

FOOD SECURITY IN HAITI: A GENDERED SOLUTION

Jennifer Vansteenkiste PhD / Research Outcomes

Food Security, Food Systems, Gender and Development Specialist Jenn.vansteenkiste@gmail.com

A Gendered Solution

Executive Summary

The world food economy succeeds at **increasing availability**, yet does so to the **detriment of women's roles in the food system**. Increases in productivity often rely on removing women from production but still leaving them with the responsibility of distribution and consumption. The outcome is reduced means to access food, heightened inequality, and social instability. All-women organizations in Haiti respond by designing value-added projects using a **Gender Central Framework (GCF)** as an organizing principle. Their work challenges gendered barriers by improving women's strategic interests and practical needs, thereby making critical and strategic contributions to food security and social stability.

How the World Food Economy Creates Food Insecurity in Haiti

Rules favouring trade liberalization have integrated Haiti's internal food economy into the global food system. Proponents claimed the availability of cheaper imported food would improve food security. The goal is to transition farmers to agro-export production and urban assembly labor in an effort to increase incomes and foreign currency to participate in the world food economy. This has resulted in social instability and increased food insecurity as employment opportunities fail to materialize and Haitians become dependent on unaffordable, volatile global food stocks.ⁱ The problem occurs when a food economy in transition wrongly assumes gender-neutrality. Yet, in Haiti, women are the *poto mitan*, the center post of the

- * Despite improving food security worldwide, Haiti is more food insecure
- * The world food economy relies on gendered roles to function, subsequently heightening inequality
- * Haitian women challenge their marginalization within Haiti's internal food economy by challenging gendered roles

household and community, responsible for food security with food production a traditionally significant piece in this gendered role. The supply-centric system has ignored this role thus removing women's **rights** and means of production and leaving women with the **responsibility** of food distribution and consumption for the household and community. All-women organizations respond to this marginalization by making gender the organizing principle of their GCF to enhance women's capabilities as conceptualized by Senⁱⁱ and Nussbaum^{iv}. This results in improved strategic interests and access to practical needs to improve food security and social stability.

Approach and Results

Results were determined using feminist methodologies, grounded theory, and mixed-methods to contrast and compare project frameworks from four community-based organizations in northern Haiti. It was determined that all-women organizations find niche markets not consumed by the world food economy to challenge socially constructed gendered norms assigned to food production. They achieve this by

protecting space within the organization from male influence and use GCF to design and practice alternative capabilities that challenge gendered roles. The newly gained capabilities in turn allow women to choose strategies to enhance their strategic interests and improve practical needs. This study allows for a new understanding of how local communities, and specifically women, improve food security. The framework has scalable potential to NGO project designs and communal

The Caribbean overall has improved, but failed to meet the basic 1C MDG target, leaving 8.1 million people undernourished, with Haiti home to 75 percent of those people.

Source: 2015 Regional Overview of Food Insecurity: Latin America and the Caribbean. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4636e.pdf>

and departmental levels.

Conclusion

It was found that all-women organizations used GCFs to identify capabilities needed to improve their strategic interests. GCFs challenge gendered barriers that prevent them from obtaining necessary capabilities for success. The outcome is improved access to practical needs for food procurement. This GCF approach creates sustainable solutions because the change occurs within the person and the organization, which also acts as a social network. It increases women's ability to produce, distribute, and consume food properly. This approach sits in opposition to approaches that try to meet immediate needs, such as improved food availability, through supply-centric models. The further benefit is that local actors identify the strategic interests and practical needs in a democratic *gwoupman* structure common in Haiti. This allows smaller groups of 60 women to formulate their desires and then bring them to the general executive committee for

further vetting and execution. The study found that, through this structure, individual and group needs are better met, creating social stability and a reduction in vulnerability. This demonstrates the agency of peasant organizations to create frameworks to make critical and strategic contributions to food security and social stability.

Policy Implications & Suggestions

The GCF has the potential to be transferable to mixed-gender CBOs and scalable to NGOs. Further, GCF is scalable to communal administrations to

“All-women organizations used GCFs to identify capabilities needed to improve strategic interests.”

create a platform for engagement with regional and central governments as a central organizing principle of policy decisions. In this way, local voices are integrated into development planning to achieve sustainable outcomes. Further research is needed to apply this GCF to future food security project designs, specifically to NGO-sponsored and communal level food security projects in Haiti. This would require pairing research groups with local organizations to design project goals, evaluations, implementation, and monitoring—all based on achieving desired capabilities. Operationalizing the CBO gender framework at the level of engagement with NGOs will demonstrate its scalability. If successful, the framework should then be applied to other food security projects with women in Haiti to demonstrate the repeatability of outcomes. **GCF has the potential to address food security at larger scales.**

For more information please read: Vansteenkiste and Schuller (forthcoming). *The Gendered Space of Capabilities and Functionings: Lessons from Haitian Community-Based Organizations.*^v

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- ⁱ Cohen, M. J. (2013). Diri Nasyonal ou Diri Miami? Food, agriculture and US-Haiti relations. *Food Security*, 5(4), 597–606. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-013-0283-7>
- ⁱⁱ Sen, A. (2006). *Capabilities, Freedom, and Equality*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.
- ^{iv} Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- ^v Vansteenkiste, J. & Schuller, M. (forthcoming). The Gendered Space of Capabilities and Functionings: Lessons from Haitian Community-Based Organizations. In *Special Issue Communities and Capabilities, Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*.