

OXFAM
RESEARCH BACKGROUNDER

USAID's AVANSE Project in Haiti

An assessment of its conformity
with aid effectiveness principles

Marc Anglade, Marc J. Cohen, and Tonny Joseph



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OXFAM'S RESEARCH BACKGROUNDEERS

Series editor: Kimberly Pfeifer

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Author information and acknowledgments

Marc Anglade is the principal of Ayiti Inclusion, a consulting firm in Haiti.

Marc J. Cohen is senior researcher at Oxfam, based in Washington, DC.

Tonny Joseph, a consultant based in Haiti, was previously advocacy and research coordinator for Oxfam America in Haiti.

The authors wish to thank the people we interviewed during the course of the research; Tariq Ahmad, Laurence Desvignes, Jonathan Greenham, Robert Maguire, Luc St. Vil, Andrew Tarter, and James Woolley and his colleagues at USAID-Haiti for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this report; USAID-Haiti and

AVANSE staff for providing documents and data; and Heidi Fritschel for copyediting. All errors remain the responsibility of the authors.

Citations of this paper

Please use the following format when citing this paper:

Anglade, Marc, Marc J. Cohen, and Tonny Joseph, "USAID's AVANSE Project in Haiti: An Assessment of Its Conformity with Aid Effectiveness Principles," Oxfam Research Backgrounder series (2018):

<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/usaid-avanse-project-in-haiti>

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AVANSE	Appui à la Valorisation du Potentiel Agricole du Nord, pour la Sécurité Économique et Environnementale (Aid to Realize the Agricultural Potential of the North, for Economic and Environmental Security)
CCIN	Chambre du Commerce et d'Industrie du Nord (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the North)
CIAT	Comité Interministériel d'Aménagement du Territoire (Interministerial Committee on Land Management)
DAI	Formerly known as Development Alternatives, Inc.
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FFS	Farmer field school
MARNDR	Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Ressources Naturelles, et du Développement Rural (Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development)
MDE	Ministère de l'Environnement (Ministry of the Environment)
MPCE	Ministère de la Planification et de la Coopération Externe (Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation)
MTPTC	Ministère des Travaux Publics, Transports, et Communications (Ministry of Public Works, Transportation, and Communication)
RESPAG II	Second Programme de Renforcement des Services Publics Agricoles (Second Program for Strengthening Agricultural Public Services)
SRI	System of Rice Intensification
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WINNER	Watershed Initiative for National Natural Environmental Resources

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains central to development in Haiti, accounting for 50 percent of employment and 22 percent of gross domestic product. Yet poverty pervades the Haitian countryside, with 90 percent of the population living below the poverty line (compared with an overall national poverty rate of 59 percent).¹ Hunger and malnutrition walk hand in hand with low incomes, with 40 percent of all Haitian households experiencing food insecurity and 30 percent of preschool children chronically malnourished.²

Recognizing the importance of agricultural development to improved food security and as a potential driver of overall economic transformation, the US government identified agriculture as a key pillar of its strategy to support Haiti's reconstruction following the 2010 earthquake. Accordingly, Haiti became one of 19 focus countries under the Feed the Future Initiative, and an existing US Agency for International Development (USAID) project, the Watershed Initiative for National Natural Environmental Resources (WINNER), underway since 2009, became Feed the Future West. The United States inaugurated Feed the Future to fulfill its pledge toward the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative of the 2009 G8 Summit, which sought to address the world food crisis.³ Initially a three-year, \$3.5 billion program running between 2010 and 2012, Feed the Future has continued since then with an average annual budget of \$1 billion. It seeks to support the achievement of global food security with a whole-of-government approach.

In 2013, USAID launched a second Feed the Future project in Haiti, called *Appui à la Valorisation du Potentiel Agricole du Nord, pour la Sécurité Économique et Environnementale* (Aid to Realize the Agricultural Potential of the North, for Economic and Environmental Security [AVANSE], also known as Feed the Future North). The \$87 million project, which aims to reduce poverty by increasing smallholder farmers' production and incomes, operates in the North and North-East Departments (see Figure 1 for a map of the Feed the Future corridors in Haiti)⁴ and will run through the end of calendar year 2019.

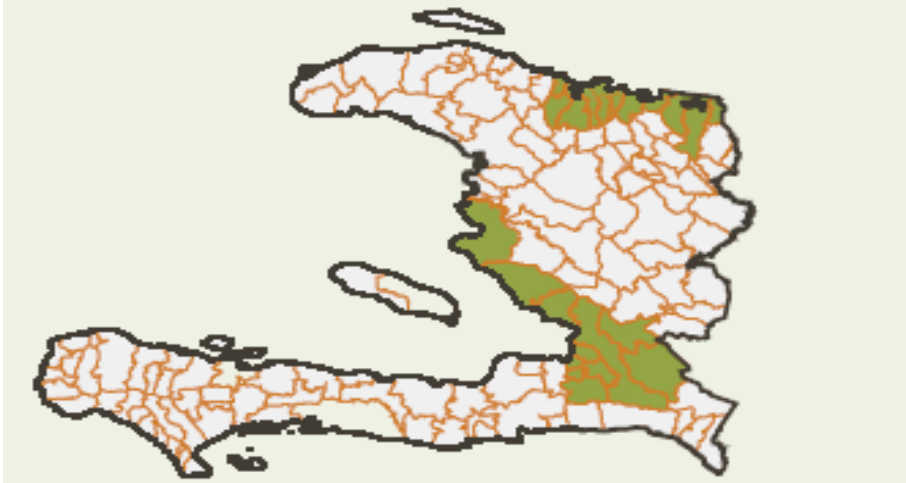
¹ International Fund for Agricultural Development, "Haiti: The Context," <https://www.ifad.org/web/operations/country/id/haiti>; World Bank, "The World Bank in Haiti: Overview," <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>.

² USAID-Haiti, "Agriculture and Food Security Fact Sheet," March 2017, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/FINAL_Food_Security_March_2017.pdf.

³ D. Fuller-Wimbush and C. Fils-Aimé, *Feed the Future Investment in Haiti: Implications for Sustainable Food Security and Poverty Reduction*, Oxfam Research Backgrounder (Washington, DC: Oxfam America, 2014), https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/Haiti_Feed_the_Future_RB.pdf; Group of Eight (G8), "G8 Joint Statement on Global Food Security—L'Aquila Food Security Initiative (AFSI)," (2009), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/g8%2%A0joint-statement-global-food-security-laquila-food-security-initiative-afsi>.

⁴ A *department* in Haiti is equivalent to a province or state in other countries.

Figure 1. Haiti Feed the Future corridors (West and North)



Source: USAID-Haiti.

This report examines AVANSE’s conformity with aid effectiveness principles, as articulated in the 2005 Paris Declaration⁵ and by the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation:⁶

- **Ownership**—Developing countries define their own model of development and adopt strategies and plans to implement it.
- **Alignment**—Donors support developing countries’ national strategies and plans.
- **Transparency and accountability**—Aid is transparent and accountable to citizens in both the donor and the aid-receiving country.
- **Harmonization**—Donors coordinate their activities in a country, taking advantage of synergies and avoiding duplication.
- **Results**—Aid and development policy focus on achieving a sustainable impact.

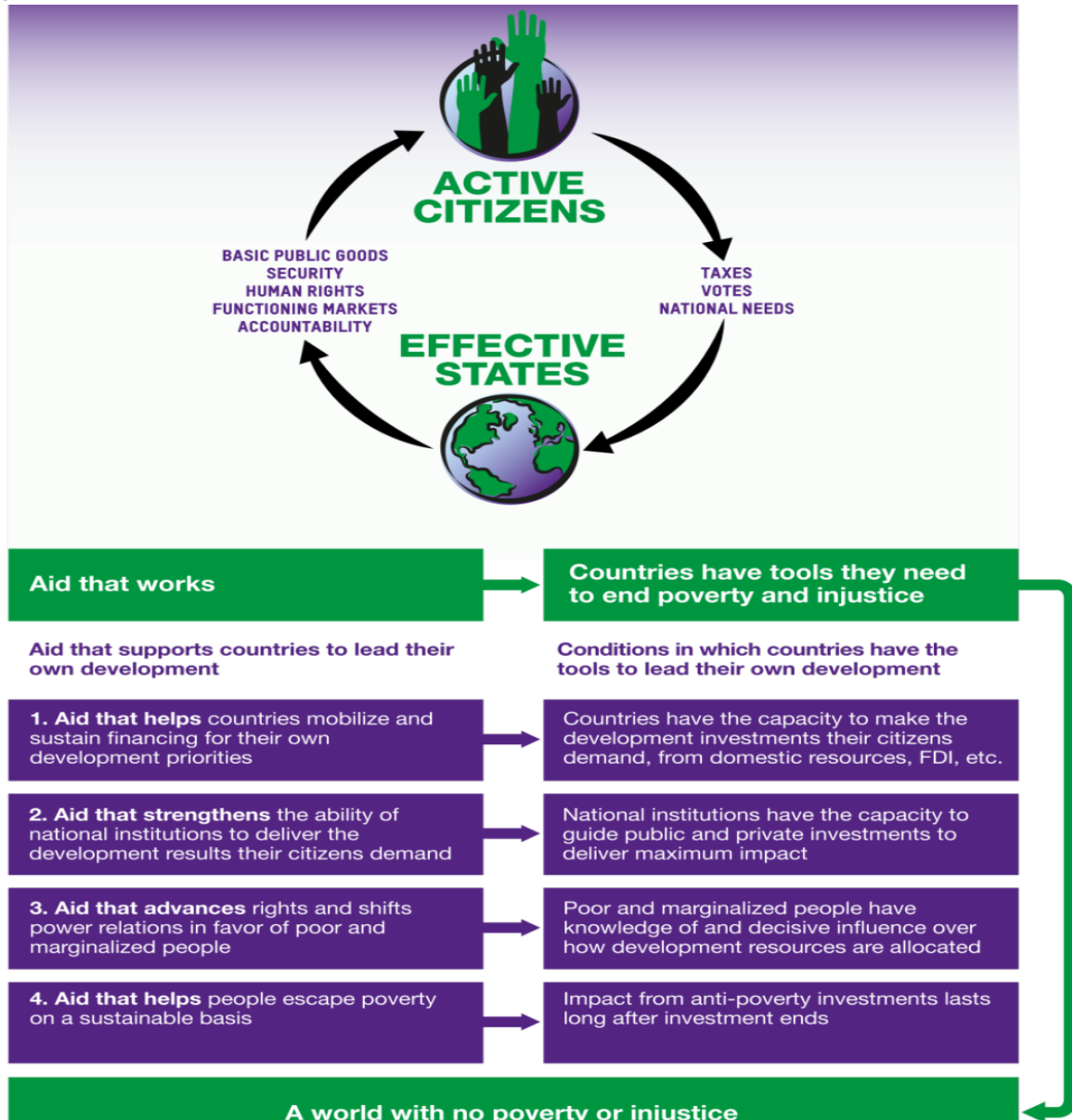
Achieving aid effectiveness is as important as achieving a project’s technical outputs. It is no mystery that sustainable results require stakeholder buy-in, and that is why ownership and alignment lead the list of development effectiveness principles on which the international community has agreed.

⁵ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, “Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action,” <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>.

⁶ See Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, “Effective Cooperation Principles,” <http://effectivecooperation.org/about/principles/>; see also F. Bena, *Efficacité de l’aide: Les clés de Busan*, Oxfam Briefing Paper (Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 2012), <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bn-busan-nutshell-global-partnership-021012-fr.pdf>.

In keeping with its rights-based approach to development, Oxfam views effective aid as assistance that “enables countries to be owners of the development process and supports the citizen-state compact by actively breaking down barriers to participation, decision-making, and accountability” (see Figure 2).⁷ Therefore, Oxfam considers citizen participation and gender equity integral components of country ownership of development, the first principle listed above.

Figure 2. Oxfam aid effectiveness framework



Source: Adams and Roche, *Accountability and Ownership*.

⁷ G. Adams and D. Roche, *Accountability and Ownership: The Role of Aid in a Post-2015 World*, Oxfam Briefing Paper (Oxford, UK: Oxfam, 2016), <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/accountability-and-ownership>, p. 1.

This paper is organized as follows: the next section provides additional background on AVANSE. We then discuss our research methods, data, and analytical framework. Next, we present our findings. The final section offers a discussion of the results, conclusions, and recommendations.

BACKGROUND ON AVANSE

USAID launched AVANSE in April 2013. It is implemented by the Bethesda, MD-based for-profit consulting firm DAI (formerly Development Alternatives, Inc.). Initially, USAID planned to have a Haitian organization take over as the lead project implementer after three years, with DAI continuing to play a supporting role for the remaining two years of the project's life.⁸ This plan reflected the agency's Local Solutions Initiative, which sought to increase the level of US aid resources channeled directly to local organizations, in order to comply with the aid-effectiveness principle of country ownership of development.⁹

USAID intended for AVANSE to target 43,500 smallholder farmers and five value chains: bananas, beans, cacao, corn, and rice. It sought to double the targeted households' incomes and double the cacao exported by the 10,000 participating producers.¹⁰ The project's intermediate results included the following:

- adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies;
- improved watershed stability;
- strengthened agricultural markets through relationships with the private sector; and
- enhanced capacity of local organizations through training.¹¹

In 2015, a report by USAID's inspector general found serious management problems in the project, including performance and staffing issues, as well as an invalid baseline study, failure to carry out a required environmental assessment, and an inappropriate focus on roads rather than irrigation.¹² During the first two years of project implementation, AVANSE went through four chiefs of party.¹³ In addition, it proved difficult to find a willing and capable local partner to take over project management.¹⁴

⁸ Interview with Jonathan Greenham, Chief of Party, AVANSE, Cap Haïtien, Haiti, November 2016; USAID Office of the Inspector General, "Audit of USAID/Haiti's Feed the Future North Project," Report No. 1-521-16-001-P (San Salvador, El Salvador: USAID, 2015), <https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/1-521-16-001-p.pdf>.

⁹ See T.S. Ahmad, A. Wainer, et al., *The Power of Ownership* (Washington, DC: Save the Children and Oxfam, 2016), www.powerofownership.org.

¹⁰ USAID Office of the Inspector General, "Audit of USAID/Haiti's Feed the Future North Project," op. cit.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Greenham interview.

¹⁴ Ibid.; interview with James Woolley, Senior Agronomist, USAID-Haiti, November 2018; USAID Office of the Inspector General, "Audit of USAID/Haiti's Feed the Future North Project," op. cit.

As a result of these problems, USAID revised the project considerably, scrapping the planned handover to a local organization and dropping beans and corn as focus value chains. That left rice as the only locally produced and consumed food product with AVANSE support and placed greater emphasis on export agriculture. USAID eventually extended the project through the end of 2019. DAI brought in a fifth chief of party to run the revamped AVANSE.

According to DAI, some of the project's subsequent achievements are as follows:¹⁵

- implementation of improved technologies, including fertilizers, plowing services, irrigation systems, and better tools, to help increase yields on nearly 5,000 hectares;
- grants to support community-led soil conservation efforts on 1,435 hectares;
- establishment of the first soil- and water-testing lab in northern Haiti;
- agreements permitting cacao farmers to sell directly to Haiti's largest exporter, Novella, nearly doubling farmers' price per pound;
- a grant to cacao processor PISA to expand fermentation facilities and improve the quality and value of producers' output;
- an agreement with a local NGO to purchase five tons of rice seed from AVANSE farmers at 68 Haitian gourdes per kilo, nearly double the average local price of 35 gourdes;
- improved rice cultivation practices leading to average yields of 5.8 tons per hectare, compared with a pre-AVANSE average of 3.5 tons per hectare; and
- a grant to the Haitian Banana Producers Union to develop a 50-hectare commercial farm for export production.

These outputs represent the *what* of the project. The remainder of this report looks at *how* and *by whom*, which were the focus of our research.

¹⁵ See DAI, "Haiti—Appui à la Valorisation du potentiel Agricole du Nord, pour la Sécurité Economique et Environnementale (AVANSE)," <https://www.dai.com/our-work/projects/haiti-appui-la-valorisation-du-potentiel-agricole-du-nord-la-securite-economique>. See also AVANSE, *Rapport annuel d'avancement (2015–2016) et planification annuelle (2016–2017)* (Cap Haïtien, Haiti: AVANSE, 2016).

METHODS AND DATA

We look at AVANSE's activities from multiple viewpoints:

- in relation to the project's vision and philosophy;
- in comparison with the findings of Oxfam's earlier assessment of the WINNER project¹⁶;
- through an aid effectiveness lens; and
- through the eyes of project beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

We employed qualitative methods in the research: a literature review, focus group interviews with project beneficiaries and nonbeneficiary farmers, and semi-structured interviews with key informants, including some AVANSE and non-AVANSE farmers. These methods allowed us to collect and provide explanatory information that goes beyond mere description of reality and allows understanding and interpretation of facts, behavior, and attitudes.

The literature review covered relevant documentation, including prior Oxfam studies. In addition, we reviewed the results of Feed the Future's Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index survey carried out in Haiti. We also examined the development projects and programs in the area that AVANSE covers, regardless of donor, including Haitian government and private-sector activities, using information from the External Cooperation Coordination Unit of the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation (MPCE).

Before conducting the main fieldwork, we pilot-tested our interview guides and made appropriate adjustments.

DATA

We interviewed the following:

- 13 focus groups in the North and North-East Departments, with a total of 78 participants
- 14 people representing stakeholder institutions, including DAI AVANSE project staff and representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development (MARNDR); the Ministry of the

¹⁶ Fuller-Wimbush and Fils-Aimé, *Feed the Future Investment in Haiti*, op. cit. Unless otherwise noted, all discussion of WINNER is based on this report.

Environment (MDE); the Ministry of Public Works, Transportation, and Communication (MTPTC); aid donor agencies; and civil-society organizations with knowledge of AVANSE. These interviews took place both in Port-au-Prince and in the two northern departments.

- 110 individual farmers, of whom 100 were AVANSE participants and 10 were farmers not targeted by the project. We identified the AVANSE participants with the assistance of the leaders of beneficiary farmer associations, with whom AVANSE staff had connected us. Nontargeted farmers engage in similar activities to the project beneficiaries but have not received AVANSE resources.

Following a workshop at which we presented preliminary results from the research, held in Cap Haïtien in May 2017, we had additional meetings with AVANSE and USAID staff in metro Port-au-Prince and received additional project documentation. There was concern on the part of AVANSE and USAID staff that we had focused only on the project's results during 2013–2015 and inadequately on the subsequent changes to the project. Based on these discussions and following a review of the additional documentation, we carried out additional interviews with the following:

- another 70 farmers, including 60 AVANSE participants and 10 nonbeneficiary farmers;
- representatives from five commune-level¹⁷ MARNDR offices;
- three representatives of communal section¹⁸ administrative councils (these consist of mayors and deputy mayors);
- six department-level representatives of MARNDR, MDE, MTPTC, and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry; and
- a representative of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the North (CCIN).

Women accounted for 34 percent of the interviewees during the two rounds.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the data from our two rounds of interviews, triangulated with the findings from our literature review and review of the supplemental documentation received from USAID and AVANSE staff, we examined how well AVANSE

¹⁷ A *commune* in Haiti is equivalent to a district or county in other countries.

¹⁸ A *communal section* is Haiti's lowest administrative unit.

matched up with the principles of aid effectiveness discussed in the Introduction. We present our findings in the next section.

RESEARCH RESULTS

OWNERSHIP

Ownership as an aid effectiveness principle is fundamentally about permitting the relevant institutions (such as ministries and their deconcentrated representatives at the department and commune level) as well as groups, organizations, and individual farmers to exercise leadership in sectoral and regional planning, about encouraging the engagement of a wide range of actors in priority setting and substantive action, and about favoring better local “ownership” of aid. All of these conditions allow national institutions to genuinely manage development policy and strategy and coordinate actions in consultation with citizens.

We assessed ownership in general, as well as two important subcategories: citizen participation and gender equity.

Ownership in general

We looked at three indicators:

1. level of participation in the design and implementation of strategies by local institutions;
2. approval of project objectives and strategy by local institutions; and
3. degree of participation by individual farmers and farmer organizations.

The interviews with ministerial representatives and local organizations indicate that AVANSE fared poorly on the first two indicators. We were told that DAI developed the project and its activities after its own study of the potential in northern Haiti, without stakeholder consultation. We note that this top-down project design approach resembles that of WINNER. Once DAI designed the project, it entered into a memorandum of understanding with MARNDR, but without putting a follow-up mechanism into place. Although national and local officials and local organizations reported some initial consultation, there was neither continuous communication about the project nor periodic checking in.

The focus group and individual interviews with farmers revealed that there was no participatory diagnostic before the project launched. AVANSE excluded farmers and other local actors from the design stage and did not give them a say in the crops and activities included in the project.

Feed the Future places considerable emphasis on empowering women, because “empowered women are leaders, helping entire communities become more food-

secure.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, we found no evidence of a specific effort to engage women in the design of AVANSE.

Citizen participation

We define *citizen participation* as a process of mandatory or voluntary engagement by rank-and-file citizens, acting individually or through an organization, in order to influence decisions on important matters affecting their communities. This can take place within or outside an institutional framework and can be organized through civil society initiatives (collective action, demonstrations, citizens’ committees) or through decision makers (referendum, parliamentary commission, mediation).²⁰

Based on our interviews with institutional representatives—mayors, other local officials, formal private sector organizations, and farmer organizations—we found no evidence that any of these institutions participated in decisions or discussions about the direction of the project. To some extent, the private sector was an exception, given its intimate involvement in the cacao value chain. However, in our supplementary research, we found that even CCIN was excluded from the project’s decision-making processes. Stakeholder groups unsuccessfully advocated for inclusion of watershed conservation and water access in the project.

USAID’s mission in Haiti informed us that regional representatives of MARNDR and beneficiary farmers “actively participate in AVANSE’s work-planning process. For example, the ministry participates in trainings organized by AVANSE and provides guidance for the farmer field schools.”²¹ Thus, the project is a bit more participatory in the implementation and operation stage than in the design stage. At our May 2017 workshop, however, numerous commune-level representatives of MARNDR and MPCE said that they were not regularly consulted about the project. DAI’s chief of party informed us that there simply was limited time available to recurrently consult these officials.²²

AVANSE did adopt a participatory approach to agricultural extension advice by making use of farmer field schools (FFSs). Oxfam’s assessment of WINNER had recommended that future projects incorporate this approach in place of WINNER’s more top-down master farmer model. A joint assessment of AVANSE’s initial use of FFSs by MARNDR and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was quite critical, however, finding that

¹⁹ Feed the Future, *A Decade of Progress: Feed the Future Snapshot: Results through 2018*, 2018, <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/FTF-Snapshot-Digital-8.6.pdf>, p. 23.

²⁰ P. André with P. Martin and G. Lanmafankpotin, “Participation citoyenne,” *Le Dictionnaire encyclopédique de l’administration publique* (Québec, Canada: Ecole Nationale de l’Administration Publique, 2012), www.dictionnaire.enap.ca.

²¹ Letter to Oxfam from Alexious Butler, Acting Mission Director, USAID-Haiti, May 10, 2018.

²² Greenham interview and remarks at Oxfam workshop, Cap Haitien, Haiti, May 2017.

the project exerted more control than is standard for FFSs, which emphasize farmers' collective experimentation and mutual learning.²³ Later in the life of the project (starting in 2015), MARNDR and USAID officials found that the schools had improved and were particularly important in enabling farmers' adoption of the System of Rice Intensification (SRI), which is quite knowledge-intensive.²⁴

Our focus group and key-informant interviews suggest that there was no community participation in project design or decision making. As evidence, interviewees mentioned the marginalization of water issues in the project, even though lack of irrigation is a key constraint facing farmers in northern Haiti.²⁵ Farmers also noted that the project failed to provide resources for their key priorities, such as credit, soil preparation, cultivation of a broader range of locally consumed food crops, and animal husbandry.

Farmers also reported that project officials were unresponsive to complaints about lack of timely distribution and sales of inputs such as fertilizer and seeds, and the scarcity of spare parts for equipment to cultivate rice and bananas. For example, at Coicou we were told:

Nou la kòm oganizasyon, tou senpleman yo vini yo di nou AVANSE ap kontinye ak program ki te la deja. Men yo pa prezante nou pyès dokiman sou projè a, eske li nan enterè nou, eske se sa nou bezwen. Yo pa di nou men a konbyen projè a evalye, kote lajan sòti, men ki aktivite, men koman kronogram projè a bati, nou pa okouran bagay sa yo. Se prany. Nou nan bezwen, se choy, nou prany. (We're a known organization, but they just came and told us that AVANSE would continue an existing program. We never saw the project document, and they didn't know whether the project jibed with our interests or met our needs. We received no information about the project budget, the source of the funds, what activities would be developed, or the timeline. No information. We were just told that we had to accept the project. Since we have enormous needs, and since the project represented something tangible, we accepted.)²⁶

²³ Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development–Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (MARNDR–FAO), "Diagnostic de champs-écoles-paysans dans 4 départements géographiques d'Haïti" (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: MARNDR, 2014).

²⁴ Woolley interview.

²⁵ See J. J. Molnar, S. Kokoye, C. Jolly, D. A. Shannon, and G. Huluka, "Agricultural Development in Northern Haiti: Mechanisms and Means for Moving Key Crops Forward in a Changing Climate," *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2015): 25–41, http://jaesnet.com/journals/jaes/Vol_4_No_2_December_2015/4.pdf.

²⁶ All quotations are transcribed from our focus group and key informant interviews. Translation by the authors.

We did, however, hear from some rice farmers in Maribahoux and Grison Garde that AVANSE was responsive to their request for help in dealing with severe weed issues related to their adoption of SRI.

Gender equity

Haiti has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.²⁷ Gender equality seeks to establish equality of opportunity between women and men, taking into account their respective needs and interests. For historical, social, or biological reasons, these needs and interests may differ. Gender *equity* therefore seeks to treat women and men differently, in order to correct the disadvantages and discrimination that women face as a step toward equality.

AVANSE's design has taken gender issues into account. The project seeks to mainstream gender in all of its activities, in particular by ensuring the inclusion of female heads of household, women farmers, and women's organizations.²⁸ For example, as Figure 3 shows, gender inclusion is an important consideration in the project's approach to the cacao value chain. However, we found that AVANSE has used a gender lens inconsistently. Our interviews with national institution representatives suggest that women's participation in AVANSE reflects their traditional roles in Haitian agriculture and society; the project is not gender-transformative, i.e., it does not seek to change existing gender relations to achieve equity.

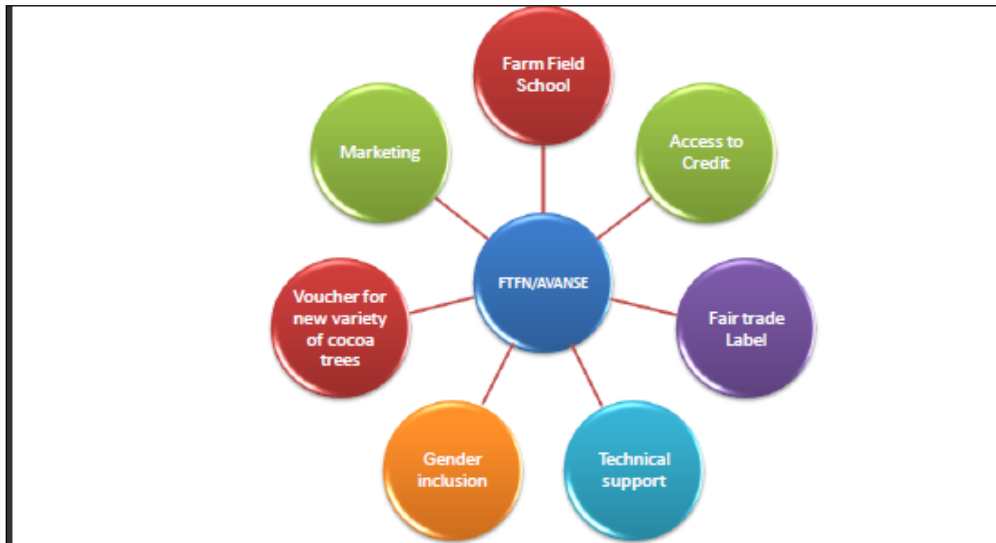
AVANSE staff told us that women accounted for 30–40 percent of the farmers involved in soil conservation activities. We note that, in general, these literally involve heavy lifting—manual labor to construct terraces and soil retention structures.

We specifically asked our focus group and individual farmer interviewees about women's participation. Most of these conversations revealed differing levels of female participation according to the activity. For example, we were told that women were quite visible in watershed conservation activities, accounting for 45 percent of the participants. In Acul-du-Nord and Bas de l'Acul, we heard that women participated in the rice value chain at more modest levels. In Terre Rouge and Plaisance, farmers reported that few women worked on rice, while in Coicou, it was "*kek grenn fanm*" ("some women"). Particularly following the revision of the project design in 2015, women's participation in project activities generally was higher than before in Ferrier and Limonade.

²⁷ See UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard," <http://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

²⁸ AVANSE, *Rapport annuel d'avancement (2015-2016) et planification annuelle (2016-2017)*, op. cit.

Figure 3. Opportunities for cacao farmers



Source: DAI.

Overall, based on our interviews across stakeholder groups and project documents, we estimate that women account for 40 percent of project participants at the sites we visited. The figure is significantly higher than that achieved by WINNER (27 percent²⁹) and slightly exceeds the share of women-headed households in rural Haiti (38.7 percent³⁰). Nevertheless, AVANSE’s own chief of party called the project’s accomplishments on gender in 2015–2016 “embarrassing.”³¹

ALIGNMENT

The principle of *alignment* speaks to donors’ efforts to support national development strategies and the institutions and procedures of partner countries, as well as meet the needs of local actors. We looked at two indicators:

1. alignment of project activities with the Haitian government’s agricultural and environmental priorities; and
2. alignment of the activities with the priorities of the target population.

²⁹ Fuller-Wimbush and Fils-Aimé, *Feed the Future Investment in Haiti*, op. cit.

³⁰ This figure comes from a 2014 estimate by the Haitian government statistical agency; see J. Herrera, N. Lamaute-Brisson, D. Milbin, F. Roubaud, C. Saint-Macary, C. Torelli, and C. Zanuso, *L’Evolution des conditions de vie en Haïti entre 2007 et 2012: La réplique sociale du séisme* (Port-au-Prince: Institut Haïtien de Statistiques et d’Informatique [IHSI]; and Paris: Développement, Institutions, Mondialisation [DIAL], 2014), http://www.ihsi.ht/pdf/ecvmas/analyse/IHSI_DIAL_Rapport%20complet_11072014.pdf.

³¹ Greenham interview.

For the first, we referred to government policy documents and interviews with MARNDR and MDE officials in the capital, as well as MARNDR officials at the department level and local government representatives. For the second, we relied on our focus group and individual interviews with project participants.

Based on our literature review and interviews with officials, we found that, at the conceptual level, AVANSE aligns well with the main priorities for the North and North-East Departments in MARNDR's three-year plan, as well as with the main concerns of MDE and the Interministerial Committee on Land Management (CIAT). For example, AVANSE seeks to promote food security by improving irrigation infrastructure; enhancing farmers' access to seeds, fertilizer, and markets; and promoting watershed conservation—all of these are high priorities for the government. AVANSE also appears to have followed CIAT's land-use plans in choosing the areas for cultivation of the target crops.

Our farmer interviewees similarly reported that for all three value chains (bananas, cacao, and rice), the project responded to their priorities. Farmers at a number of sites did tell us, however, that the project did not address requested support for growing yams, an important local food crop. Farmers in Acul-du-Nord said that they did receive support for yam cultivation in the latter stages of the project.

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Aid transparency requires that information about aid be useful, useable, and used by stakeholders. It is intrinsically valuable, supporting the human right to freedom of information.³² It is also a crucial tool for ensuring *accountability*: donors' accountability to their own taxpayers, to aid-receiving governments, and to project beneficiaries, and aid-receiving governments' accountability to their citizens (which is closely related to the citizen-participation aspect of country ownership).

For this indicator, we have taken the following into account:

1. accessibility of information on project activities;
2. availability of project documents in the language of affected people;
3. transparency and clarity of objectives and processes throughout the project cycle.

³² See United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," 1948, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

Representatives of national institutions said that USAID and DAI provided little to no information about the project. We heard this from the External Cooperation Coordination Unit at MPCE, as well as from MDE and MARNDR and their departmental offices. When MARNDR requested information, it received a single briefing. Staff of the research and programming unit at MDE were not even aware of the project; this was also the case with WINNER. At the departmental level, officials had no information other than a single presentation made at the department sectoral coordination body. With regard to documents, MARNDR received an initial project document but no progress reports or further documentation of any kind, other than a slide presentation, either in the capital or at its departmental offices. MDE received no information whatsoever. According to a MARNDR report published shortly after the launch of AVANSE, “Les responsables du programme sont restés sourds aux appels de demande lancés pour obtenir la documentation du programme.” (“AVANSE staff ignored our requests for project documentation.”) No government officials or entities in the North and North-East Departments with whom we spoke had comprehensive knowledge of AVANSE’s activities and results. AVANSE staff, however, reported that there are periodic meetings at which they inform local officials of project activities.

Most individual farmers and representatives of farmers’ organizations said that they had not seen the original project document and that their viewpoints were not taken into account when the project was launched. In some areas, such as Bas de l’Acul, Limbé, and Ferrier, farmers were quite familiar with AVANSE and the other agricultural projects in their communities. These better-informed farmers also told us that they received periodic briefings on the stages of the project cycle. They sometimes met project staff during distribution of seeds and planting materials (especially for cacao and bananas), but they reported a lack of follow-up visits in response to beneficiary feedback or requests. Also, farmers engaged in cacao cultivation with AVANSE support tended to have much more information about the project. Individual interviewees and focus group participants in Grison Garde told us that they received substantial project information during training sessions. Regardless of the level of information farmers reported, no one to whom we spoke knew that the project would end in 2019.

Numerous farmers told us that they had access only to general information indicating that AVANSE would boost productivity and income for the targeted crops, but no detailed information on project plans. Moreover, they said that the materials that they received were in English. Although we were able to obtain French reports from AVANSE staff, we did not see any materials in Kreyòl, the only language in which most farmers in northern Haiti are fluent.

Beneficiary farmers told us that they did not receive information about the real objectives of the project, just slogans and speeches about boosting production.

Project staff neither provided them with reports nor discussed objectives with them in depth. Some farmers were left with the impression that the project was mainly designed to produce cacao for large companies to export. They concluded that this was why the project ignored requests for development of irrigation infrastructure and why, during their rare visits, project staff rejected requests for assistance in producing local food crops such as yams. Information sessions with project staff usually concerned cultivation techniques, not project goals.

On the positive side, we heard that the new project leadership that took over in 2015 made significant efforts to improve transparency. Notably, the project began periodic radio broadcasts aimed at providing the general public in the northern region with information about AVANSE.

HARMONIZATION

Aid harmonization means that donors make an effort to collaborate, promote synergies among their programs, and avoid duplication of effort and elevated transaction costs. Unfortunately, from our interviews with donor representatives and government officials in both the capital and the northern region, we could find no evidence of attempts to harmonize AVANSE with other donors' projects in either its design or implementation. Government bodies aimed at facilitating harmonization (*tables de concertation*) exist at the department level. However, as noted in the discussion of transparency and accountability, the project's engagement with department-level government representatives was irregular and somewhat superficial.

RESULTS ORIENTATION, INCLUDING SUSTAINABILITY

Results orientation means managing aid projects based on the intended results and making decisions based on concrete data. In our judgment, AVANSE had difficulties early on in part because staff did not conduct an *ex ante* impact assessment. This failure also made a results orientation difficult to implement.

With regard to its goals of increased production and farm income, we note that AVANSE abandoned its initial focus on the corn and bean value chains after 2015, thereby sharply increasing the emphasis on export agriculture (bananas and cacao). The project has had important positive results for cacao: notably, it has greatly reduced the chain of intermediaries and allowed farmers to gain a greater share of the overall value produced through agreements with the three

big purchasing firms (Novella, PISA, and Fecano). The project has not, though, provided support to small-scale cacao processors. Another significant achievement, according to the departmental offices of MARNDR, is the global price information system that AVANSE has established, which allows farmers to sell their product when prices are favorable.

Several beneficiary farmers and nonparticipants in Milot, Plaisance, Maribahoux, Grison Garde, and elsewhere reported that AVANSE had led to bigger harvests. Other farmers with whom we spoke had a wait-and-see attitude, since they had not yet harvested a crop using the seeds or techniques they obtained and learned through AVANSE. A female farmer in Limbé told us, "*Sa Avanse ban yo mwenn m poko rekolte, m plante li pran. Map tann.*" ("We haven't actually harvested what AVANSE gave us. We planted the seeds, the crops are growing, and we'll see what we get.")

In some areas, after the drought lessened, banana farmers were particularly pleased with production gains resulting from techniques learned from AVANSE. We spoke as well with banana farmers who received support from AVANSE and reported seeing few concrete results.

We asked farmers how they thought the project had affected their living standards. Cacao producers told us that their incomes had increased. Some of the rice farmers we interviewed said that SRI had led to higher yields, despite problems with weeds, and also to income gains. USAID staff concurred, noting that even with chronic drought in northern Haiti, participating rice farmers who adopted improved cultivation practices promoted by AVANSE often achieved higher yields than those typical of neighboring farmers using traditional methods. Rice farmers with whom we spoke also viewed the project's efforts to help farmers produce seeds for sale as positive. Despite these favorable outcomes, we also spoke to many farmers across the three value chains who told us that they did not see much difference in earnings as a result of AVANSE.

Concerning AVANSE's efforts to help farmers address production constraints, most of our interviewees said the project made little difference with regard to infrastructure, but most pointed to regular distribution of seeds as an important positive outcome. In addition, farmers said that AVANSE's efforts to geolocate participating farms facilitated a better seed distribution process.

In contrast, numerous farmers complained about AVANSE's fertilizer distribution. The following sentiment was common: "*Nou pa jwenn ase angrè ni a tan.*" ("We can't get fertilizer in sufficient quantities or on time.") We did speak to some farmers who said that AVANSE's input voucher system has improved fertilizer availability, and we even heard reports that beneficiaries who receive fertilizer through the system resell it.

We encountered many complaints about poorly functioning machinery received through the project, such as the following: “*Pas de machine réelle pour le labourage. Les charrettes à bœufs viennent avec 15–20 jours de retard. Mais au moins ils nous ont aidé!*” (“No real labor-saving machinery. Plows drawn by cattle arrive 15–20 days too late. But at least we got some assistance!”)

Oxfam’s assessment of WINNER noted sustainability issues—that is, concern that gains from the project would not last once US government resources ceased to support activities—and this was also a problem with AVANSE. For example, we are not certain whether the input voucher system will remain in place once the project ends. We also note that following the unfavorable audit, USAID decided not to turn project management over to a Haitian organization, as originally planned. Both AVANSE’s chief of party and USAID staff told us that it was not possible on a timely basis to find an organization in northern Haiti with sufficient capacity. But we found little evidence that AVANSE worked with any local organizations, apart from farmer associations and the cacao-purchasing firms, and the project does not appear to have undertaken any efforts to strengthen project management capacity in northern Haiti.

According to our interviews, AVANSE did not involve department- and commune-level officials in project implementation or monitoring and evaluation. Accordingly, it will be difficult for MARNDR to take up and maintain these activities. Before the end of the project, it will be important to better integrate MARNDR staff in project activities. While some joint activities have already taken place, department-level officials report that AVANSE has yet to provide capacity strengthening and knowledge transfers to allow them to sustain the results.

Again, our farmer interviewees had mixed views. One in Acul-du-Nord told us,

Li trè diferan, anvan sa ou pat konnen, ou vin jwenn, yo pat genyen peyizàn yo pataje avek yo. Menm panse ke koulye a travay Avanse a se yon travay kap bay rezilta pa rapò a ansanm de bagay ki fèt nan jaden yo. (Before it was very different, we didn’t know, no one shared knowledge with us. Now I believe that AVANSE will make a big difference as to what I do in the garden.)

But we also heard the following:

Nou pa ka reproduwi paske lè yo te banou plan bannann yo, yo pat nan yon sezon ki te ka rapòte. . . . Pat gen tè ki te prepare epi nan yon move sezon solèy kanpe, sa fè tout plant echwe e nou pa reyisi yo. (We can’t reproduce AVANSE’s techniques or the banana suckers³³ that we received when it wasn’t planting

³³ A *sucker* is a lateral offshoot from a banana tree that is used as vegetative planting material for a new tree. See <http://www.promusa.org/Banana+sucker>.

season.... There wasn't any land prepared for planting, and we were smack in the middle of the drought. That's why the plants didn't survive and we lost everything.)

Project staff told us they drew lessons from such experiences and took steps to ensure sustainability. Training provided to farmers' associations and through FFSs sought to make SRI techniques, cacao planting, and banana cultivation viable beyond the life of the project. And indeed, the cacao network that AVANSE developed seems to be functioning well. However, without complementary infrastructure development (particularly irrigation and flood control), the project's long-term viability is in question, given the cycle of droughts and floods that the region experiences.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Because we carried out our analysis through an aid-effectiveness lens, we highlight the importance of listening to the farmers who are AVANSE's intended beneficiaries. Development actors, including government technical specialists posted in Haiti's departments and communes, need to recognize that an effective and sustainable project meets affected people's needs and is owned by them.

Accordingly, our general conclusion is that AVANSE will represent a great failure if it does not turn its attention to agricultural infrastructure during the short time that remains in the life of the project. Participating and nonbeneficiary farmers alike have emphasized their crying need for infrastructure, especially for water (irrigation systems, dams, or pumps). The problem of drought during much of the period of AVANSE's operations demonstrates these farmers' wisdom in insisting on a focus on agricultural infrastructure.

There is still time to provide some support to environmentally sustainable approaches to irrigation through AVANSE, and we note that the project did address water issues in some places, such as Gasen. However, a former project staff member expressed concern to us that USAID environmental regulations made it difficult to expand irrigation infrastructure through the project.

We also highlight the decision not to turn project implementation over to a Haitian entity after three years, as originally planned. This decision dramatically undermined the project's strong initial focus on ownership. Although we do not minimize the difficulty of finding an organization in northern Haiti with appropriate project management capacity, AVANSE has made minimal efforts to enhance local capacity.

We found the project to be well aligned with Haitian national development plans. The trade-off between alignment and citizen participation that is evident in AVANSE seems characteristic of Feed the Future projects across countries, as noted in prior Oxfam research.³⁴

Harmonization of donors' efforts is also an essential aspect of aid effectiveness. But AVANSE has simply ignored the need to develop complementarities and

³⁴ E. Tumusiime and M.J. Cohen, "Promoting Country Ownership and Inclusive Growth? An Assessment of Feed the Future," *Development in Practice* 27, no.1 (2017): 4–15.

avoid overlaps. In Coicou, for example, a small-scale irrigation system is in place, and AVANSE could have improved water accessibility by making some improvements to it. Farmers complained that in the absence of such efforts, they had to change their production systems. We emphasize that even AVANSE's gains for cacao will be jeopardized without greater attention to water infrastructure.

Notwithstanding these critical conclusions, it is important to remember that AVANSE has generated some promising results, especially for cacao, but also for rice and even for bananas. Maintaining and possibly enhancing those results are crucial to the well-being of the rural population of northern Haiti. But that can happen only if the project reorients itself during its concluding phase to better address the recommendations of participating farmers.

More than one project stakeholder has concluded that the project privileges export agriculture over locally consumed food crops. We heard this from former project staff, current staff, government officials, and farmers who picked the point up in meetings with AVANSE technicians. The logic is that products that can find a substantial export niche are the most interesting ones, and the ones that will provide greater and more stable farmer income. Given severe, chronic food insecurity in Haiti, we encourage greater attention to the food crops regularly produced and consumed in northern Haiti.

In addition, at many of the project sites we visited, partner farmers emphasized that favorable results were sustainable only if AVANSE resources continued to support the activities. In some cases, however, the project seems to have left sustainability to chance: it gives out seeds and banana suckers and provides on-the-job training on planting and care of the crops. This leaves the impression that the results are all about "we'll see." For example, in Cormier, Grande-Rivière-du-Nord, here is what members of the participating farmers' association said about AVANSE:

Pa teni kont de bezwen zòn la paske nou plante yanm, pwa yo pa janm gade sa.... Bon pou kakawo a, nou pa konn gen kakawo pou vann, men nou konnen apre kek ane nap ka vini al vann kakawo.
([The project has] not really addressed the needs of our zone, we plant yams and beans, but that doesn't interest them.... Ok, if we're talking about cacao, we aren't used to selling it here, but we'll see in a few years if we end up growing and marketing cacao.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here we offer some general recommendations for the ending phase of AVANSE. Because the project has a decidedly mixed record on operating in accordance with the principles of aid effectiveness, we also provide some recommendations on how to improve on each of those principles.

General recommendations

Our assessment has not focused on the financial and administrative aspects of AVANSE, but these have had a substantial impact on the project's results. According to one of our key informants with knowledge of AVANSE's operations, "The bureaucracy and monitoring and evaluation processes associated with the project created a complex and inefficient machine that cast a huge shadow over its stated goals. Administration took a huge bite out of the available resources. Project staff did not spend funds in an effective manner." Other people with whom we spoke, including some AVANSE employees, confirmed this account. Related to this, one of our interviewees spoke of "constant coming and going of chiefs of party and senior staff, with a big fleet of vehicles all over just for project visibility."

As the project enters its endgame, its management needs to devote a larger percentage of the budget to technical issues. In addition, we propose that for its remaining months, AVANSE set up a steering committee that would include the following members:

1. the chief of party and deputy chief of party of AVANSE;
2. departmental directors for the North and North-East Departments of MARNDR, MDE, MPCE, and MTPTC;
3. the presidents of the mayors' associations of the North and North-East Departments;
4. two representatives each from the administrative councils and assemblies of the northern communal sections;
5. two representatives of the farmers' organizations that participate in AVANSE;
6. one representative from CCIN; and
7. one representative of civil society.

The steering committee should have a good gender balance and should meet at least monthly. Its work should include such activities as

1. rapid efforts to reorient the project toward ownership, including by increasing civic participation and gender equity, while making sure that the project continues to perform positively vis-à-vis its stated objectives;
2. ensuring continued learning and necessary adaptation;
3. coordinating the engagement of all relevant governmental actors, in close collaboration with partners, while seeking synergies among AVANSE and other development projects, in order to achieve greater development impact;
4. periodic reviews of project activities to make note of accomplishments and challenges;
5. establishment of appropriate mechanisms to continue AVANSE activities once the project ends; and
6. facilitating an ex post evaluation that will explore the lessons learned.

In order to permit its activities to continue post-project, AVANSE needs to develop an inventory of experiences, tools, procedures, results frameworks, risk management activities, and modalities used in its implementation. Project staff should share this inventory with the steering committee, MARNDR's and MDE's departmental offices, and partner farmer organizations.

MARNDR and MDE, in the capital as well as at the department level, must insist on more and better information about the project. MARNDR's local offices (departmental and communal) must step up their monitoring of AVANSE in terms of technical developments and results. The ministry must also get more involved in project implementation in order to continue activities after AVANSE ends. Parallel to this work, the ministry and AVANSE need to help strengthen the capacity of farmers' organizations to manage projects. Ownership, sustainability, and a results orientation become concrete when farmers are able to master a project's functions, techniques, and processes, and the various stakeholders incorporate these elements of the project into their plans, ways of working, and management practices.

Furthermore, a number of other steps are needed to improve coordination and administration:

1. The departmental offices of MPCE should work with the delegates (governors) of the North and North-East Departments to mobilize the departmental coordination platforms. These are already in place and constitute a participatory mechanism for coordination, harmonization, orientation, communication, and follow-up with regard to development activities. Similarly, the departmental offices of MARNDR should strengthen the agriculture sector platforms (*tables sectorielles de l'agriculture*).

2. MARNDR should include continuation of AVANSE activities in its budget, and the Second Program for Strengthening Agricultural Public Services (RESPAG II), supported by the World Bank, should focus on strengthening the capacity of MARNDR's departmental and communal officials to ensure proper follow-up for continuing AVANSE activities.
3. MARNDR, MDE, and MTPTC offices in the two departments need to participate in planning and implementing improvements in agricultural infrastructure and watershed conservation.
4. MARNDR's departmental units need to take over and maintain AVANSE's global cacao price monitoring system.

Improving conformity with aid effectiveness principles

Ownership and participation

AVANSE did not have a participatory baseline diagnostic exercise. It excluded farmers and other local actors from involvement in project design. Although the project did enter into a memorandum of understanding with MARNDR, that does not mitigate the top-down design process. Ownership is not just about encouraging national institutions, local organizations, and participating farmers to accept the preferences of donors and their implementers. Rather, it is about the degree of control that beneficiary governments and citizens can exercise in policies, development programs, and projects. As AVANSE winds down, it needs to pay greater attention to this question of freedom to choose.

Partner farmers can still take ownership of AVANSE. To do so, they need to articulate their demands clearly and discuss them with department-level representatives of the central government so as to develop a plan, particularly with regard to

1. irrigation,
2. watershed conservation,
3. essential products such as livestock, beans, and yams,
4. reorientation of current focus value chains (bananas, rice) in terms of timing, inputs, and infrastructure,
5. the need for spare parts for machinery that the project has provided, and
6. maintaining agreements that AVANSE has negotiated for the purchase of products from farmers.

Such a degree of farmer participation would enhance farmers' ability to make choices during the remainder of the project and improve its results. It is important to have meetings at the level of FFSs, farmer associations, and MARNDR's commune-level representatives to discuss priorities.³⁵

Gender equity

At many of the AVANSE project sites, women receive about 30 percent of the resources, heavily concentrated in the areas of commercialization and watershed conservation. During its remaining life, the project needs to make a concerted effort to consult with women farmers about their needs and priorities, and engage them in project activities where their presence has thus far remained minimal, such as rice production. Although AVANSE has achieved a higher level of women's participation than WINNER and many other development projects in northern Haiti, much remains to be done.

Alignment

AVANSE is well aligned with Haiti's national development plans in a general sense. However, the project and its successor activities need to pay greater attention to identifying and meeting needs articulated by participating farmers.

Transparency and accountability

AVANSE regularly publishes reports in English and French. These are helpful to the donor in making the project visible and proved an important tool for our research. However, Kreyòl materials on project results, risks, and constraints would be tremendously valuable to local actors and stakeholder institutions, both as a source of information on rural development activities and as a way of facilitating accountability to stakeholders. AVANSE should provide such reports on a regular basis to the departmental and communal offices of MARNDR and MDE, as well as to the CCIN, mayors, and farmers' associations. These reports should also go to the department-level agricultural coordination bodies. In addition, senior AVANSE leadership and project technical experts need to meet regularly with these stakeholders.

Harmonization

MARNDR's departmental representatives urgently need to ensure AVANSE's harmonization with other donors' projects. Relevant projects include RESPAG II and the Programme de Mitigation des Désastres Naturels (Natural Disaster

³⁵ See Ahmad, Wainer, et al., *The Power of Ownership*, op. cit., on support for community-level priorities as a key aspect of country ownership.

Mitigation Program), funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. The latter has a sustainable agriculture component.

Results and sustainability

AVANSE has transferred technical knowledge to farmers. However, in order for farmers to continue to learn new skills and to spread that knowledge, ongoing training through FFSs and workshops with farmer associations will be necessary.

More generally, as the project winds down, USAID and DAI need to enhance the participation of MARNDR's departmental and communal offices. A monitoring and follow-up mechanism is essential. It must include all the relevant actors in order to sustain and enhance AVANSE's significant results for cacao and SRI.

Owing to the persistence of drought in northern Haiti during much of the life of AVANSE, the project needs to monitor crop losses more carefully. Even where it has had successes, losses are often nontrivial. However, the data are currently quite poor. We spoke with farmers who estimated their drought-related crop losses in the range of 70 percent, and a few said losses exceeded 90 percent.

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US POLICY & ADVOCACY OFFICE

1101 17TH STREET, NW, SUITE 1300
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
(202) 496-1180

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