than the nation's men" (Smith, 2001 p.158).

Male earned income is higher than that of females in Haiti. In 2003 the estimated earned income (PPP adjusted) for males was 2,396 US\$ and the estimated earned income for females (PPP adjusted) was only 1,339 US\$ in 2003. Women's economic activity rate (as a percentage of the male rate) is 70 percent (Human Development Report, 2003).

Female adult (age 15 and over) illiteracy rates were 52.2 percent in 2000 while male adult illiteracy rates were 48 percent (World Bank Group, 2003). Combined primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment was 48.9 percent for females and 52.9 percent for males in 2003 (Human Development Report, 2003). Education statistics suggest that female-male access to and use of the education system are nearly equal. However, it does not reveal the actual daily attendance rates of girl children compared to boy children.

Women in Haiti are detached from the macro-level positions that would allow them to engage in the decision-making process, and, ultimately, in the macro-economic policies that are put forth. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women hold only three of the 83 lower House seats and seven of the 27 upper House seats (Inter-Parliamentary). Although women make up 50.9 percent of the population, they only hold 3.6 percent of the lower House seats and 25.9 percent of the upper House seats.

FEMALE ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Haitian peasants are financially insecure. They live in an economically constraining environment in which they lack access to fundamental human needs as well as vital resources that are necessary to create financial security. They lack adequate access to such fundamental needs as nutritional food, potable water, sanitation services, healthcare and education. Furthermore, it is difficult for Haitian peasants to obtain affordable credit, to access modern agricultural technology, and to engage in political, social and economic decision-making processes that take place at the national level.

The level of poverty and economic vulnerability in Haiti is extreme, and while the economic situation is extremely difficult for Haitian men, it is even more desolate for Haitian women. The economic situation in relation to Haitian women merits further examination because Haitian women and women-headed households suffer more from the deteriorating economic condition and because of the unique position Haitian women occupy within the national, local, community, and household economies.

Haitian women are commonly referred to as the *potomitan*, or center pillar, of Haitian life. Their activities and survival strategies produce economic benefits on the household, local, and national level not only through their activities within the “visible” formal economy but mainly through their activities within the “invisible” informal economy and the “invisible” care economy. Within the informal economy women are the vital components of the exchange of commodities between the countryside and towns. Activities within the informal economy include the work of women street vendors as well as the work of the *madanm sara*, or market women. Within the care economy, women complete activities of care provision for their families such as preparing meals, cleaning, washing laundry, fetching water and firewood, and rearing children.

Despite the economic importance of these activities and various survival mechanisms carried out by women, women’s economic vulnerability continues to rise.

SIGNIFICANCE

It is essential to pose this question for a variety of reasons. Women’s economic well-being is linked to their children’s education enrollment rates, education attendance rates, and level of education attained as well as their families social, psychological and physical well-being. Women’s economic well being is also connected to a woman’s own development. Asking why women are poorer is an essential question for the development of Haitian communities, families, women and children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GLOBAL ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Since the 1970's the global economy has been in a process of restructuring. The new global economy is shaped by transnational corporations (TNCs) and international financial institutions through global production, consumption, and capital flows (Naples and Manisha, 2002 p.15). According to Dupuy (2002), individual citizens and nation states are losing power to determine the national economic plan of societies as decision making power is transferred to "international institutions that are not subject to democratic control and accountability." (p. 16)

The new economic order has not promoted social and economic development among developing and underdeveloped countries but has rather created a series of negative outcomes. Features of global economic restructuring include:

a decline in organized labor and formal labor and formal labor contracts; increasing internationalization of capital; growth in informal and part-time employment; loss of local economic and natural resources; cutbacks in social provisioning associated with the so-called welfare state, restructuring of women's work; and a growing disparity between classes (Naples and Manisha, 2002 p.11).

ECONOMIC PLANS FOR HAITI

Structural adjustment policies (SAP) imposed by international lending institutions on Third World countries as a stipulation to receive loans for development have contributed to the process of global economic restructuring as the liberalization of national economies is the primary objective of such policies (Naples and Manisha, 2002 p.12). Similar to interventions in many other indebted Third World countries, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are promoting structural adjustment policies in Haiti. The Haitian SAP calls for "reduction of state spending; shrinkage of government through massive layoffs; privatization of state-owned enterprises; financial liberalization; export-led production; and elimination of import tariffs and restrictions" (Bell, 2002 p.102). It is promoted as having the ability to create an ideal investment opportunity for international business thus sparking economic growth.¹

Robert Fatton Jr. states the "Haitian SAP is anchored in a series of deeply flawed assumptions" because it posits that the free market strategy and privatization can produce economic development (Fatton, 2002 p.124).

¹ The SAP supposedly creates an ideal business investment by "1) opening Haiti up for foreign trade and investment, 2) ensuring that the Haitian government has a very limited role in the economy and 3) keeping the wages of Haitian workers very low." (Haiti Reborn.)

It [the Haitian SAP] posits that development can be “private-driven,” and that the Haitian bourgeoisie can suddenly have a change of heart and become the engine of the takeoff, even though the bourgeoisie has never shown any commitment to sustained productive investment. It posits that privatization leads necessarily to rational economic decisions and that private agents are inherently more virtuous and efficient than public servants, even though revenues derived from the sale of state assets can be stolen and squandered, and private agents are bent on defending their own selfish interests rather than the collective good. It posits that democratic governance is compatible with the imposition of fiscal austerity in an environment that is already suffering from acute material deprivation, even though the huge costs of SAP are unlikely to be tolerated even by the docile and passive population. Finally, it posits that trade liberalization will promote a more efficient Haitian economy, even though the small national industrial base is incapable of withstanding and surviving foreign competition without public protection (Fatton, 2002 p. 124).

Alex Dupuy asserts that

Rather than laying the foundation for a less dependent or integrated process of growth with equity, the free market strategy will reinforce Haiti’s underdevelopment and dependence on the core countries (primarily the US) and their regulatory agencies. That is because it will undermine the efforts at agricultural rejuvenation and greater domestic food self-sufficiency without leading to a sustainable process of industrialization. (Dupuy, 1996 p.41)

WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY

While women all over the world are increasingly occupying space within the industrial, services, agricultural and informal economic spheres, women’s work is still underestimated (Visvanthan et al, 1997 p.112). In Haiti, women comprise 43 percent of the three million workers in the formal income-generating labor force (The World Bank Group, 2003). They account for 70 percent of the workers in the commercial and assembly sector; and they account for 49 percent of the farmers in the agricultural sector (Economic Justice). Countless women contribute to the economy vis-à-vis other informal activities such as “subsistence production, informal paid work, domestic production and related tasks, and volunteer work” (Beneria, 1997 p. 112).

Like many poor women in third world countries, the economic participation of Haitian women has not prevented economic vulnerability among women and female-headed households. In fact, economic insecurity is increasing rather than decreasing among Haitian peasants in particular but especially among Haitian peasant women as a result of national economic deterioration. Deere et al., assert that the economic crisis affects women more than men. Not only are women disadvantaged by occupational distribution and inadequate access to vital resources but “women’s roles as producers and consumers are different” (Deere, Safa, and Antrobus, 1997 p.267).

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY OF WOMEN

Haitian women experience economic insecurity on a different level than men. While male earned income was 2,396 US\$, female earned income was only 1,339 US\$ (PPP adjusted) in 2003 (Human Development Report, 2003). What is more, women are subjects of sexual discrimination. Within the formal income-generating sector women are subject to unequal wages, unfair employment subordination, and higher underemployment and unemployment than men; and within the informal sector women's contributions to the economy are not given value and in fact are invisible in the macro-economic accounting of the nation.

Elson blames the invisibility of women's informal contributions on the male-biased macro-economic principles that power global economic restructuring. She posits that macro-economics "considers only the monetary aggregates of the *productive economy*. It ignores resource aggregates of the *reproductive economy*" (Beneria, 1992). In assuming that the reproductive economy can continue to function regardless of external shocks that disturb its relationship to the productive economy, macro-policy takes the activities within the *reproductive economy* for granted; "this is equivalent to assuming that there is an unlimited supply of unpaid female labour, able to compensate for any adverse changes resulting from macro-economic policy" (Baker, 1994 p. 42).

These policies are incomplete, one-sided mechanisms that do not do not have an understanding of intra-household economics, household budgets, or the gendered division of labor and therefore do not adequately respond to Haiti's economic deterioration (Beneria, 1992).

Many women throughout the world are adversely affected by global economic restructuring and structural adjustment policies. According to Vivienne Taylor, economic structural adjustment programs contribute to an increased poverty among women and a crisis social welfare (Taylor 1999). Through structural adjustment programs, spending on health care, education, agriculture and other basic social services is reduced while prices for basic foods, gasoline, and transportation increase, wages remained fixed. The result is a lowered standard of living and increased poverty. (Taylor 1999)

Institutions such as Haiti Reborn, a section of the Quixote Center, support the notion that the economic deterioration Haiti is experiencing is a consequence of the neoliberal macro-economic plans promoted by international lending institutions and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Haitian political, social, and economic history and context merits attention in order to understand accurately how global economic restructuring and structural adjustment policies are affecting the Haitian peasantry in general and women in particular. This project investigates the deteriorating economic situation of Haitian peasant women and the strategies that women are devising to respond to their increasing vulnerability produced by Haiti's role in the new global economic arrangement.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

My second-year experience and internship provided me with a clearer understanding of the development situation in Haiti, global economic restructuring, and the micro-economic situation of Haitian peasant women. With this knowledge, I was able to have the ability to identify the causes of women's economic stability, assess the activities and interventions of Fanm Mouvman Peyizan Papay (Fanm MPP), along with being able to identify further interventions that can assist Haitian women gain more economic stability.

As a result of living in a rural Haitian community and working with a grassroots peasant movement, I increased my general knowledge of the social, political, and economic situation of the country. This kind of submersion provided me with a more comprehensive understanding of the development situation in Haiti because it gave me the chance to observe directly the development issues facing Haitian peasants.

MPP provides popular education to peasants on the social, political, and economic reality of Haiti as well as assisting the peasants to understand their situation within the larger international context. Part of my experience with MPP was to act as a participant in the various seminars they provide. Through these seminars my awareness and comprehension of the development situation in Haiti was made stronger and more complete. One of the goals of MPP's popular education is to assist Haitian peasants understand Haiti within the context of globalization, particularly global economic restructuring. This education along with my observation provided me with an increased understanding of the affects of global economic restructuring and neoliberal economic policies on Haiti and Haitians, as well as one point-of-view on development in Haiti.

Work with the Haitian women and direct involvement in women's groups and projects allowed me to have an in-depth comprehension of the daily lives of rural peasant women in Haiti and enabled me to understand their micro-economic situations. This combined knowledge permitted me to situate women within the larger development context of the country and, more specifically to my research, within the economic situation of Haiti and the global economic restructuring of the world. I gained the capability to analyze women's individual economic situation within the larger development context of Haiti and within the global economic restructuring occurring within the world today.

This comprehension and information I gained gave me the ability to identify the causes of women's individual economic instability and the effects of this economic instability on women, households, and community. An understanding of women's micro-economic situation and its relation to the macro-level enabled me to discuss with the women ways in which Fanm MPP could expand their economic activities.

METHODS

HOST ORGANIZATION AND ITS RELATION TO THE PROBLEM

Nou pa fè pwogram pou fè pwogram, nou pa fè pwojè pou fè pwojè. Nou pa yon òganis devlopman, nou pa yon pwojè devlopman. Nou se yon òganizasyon popilè

ki gen yon pwojè sosyete, yon pwojè chanjman sosyal. Konsa, tout pwogram, tout pwojè nap fè gen pou ede nou vanse nan wout chanjman an.

We don't have programs to just have programs; we don't have projects to just have projects. We are not a development organization; we are not a development project. We are a popular organization with the mission to work towards social change. All the programs and projects we are carrying out help us to advance our mission of social change.² (Mouvman Peyizan Papay, 1998 p.195)

*Mouvman Peyizan Papay*³ (MPP) is the largest, oldest peasant organization in Haiti. MPP is a popular organization created by and formed with Haitian peasants. It is an organization for peasants that help them to work to understand their development situation, ameliorate their misery, and work to change their society and community.

In 1973 Chavannes Jean-Baptist invited local peasant farmers in Papay to sit together to discuss the situation of life in Papay, to see what they could do together, to look for solutions to the problems that people felt were destroying the community. After several meetings such as these, the peasants decided to form a *gwoupman*⁴ called *Gwoupman Kè Kontan*⁵ that would unite the lives of these individuals together in work, reflection, and community life. During the same time, Chavannes organized a meeting with individuals from the village of Basin Zim with the same intention and *Gwoupman Janbatis Chavàn*⁶ was created.

From these first two *gwoupmans* the idea and philosophy of MPP took shape. It is the *gwoupmans* that form the base structure and *potomitan* (center pillar) of MPP.⁷ Individual peasants are united into small groups in order to join material and human resources, work together, share ideas, learn together and plan together. The group designates an activity and a day of the week to work together. Activities can include raising animals, farming in a garden, fishing, food processing, storing and selling grains, as well as creating and working in a tree nursery. Individuals come together once a week to work; and when they are finished with their work they sit together, they eat together, they reflect together, and they share their experiences. Today, thirty years after the first two *gwoupmans* were formed, MPP has thousands of *gwoupmans* throughout Haiti with tens of thousands of members.

The rural village of Papay in the Central Plateau department of Haiti is home to the organization's main office and training center. Although formed and centrally located in Papay and the Central Plateau, MPP works throughout Haiti in various other villages, zones, and departments.

² All translations are done by the author unless otherwise noted.

³ Peasant Movement of Papaye

⁴ Group

⁵ Happy Heart Group

⁶ Group Chavannes Jean-Baptist

⁷ Article 32 MPP statute states that the "baz fondal natal, poto kwen ak poto mitan MPP se gwoupman." (Mouvman Peyizan Papay; 1998) The fundamental base, the center point and center pillar, of MPP are its groups.

MPP, kòm òganizasyon peyizan, premye objektif nou se agrikilti paske Lavi nou mare ak sa. Si pa gen agrikilti, pa gen peyizan.

As a peasant organization, MPP's primary objective is agricultural because our lives are tied to agriculture. If we don't have agriculture then we don't have peasants. (Mouvman Peyizan Papay 1998, p. 228)

MPP's work is connected to the economic insecurity of Haitian peasant women in several fundamental ways. First of all, it is important to acknowledge that MPP is connected to the peasants' agricultural economy. MPP's central focus, its primary objective, is agricultural because agriculture is the peasant way of life. MPP is an organization created by and composed of members who are peasants, who are integrally connected to and dependent upon the land culturally, economically, politically, and socially. The peasant's economic development situation is tied to the land, to agricultural production, to agriculture development. MPP works to promote sustainable agriculture, to provide popular education to peasants, to connect peasants with necessary agriculture resources, to unite peasants in their work, to fight for peasant rights, and to defend the peasant farming culture.

In addition to this general fight to improve the lives of peasants, MPP acknowledges the unique situation of Haitian peasant women and fights to help women rise out from under domination and exploitation. MPP believes that Haitian peasants, in general, live under domination and exploitation produced by a predatory government and a global economic agenda set by capitalists. Haitian peasant women are not only affected by this domination and exploitation but are subject to further domination and exploitation produced by men. This double domination has caused Haitian peasant women to be even more economically vulnerable. MPP understands that a society where there is equality between women and men is extremely important for social and economic development. As a result, MPP works to promote equity between women and men, and also to provide women with special assistance.

In Haitian society, men tend to have the opportunity to obtain higher levels of education and as a result men overwhelmingly possess staff and leadership positions within the MPP. Recognizing this inequality, and attempting to redress this issue, the MPP has made a conscious decision to send young women to school in order to be trained to be the leaders of the MPP tomorrow. There are approximately 15 young woman attending university to become agronomists, technicians, accountants, and various other business related professionals and when they are finished with school they will receive staff and leadership positions within the organization.

Recognizing the unique difficulties that Haitian peasant women face and recognizing that women are best equipped to understand their own development problems, MPP has a women's movement called Fanm MPP, which means the Women of MPP. Fanm MPP functions within MPP and holds the same philosophies as MPP but concentrates its efforts on the developmental concerns of Haitian peasant women.

Like MPP, Fanm MPP forms gwoupmans but the groups they form are made up specifically of women. The women's gwoupmans meet weekly to work and discuss their development situation, just as general MPP groups. However, the women's groups are distinctive, "for among their central objectives are promoting women's rights, addressing women's special needs, and empowering women to do those things themselves" (Smith, 2001, p. 158).

San fanm, changman pa posib

Fanm MPP believes that women play a central role in bringing about change in Haiti because "without women, change is not possible." As noted above, Haitian women are commonly denoted as the *potomitan* (center pillar) of Haitian society. This idea is rooted in the central role that women play in Haiti's informal economy along with the important role they play in the family and community as caretaker, nurturer, wife, mother, midwife, and spiritual leader. Women play such a vital role in Haitian society that excluding them from the struggle makes development unattainable.

Nou pa kapab gen yon sosyete san dominasyon ak eksplostasyon si fanm yo toujou rete anba dominasyon ak eksplostasyon gason.

Another belief of Fanm MPP states that "a society without domination and exploitation is impossible if women are still subjected to domination and exploitation by men" (Mouvman Peyizan Papay, 1998, p. 78). This philosophy requires that women's concerns must be an integral part of the development process, an integral part of MPP's work, because real development is not achieved unless the situation and position of Haitian women is improved too.

BROAD APPROACH OR STRATEGY

Research for this project included various strategies based upon qualitative research methods. The research began with a situational analysis conducted before and during my time in Haiti. This research included reading books and articles on the history and the developmental situation of Haiti. This process allowed for a basis of understanding regarding the economic, political, and social situation of the country as well as preparing me for the second-year experience. It provided a starting point for the rest of my research and for my analysis.

A major element to my research approach was participant observation. I spent seven months fully immersed in the life and culture of rural Haiti through my work with MPP and through living directly in the Papay community. Living and working in the community allowed for me to have daily interaction with MPP staff, members of MPP and Fanm MPP, and peasants in the community. I observed community life, people within the community, interactions I had with people, interactions peasants had with each other, how MPP functioned, how MPP worked within the community, etc. I participated in a variety of activities and meetings such as office work, staff meetings, gwoupman meetings, MPP training sessions, popular education seminars, community activities, cultural activities, and daily conversations with people in the community. The participant

observation approach permitted me to become fluent in Haitian Creole, allowed for me to develop relationships with people in the community, led to a deeper understanding of the development situation of Haitian peasants, and gave me a solid base in which to complete analysis of the economic situation of rural peasant women.

Living in Haiti, in and of itself, was a rich source of information because I was a participant in events that were taking place. In addition to that rich source of information, I had direct access to Haitian newspapers and news radio reports, which are difficult to obtain outside of the country; and direct access to Haitian peasant responses to the news events, which is even more difficult to obtain outside of the country. As well as consulting local news sources, I regularly consulted the internet and Haitianists in the United States to provide me with news and analyses of Haiti, especially the political situation of the country.

Another essential element of the research I conducted was informal discussions and interviews that I performed. In my daily interactions with MPP staff, MPP members, and individuals within the community I discussed people's perceptions of the economic, social, and political condition of the country. These informal conversations were rich sources of information that have a special value not found in books or journal articles because these discussions were first-hand experiences, peasant perceptions of their own developmental situation. These conversations helped me to create questions that I posed throughout my analysis.

In addition to the informal discussions, I created an informal questionnaire on the economic situation of Haitian peasant women. In order to respect and ensure that my participants were comfortable I made an intentional decision to not use tape recorders and simply rely on written notes taken during the interviews. However, this limited my ability to capture all information discussed in the interviews and also did not provide me with direct quotes to cite in my findings. In spite of the limitations I gained a wealth of knowledge from these interviews. Haitian peasant women taught me that they understand their vulnerability and they understand the situation within which they live that produces that vulnerability. My interviews with peasant women allowed my analysis of the economic vulnerability of rural peasant women to be more complete and more real as what these women told me is based on their own life experiences.

The participants of the informal interview were MPP *animatrix* (women who trained to form MPP *gwoupmans*) and members of the MPP *gwoupmans* within which I participated. I purposely chose to only interview individuals whom I knew well and who felt comfortable with me so as to attempt to avoid responses that were insincere as a result of mistrust of the interviewer.

Mistrust was a serious issue that I had to deal with but not only because I was a *blan* (foreigner) to the community. Mistrust exists in Haitian society between Haitians themselves and I was told is sometimes stronger than the mistrust that Haitians have towards *blans*. The degree to which mistrust is a problem was not merely an obstacle for my research but was and is also an obstacle for development in a rural Haitian

community. People have difficulty trusting the intentions of others and sometimes doubt the real purpose of others' work because what they have experienced in the past has been self-seeking individuals who want to improve themselves in the name of peasants.

I spent three months regularly attending weekly gwoupman meetings and speaking with the women outside of gwoupman meetings before I even mentioned that I would like to ask questions. I wanted to earn the trust of the women, and I wanted them to be comfortable with me. There was one day in particular that made me realize the women were "ready" for me. I showed up at the meeting, like any other week, a few minutes before the meeting started; not all of the women had arrived yet and those that were there were looking for a place to sit under one of the trees in the garden. They were clearing places to sit and breaking leaves off trees to sit down. At every meeting before a woman always made sure that there was a chair for me to sit on and if no one brought a chair someone would always return to her house to bring me a chair. At this particular meeting, no one had brought a chair to the meeting. One of the women said that Sabine⁸ (the woman who lived the closest to the garden) needed to bring a chair for me. Several others responded and said that I was part of the group and did not need to sit in a chair any longer because I was not just a visitor any longer. It was at this meeting that I knew that I had developed a relationship with the women that allowed for them to feel comfortable with me.

I asked myself after this meeting what made this meeting different than all the others, why now were the women comfortable with me as a member of the community. I think time revealed to them my dedication to the gwoupman and my sincerity in getting to know the women as individuals. I would occasionally visit the women at their homes, would speak with them in the community, and participated with them in organizational and community activities.

The strategies that I employed throughout my second-year project allowed for me to obtain and access information that were invaluable to my analysis of the economic situation of Haitian peasant women. Without the obtained information, my conclusions and analysis would be incomplete.

EXPERIENCE WITH HOST ORGANIZATION

Working with MPP was an invaluable experience, in which I learned a great deal about the work of peasant movements, about the development situation of Haiti, and especially about grassroots development.

I was able to access a tremendous amount of information and participated in a variety of activities, trainings, meetings, and seminars that I would not have been privileged to otherwise. MPP connected me directly with peasants and peasant gwoupmans in order to conduct the research that was necessary for this paper and my analysis. MPP provided me with consultation regarding the information that I obtained. The movement fully

⁸ All names have been changed to respect the confidentiality of the individual.

incorporated me in their activities so that I would experience first-hand the actions of the movement and have direct interaction with peasants in the community as well as leaders of the movement.

I was given direct access to MPP documents that provided me with essential information on the movement's history, structure, philosophy, and objectives as well as to the movement's analysis of the cultural, economic, political, and social situation of the country. Having this information allowed for me to see the organization's point-of-view regarding the development situation of Haiti and the development strategy they employ.

INFORMATION ANALYSIS

The information I collected was analyzed through field notes that I wrote, discussions with MPP leaders and my field advisors, email discussions with my academic advisor and individuals in the United States who work in development in Haiti, as well as through personal reflection.

LIMITATIONS

While the information I collected and the analysis that I conducted were priceless attributes of my research, I recognize that this strategy is limited because of time, methodology, limited contacts, and political events. Therefore, my analysis and my findings make up one part of the development discussion on the country and the development problem but nonetheless make up a crucial piece of the development discussion because it is rooted in grassroots, peasant experiences.

Time was the principal limitation that I felt limited my research. Time was a limitation because seven months was not sufficient time to fully become a member and participant within MPP and the Papay community let alone to complete research on the development situation of a country. The first few months were used to simply adjust to the organization, the community, and the situation of the country. While this process is important, I felt that after this step was complete that I was rushed to carry out of steps in my research strategy.

The qualitative sociological approach that I used for my research, which included the participant observation approach and informal conversations, has limitations. The research approach is not a neutral approach. The qualitative nature of my research is subject to my own personal perceptions, thoughts, emotions, and experiences that affect the way in which I conduct and analyze the research. Nor does the research provide any quantitative data that can be examined and compared to other quantitative data.

Working with MPP and living in Papay put me in a unique but limited setting. I recognize that my experience with MPP has contributed to and limited my perceptions and analysis of the country because I lived only in one community and had limited encounters with other parts of the country. MPP, while not an actual political organization, has strong political opinions and strong development convictions. I acknowledge that these political opinions and development convictions have influenced and to some degree have restrained my analysis.

UNEXPECTED DEPARTURE

Approximately two months before my scheduled departure from Haiti I was obliged to leave the country due to the deterioration of the political situation. The US embassy had issued a statement that all non-essential United States citizens were asked to leave the country due to the deteriorating political situation. SID sent me several emails asking me to consider evacuating the country but after speaking with Chavannes Jean-Baptiste (Executive Director of MPP) and other MPP leaders I did not feel that that was necessary. The small village I lived in called Papay is located in the Central Plateau, and had been quiet at the start of the political uprising because the armed rebels were concentrated in the north of the country. However, on February 16th the armed rebels, called the Resistance Front, took over control of the city of Hinche which is located approximately 5 miles from Papay. At this point, we decided that it would be best if I left the country due to the high-level of political uncertainty.

This unexpected evacuation caused me to leave my internship and second-year work before the completion of my anticipated work goals and the research of my second-year project. I was unable to conclude the interview process which I had begun with the women in the community. Furthermore, this departure had negative psychological impacts on me as well. I left my community hurriedly without having the chance to speak with many of the individuals and groups with whom I lived and worked. I left my co-workers and neighbors in a tense situation where many are fearful because they do not know what will happen next. My ability to leave the situation highlights the gross inequalities of our world, and I see how my privilege as an American citizen sets me apart from my Haitian co-workers and neighbors.

SCHEDULE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Participation in Weekly Gwoupman Meetings

1. Inyon de Jen (Youth Union): I partook in weekly meetings with the group of young men and women. We worked on the groups objectives for the upcoming year, we planned an economic project for the group, and we worked on the organization of the group.
2. Fanm Papay (Women of Papay): The women in this group were taking a break from their normal economic activity but continued to meet every week. I was able to participate in their discussions about the upcoming year's economic activities, their analysis of various social problems confronting the women in their community, and was able to develop a close relationship with many women in the group who later became participants of my questionnaire.

B. Animator/ Animatris Training Session

- Four two week training sessions
1. The first session was a situational analysis of the reality of Haiti including information and statistics on population, health, education, agriculture, and on the Haitian economy. This session was rich in contextual information and showed how all of these elements contribute to the development situation of the country. It also

provided me with the opportunity to understand MPP's development position and work in the country.

2. The second session was a situational analysis of the current realities of the world and their affects on Haiti and other small countries. We namely focused upon globalization, global communication, global economic restructuring, the Green Revolution vs. sustainable agriculture, Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), and the affects of all of these events on the peoples of the world.
3. The third session was information on the use of popular education as well as instruction on using popular education to provide peasants with information. This session of the training was called off before its conclusion due to the deterioration of the political situation in the country at that time.
4. The fourth session of the training was on organizing peasant groups. I had intended on participating in this session but was obliged to leave the country before this training session took place.

C. Monthly “Grand Ekip” Meetings

- As a part of Fanm MPP, I participated in monthly *Grand Ekip* (board) meetings. MPP is composed of a women's board, a project board, a technical board, an education board, an executive board, and an administrative/financial board. In these meetings, we discussed the upcoming events as well as past events that the various sectors had and would implement. My role in these meetings began as an observer but as I began to work with individuals to develop projects I participated in giving reports.

E. Creation of Reproductive Health and Sexual Education program

- MPP is in the process of creating an integral health center for individuals in the community and MPP members. I worked closely with the Haitian doctor establishing the center to create a reproductive health and sexual education program for the health center. I carried out sociological research, worked on developing educational materials, participated in brainstorming meetings, and attended meetings with the Haitian Ministry of Public Health official in Hinche. I also carried out research to look for funders and grants for the program as well as wrote grant proposals.

F. Translation

1. Brochure
2. Fanm MPP documents

G. Computer Training and English Lessons

- Worked with women within the women's movement to provide them with computer and internet training as well as work with them on learning English.

I. Master's Paper

PRESENTATION

The potomitan, that which holds everything together, is the common phrase used to describe Haitian women. Despite the regularity and familiarity of the term as well as the importance that it suggests, Haitian women do not receive the respect that they deserve from their families, rural communities, as well as their country. Instead rural Haitian women are disrespected, marginalized, oppressed, and dominated.

Haitian peasant women are overworked, exploited, and undervalued in every aspect of their lives. From the tedious, time-consuming work of managing the household to the laborious work in the family's garden to the demanding work of managing a *ti komès*,⁹ women find no relief. Women are responsible for preparing meals, washing and ironing, cleaning the house, caring for children, and taking care of the men of the house. They assist in planting, harvesting, weeding, and processing produce. They are buying, selling, and transporting merchandise. They are struggling to survive everyday and receive little support.

The circumstances within which rural Haitians live cause ordinary peasant women to carry-out a multitude of arduous, mundane tasks in order to ensure that their families' survive. While peasant women are not "super-sheroes," their capacity and determination is more than honorable and deserves to be understood for the significance it has not only to Haitian families and Haitian society but also to the world.

Women's contributions to their families and communities' well-being are significant but yet it raises a question that is complex to answer. If women are the potomitan of Haitian life than why do they hold a subordinate position within society? Why have women not received the respect that they deserve and why have they not demanded the respect that they deserve?

The women in my community are able to recognize that they are subjected to discrimination based upon their gender by their families, communities, and their nation but the source, the cause, of that exploitation and domination is not apparent to either the women themselves or myself as an observer-researcher. It is easy to see that women hold a subordinate position in society. Comparing activities of men and women is one way in which this is visible. Women's work is never-ending, and they work all day without relaxation. Men, on the other hand, are allowed to relax and participation in social recreation, whether that be playing cards or dominos or socializing around the community, once the work in the garden or field is finished. However, pin pointing the exact causes of exploitation is not as clear-cut.

The questions stated above can be the topic of an entire paper but it is necessary to address these issues nevertheless. Based upon my observations women's subordination is the result of complex socio-cultural issues: enculturation, relationships between men and women, socially defined gender roles, and social perceptions of male and female.

⁹ Small business. The term used to refer to economic activity within the informal sector.

CONTEXT

Haitian women live within a complex environment that influences the lives they lead, the struggles they endure, the choices they have, and the decisions they make. Without first understanding this environment it is impossible to analyze the economic vulnerability of Haitian peasant women because women's poverty is a product of this environment and the elements that create the environment. It is within this very specific context that the economic vulnerability and the responses to that economic vulnerability need to be understood.

Haiti is failing politically, socially, ecologically, and economically. In the midst of a deteriorating situation Haitian peasants are struggling to produce food, to feed and care for their families, to find work, to make a little money, to survive and to live like human beings. Their struggle is an element of the larger deterioration but is also a product of that deterioration.

INCREASING POLITICAL INSECURITY

Haiti has been attempting to develop a new democratic political system amid the bleak economic and social realities. Crucial political institutions including the Parliament, the judicial system, the legislature and the Haitian National Police possess underdeveloped, fragile structures that are dangerously unstable. Institutions are confronted with "extreme political polarization, class divisions and a fractured national identity" thus complicating the restructuring process (World Bank, 1998).

Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. Over three decades of the Duvalier dictatorship followed by military rule ended in 1990 when Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected president. Most of his term was usurped by military takeover, but he was able to return to office in 1994. His associate Rene Preval took office in 1995, while Aristide won a second term as president in 2000, and took office in early 2001.

However, some say Aristide's popularity had already begun to diminish reflected in the low voter turnout for the 2000 presidential elections. An element contributing to the disappointment of the Aristide government was his agreement to a Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) for Haiti so that he could return to Haiti in 1994 to finish his term. Aristide was constrained by the pressure he received both from those wanting the implementation of a SAP and by the pressure from those at odds with a SAP for Haiti. Other factors contributing to the loss of popularity of the Fanmi Lavalas party include the reported corruption, arming of gangs, drug dealing occurring within the party.

Political violence and uncertainty continues to plague the country. Two years short of finishing his term, President Aristide left office and Haiti on February 29, 2004. The departure of Jean-Bertrand Aristide came after a turbulent three years in office.

In May 2000 legislative elections were denounced by observers of the election as fraudulent and accused Aristide's party, Fanmi Lavalas, with interfering with the outcome. The contested elections sparked a political stalemate between Fanmi Lavalas

and the political opposition where the opposition refused to negotiate with Aristide and Fanmi Lavalas, and caused the international community to withhold aid.

Haitian political opposition and civil society united to create an organization called Group 184, which is a broad-based social and political coalition, to denounce Aristide and demand that he resign. Leading up to the 200th year celebration of Haiti's independence on January 1, 2004 the country experienced a lot of political turbulence. Political demonstrations by both social and political opposition groups to Aristide as well as Fanmi Lavalas supporters occurred all around the country. The demonstrations were frequently put down violently and caused many to be wounded. Opposition groups demanded that Aristide resign from presidency while Aristide supporters were denouncing the opposition and asserting that Aristide should complete his five-year term.

The political situation intensified in late January and early February, when the former Lavalas gang known as the *Lame Kanibal* (Cannibal Army) joined forces with some former military forces, to form the Liberation Front. The armed forces violently took control over several major cities in the north and central region of the country and declared that they would march into Port-au-Prince and take over the capital unless Aristide stepped down from power. International forces did not interfere, and was criticized as the situation was clearly deteriorating and insecurity was increasing.

On February 29, 2004 Jean-Bertrand Aristide left Haiti and resigned from the presidency. However, much controversy has arisen over his departure and resignation. Aristide and his supporters, both in Haiti and the US, claims that the US marines forced him to leave office, calling his departure a coup. Following Aristide's departure a transitional government has been established until democratic elections can take place.

The departure of Aristide and the creation of a transitional government has altered Haiti's political situation but has not eliminated political problems facing the country and has created some new dilemmas.

INCREASING SOCIAL VULNERABILITY

Social development conditions in Haiti are depressing. Haitians suffer from low life expectancy, poor health and nutrition conditions, high illiteracy rates and low levels of formal sector job skills. As a result, easily treated conditions such as malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, and parasitic diseases are major problems, and maternal and infant mortality rates are high. The average life expectancy is 49.5 years of age. According to the 2003 Human Development Indicators 50 percent of the population is undernourished, 54 percent of the population does not have access to safe drinking water, and 72 percent of the population does not have access to improved sanitation. Infant mortality is 79 per 1,000 live births and maternal mortality is 520 per 100,000 live births.

“In short, the overwhelming majority of the Haitian population is living in deplorable conditions of extreme poverty” (World Bank Poverty Report, 1998). Social development conditions in Haiti continue to deteriorate rather than improve. In 2002, Haiti ranked 146

out of 173 countries in the United Nations Human Development Indicators (HDI) and fell to 150 in 2003 (Human Development Indicators, 2002 and 2003).

INCREASING AGRICULTURAL DETERIORATION

Ecologically, the country is in danger. The degree of deforestation is disastrous with only 2-3 percent of Haiti's hardwood jungle remaining (Human Development Indicators, 2003). The land is barren; there are no trees to hold the soil or rain waters. Soil erosion and degradation caused by deforestation and from over exploitative farming techniques are continuing to have a disastrous impact not only on the environment but also on Haiti's agriculture sector. Lakes and rivers are drying up. Farmers are not yielding the same amount of produce. Rain is either dangerously scarce causing draught or dangerously excessive causing disastrous flood rains. These floods carry away millions of tons of top soil which is then deposited in lakes, rivers, streams, and the ocean killing fish and polluting the water.

As agriculturalists, peasants rely upon the land for their survival. They depend upon a good yield from the rainy season to last them during the dry season. Many Haitians told me of their inability to produce enough for their families to eat and to sell at the market in order to buy other necessities that they need. Many times I heard that the land was once capable of yielding enough produce but that the land does not now give them what it used to give them.

INCREASING ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Economic conditions in Haiti are miserable with approximately 70 percent of the population living in poverty; and in rural areas 80 percent of the population lives in poverty. Most Haitians are barely surviving. They labor in their unproductive fields under the unrelenting sun and struggle to maintain a *ti komès* (little business) in the economically insecure informal sector. They live day to day not knowing whether they will find a little bit of money or food in order to feed their families for the day.

Unemployment and underemployment are widespread with few opportunities in the formal sector of the economy. Haitians who are fortunate enough to be employed in the formal sector are underpaid. There has been so little investment in technical training that it has led to a shortage of skilled laborers and an overabundance of unskilled labor.

Nearly 70 percent of the entire Haitian population is dependent upon the declining agriculture sector that employs about two-thirds of the economically active work force. The agriculture sector lacks investment, irrigation, technical training, agronomists and other specialists, and an agricultural development plan.

It is estimated that 60 percent of the population relies upon the financially insecure informal economy for economic survival. Within the informal sector there are few resources such as credit and training that could assist Haitians to develop a *ti komès*.

The well being of the national economy has been deteriorating. Haiti's Gross Domestic Product fell from 4.0 billion US\$ in 2000 to 3.7 billion US\$ in 2001 its annual GDP

growth rate was -1.7 percent in 2001 (World Bank Group, 2002). During the early 1980's five gourde, the national currency, was equivalent to 1 \$US. In 1998, the value of the gourde dropped to 16 and in 2003 the value of the gourde was around 42-43 gourde for 1 \$US.

The devaluation of the nation's currency and the deterioration of the national economy have had a tremendous affect on the Haitian peasantry. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita fell from 510 US\$ in 2000 to 460 US\$ in 2001. (World Bank Group, 2002) Haiti's GDP per capita annual growth rate was -2.5 percent between 1990 and 2001 (Human Development Indicators, 2003).

The drop in real income coupled with the rise in the cost of living has made survival hard. For most peasants, purchasing basic necessities such as foodstuffs, toiletries, and clothes has become a luxury that few can afford.

As the political, social, ecological and economic situation of Haitian peasants deteriorates, life becomes more difficult and peasants increasingly fall back on a variety of coping mechanisms to survive. Both peasant men and women suffer intensely from grinding poverty and both employ a variety of survival strategies to cushion the intensity of their poverty. Yet it is Haitian women who are poorer and suffer more intensely from the declining state of affairs.

WHY ARE HAITIAN PEASANT WOMEN POORER?

Why are Haitian peasant women poorer than men? It was with the objective of solving this question that I based my second-year project. I carried this question in my mind to every group meeting, to every seminar or training, to every committee meeting, and every discussion that took place. I used this question as a foundation to analyze everything I saw, heard, experienced, felt, and learned. What I realized was that this question was far more complex and challenging than I had anticipated. Poverty in Haiti is so crushing for all peasants that it took me some time to be able to see the specific issues confronting women.

Haitian peasant women in general are poorer and more vulnerable to Haiti's deteriorating development situation due to their economic function within society. They complete a variety of non-income generating activities that are economically beneficial to both family and society and they do not have access to important resources that could assist them in achieving economic stability. As producers and consumers, women hold a very different economic role than men. (Visvanathan, 1997 p.265)

ECONOMIC ROLE

Haitian peasant women occupy a central economic role within the Haitian family and the nation. Although women find few opportunities within the formal economy, women find themselves supporting families through work in the agriculture sector, the informal economy, and domestic economy.

Agriculture Sector

Locating peasant women within rural Haiti where agriculture is the dominant source of a family's income is an important point of departure in understanding the economic role that women play. Women are important participants of the work that is carried out in the agriculture sector. While men are primarily responsible for the physically strenuous work in the garden or on the farm, women play a vital role in the agriculture sector. Women work in the garden or on the farm alongside of men planting, cultivating, weeding, and harvesting produce.

I was able to visit a *konbit*¹⁰ one afternoon and observe the importance of women's work in the fields. The *konbit* was the peanut harvest, and the men were uprooting the peanut plants while the women were completing the tedious work of removing the peanuts from the roots. The owner of the field commented on the importance of the women's work because, even though the men's work was physically strenuous, without the work that the women carry out in the field the crop would not get harvested.

Women are also responsible for taking care of small animals such as chickens, turkeys, and sometimes goats and pigs. Darline, an older peasant woman in the community, was responsible for feeding and watching her family's chickens, pigs, and goats. The chickens were cage-free and required that she keep an eye on them constantly throughout the day to ensure that they would not wander too far from her family's yard. The goats required that she find someone, when she was too busy preparing meals to do this herself, to escort them to an area where they could eat throughout the day. The pigs were less tedious because they were located in the back of the family's garden next to the house. The family's animals were an important aspect of their income, and Darline would sell eggs from her chickens and occasionally kill a goat or chicken for her family to eat. Like Darline, many peasant women are responsible for the care of small animals that add to the family's income.

Women are also responsible for milling corn and sorghum, roasting and grinding coffee, transforming manioc into cassava, shelling beans as well as preparing other foodstuffs such as peanut butter, jelly, milk, juice, and butter for consumption.

Market days in Hinch, the nearby larger city, were Wednesdays and Saturdays which meant that one could see the market women transporting produce to and from the market on the tops of their heads or on their donkeys. These women play a vital role as there are no other mechanisms to transport produce to and from the market.

Women also play an important role transporting produce and goods to and from the countryside and Port-au-Prince. Several women in the community were involved in this sort of exchange of goods. Violet and Ma Eddie would take public transportation to Port-au-Prince to purchase clothes, household items, and other things in bulk and return to Papay to sell these items in the community as well as at the Hinch market.

¹⁰ A *konbit* is a Creole word used to describe an informal group, usually neighbors, of peasants that complete work in an individual's field in order to help him or her with the work.

Different kinds of labor carried out in the agriculture sector are valued differently and are also compensated differently. The role of the women in the konbit for the peanut harvest did not carry the same social and work value as the role of the men in the konbit. The men's work was seen to be more difficult, requiring more strength therefore more respected and the women's work was seen as secondary work to the men's work. Women like Violet, Ma Eddie, and Darline are transforming, transporting, and selling produce that directly adds to the economic well being of the peasant family but does not possess the same value as work completed by men.

An example of the disparity is the transporting of produce to and from the countryside for sell at the market. Women and men both are involved in the transportation of goods around the country; however what is different is the amount of goods transported and subsequently the value placed upon that activity. Women transport smaller amounts, generally what they can carry on their person while men transport larger amounts, generally an entire truck load. Each role is a vital component of the agricultural economy but the roles do not possess the same value and are not compensated in the same manner.

Women perform valuable work that contributes to the functioning of the agricultural sector, yet it is perceived as secondary to the role of men. Women's activities tend to be more subsistence, intended for the direct consumption of the household. Men's role tends to be perceived as more economically beneficial, while women's role tends to be less economically visible and therefore perceived as less valuable.

Domestic Economy

Women's expected role within the family is caretaker of the household and the family; she is responsible for organizing the household so that it runs well. Although given little value, this responsibility is no light task.

Within the household, women are responsible for a variety of beneficial tasks that include cleaning the house, organizing the household, fetching water and firewood, preparing meals, feeding the family, washing and ironing clothes, bathing children and getting them ready for school, taking care of the husband or man of the house, and caring for a sick member of the family. In addition to these physical domestic tasks women also bear a psychological and emotional burden that weigh heavily on them.

I would frequently visit the home of a woman in the community named Marie. She was a woman in her late 50s, and she had children my age, but she and I formed a special friendship. During one of my visits she told me why it is difficult to be a woman and a mother in Haiti not merely because of the physical tasks that they carry out for their families and children but because of the things they cannot provide for their families. She told me that one of the hardest things for her was when her children would ask her for something that she could not provide them, and she said that it was she, as their mother, that they would go to when they needed something. It struck me then how deep the pain is that these women experience not only because of the strenuous, tiresome activities that they carry out but also the deep psychological and emotional anguish caused by their economic vulnerability.

In Haiti, these domestic activities are tedious tasks that consume much of a woman's day. For example, preparing the large afternoon meal begins in the morning around 8 or 9 so that the meal is ready to serve around 1 or 2 in the afternoon. Haiti lacks many advanced resources and products that would allow such tasks to consume less time and, thus, the deficiency is made up by women.

These domestic services are invaluable to the household economy as it means that income is not spent to pay other individual to complete this work. Furthermore, it allows the husband to concentrate his efforts on the more strenuous agriculture work in the garden. Frequently, young girls will assist their mothers with the cooking, cleaning, fetching of water, rearing of younger children, and other domestic tasks so that the burden does not lie solely on the back of the women. It is also common for another woman to work in the house in order to provide further assistance. For these activities, she is paid a small amount of money that then contributes to her family's economy.

Informal Economy

In the rural areas of Haiti, there are few opportunities in the formal sector; and there are few women who possess adequate schooling or training to obtain work in the formal sector. Therefore, many women depend upon the weak informal economy to provide additional economic support for their families.

Women in the community engaged in *ti komès*. Some women possessed a small shop at one's home in which they would sell a variety of goods, others would sell produce or food in the streets or in the market, still others would carry out the work of a seamstress or a baker. *Ti komès* literally means small business and consists of a variety of economic activities within the informal economy and many women carry out activities within the informal economy in addition to the work that they carry out in the fields or in the home.

The informal economy is extremely vulnerable to political, social and economic factors, and it provides no income guarantee. It lacks governmental support that could make *ti komès* more secure. There is a deficiency in vital resources such as business or technical training and credit with reasonable terms of agreement or rates.

A young woman, named Rose Laurie, with a business degree working for MPP described another negative element to work in the informal economy. She said that many times when a woman establishes a small business she then loses economic support from her husband. It is common for a man to withdraw or reduce the amount of money that he gives to his wife to purchase necessities and food items when she has a *ti komès*. The woman is then obliged to rely heavily upon the benefits from the *ti komès* and she will have to spend the profits that she makes rather than investing the profits into the business. The business then is unable to grow and will more than likely eventually fail. Work in the informal economy is not a stable source of income nor is it an adequate substitute for work in the formal economy.

Importance of Economic Role

From their activities in the agriculture sector to their domestic work in the household to their businesses in the informal economy, Haitian peasant women occupy a very different economic role in Haitian society than peasant men. Women are producing goods and providing services; they are toiling to sustain their families. Some of their activities are income generating such as the selling of produce and the profits from a ti komès. Some of their activities are non-income generating such as processing produce for consumption and managing the household. Regardless of whether their activities are productive and generate an actual income or are reproductive and regenerate the household without producing any profits, women's economic role is important for Haitian families and the nation.

Haitian women's economic role, especially their survival strategies, makes up for government and private-sector deficiencies within the Haitian economy. Their economically valuable activities are being exploited and taken advantage of to a point that makes women more vulnerable rather than less vulnerable.

EXPLOITATION

Their economic situation is a product of the country's intense poverty, the deteriorating political crisis, the degrading ecological state of affairs, the weakening economy, and the economic role of women in the Haitian micro and macro economy. The economic activities that women are completing are meant to help the household survive, are meant to help women become more financially secure. However, every year as the economic situation of country deteriorates, and women continue to become poorer and more vulnerable.

Women make significant contributions to the national, local, and household economies vis-à-vis their economic role in the agriculture sector, domestic economy and informal economy. Women's diverse household survival strategies and the lifestyle changes that women and their families develop to deal with the macro-economic policies and deteriorating national economy allow for the government to continue its negligence. The government relies on the economic role of women; it relies on women to carry out more survival strategies as their families' economy deteriorates, so that it can continue to pursue neoliberal economic policies and continue to fit the country into the changing global economy. The specific affects of globalization and structural adjustment are difficult to pin point at the micro-economic level yet the macro-level affect that these policies have are felt by the peasantry. Trade liberalization, for example, has had a profound impact on the livelihood of the peasantry. Cheap imports of rice and sugar flood the Haitian market having devastating affects on rice and sugar producers in Haiti. Haiti used to be self-sufficient in both rice and sugar but now Haitian farmers cannot compete with the low prices of the imports and many have abandoned production.

As Haiti is re-ordering to fit within the new global economic system, the Haitian peasantry is being ignored and their work is being exploited. The economic policies of Haiti are not assisting the Haitian peasantry but rather taking advantage of their economic role. Rather than investing in agricultural and social development which would be to the

advantage of the peasantry economic policies are exploiting the work completed by the peasantry. The exploitation that the peasantry is experiencing is worse for women because of their disadvantaged economic role within Haitian society.

RESPONSES OF WOMEN

Despite the vulnerability of their situation and despite their intensifying poverty Haitian peasant women are responding to improve their situation. They are carrying out a variety of survival activities that includes reproductive as well as productive work in the agriculture sector, domestic economy, and work in the informal economy.

The women of Mouvman Peyizan Papay are an excellent example of the determination and strength of peasant women in Haiti. The women of MPP are carrying out a variety of alternative survival activities. They are working to improve their lives; they are working to change their situations within their families, communities, and nation. They are struggling to better understand their situation and the development problems of their country. The women of MPP are organizing themselves, educating themselves, developing projects, and networking with other women's movements. They are fighting for the development of their country, their communities, and their families.

Organizing

The women of MPP are bringing peasant women together in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons. The women's gwoupmans that are composed of 10-15 women are one example of the way in which the women of MPP are organizing Haitian peasant women.

The gwoupman brings together women so that these women can work together to understand and improve their economic, familial, political, and social situations. Women are organized into groups based upon common backgrounds and/ or similar problems. For example, a group of women who work the land will be brought together or a group of women merchants will be brought together. The objective is to group women together with similar difficulties and comparable experiences because these women will best be able to form a group and stay together to help individuals within the group advance.

These small groups bring women together to discuss their situations, encourage shared learning, create solidarity among the women, and establish a support system that would otherwise not exist. The gwoupmans provide the women with a comfortable environment that is non-threatening and allows the women the opportunity to learn more about their situation as well as to talk with other women about their circumstances.

The opportunity given to the women through this group experience is invaluable because for many of these women are not allowed this kind of sharing, learning, solidarity, and support through other structures in society. It is only through their participation in MPP gwoupmans that many peasant women find their strength to continue their fight for a better life. This type of organizing allows women to see that they are not alone and it allows women to understand their situation better so that they can demand change in their families, communities, and society. It unites women. It enlightens women. It empowers women.

There is a negative affect, however, that presents itself because organizing creates one more responsibility, one more task that the women must bear and leads to the triple burden of women. It was evident through my experience that women took time out of their week in order to attend the meeting. Sometimes I was able to see that was a true burden for the women because it meant that she was even more pressed for time or that she must neglect something or that she must find someone to help her out with work at her house.

Other ways in which the women of MPP are bringing women together include educational and informational seminars as well as through festivals and events. For example, the women of MPP organized a festival to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, 2004. This festival was not only opened up to all women and men of MPP but was also opened to other women's groups in Haiti and to individual women who would like to participate in the festival. The festival displayed the talents of women in cooking, sewing, dancing, singing, playing music as well as provided information on the economic and social situation of women in Haiti.

Education

Popular education is a fundamental component of the work of MPP. Each gwoupman is formed by a trained popular educator called an *animator* or *animatrix* who works with the group in order to help them better understand their individual situation located within the local, national and international contexts. Popular educators do not utilize typical education methods of a "teacher" giving information to "students." Instead, MPP uses a method based upon the teaching of Pablo Friere and focuses on the idea that groups of individuals work together to educate.

Popular educators use a variety of tools such as popular theatre, songs, images, and stories in order to assist the peasants in understanding and learning about their circumstance. The trained animatrix of MPP employ these educational tools within gwoupman meetings to encourage discussion and reflection about women's situation, present new ideas or topics to the group as well as to honor the role of women in Haitian society.

The most popular forms of these educational tools are songs created by the women of MPP. These songs are sung at every gwoupman meeting as well as seminars or women of MPP board meetings. These songs are used to educate and explain the situation of Haitian women. They are used to celebrate women's role in society. They are used as a mobilizing tool to encourage women to get involved in the struggle to change society. They are also sometimes used as a tool to "jab" at individuals or society that would not otherwise be allowed as a topic of discussion in Haitian society.

Fanm malere ou se poto mitan lavi a. Lakay la se ou. Jaden an, ti komes la se ou menm. Fanm malere, san ou lit la paka reyisi. Mwen wete chapo ba devan ou. Se ou menm ki plis soufri grangou ak imilyason. Se ou ki pote bout panyen nan tet ti bourik devan. Tout eksplwate se sou ou yap tann pou fanmiy manje. Ann met tet ansanm pou n chanje sa. (Liv Chante, MPP 2003)

Poor women you are the center pillar of life. You are the Haitian household. The garden and small commerce is you too. Poor women, without you the fight cannot rise up. I take off my hat to salute you. It is you that suffers from starvation and humiliation. It is you that carries the heavy load on your head, small donkey ahead. You experience all types of exploitation while trying to feed your family. Let's put our heads together to change that.

In addition to the educational tools utilized in gwoupman meetings, the women of MPP, have encouraged the sharing of information through training seminars. In particular, the women have offered seminars on natural medicine, midwife training, gender in Haitian society, as well as on culture and society. The seminars are designed to encourage the sharing of information and issues outside the seminar within gwoupmans so that a larger group of individuals can benefit from the discussion of the various topics. Participants, usually popular educators, are chosen that will pass along the knowledge and encourage others to reflect upon the topic in group meetings. This kind of sharing allows for the maximum amount of individuals to benefit from the information and reinforces the gwoupmans themselves.

Development Projects

In addition to providing education and organizing women into groups, the women of MPP have also created several economic projects in order to help Haitian peasant women. The economic projects include a seamstress shop, peanut butter and jelly processing, and several small commerce shops. These projects are managed by the women of MPP and produce economic benefits for the women of MPP as well as the women that participate in these projects.

In working with the women of MPP I was able to share my ideas about their development projects and suggest to them ways in which they could develop these projects in order to improve the economic situation of the women working on the project. We discussed ways in which Fanm MPP could expand the marketing of their products so as to sell them in the national as well as the international markets. This expansion asks that the women establish a laboratory to analysis their food products as well as to send a young woman to school to learn about marketing so that they can successfully market their products.

International Networking

The women of MPP participate in national and international conferences and seminars. These seminars give the women the chance to network with women's movements and organizations from other countries and allow for the women of MPP to establish international solidarity networks.

Response to Globalization and Structural Adjustment

The women of the MPP are working to improve the situation of Haitian peasant women and to challenge the elements in their society that make them among the most marginalized and exploited in Haitian society. However, can the women of the MPP challenge the globalization of their economy and the structural adjustment policies being

put in place? I not only believe that the women of the MPP, as well as the men of the MPP, are challenging the globalization occurring in the country but are also working to provide development alternatives that would lead to sustainable development for the country.

Through organizing peasant women and men in gwoupmans, through educating peasants on their social and economic development situation, through developing a sustainable development strategy for the country the women of MPP and the MPP are challenging the globalization and structural adjustment policies imposed upon the country. Yet it is no simple task, especially when these individuals have traditionally been excluded from the decision-making process that occurs regarding the economic and social development of the country, but I believe that the women of the MPP and the MPP are demanding their inclusion in this process and the opportunity to determine a development strategy for the country that is beneficial to all.

Chavannes Jean-Baptiste has been invited to create a Commission for the Peasantry that will report to the transitional government the development needs and strategy asked for by the peasantry. This committee is a hopeful sign for the voice of the peasant, and it is hoped that this is a signal of the peasantry's place in the decision-making process of the country.

CONCLUSION

Haiti has experienced over 200 years of political instability filled with coup d'états, dictatorships, corruption, and political violence. After hearing about the deterioration of the country's political situation in the news and the resignation of former President Aristide, many people are curious as well as concerned about what will happen next for the country and for the people of Haiti. What does this transition and new political juncture mean for Haiti?

Today, due to the current political juncture of the country, Haitians find themselves at a political crossroad and once again have the chance to open a new chapter. The political situation in Haiti has most definitely changed due to the departure of a democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Haitians find themselves in a difficult situation where they need to continue working towards establishing democratic institutions in Haiti. It is up to Haitians, along with the support of the international community as well as support from the friends of Haiti, to rebuild their nation and their communities. It is the work of civil society organizations, professionals, politicians, students, and individual citizens within Haiti to continue the democratization of this small island nation.

The Haitian political crisis has taken a heavy toll on Haitian peasant women who were already economically vulnerable individuals within an economically, politically, and socially insecure environment. As the potomitan of Haitian society, Haitian peasant women are working to increase their security, the security of their families, as well as the security of their nation. As the potomitan of the MPP, the women of MPP are organizing themselves, educating themselves, working towards their own development, and challenging globalization.

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