

# The agriculture–nutrition nexus in Haiti



### In a nutshell

- More than one-third of Haiti's population (or approximately 4 million people) remains food insecure; chronic poverty prevents many Haitians from accessing the food they need
- 60% of Haitians (~6.5 million people) practise agriculture but meet only 55% of Haiti's food needs
- 22% of households experience severe hunger; only 23% of households consume a diverse diet
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of children under 5 years of age are affected by chronic malnutrition while 70% are anaemic
- More than 164 non-governmental organisations operate in Haiti; not all of their activities match national food security plans and most actions have limited scale
- In 2015, the government defined the National Policy of Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutrition Security in Haiti; this has 15 strategic actions, one of which is to boost supply of beans, chicken, eggs, maize and plantains

### Key recommendations

- Improve coordination among agencies working in the agriculture and nutrition sectors and adopt a multistakeholder, multidisciplinary, intersectoral and interministerial partnership approach to improve food- and nutrition-security outcomes
- Increase investments in agriculture and nutrition services; farmers particularly need access to credit, agricultural insurance, irrigation, inputs (seeds, pesticides and fertilisers) and transport, storage and processing facilities
- Promote production and consumption of locally produced nutrient-dense foods (such as dark green leafy vegetables) as part of a diversified diet at the household level
- Improve the collection and monitoring of nutritional data

**More than one-third of Haiti's population remains food insecure, despite the efforts of international donors, government ministries and numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs).**

**Enough food is available in the country to feed everyone, but half of it is imported every year. Chronic poverty prevents much of the country’s population from accessing the food they need.**

Although 60% of Haiti’s 10.7 million people practise agriculture, these farmers only meet about half of Haiti’s food needs. Imported food, including food aid (3%), makes up the remainder. The highest level of food insecurity is found in rural areas, where it approaches 50%.

*“Average farm sizes are small (about 0.62 ha). Pressure on agricultural land is high. Land is often overexploited and soils, water resources and forests are being degraded.”*

The nutritional consequences of food insecurity are severe at the best of times, and catastrophic when shocks such as earthquakes and hurricanes occur. Broad-based policy plans have sought to improve coordination of agricultural and nutrition programmes. These have brought international donors together with several government ministries, local and international NGOs and technical and development partners, but the technical, financial and institutional support that farmers receive has remained limited in scale.

## **Agriculture**

Haiti has diverse agro-ecological zones: dry and irrigated plains, subhumid mountains and humid plateaus. The challenges facing farmers are just as diverse. Farms are very small (averaging 0.62 ha nationally) and often impoverished by constant use.





Half of the surface area of the country is made up of mountainous slopes that are too steep to farm, and much of the rest is prone to rapid erosion if not managed carefully. Surveys have found that 63–79% of plots are overexploited.

Less than 30% of farmers use fertilisers, despite the government subsidising up to 80% of their cost since 2008. Only 10% of farmers have access to irrigation; the rest depend on rainfall. All are exposed to the hurricanes, floods and droughts that hit the island frequently. Farmers face a lack of transport, storage and processing facilities for their harvests, which contributes to 35% postharvest loss.

Despite all of this, farming, together with fisheries and forestry, provides a quarter of Haiti's gross domestic product. Agriculture is the main source of income for about a third of the population, but 60% are involved in the sector to some extent. Around 55% of the population practise some form of animal production, though most of these households keep only a few animals, such as a few chickens or a single pig. Production also tends towards the small scale in fisheries, which involve 3% of Haiti's population along the country's long coastline and many bodies of water.

## Food

Food security in Haiti is about more than just how much food is available. Enough food is available in most years to meet basic needs of the population, but only through importing almost as much food as the country produces. Many people are unable to access this food because of persistent poverty, and this fuels food insecurity. The most at-risk groups include widows and children. Food insecurity is also closely tied to other factors such as disease outbreaks, price shocks, natural disasters and political instability. Hunger and malnutrition are most prevalent in vulnerable communes of the departments of Nord-Est, Sud-Est (Belle Anse district), Ouest (La Gonave island), Artibonite (Haut Artibonite) and Centre.

Food insecurity is not surprising in a country where households spend 65% of their income on food, yet only 30% of the

population eats three meals a day. Just 22.9% of households report having a diverse diet; of the rest, 54.7% consider their dietary diversity to be unsatisfactory. This rate is much worse in rural areas, where 80.4% of households report the diversity of their diet as unsatisfactory.

Within households, women are the chief decision-makers about what is eaten. Women play a strong role throughout agriculture and the food trade, and their activities are fundamental to food security in the country.

## Nutrition

Haiti has one of the highest rates of child malnourishment in the world (Figure 1). Nationally, nearly a quarter (23.4%) of children under 5 years of age are chronically malnourished, 7.1% of them severely so. The worst-affected departments are Nord-Est (32.9%), Grande-Anse (27.6%) and Nord (27%). The least-affected areas are the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince (16.4%), Centre (21.3%) and Sud (22.9%). In 2013, the department of Nord-Est was reported to have the highest prevalence of acute malnutrition, followed by the departments of Nord, Nippes and Sud-Est. Nationally, more than a third (37%) of 18–23-month-old children are stunted. Poor nutrition also takes other guises, such as wasting, low birth weight and pervasive micronutrient deficiencies. Iodine deficiency affects 70% of 6–12-month-old children, and 70% of children under 5 years of age are anaemic.

*“Less than 30% of farmers use fertilisers, although the government has provided subsidies of up to 80% since 2008.”*

Anaemia is also a health burden for 50% of pregnant women and for 40% of all women between 15 and 49 years of age. Among these adult women, 11.3% suffer from chronic energy deficiency. At the same time, 30% are overweight; of these, 9% are obese. Obesity is most prevalent in the metropolitan areas of Port-au-Prince, where food insecurity is generally less of a problem but education on nutrition is lacking.

## The policy and institutional framework

The Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development (MARNDR) is the main institution in charge of addressing food and agriculture in Haiti, while the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) leads nutrition-related services. MARNDR elaborates and implements food-related policies and programmes through its National Coordination of Food Security (CNSA) body, which also establishes and operates the National Observatory of Food Security (ONSA). Like other ministries, MARNDR benefits from the support of many international donors.

The main policies addressing agriculture, food and nutrition in Haiti are usually broad ones that also seek to target extreme poverty, environment and incomes. Six new plans and one update to an earlier plan have been developed in the last decade. The most recent policy is the 2015 National Policy of Food Sovereignty and Food and Nutrition Security (PNSSANH). This policy’s 15 strategic actions are to be implemented by 14 different ministries and related structures, with a stated purpose of establishing food sovereignty, with a particular focus on beans, chicken, eggs, maize and plantains.

Among the larger-scale actions carried out by the government, the agricultural recovery plan under PNSSANH is of particular importance. Its main project is the 2013–2017 Food Security Project (SECAL), which focuses on the rural Ouest, Sud and Artibonite departments.

*“Only 10% of farmers have access to irrigation, resulting in low crop yields.”*





Through this, MARNDR provides irrigation infrastructure, seeds, agricultural research, technical assistance and subsidies to farmers and livestock producers. Priority commodities are maize, beans, plantains, eggs and chickens. The objectives are to increase production and the preservation, processing and marketing of agricultural products. SECAL also supplies food to 1.5 million children in schools, with an eventual target of 3 million.

Platforms exist to ensure that actors work together to avoid conflict or duplication. The government ministries meet regularly in a roundtable (*table de concertation*). Within MARNDR, different structures meet in a Sectoral Table to distribute roles. In practice, however, most programmes and projects in the country are funded by international donors. They are often implemented, in part or whole, by NGOs and target specific areas and populations. Significant impacts at the national level are rarely sought.

Prominent among NGOs involved in policy formulation are the National Platform of Food Security (PFNSA) and the Civil Society Initiative (ISC). National NGOs that participate in agricultural and nutritional activities include the Haitian Association for the Promotion of Autonomous Development (PRODEVA), Concert-Action and the Haitian Association for Water and Soils Management (ASSODLO). Haiti is home to a great many NGOs; 164 are currently recognised through government agreements, but the true number is larger, and many have a hand in agriculture and/or nutrition.

There are two major women’s organisations in the country: Haitian Women in Solidarity (SOFA) and Fanm Yo La. While very active in a range of social and political efforts, these organisations have not been involved in agriculture or nutrition. Given the critical role of women in these issues and how deeply they are impacted by them, organisations like these have the potential to play an important part in the future.

## Strengthening the agriculture–nutrition nexus

Despite many policies, programmes and projects to improve both agriculture and nutrition in Haiti, 38% of Haiti’s population remains food insecure, with the largest numbers in rural areas.

The causes of this are both local and national, and action is needed at both levels. This will require a multistakeholder, multidisciplinary, intersectoral and interministerial partnership, powered by consensus among actors – including the private sector, donors and development partners – and the scaling-up of small but successful projects.



Opportunities for intervention include:

- Effecting land-use reform and organising small-scale farmers into associations so they can better access investment and technical support and improve production.
- Investing in agricultural research, education, extension and nutrition programmes. Education of adults and children needs to be stepped up on the topics of nutrition, home food production and the diversification of food production and diets.
- Bringing women’s organisations into action for food and nutrition security. If this is done, these organisations could be strong actors in enhancing the agriculture–nutrition nexus.
- Providing support for development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

## Nutrition in Haiti

### *Undernutrition*

- Only 30% of the population eat three meals a day; 59% eat two meals a day; and 11% eat one meal a day or fewer
- 23% of children under 5 years of age are chronically malnourished, and 7% suffer from severe chronic malnourishment

### *Micronutrient deficiency*

- 50% of pregnant women and 70% of children under 5 years of age are anaemic
- 70% of 6–12-month-old children are deficient in iodine

### *Stunting*

- 37% of 18–23-month-old children are stunted

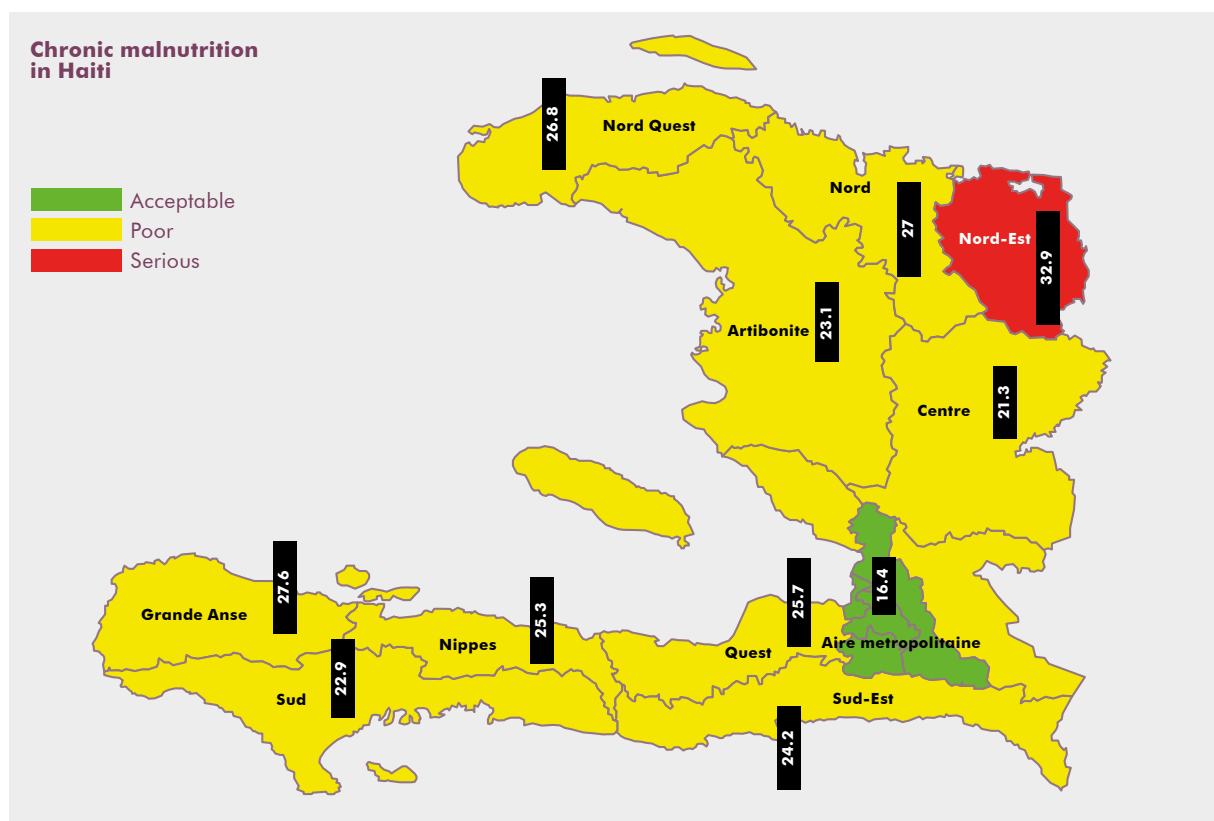
### *Obesity*

- 9% of women between 15 and 49 years of age are obese, with the highest concentration in Port-au-Prince



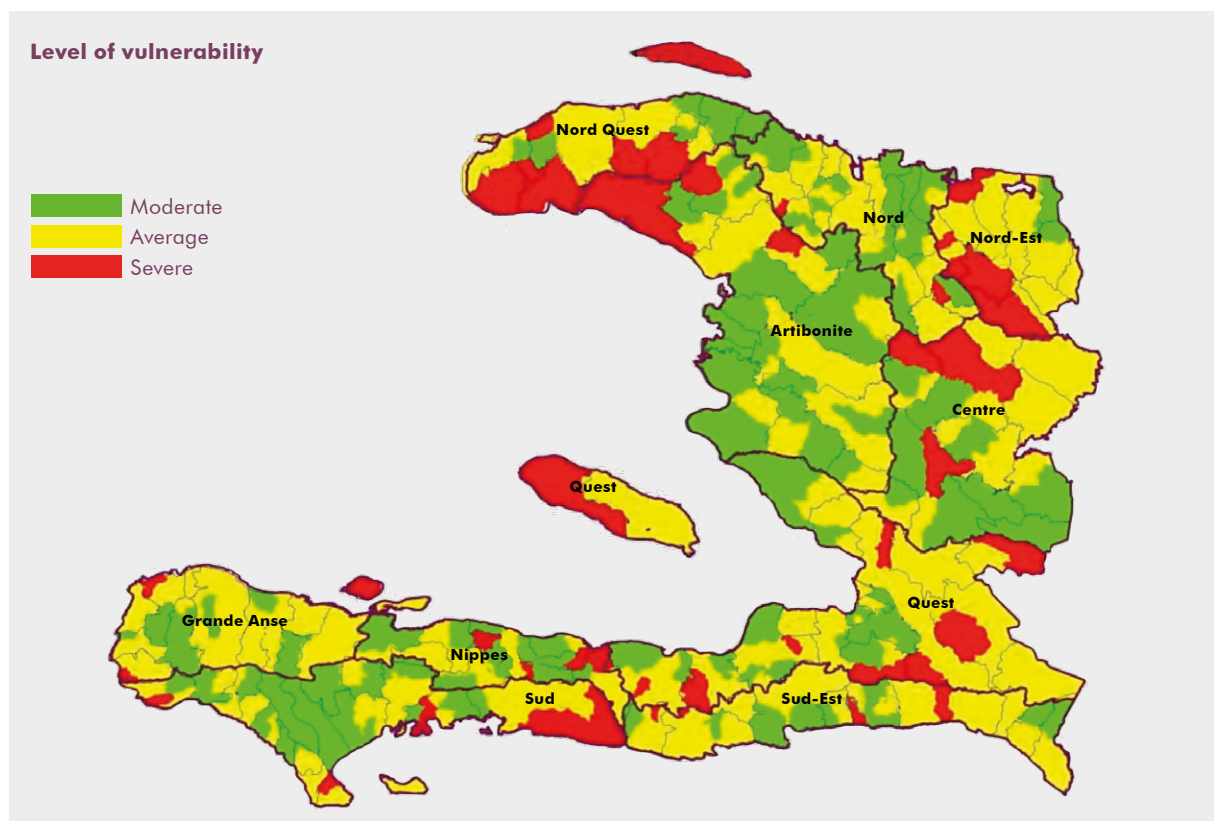


Figure 1. Rates of chronic malnourishment in departments of Haiti.



Source: MSPP (2012).

Figure 2. Areas most at risk of food insecurity.



Source: CNSA and FEWS NET (2009).

## Further reading

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Page 2: Commune of Jean Rabel, north-west region, Haiti. Farmer weeding. ©IFAD/Sarah Morgan  
Page 4: Children eating a hot meal: Port-au-Prince, Haiti. ©Alamy  
Page 5: Woman cleaning fish, fishing village on the Caribbean coast, Petit Goave, Haiti. ©Alamy  
Page 6: Osnia Prévoit, cooking cassava sweet cake, cassava transformation project, Belladère, Haiti. ©IFAD/David F. Paqui

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