

CHAPTER TWO

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Objectives

The present report has been commissioned by USAID/Haiti as an attempt to provide a conceptual overview of the soil conservation projects that have been operating in Haiti during the past two and a half decades. Recent studies commissioned by USAID have referred in a convincing but general way to the central role which deforestation and soil erosion play in the contemporary impoverishment of the rural economy, and few persons would dispute the contention that reforestation and general soil conservation constitute a sine qua non for any serious rural development in a country which has nearly 90% of its surface in the form of slopes.

But no coherent stance or policy toward these matters has as yet coalesced in the Haiti mission. On the contrary, one senses the presence of bewilderment and hopelessness in the face of what gives every appearance of being a rapidly deteriorating ecological situation. Is there any useful assistance which a powerful funding agency can give that would stand a chance of having some positive impact?

The results of this research are optimistic, not about the current ecological crisis, but about the possibilities of making meaningful financial investments in projects that will arrest and reverse the process of ecological degradation in participating communities. The strategy for this research has been to examine as many soil conservation projects as possible in the time available, to distinguish the successful elements from the failures, and to generate a series of concrete propositions about the determinants of success and failure in these soil conservation projects.

At first there was some skepticism about whether any successes would be found. This skepticism, though understandable, proved unfounded. As will be discussed in the following chapter, under certain conditions the Haitian peasant has been found to adopt behaviors which do arrest and control erosion. These conditions are not yet widespread. But funding and implementing agencies could be instrumental in providing the inputs which would lead to these changes.

The majority of projects examined in this research fall closer to the failure pole than to the success pole, including many of those in which USAID has been involved. But there are very clear indications as to the nature of the false steps that were made, steps which could in the future be avoided.

2.2 The Variables Investigated

A major guiding hypothesis, of course, was the assumption that the success or failure of efforts to protect and reforest hillsides would not be unilaterally determined by one simple factor. Built into the very scope of work prepared by the ADC was a series of complementary hypotheses paving the way for the investigation of multiple factors and the determination, at least in an exploratory fashion, of the manner in which these separate factors interacted to determine the outcome of given projects. For purposes of this report, I will organize the hypotheses into four major groupings: institutional, organizational, technical, and sociocultural.

To begin with institutional hypotheses, it is reasonable to assume that the success or failure of projects is heavily influenced by the strengths and weaknesses of the agencies which fund and/or implement the projects. All other things being equal, one would expect, for example, that a well organized institution which delivers required materials on time, which maintains its vehicles in working order, which provides regular supervision to ongoing activities, will be much more successful in its projects than an agency which is weak on the points mentioned above. Could it be that the ultimate success or failure of projects soil conservation efforts has hinged principally on these institutional variables?

An alternative set of hypotheses would look, rather, to organizational features of the project themselves. Perhaps success is determined less by the characteristics of institutions than by the particular grouping principles which are used to organize communities into action units, the educational inputs which are given to participating units before and during the project implementation; and--most importantly--the motivational strategies which are used to elicit and sustain involvement in the project. To what degree have factors such as these--which I will lump under the rubric "organizational variables"--been the principle determinants of success or failure in soil conservation efforts in Haiti?

Perhaps in focusing on institutions and on organizational models, we may be missing the boat. Perhaps success or failure is rather determined by a third sort of factor--the technical factor. Perhaps the principal element which governs the outcome of efforts to plant trees and build structures is rather the simple question of whether the trees are properly chosen and planted in view of prevailing climatic or edaphic conditions, and whether the walls or terraces are designed with a technically correct assessment of local topography and are constructed in a technically correct manner which permits them to carry out their soil-retaining function and to withstand for as long as possible the ravages of time. Perhaps we should look to these technical factors as the principal determinants of success or failure in Haitian soil conservation efforts.

But social scientists, especially those with an ethnographic bent, may incline to yet a fourth type of hypothesis, one which could perhaps best be labeled "sociocultural". Perhaps in the long run the success or failure of soil conservation projects has been most heavily determined, not by institutional, organizational, or technical factors, but rather by economic, social, and cultural factors inherent in the communities themselves. Perhaps the very nature of the local agrarian economy itself has contributed to, or militated against, the success of efforts to plant trees and build structures. Of particular importance, perhaps the very character of local land tenure is the overriding element determining the willingness of individuals to participate in projects or not. Or is there perhaps something in the local value system, e.g. in some cultural feature which affects willingness to make long-term investments, which is the principle determinant of project success or failure. To what degree, then, do such sociocultural factors influence the outcome of projects so strongly as to render any institutional, or technical consideration of secondary importance?

These alternative factors were built into the scope of work prepared by USAID/Haiti, not as mutually exclusive hypotheses, but as complementary variables which are probably exerting simultaneous impact on the course of soil conservation interventions. It was

realized from the outset that not only time constraints, but the very complex character of the variables themselves, as well as the small number of discrete projects that were available for examination, would preclude resolution of the hypotheses in any statistical sense. The factors have been formulated as "hypotheses", not as a prelude to statistical investigation, but as a means of identifying and separating discrete issues, and of imbuing the investigation with sufficiently precise questions so as to ensure that the descriptive information gathered is relevant enough to provide USAID and GOH program planners with concrete insights into the most promising routes to follow in future soil conservation projects.

2.3 Methodological Approach

Having clarified some of the major questions to be posed, the task was to select the specific projects that would be examined. As a preliminary to the work, a thorough review was made of the relevant literature available in Haiti. (A bibliography is provided at the end of the report). In conjunction with the ADO, I selected the regions that were to be visited and the projects whose progress and/or outcomes would be examined. It was considered essential to include several past projects which included soil conservation measures but which have now ended. Success and failure of projects, after all, is best assessed when the project itself has long since stopped. But it was felt to be unnecessarily restrictive and counter-productive to limit investigation only to projects of a distant past,

where information on the project itself would be strictly retrospective. Some of the most promising soil conservation efforts are still in progress; and though the success or failure of these efforts is still a moot point the strengths and weaknesses of certain project features can be perceived even when the project is still in progress. The information on certain projects was to be fairly thorough, including several days residence in villages where the projects took place. Information on other projects had to be more cursory in nature, restricted to interviews with persons involved in the project. The conclusions drawn in this paper stem from information gathered on a total of nineteen projects, fifteen of which I was able to visit personally. This fieldwork phase of the research lasted from early July to mid September of 1979.

Information was gathered on the following projects (not in the order listed):

In the Kenscoff Area

1. An erosion control project in Furcy which began in the 1940's under the direction of a Haitian agronomist working out of Damien. The project emphasized the use of small terrach-like structures in conjunction with vegetable planting.

2. A reforestation project run by the U.N. in Furcy. The project consisted mostly of the planting of two experimental wood lots to compare the suitability of different varieties of eucalyptus and other lumber trees.

3. A reforestation project currently headed by two Damien agronomists operating out of Kenscoff, who use Food for Work supplied by CARE and who receive most of their seedlings from the private Baptist Mission nursery at Fernath, run by Wallace Turnbull, Jr.

4. Terracing and reforestation activities which began in the Fort Jacques area in the early fifties. Special attention was given to assessing the role of Food for Work, much of which was supplied by Church World Service.

5. Reforestation activities done voluntarily by the Community Council of Madlen, a community across the ridge from the Baptist Mission at Fernath.

In the aux Cayes Area

6. A general soil conservation project run by the U.N. and the FAO in the hills between Maniche and Laborde. The project entailed the planting of several varieties of both Lumber and fruit trees and the construction of a broad variety of erosion control structures.

7. Reforestation activities supported by Catholic Relief Service, administered by an Oblate missionary priest in aux Cayes.

8. The USAID supported restoration of the Acul watershed above Ducis, involving the collaboration of independently contracted foreign technicians and the Damien-based Projet de Developpement Agricole Integre.

In the Limbe Area

9. The reforestation activities of Ronald Smith, who operates a nursery on the grounds of the Hopital Don Samaritain, and who has devised a scheme for selling seedlings at subsidized prices to interested local landowners.

10. A general reforestation and erosion control project supported by FAO in the Limbe area involving an experimental farm for the demonstration of different erosion control structures. In its earlier phases this project emphasized the construction of vegetative barriers.

11. A project supervised by the Oriental Mission Society outside of Cap Haitien, involving the establishing of contractual relationships between peasants and a cooperative for planting and maintaining trees on what is in effect a sharecropping basis.

In the Belladere Area

12. The agricultural colony that was established by presidential decree in the late 40's and which involved some tree planting and erosion control.

13. An ongoing BCA coffee project involving the use of credit and fertilizer, one of whose objectives is the motivation of peasants to expand their coffee farms using modern techniques.

14. An irrigation project in the Croix de Fer area, visited in order to observe the operation of a contract system of labor, different from the more conventional daily wage systems.

In the Northwest

15. A now defunct reforestation project in the community of Ma-Rouj (beyond Jean Rabel) whose central element entailed the establishment of a community based nursery.

16. The HACHO sponsored reforestation and erosion control activities in and around Jean Rabel. (The Ma-Rouj project was an earlier phase of this project).

17. A number of HACHO wall building activities outside of Gonaive and in and around Anse Rouge.

18. The reforestation projects operated by the German funded Fonds Agricoles in the Northwest.

19. In addition, information was also gathered on the Pilot project of Marbial, in the mountains of the south near Jacmel. This was one of the first development project funded by the U.N. (UNESCO) in Haiti and entailed both reforestation and erosion control.

To permit both freedom of movement and accessibility to hard-to-reach areas, I rented a four-wheel drive vehicle. In each of the areas of Furcy, Belladere, and aux Cayes I was able to spend several days living in rural communities doing brief village field-work among farmers involved in the projects, in addition to the standard interviewing which I did of project technicians and administrators. In the North I stayed in Cap Haitien and in the Jean Rabel area stayed with foreign technicians involved in HACHO projects. But in every region I attempted not only to visit the sites that had been reforested and terraced, but also to interview

individuals at both the "delivery" and the "receiving" end of project interventions. An attempt was made, in short, to view projects not only from the vantage point of the project technicians, but also from the perspective of the participating farmers and their local agrarian economy.

2.4 Guiding Hypothesis of the Presentation

The basic hypothesis of this presentation posits the operation of an energetic profit-motive that has governed the behavior of Haitian peasants with respect to their participation in soil conservation activities, and indeed in most other developmental activities. The tenacity and depth of this profit motive must be viewed in the dual context, firstly, of a profound, historically derived market orientation which has characterized Haitian peasant society from its 19th century inception and, secondly, from the unparalleled material poverty which continues to afflict the vast majority of Haitian peasant households. The success or failure of soil conservation efforts has hinged largely on the manner in which these projects have intertwined with, meshed with, and addressed themselves to this profit motive.

But there are two major ways in which this profit-motive has been able to work itself out in the context of reforestation and terracing activities. In the case of a small-number of spectacular success stories, in which the projects have provided them with the opportunity to substantially increase their cash income, the peasants have incorporated innovative and dramatically effective erosion control measures into their economic repertoire. But in other projects which have attempted to peddle measures of little immediate economic value to the peasants, the profit motive has expressed itself in a fundamentally different, substantially less productive fashion. In this latter type of project the peasants have participated for the sole purpose of plugging into the flow of Food for Work and cash wages that foreign development agencies have been pumping into Haiti since the late forties and early fifties. In these cases,

tree planting and wall building have been performed out of mechanical compliance to the conditions of temporary employment, but have in no way become incorporated into the economic repertoire of the peasants.

My argument will be this: the Haitian peasant is too impoverished to afford the luxury of being seriously concerned with "soil conservation" as a long term objective. Soil conservation is possible and has been achieved--but only as a secondary result of innovative activities whose primary function from the peasant's point of view is the generation of a higher cash income.

2.5 Structure of the Presentation

The presentation will be structured as follows. Chapter three will identify and describe the factors which have led to self-sustained erosion control behavior among the peasants of a particularly favorable region of Haiti. Chapter Four, in contrast, will trace the evolution, transformation, and degeneration of certain less successful projects into collective charades whose prime function is the collecting of food and cash from the ubiquitous foreign development agencies.

The following three chapters will focus in on specific aspects of projects. Chapter Five will examine the institutions which have played a role in soil conservation and will identify the points at which their interventions have been weak. Chapter Six will deal with questions of the organization and motivation of the community groups which actually carry out the projects. Chapter Seven will examine a number of technical decisions which each project has confronted, with a view to choosing those alternatives which have seemed more successful.

The final two chapters will deal with certain key aspects of the economy and culture of the Haitian peasant. Chapter Eight will deal with the role which land tenure factors have played in the success or failure of soil conservation efforts. And Chapter Nine will examine briefly certain dimensions of the cultural underpinnings of Haitian peasant life as they relate to the participation of the peasant in soil conservation projects.

A guiding theme which will inform the entire report is the conclusion that the failure of many soil conservation projects stems from the failure

of project planners to demonstrate convincingly and to exploit the economic potential of certain fast growing tree species, from their failure to devise detailed microeconomic models of a transformed peasant economy based on agroforestation, the integration of profit-generating tree planting with traditional cultivation.

In line with this general conclusion, two appendices have been included, discussing the costs and benefits of various project alternatives. The task is seen as devising and implementing an approach to reforestation which departs from the conventional project stance that defines trees as a useful but minor supplement to the peasant economy. What will be called for, rather, is a reconceptualization of trees as a central weapon in the economic strategy of the mountain peasant capable of doubling and tripling not only the annual income generated by a given plot but also the cash value of the plot itself. It is envisioned here that the objective of "soil conservation projects" could be redefined as that of creating for the first time in Haitian history communities of peasants who are making a profit from the planting (as opposed to the simple cutting) of trees.