

Improving Aid Effectiveness by Increasing Local Ownership: A Case Study of USAID's Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Investments in Haiti's St. Marc Corridor

A Dissertation Proposal Presented to the Faculty of the
Heller School for Social Policy and Management
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by

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Haiti is, in many ways, the poster child of failed foreign aid, the result of ineffective donor practices and poor national governance. Despite receiving billions of dollars in aid over the last two decades, the former French colony is now the poorest country in the world. A long history of colonialism, occupation and unpopular foreign policies, have hindered the trust of Haitian citizens towards outside assistance. Further, government corruption, violence, poor infrastructure, tropical storms, high unemployment, environmental degradation and a heavy burden of disease, coupled with the impacts of a devastating earthquake in 2010, have left the country struggling to rebuild. At the same time, the earthquake has helped garner international attention and with it, an influx of donor aid.

The aim of this research is to improve aid practice so that Haitians (particularly the direct beneficiaries of aid), have a greater role in the aid process. It is hoped that the research findings will be used to support advocacy efforts for U.S. government aid to align with Haiti's vision for agriculture and food security, helping Haiti move towards self sufficiency by increasing employment opportunities and access to food. The study will seek to answer four questions: 1) What is the vision for the agriculture sector and food security in Haiti; 2) What is the representation of the Haitian people (both those in government and the beneficiaries) in the aid process; 3) What are best practices to increase food security; and 4) What are the opportunities for improving the effectiveness of agriculture aid in Haiti?

The proposed research is built on the development theories of ownership, participatory development, citizen-state compacts and the internationally recognized principles of aid effectiveness, which hold that increasing the representation of the recipient population in the aid process, improves the effectiveness of aid. Decades of development experience has shown that aid is more sustainable when it aligns with the expressed needs of the recipient country and its citizens.

The research will be conducted in partnership with Oxfam America, a U.S. based non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Haiti to improve aid effectiveness in the agricultural sector. Working with local partners and the donor community, Oxfam is helping to make the aid process more transparent and identify ways in which the Haitian people can have a greater voice in the design and delivery of aid.

The research will focus on food security and agriculture policy, areas vital to the economic recovery of the country and their ability to meet the most basic need for its people: food. The once productive island now imports the majority of its food, and as a result, is subject to spikes in food prices on the international market. Agriculture reform is a top priority for the Government of Haiti, and is supported by several donors including USAID, through its WINNER program and Feed the Future Initiative (FtF).

This will be a mixed methods study: the research will include quantitative data on the amount of aid provided to agriculture and food security programs in the St. Marc Corridor and how the money is allocated from the national to the beneficiary level. Data will be gathered using a review of published reports, online databases, informal interviews and requests for data from relevant agencies. Qualitative data will be used to examine how the aid is spent and the selection process for beneficiaries and implementing partners, and best practices in food security and sustainable agriculture. Methods include interviews, field visits, and a literature review of published and unpublished reports. The study will also highlight three to five case studies of associations that receive agricultural aid for comparative analysis, relying on focus group data to be collected by Oxfam America.

Dissertation Committee

Laurence R. Simon, Ph.D. Chair
Allyala Krishna Nandakumar, Ph.D.
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Defense Hearing:

Thursday, April 4th from 9am to 11am, Heller School, Rm G55