

**LÈ FANM ANDEYÓ TRAVAY: A MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF  
AGRO-SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES OF RURAL WOMEN HEADS OF  
HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTHERN HAITI**

**Location:** Cap-Haïtien, Haiti

**Dates:** August 13, 2019 - September 8, 2019

**Summary of Project:**

Gender in Haiti has always been a contentious issue. Women are silenced and burdened by the intersectionality of social, economic, and environmental oppressions. In much of rural Haiti, women and men work side by side. It is estimated that nearly three quarters of the Haitian people reside in rural areas and work (both formally and informally) as peasant farmers. Since the 1950s, specifically 1955, the environment in Haiti has been overseen by the Ministry of Environment whose fundamental mission is to reduce environmental vulnerability.

This research sought to ascertain if women, specifically those who are heads of households, practice sustainable farming utilizing their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK<sup>1</sup>), maintain TEK whilst encompassing the governance of the Haitian state, or disengage with those guiding principles altogether. In this context, agro-sustainability refers to the sustainable methods farmers use to plant, grow, and nourish their lands and not solely the practice of farming (or agriculture) itself. I used a combination of ethnographic methods that included participant observation to complete an analysis of the development and implementation of farming techniques of rural women. This study aimed to analyze the perception of locally driven agro-sustainability customs and to evaluate whether these practices stem from the top down processes dictated by the Haitian state.

**Summary of Activities:**

In order to investigate the feasibility of the implementation of development strategies such as those advanced by agencies and organizations (e.g., the Ministry of Environment, NGOs, international aid agencies, Haitian run organizations, etc.) this project considered the agro-sustainability practices of rural women in Northern Haiti as the point of departure. My

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” “Indigenous Knowledge” and “Locally driven” will be used interchangeably in this report to describe the agro-sustainability practices of native rural peoples.

primary research question, then, was *what agro-sustainability practices are most prominent among rural women heads of households (FHH) in Cap-Haïtien?* This research question was guided by a singular objective along with ethnographic inquiries.

I arrived in Haiti through the CAP airport and was immediately taken to Milot from whence I commenced my research. As a means of analyzing the practices of rural Haitian women farmers, who are the heads of their households, in agro-sustainability, whilst addressing the cultural context of sustainability among female farmers, I asked the following questions: Are the agricultural farming methods that are practiced derived from indigenous knowledge or outsider knowledge guided by the top down discourse of the Haitian state? If outsider knowledge is being utilized, what institutions implemented these practices and are they following up with periodic and applicable feedback? What are the perceptions of the women as to the relative effectiveness of either approach? Are these practices sustainable or do they *further* deteriorate the environment by exacerbating soil erosion? Are these practices supported by a *konbit*<sup>2</sup> or on an individual basis? Does the yield of these practices help improve the livelihoods of the farmers involved? Are the farmers producing these crops as a means of subsistence, for economic supplement within informal markets, or both?

In Milot I was able to speak with several women farmers, heads of households, who still actively plant. This was a roadblock that I had not foreseen: the fact that many women in Milot no longer farm but are still considered farmers. I was, however, informed of the vast amount of farmland that is located in the mountains above Milot, in a place called Chwazèw. With the help of a research assistant I trekked up the mountain and found so many women who actively engage with the land daily. This opened the door for me to speak with many women there and not focus entirely on Milot. I spoke with them both individually and conducted a focus group over the course of two weeks. I conducted a pile/sort engagement activity with them as well. It was very informative and engaging.

After visiting Chwazèw, it occurred to me to broaden my research even further to different regions of Cap-Haïtien due to the usefulness of having varying perspectives. I was able to travel to the communes of Robiya and Port Margot to increase the range of my research area.

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<sup>2</sup>Translation: cooperative

Those were conducted as a series of day trips set up specifically for interviews with the women in their environment. I was able to take pictures and observe the women as they worked as well as speak with them one on one.

From the beginning, I was extremely interested in the women's "time poverty" or the daily activities that they partook in that prevented them from farming as they saw fit. I was able to get a lot of photos of the women working and doing their daily activities. In observing them, I was able to discern which activities hindered planting progress and which did not. I compiled data discussing the amount of aid, or lack thereof, that has been issued from the state, agents of the states, or non-profit organizations.

Due to my interest in how the Haitian state and the Ministry of Environment disseminate information, I set up a focus group with students at the University of Haiti to understand how and what they are taught about sustainability. I wanted to consider whether or not the Haitian state factors in TEK or dismisses it altogether. Lastly, I wanted to know whether or not those farmers that participated in konbits or official agricultural organizations had better yields than those that did not. As a result, I compiled data concerning cooperatives as well as the pros and cons of them.

Last but not least, I booked a bus ticket to Port-au-Prince (PAP) and to depart on a flight from the PAP airport. The objective of this was to experience the compounded "time poverty" of those in the rural areas who have to travel to PAP for everything such as official documents, etc. which can prevent them from obtaining *formal* work. The ride, though 75 miles, takes anywhere between six and eight hours depending on the weather and if the driver stops multiple times. The bus also goes through the mountain which is nothing short of terrifying.

#### **Future research:**

My ultimate goal is to understand, and eventually help to rectify, how and why the infrastructure of Haiti cannot withstand natural hazards that become full blown disasters. My thesis "*Lè Fanm Andeyò Travay: A Micro-Level Analysis of Agro-Sustainability Practices of Rural Women Heads of Households in Northern Haiti*" is intentional in that it centers rural women and their agricultural practices. Rural women are considered to be the most marginalized group in Haiti, thus, my rationale is that empowering and aiding them will have a trickle up

effect. It is my hope to expound on this research utilizing the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) methodology that will allow Haitian farmers to improve their soil quality and counter deforestation using the assets available to them in their community. On a very basic level, the knowledge of the practices, good and bad, was needed in order to proceed.

**Photos:**

