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Putting Local Universities in the Driver's Seat in Haiti

In Haiti, USAID used evaluation findings from the AREA activity to increase their focus on strengthening the capacity of local Haitian universities and researchers to develop agricultural research and extension programs. The Mission also supported two local universities to create in-country master's programs to train Haitian agriculture professionals.

CONTEXT

Agriculture is critical to the Haitian economy, providing the primary source of income for 60 percent of the population and accounting for a fifth of the country's gross domestic product. However, lack of resources for farmers, inefficient farming practices, diseases and pests, low uptake of improved production methods and seeds, and other factors challenge the strength of the country's agriculture sector and food supply. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Haiti implemented the *Appui à la Recherche et au Développement Agricole (AREA)* activity from May 2015–December 2020 to address some of these challenges. The activity supported capacity strengthening through applied research, agricultural extension, and higher education to increase farmers' and the private sector's access to improved production technologies. To strengthen applied research capacity, the activity provided producers with research-based diagnostic services while also increasing the number of agricultural research scientists and existing resources. To provide agricultural extension services, the activity used three models to help farmers adopt new technologies and improve yields: Master Farmer, Farmers Field School, and Input Supply-Driven models. Finally, to support higher education, AREA developed an innovative education program



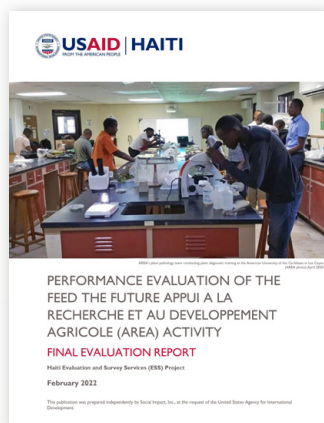
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for agricultural studies to strengthen the capacity of Haiti's agricultural universities and researchers. The activity also sponsored Master of Science degree scholarships for promising Haitian agricultural scholars.

The Mission used AREA's final performance evaluation to inform development of a follow-on activity to support agriculture in Haiti. The final performance evaluation assessed how to better engage higher education institutions in agriculture; support local systems to conduct applied research, including supporting an extension system to contribute to a more productive agricultural sector; identify any lessons learned and recommend possible follow-up actions; and guide similar USAID programs in Haiti and elsewhere.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team used a mixed-methods approach that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods. This included document review, 58 key informant interviews, 12 focus group discussions, three direct observations of AREA-supported activities, and surveys of 462 trainees. The evaluation questions, document review, initial discussions with USAID, and the team's evaluation design knowledge all informed creation of the interview guides and surveys. The evaluation involved local actors from the onset: USAID/Haiti worked with local partners to develop the evaluation scope of work and questions; local consultants worked with USAID/Haiti to finalize the evaluation design; the implementing partner hired local firms to collect field data; and the evaluation team included a local consultant. Study participants included implementing partner staff, USAID/Haiti personnel, farmers, trainees, and other direct activity stakeholders. However, the evaluation team encountered significant challenges while conducting the evaluation. Notably, the implementing partner's lack of data communication and database management limited the evaluation team's ability to access experimental data and contact information for potential survey respondents. Additionally, recent earthquakes and the security situation in Haiti prevented the team from accessing all planned sites. A detailed description of the methodology can be read in the [evaluation report](#).



EVALUATION FINDINGS

The evaluation found that AREA supported applied research by equipping laboratories and research stations, supporting access to funding for research programs, improving training curricula, and providing scholarships to 25 students to complete their master's degrees in the United States. However, the operating environment, lack of government and private sector interest, and the activity's lack of an exit strategy threatened progress on improving Haitian research capabilities. Participating local partners, universities, and research centers used the activity's research results—engaging in seed multiplication, extending newly acquired knowledge to other parts of Haiti, and forming networks





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with other national and international researchers. The research program developed improved seed varieties tailored to local needs, which Haitian firms can produce and distribute. There is evidence of local ownership, as well: four years after the end of the activity, local agricultural researchers are still working with these improved seed varieties, including in partnership with farmers' associations.

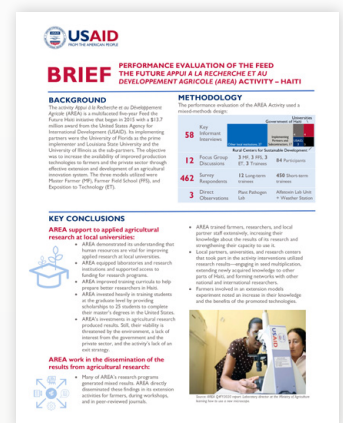
Participating farmers noted that the activity's extension models experiment increased their knowledge of the promoted technologies. Farmers who participated in Master Farmer and Farmers Field School praised their respective programs as having the best model, but those who participated in the Input-Supply Driven model were not satisfied. While all focus group discussion participants expressed interest in continuing to use the technologies introduced by the program, the need for inputs and materials limited their ability to do so. Farmers noted user-friendliness, cost or time required, local market demand, and return on investment as the most important factors determining their adoption of a technology.

ACTION BASED ON EVIDENCE FROM THE FINDINGS

Following completion of the evaluation, USAID/Haiti developed and disseminated an [evaluation brief](#) summarizing the findings. The Mission then used the evaluation findings to inform design of a new activity, the Haiti Agricultural University Partnership Activity.

Local universities were at the forefront of design and implementation for the follow-on activity. Instead of engaging U.S. researchers and institutions to conduct research in Haiti, the new activity prioritizes strengthening the capacity of Haitian universities and researchers to develop a research and extension agenda. As of early 2024, six universities targeted by the new activity have developed individual development plans and started implementation of their research programs. In addition, Haitian universities have developed two in-country master's programs to train local professionals in-country instead of abroad.

Furthermore, Haiti's Economic Growth and Agricultural Development office has shifted its implementation strategy toward a market systems development approach. This approach empowers local actors to lead development, such as by helping them work directly with farmers to provide access to improved seeds and technology or by facilitating connections between universities and the private sector. By supporting local partners to develop market relationships, USAID ultimately supports a sustainable local system that is not reliant on continued U.S. support.



LESSONS LEARNED

- ▷ **Establish expectations about data management from the beginning.** AREA's evaluation team faced significant difficulty in accessing implementing partner data. This data management challenge delayed the evaluation and required the team to fill in gaps through alternate methods. To avoid similar situations, activities should ensure expectations around storing, managing, and sharing data with USAID are clearly understood, as outlined in [ADS Chapter 579, section 579.3.1](#), during the contracting stage.
- ▷ **Expect difficulty reaching potential survey participants in countries with unstable security situations.** It is common for people in Haiti and other unstable countries to change phone numbers often. As a result, the AREA evaluation team had difficulty reaching former trainees when using the phone numbers recorded in the implementing partners' training logs. To track down respondents, the evaluation team went to surrounding areas where farmers might meet, such as markets, community centers, and churches, and asked locals if they knew where to find uncontacted trainees. This approach was not always successful, and unfortunately there are few more durable alternatives for contacting potential survey respondents beyond phone numbers. Evaluation teams working under similar conditions should be aware they likely will not be able to contact many potential survey respondents.
- ▷ **Develop and follow a [process map](#) to help manage all the moving parts of a complex evaluation.** USAID/Haiti used a process map to ensure the full evaluation team understood when key events needed to happen, keeping the team coordinated and informed. Bolstered by the strong working relationship between the evaluation team and USAID/Haiti, the process map helped establish expectations and keep the evaluation on track through several challenges.
- ▷ **Empower local actors to lead; let USAID take the back seat.** Because local universities did not drive research agendas with U.S. universities during the AREA activity, they were left without connections and an independent research program when the program ended. In the follow-on Haiti Agricultural University Partnership Activity, USAID/Haiti corrected this issue by putting local universities in the driver's seat, empowering them to lead the activity's agricultural research program, thus ensuring it was driven by and responsive to local priorities. This allows Haitian universities to benefit from collaboration with U.S. universities while setting them up for sustainability after the end of the activity.



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