A Rapid Food Sovereignty and Health Assessment Tool: Haiti

2025

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This tool is based on interviews and workshops with leaders from community-based organizations in Haiti, and we are thankful for their expertise, knowledge and contributions to the development of this document. Their hard work informs the content of this report.

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Introduction

In 2018, the Haitian government introduced 'food sovereignty' into Haiti's policy landscapes with the publication of the National Policy for Food Sovereignty, Food Security and Nutrition (PNSSANH). The document is novel in that it provides an inter-sectoral analysis of Haiti's food systems, and offers detailed recommendations for change by connecting domains — land, nutrition, health, gender, trade, and culture — that have previously been siloed in the policy arena. The introduction of food sovereignty is indeed emblematic of a paradigm shift in Haitian national policy and opens up an opportunity for a radical shift in service provisioning and research related to Haiti. This policy is a call to move beyond discussions about food security and assessments, which have narrowly tended to focus on caloric sufficiency, access, and diversity, to consider broader questions, including how land, gender, traditional food cultures, and pro-peasant agriculture are fundamental to creating healthy, economically and environmentally sustainable, and culturally enriching food systems in Haiti. Yet, the PNSSANH also presents a new challenge, for scholars, practitioners and the state — how do we evaluate and monitor progress towards the core goals of food sovereignty?

Here we offer a Rapid Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool in the hope of supporting the continued emergence of alternative, pro-peasant food systems in Haiti and beyond.

Rapid Food Security Assessments and why we need Rapid Food Sovereignty Assessments

Food security is typically defined as "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for a healthy and active life" (FAO 1996). While is no standard metric to assess food security, evaluators tend to rely on an assortment of data at multiple scales, often collected through a variety of means including individual and household surveys, national data sets and economic models. Rapid Food Security Assessments (RFSAs) have been used since the 1980s as a way to quickly evaluate the state of food security in a given population. RFSAs have tended to be used during or after extreme weather events, poor harvests, or other dramatic events which affect food security in a given area. Early food security methodologies and RFSAs tended to estimate caloric intake and food availability. Over time, the scope of RFSAs has expanded to take account of the diverse socio-economic and environmental contexts that impact a population's food security.

The World Food Programme's Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI), for example, is often used to measure household food security.

The CARI includes questions that seek to capture an individual's demographic details, caloric intake, dietary diversity, food market costs, and food insecurity adaptation strategies (ie. reducing meals, selling animals or land, use of credit), as well as past and projected harvests, and subjective well being. While this tool provides a much more detailed picture of food security than past household surveys, there are some shortcomings. First, the **CARI** categorizes households, and subsequently regions, into four levels of food security. While this provides a necessary overview for intervening actions, this broad-level data often lacks information or discussion about the structural factors that impact food insecurity in a given community. Second, the tool tends to be carried out by external actors, and the information produced is used to guide intervention by other outside actors. Community groups and sampled individuals are rarely asked to engage in collecting the data and have little control over the information contained within it. As such, the RFSAs often result in a measure of food security in the absence of local participation and without analyses of the structural forces that impact community food security. For example, questions relating to land tenure, rural labour, agroecological practices, the impacts of imported food on rural livelihoods, the gendered dynamics of food production, marketing and consumption and the cultural value of traditional diets, are largely absent. Documenting these dynamics not only has the potential to provide a clearer and more nuanced picture of food security in a given region, but also allows policymakers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and community leaders, to analyze how food insecurity emerged, and how it can be improved. In short, an inter-sectoral and richer view of Haiti's food systems, including but moving beyond traditional food security metrics, requires a food sovereignty assessment.

The CARI

A richer, cross-sector vision of Haiti's food systems, going beyond traditional measures of food security, requires an assessment of food sovereignty.

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What is food sovereignty?

More specifically, food sovereignty can be seen to cohere around a number of key pillars, including calls for redistributive land reform, increased transparency, democratic control, and gender equity in all decision-making from farm households to agricultural policy-making; support for agro-ecological research and pro-poor agronomy; and recognition of the rights of nations and peoples to support culturally appropriate and diverse food systems, including autonomy in trade policies. Food sovereignty challenges the neoliberal approach to food and agriculture and calls for a range of alternative policies to foster more equitable and sustainable farming systems. Advocates also stress that enhancing smallholder livelihoods and the localization of agro-food systems will tend to enhance access to healthy, culturally appropriate food, which reflects the fact that diverse diets historically emerged out of local agricultural conditions.

Food Sovereignty is a conceptual framework that was coined in 1996 by the global peasant movement Via Campesina, and it calls for "the right of populations to define their agricultural and food policy" and recognizes "the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced using sustainable methods

Via Campesina. (2007). Nyéléni Declaration. Forum for Food Sovereignty, Sélingué, Mali.

The Rapid Food Sovereignty Assessment in this document is a community-developed tool designed to not only measure caloric intake, food availability, and food costs, but to also collect information on the relationships between food security, land, gender, health, state policies, trade regimes, and food cultures.

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Today, rapid food security assessments rarely address the interconnections between land tenure, ecology, diets, health, culture and economies. Yet, food security data informs national policies on food, agriculture and nutrition, rural development, health, and the service provisioning of international NGOs and researchers. Moving towards environmentally integrated, gender-inclusive, and pro-peasant food systems in Haiti must begin with collecting comprehensive data on these critical aspects of food sovereignty. Our hope is that this Rapid Food Sovereignty Assessment tool will provide researchers, community leaders, and development practitioners a means of discovering the dynamics that together create food systems, and, when used over time, it will highlight the ongoing and structural factors that have been impeding food security in Haiti for decades.

There is much overlap between rapid food security assessment tools and this Rapid Food Sovereignty Assessment tool. For example, this tool contines to collect demographic, and individual health information, dietary diversity, and food sufficiency. What this tool adds is attention to land tenure arrangements and environmental resources, food storage facility access, access to transportation networks and markets, respondent perceptions of healthy and accessible foods, security threats, and a gendered picture of food culture, health indicators, land and labour practices, and participant perspectives on how best food security could be addressed in households and communities.Our hope is that this Rapid Food Sovereignty Assessment tool will allow for food systems evaluations, moving beyond questions of hunger and dietary diversity, to include the intersectional factors —health, environments, policies and trade, gender relations, and culture— that bear on Haitian diets and livelihoods. The hope is that this tool will help us all to better understand how to craft healthier, inclusive and environmentally friendly food systems in Haiti.

What is food sovereignty?

Calls for redistributive land reform

Support for agro-ecological research and pro-poor agronomy

Increased transparency

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Gender equity in all decision-making from farm households to agricultural policy-making

Recognition of the rights of nations and peoples to support culturally appropriate and diverse food systems

Democratic control

Autonomy in trade policies

Tool Methodology

Our team would like to stress that this tool is not designed to provide a concrete measure of food sovereignty in the same way that food security has been measured. Food sovereignty is a fluid movement, and concept not a precise measurement. Instead, this tool is designed to collect information on the critical 'pillars' of food sovereignty. Primary among the food sovereignty pillars is democratic control over food systems. Indeed, this tool is the result of a collaborative research project which engaged over thirty community-based organizations in Haiti, and a team of Haitian and international researchers and students. Our work took place over 2-years, from 2021 to 2023, and was founded on a community-based participatory methodology with the intention to emphasize the importance of community-defined problems and possibilities for change.

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Our team, made up of Canadian and Haitian Scholars, as well as Haitian community organizations, has been committed to a community-grounded process and has included interviews and workshops with Haitian partners with the goal to establish a tool that is community-driven and relevant for Haitian community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and state institutions.This tool has been tested in two case studies and tends to take between 35-90 minutes to carry out with individuals. This is generally consistent with the time required to conduct rapid food security assessments.

Tool Methodology

We encourage practitioners and researchers you to conceptualize this tool as a living document. The questions below, and the information they generate, were developed in the context of Haiti's North Department, which has its own unique advantages, and challenges relating to inter alia food security, diet, healthcare, land tenure, agricultural production, employment, and environment. Still, we have tried to make the tool applicable to a variety of contexts and hope it can serve as a guide to enhance community-engaged data collection and community access to the information generated.

Tool runtime: 35 -90 minutes

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PART I: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name:

Year of Birth:

Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Others

1. In which department were you born?

2. Where do you live now?

3. Year you came to this area:

4. Conjugal Status:

☐ Married ☐ Common Law ☐ Single

☐ I have a boyfriend/girlfriend but live at home

☐ Other:

5. What level of school did you finish?

☐ I never attended school or attended minimally

☐ Finished Primary School

☐ Finished Secondary School

☐ Finished a college or University Program

6. During the past year, what was your main activity?

☐ Paid Employment

☐ Informal Commerce

☐ Going to School

☐ Caring for Children

☐ Household Work

☐ Long term illness

☐ Agriculture

☐ Other If "Other", Describe:

7. Does your activity (or work) change throughout the year/season? ☐ YES ☐ NO
   If yes, describe how:

8. How many children do you have?

9. How many children are in your care?

10. How many people are in your household that eat from the same pot?

Adults: Children:

11. How many men/women are there in your household?

Men: Women:

1. How easy or difficult is it for you to get to the closest market?

☐ Easy ☐ Somewhat challenging ☐ Difficult

2. Do you have a reliable form of transportation? ☐ YES ☐ NO

3. How do you usually get to the market?

☐ Walk ☐ Public ☐ Transport ☐ Motorcycle Bicycle ☐ Own my own vehicle

☐ Other

4. Do you have access to a latrine at your home? ☐ YES ☐ NO

5. What is your relationship to land access? (Check all that apply)

☐ I don't have access to land

☐ My family has land that I help to cultivate

☐ I own land and work it myself or with my family

☐ Own my own land and rent it to others (Lwe/Fèmaj)

☐ I own my own land and have someone on it through sharecropping (demwatye)

☐ I lend my land to others as "jwisans" (for pleasure)

☐ I own my own land but someone has it through "bay kenbe"

☐ I rent land (lwe/fèmaj) from others

☐ I cultivate land that I hold through a "bay kenbe" land relationship that is someone else's

☐ I have land that I cultivate from "Jwisans" from others

☐ I cultivate someone else's land through "Demwatye" (Sharecropping)

☐ Other: Describe:

6. If you have land, describe/estimate for each category that you have selected, the amount of land that you have (in *kawo tè*).

7. What is the land used for? (For researchers: What do you grow? Do you *fè elvaj* [pasture])?

8 Are you able to store food after harvesting (ie. do you have a depot)?

☐ YES ☐ NO

9. If you have access to land, is it irrigated? ☐ YES ☐ NO

☐ Some is ☐ and some is not

8. If you work land, what problems do you have with your production? What limits your harvest?

9. Has it ever happened that the planting time comes but you don't have the means to plant?

10. Do you do the following (Check all that apply):

- ☐ *Fè Jaden* (work in agriculture/have a garden)
- ☐ Gather Traditional Plants
- ☐ Preserve Cultural Foods
- ☐ Fish
- ☐ Cook Traditional Foods

1. What does nutritious food mean to members in your community and you?

2. How do you and people in your community learn how to make dietary choices for good health? (Researchers can ask about doctors/*medsin fèy [traditional healers]*/mothers/grandmothers/family/NGOs)?

3. Do you think people in your community receive adequate food on a daily basis? (Prompt: Do you know or think people in your community are hungry?). Explain.

4. What health issues do you most hear about in this area?

5. Do you think health problems in your community caused, or exacerbated, by a lack of healthy, nutritious foods? ☐ YES ☐ NO
If so, explain:

6. Describe how men or women suffer more different health concerns?

1.. Who controls the access to irrigation water in your community?

- ☐ The state
- ☐ Large land owners
- ☐ Peasants
- ☐ Corporations
- ☐ CASECS (*Conseil d'administration de la Section communale* (Leader of Communal Section)
- ☐ NGOs (Non-Governmental Organization) Gangs
- ☐ Other: Describe

2. Are land rights, ownership, and access to land a problem in your community?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If so, explain:

3. Are foods needed for ceremonies available in your community?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If so, explain:

4. Are foods needed for ceremonies more or less expensive than other options? (Researchers, probe with the example of imported chicken, and chicken used in ceremonies *"poul peyi, poul pepe, poul glase*).

☐ More Expensive

☐ Less Expensive

☐ Roughly the Same

5.. Do people in your community pay a fair price for healthy food? ☐ YES ☐ NO

6.. Is food provided by NGOs healthy, nutritious and suited to the people in your community?

☐ YES ☐ NO

7.. Has historic food aid programs helped your community? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If so, explain:

8. Have food programs disrupted local or traditional foods, or local control over land and resources?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If so, explain:

9. Describe examples in history that have disrupted or transformed your food systems/environment. How has the food system changed over the years? How did this impact your community?

1. Do you think environmental changes have impacted your community? How?

2.. What connections do you see between food and environmental health?

3. What are the threats to peasant agriculture in your area?

- [ ] Land Grabbing
- [ ] Climate Change
- [ ] Difficult to access land
- [ ] Access to Water and Irrigation
- [ ] Access to seeds and agricultural inputs
- [ ] Gangs
- [ ] Other. Describe:

4. Do you know of community planning preserve agricultural lands as agricultural lands. That is, instead of changing them to commercial or other development land?

☐ YES ☐ NO

5. Are the environmental impacts of agricultural production considered by decision-makers in your community? ☐ YES ☐ NO

(Researchers can probe by asking about the impacts of fertilizer/pesticide use)

6. What environmental concerns do you have that impact the local food system?

1. In general, how is your health?

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Very Good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Some persistent health challenges
- ☐ Poor

2. What is your weight: _____

3. What is your height: _____

4. Do you consider yourself overweight, underweight or just about right?

- ☐ Overweight
- ☐ Just about right
- ☐ Underweight

5. In general, how is your mental health?

- ☐ I am usually happy
- ☐ I am sometimes happy
- ☐ I am often discouraged
- ☐ I am depressed

6. Thinking about the amount of stress in your life, how would you describe most of your days?

- ☐ Not at all stressful
- ☐ Not very stressful
- ☐ A bit stressful
- ☐ Extremely stressful

7. How would you describe your sense of belonging in your community?

- [ ] Strong
- [ ] Somewhat strong
- [ ] Neutral
- [ ] Somewhat weak
- [ ] Very weak

8. How do you feel about your life as a whole right now?

- [ ] Very Satisfied
- [ ] Somewhat satisfied
- [ ] Neutral
- [ ] Somewhat dissatisfied
- [ ] Very dissatisfied

9. Describe any health problems that trouble you:

10. Do you have any of the following diet-related conditions? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Diabetes
- ☐ Heart Disease
- ☐ High blood pressure
- ☐ Obesity/Overweight
- ☐ Anemia
- ☐ Fibroids
- ☐ Fibroids Thyroid issues:
- ☐ Other (describe):

11. In the past 12 months, have you avoided going to a doctor because of cost? ☐ YES ☐ NO

12. Which of the following do you regularly consult with for your health:

- ☐ Local Healer (*Medsin Fèy)*
- ☐ Local Midwife (*Fanm Saj*)
- ☐ Male Voudou Priest (*Oungan*)
- ☐ Female Voudou Priestess (*Mambo*)
- ☐ Medical Doctor (Western Medicine)
- ☐ Voudou specialist (*Bòkò*)
- ☐ Other. Describe:

1. Describe your diet?

2. What does a typical day of eating look like for you? (Prompts: do you have coffee, a drink, a piece of fruit?

3. What does it mean to you to eat healthy?

4. Does the food that you eat address your health needs? ☐ YES ☐ NO

5. How easy is it for you to get food?

- ☐ Easy
- ☐ Somewhat easy
- ☐ Somewhat difficult
- ☐ Difficult

6. Most often, how do you get food?

- [ ] I grow it myself, or my family grows it
- [ ] I buy it or my family buys it
- [ ] Food Aid
- [ ] I or my family buy on credit
- [ ] Food Sharing

7. What are you most concerned about when you seek food:

- [ ] Cost
- [ ] Nutrition
- [ ] That it will fill me and my family
- [ ] That it is local, Haitian food

8. Are you concerned about any of the following in your food? (Check all that apply)

- [ ] Chemicals
- [ ] That it is imported
- [ ] That it is processed

9. In the past 12 months, state which were true, sometimes true or never true.

	TRUE	SOMETIMES TRUE	NEVER TRUE
You or a family member worried that food will run out before you can access more.	○	○	○
You couldn't afford, or have access to being able to eat balanced meals.	○	○	○
You and others in your house rely on low-cost foods, or poorer quality foods.	○	○	○
You couldn't eat the foods you would choose (a balanced meal) because you couldn't afford it.	○	○	○
Your children weren't eating enough because you couldn't afford it.	○	○	○
You cut your meal size or skip meals because there isn't enough food.	○	○	○
Did you ever not eat for a whole day because there is not enough food.	○	○	○

10. Do you think access to different foods impact any of your health issues or concerns?

☐ YES ☐ NO

11. Are you comfortable with the quality of the food that you eat?

☐ YES ☐ NO

1. How is food divided in your house? (For researchers, you can probe with questions like, who eats first, men or women? who gets the most meat? does gender impact food distribution?)

2. How does your gender impact your health and diet?

3. How are inheritance rights in your house divided? Who had rights to inheritance?

- ☐ Men inherit much more
- ☐ Men inherit more
- ☐ Both men and women inherit equally
- ☐ Women inherent more
- ☐ Women inherit much more

4. Are men in Haiti prioritized for land inheritance? ☐ YES ☐ NO

5. Who works more with chemical fertilizers and pesticides (men or women)?

☐ Men ☐ Women ☐ Both

6. Are there social gender preferences in terms of who is prioritize in other ways (ie. sending to school? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If so, explain:

1. Does the food that you eat align with your cultural heritage and traditional food systems?

☐ YES ☐ NO

2. Does your community want to preserve its cultural food traditions?

☐ YES ☐ NO

3. What are some of your traditional foods?

4. What agriculture food traditions are still practiced in your community?

5. What three foods would you consider to be traditional foods for your area?

6. Which of the foods that you just mentioned do you eat on a regular basis?

7. Do you eat traditional foods as much as you would like? ☐ YES ☐ NO

8. If you don't eat traditional foods as much as you like, why not? Check all that apply:

- ☐ I don't know where to get them
- ☐ I don't know how to get them
- ☐ I don't know how to prepare them
- ☐ They are too expensive
- ☐ The place I got them before has been developed/taken over
- ☐ I'm not sure they are safe to eat (ie. pollution)
- ☐ I currently eat them as much as I like
- ☐ Other

9. Is there discrimination towards local foods/local people (ie. *peyizan*) that impact what people eat?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If so, explain: (Research can probe using examples of *pitimi pa monte tab*, or preferences for bonbon sell because "bonbon siwo sanble kaka chwal".

10. Have agriculture and food traditions been lost in your community? ☐ YES ☐ NO

11. List as many traditional foods as you can think of. Which ones do you have access to? (*Researcher: List foods in the left column & check the appropriate boxes to indicate access to these foods*).

Participant Provided List of Foods	I have access to this and eat it regularly	I sometimes have access to this	I don't really have access to this
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐

12. Of the Following Foods check all the statements that apply to you

FOODS	JE MANGE CECI:			Je veux en manger davantage	J'aimerais en savoir plus	Je sais comment les préparer	C'est trop cher	Je sais comment en avoir	Je n'aime pas cet aliment
	PARFOIS	SOUVENT	JAMAIS						
CASSAVA BREAD (KASAV)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Millet (Pitimi)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Okra (Kalalou/Gombo)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SWEET POTATO BREAD (PEN PATAT)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MOLASSES BREAD (BON BON SIWO)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
JUTE LEAVES (LALOW)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MASHED BREADFRUIT (TOM TOM)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PUMPKIN SOUP (SOUP JOUMOU)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
CORNMEAL PORRIDGE (AKASAN)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
HOMINY /BEAN/PUMPKIN STEW (CHAKA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
CORN BREAD (PEN MAYI)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
STEW (BOUYON)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SWEET POTATO (PATAT)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
FRIED FOOD PLATTER. (FRIKASE)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
CHAYOTE (TCHÒK MILITON)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
HOT CHOCOLATE (CHOKOLA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
BREADFRUIT (LAM)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
YAM (YANM)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SWEET (DOUS)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PLANTAIN (BANNANN)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PEANUT BRITTLE (TABLÈT)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
OTHER THAT PARTICIPANT WOULD LIKE TO ADD	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

1. What would the community benefit most from to improve healthy food systems?

2. What are some ways that we can protect traditional Haitian foods?

3. Who is currently working to solve food problems in your community, and what are they doing? (*For Researchers you can prompt about: the state; NGOs; community organizations. Try to learn who are the big players in the local food movement*).

4. Do you have anything else you would like to share with us?

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