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**Filling in the Gap: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experiences of Agricultural Change Agents in Northern Haiti**

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**Abstract**

*In order to better understand the lived experiences of change agents in the North Department of Haiti, a hermeneutical phenomenological study was conducted. Change agents must work against a variety of barriers in order to help influence change within their spheres of influence in rural Haiti. The change agent experience in this study is collaborative, mutually benefitting, deeply cultural, and built out of necessity. Change agents in this study have found that by working together, they are able to fill in the gaps left by unequal distributions of resources within their communities such as tools, money, advisory services, or even basic agricultural knowledge. Despite holes within the agricultural support services in their areas, the change agents have mobilized community members to work together to move their communities forward. Understanding the lived experiences of change agents will help inform ongoing and future agricultural development efforts in the North Department of Haiti.*

*Keywords:* community-based organizations, perspectives, capacity-building, sustainable development

### **Introduction/Review of Literature**

Change agents immerse themselves within the social system they aim to influence by bridging gaps between the proposed change and the individuals they hope will adopt the innovation. A change agent “is an individual who influences client’s innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency” (Rogers, 2003, p. 27). Haiti is a target for foreign change agents who wish to impact the country and essentially lift its people out of poverty (Smith, 2001). The effect of these foreign change agents has not been without controversy (Katz, 2013). Corruption, misuses of donor money, and inappropriate actions within local communities are some of the controversies surrounding international NGOs (Spencer, 2012; Themudo, 2014). Despite the overwhelming influx of aid within the poverty-stricken country, little change has been seen in the economic status of its population (Katz, 2013). As an alternative to foreign assistance, Smith (2001) argued that effective change agents already reside in the rural areas of Haiti. Similarly, Trouillot (1990) claimed “any solution to the Haitian crisis must find its roots in the resources of the peasantry” (p. 229).

Over 80% of the country’s poorest individuals reside in rural Haiti and many of the Haitians in these regions are involved in agriculture (Philius, 2013). The North Department of Haiti provides a snapshot of the agricultural divide within the country of Haiti. Located in the northernmost region of the country, the North Department is separated by six to eight hours of travel by land to the capital. The majority of government and aid agencies have their headquarters in and around the capital (Dubois, 2012), rather than in the rural Departments.

The lack of resources and physical distance from larger agencies creates a

unique situation for change agents located in the North of Haiti. Change agents within the North are closely associated with grassroots organizations (Smith, 2001), which are created by community members for their particular community (Uphoff, 1993). Grassroots organizations are typically smaller in scope of mission and more targeted in population served as compared to larger international nonprofit organizations. The presence of grassroots organizations in Haiti has grown significantly since the 2010 earthquake (Edmonds, 2012) as a result of a need to fill in the gaps left by governmental agencies. The leaders of grassroots organizations are motivated to be self-sufficient and desire to bring much needed resources to their communities (Edmonds, 2012).

Change agents in rural communities engage in formal, informal, or voluntary roles (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). In some communities, change agents can be seen as community organizers pushing for social reform (Pearce, 1993). Change agents within grassroots organizations can act as links to support in areas with little access to outside resources (Mazzeo & Chierici, 2013). Additionally, change agents can act as links between local communities and larger change agencies (Rogers, 2003). The varying roles change agents play within rural communities are cohesively linked together by the desire to elicit change, but change agents can run into difficulties when faced with cultural barriers inhibiting acceptance within local communities (DeYoung, 1995). Change agents can also be impacted by limited resources to make lasting impacts in rural communities (Mazzeo & Chierici, 2013). A hermeneutical phenomenological study was conducted in order to better understand the lived experiences (van Manen, 1997) of Haitian change agents in the North Department. Exploring the lived experiences of Haitian

change agents will help inform ongoing and future agricultural development efforts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Phenomenology's aim is to describe a phenomenon (Kafle, 2011). Phenomenology focuses on the way meaning is constructed through experience. Therefore, phenomenology is concerned with how individuals interpret their lives and "what it means to them" (Landridge, 2007, p. 4). Heidegger (1996) argued consciousness was not able to be separated from other facets of life. Since individuals cannot separate their interpretations from their history and experiences, Heidegger (1996) moved to combine the thought-processes of hermeneutics with phenomenology. Hermeneutics is a process that takes human experiences and views the experiences through language as text (Lavery, 2003). The experiences are texts which can be examined to derive deeper meaning. Hermeneutic phenomenology is then a practice in which the researcher's and subject's interpretation is combined to generate meaning.

The foundation of phenomenological studies is grounded in the exploration of lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). Lived experiences are unique in nature and must be defined. As van Manen (1997) noted, "lived experience first of all has a temporal structure: it can never be grasped in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past presence" (p. 36). Lived experiences are therefore the materialization of past experiences as an individual has lived through them, whether aware or unaware of their significance.

Studies of lived experiences have been used to gain deeper understanding of individuals. Studies of the practices of indigenous educators and the exploration of the perceptions of entrepreneurship among farmers use hermeneutic phenomenology to

gain meaning from these experiences (Hennon, 2012; McInnes, 2013). Analyzing lived experiences allows unearthing the nuances of a person's experience and deriving meaning from these moments in time. Studies on the lived experiences of others using hermeneutical phenomenology can also be used to influence practices which may help those in similar situations. In a study by Joshi, Chelliah, and Ramanathan (2015), researchers explored the lived experience of a grassroots innovator in India. The findings of this study could "serve as an aid for future research" (Joshi, Chelliah, & Ramanathan, 2015, p. 27). The lives of change agents have been documented using various methodologies (van Manen, 1997), but the use of hermeneutic phenomenology is little to be seen.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of change agents in the North Department of Haiti. The following research objectives guided the study: (a) identify the self-perceived experiences of change agents, and (b) describe the manner in which the experiences of change agents were influenced by governmental assistance.

### **Methods**

This descriptive study was qualitative in nature since hermeneutic phenomenology places importance on analyzing lived experiences as text, spoken by individuals (Merriam, 2009). Hermeneutic phenomenology "avoids methods for method's sake and does not have a step by step method" (Kafle, 2011, p. 191) for data collection or analysis. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology, therefore, is to produce "rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals that are able to

connect with the experience of all of us collectively” (Smith, 1997, p. 80). The methods were drawn from the objectives of the study in order to keep the phenomenological essence. Within this framework, the lead researcher played a key role in producing the meaning from the lived experiences.

### Participants

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to recruit 16 participants who actively worked within grassroots change agencies in the North Department of Haiti. Each individual in this study was identified as a change agent by self-identification or peer identification. The individuals in this study worked directly with small-scale farmers in the North Department in various capacities. Twelve of the participants worked with konbits, cooperative agricultural organizations based in their relative communities. Three of the participants were local agronomists working within their home communities, with no formal affiliation with the government. One participant was the regional leader of a large-scale agricultural grassroots organization with offices throughout the country. Participants who were involved in konbits held informal positions within the konbits. The agronomists were voluntary service providers within their communities. The participant who was involved in the large-scale grassroots organization was a paid change agent.

Change agent responsibilities for the participants in this study varied. Those who worked with konbits focused on organizing group members to assist specific farms on certain days of the week. They were also responsible for recruiting members, resolving conflicts within their konbits, and offering advice and assistance to their group members. Agronomists in this study were

informal sources of advice within their communities and offered their services to neighboring farmers. One participant organized trainings for farmers within his area several times a year. The leader of the larger grassroots organization was in charge of overseeing the training of extension service providers in his organization, providing oversight to agricultural programs in the region, and creating partnerships with other in-country organizations.

The participants in this study represented four different *arrondissements*, or districts, within the North Department. In total, there are seven *arrondissements* in the North. The zones represented in this study were Acul-du-Nord, Cap-Haïtien, Grand-Riviere du Nord, and Limbé. These specific zones were selected based off of the accessibility to change agent populations and the willingness of change agents to be a part of this study. The majority of this study’s participants were male with only one female in the population. The ages of the individuals ranged from 29-85 years of age, with 8 individuals over the age of 50.

### Sampling Methods

For this study, it was imperative to find change agents within the North Department. In order to achieve this purposive sample, a native-born Haitian research assistant was employed to gain access to the population of interest. The research assistant used a key informant in the specified regions to identify potential participants who fit the criteria of a change agent. The process of identifying a key informant varied by region. For two regions (Cap-Haïtien, Grand-Riviere-du-Nord), the key informants were previous classmates of the research assistant. The classmates were asked to identify agricultural change agents within their communities. In one region (Limbé), the key informant was identified by asking the farmers in the area who is

actively involved in grassroots organizations. The individual was then asked to help introduce the researchers to change agents within these organizations. In the final region (Acul-du-Nord), the change agent was identified by an acquaintance of the lead researcher.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection occurred June - July 2016. The research process involved individual interviews, hermeneutical interviews with the participants, and reflective journaling by the lead researcher. The research process in hermeneutical phenomenology is a longitudinal process which begins prior to the participant interviews (McInnes, 2013). Pre-reflection is helpful in identifying the biases and historical experiences of the researcher prior to interacting with the participants in the study (Kafle, 2011).

**Interviews.** Interviews consisted of open-ended questions which aimed to explore the ways in which change agents work with small-scale farmers, describe their experiences with small-scale farmers, and explore change agents' view of resources available for the communities they assisted. The aim of the conversations was "not to understand individual people, but to understand that about which they speak" (Wilke, 2002, para. 19).

The individual interviews were conducted by both the research assistant and the lead researcher in Haitian-Creole. Although the lead researcher has worked extensively in Haiti, the lead researcher is not a native Haitian, which presented difficulties in reaching the desired populations. By interviewing the participants together, the lead researcher was able to gain legitimacy within the change agent population. The initial questions were asked by the research assistant and clarifying questions which emerged from the

conversation were posed by the lead researcher. During the interviews, the lead researcher took field notes.

### **Hermeneutic interview reflection.**

Once the interviews concluded, the lead researcher summarized the contents of the conversation with the participant. This allowed the lead researcher to ask "is this what the experience is really like?" (van Manen, 1997, p. 99). The conversation allowed the lead researcher to ensure a level of confidence with the emerging themes in the interview. The contents of these conversations were also audio-recorded with participants' permission to ensure that text was available to analyze, which is consistent with hermeneutic orientations (van Manen, 1997).

**Reflective journal.** The lead researcher kept a reflective journal throughout the data collection process to document emerging interpretations, perspectives, and biases during the data collection process. The reflective journal was handwritten within the field notes of the study. There is no fixed amount of reflections recommended by hermeneutical phenomenology practitioners, therefore, the lead researcher used a total of three journal entries throughout the data collection process.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

While there is no delineated step-by-step process to follow when analyzing data collected using hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen (1997) identified six research activities which can be used as guidelines when conducting this type of research. The guidelines are as follows: (a) turn to the phenomenon of interest within the study, (b) investigate the phenomenon as it is lived not as it is understood, (c) reflect on the emerging themes which help to describe the phenomenon, (d) describe the phenomenon

through writing and rewriting, (e) remain connected to the phenomenon as a pedagogical source, and (f) balance the research context by analyzing individual experiences and relating them back to the entire picture.

**Preparation for analysis.** The interviews were transcribed into Haitian-Creole by a native-born educator in Haiti. The interviews were kept in their original language to uphold the integrity of the lived experiences. The lead researcher, who speaks Haitian-Creole, analyzed the data in their original language. Translation of the quotes into English was completed by the lead researcher. Interpretations from the texts as well as translations were then confirmed with the individual who transcribed the data to confirm accuracy of the interpretations. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**Thematic analysis.** Data is recommended to be analyzed using thematic analysis (van Manen, 1997). van Manen (1997) suggested identifying themes by using a sentence approach, selective approach, or line-by-line approach. For the purposes of this study selective highlighting of key elements which related to the focal phenomenon were pulled and categorized. Themes which emerged from the data were categorized by commonalities and then overarching themes and sub-themes were selected (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) addressed the need for imaginative variation within phenomenological studies. Imaginative variation “has to do with trying to see the object of the study - the phenomenon- from several different angles or perspectives” (Merriam, 2009, p. 158). Similarly, the hermeneutic circle as proposed by Gadamer (1997) allows for a continual movement from interpreting, reflective writing, and reading of the text. The lead researcher was also able to implement imaginative variation

during the interpreting phase of hermeneutical analysis by following the guidelines of the hermeneutic circle. The process of data analysis, therefore, took on the following process: (a) read the text, (b), highlight selected text which relate back to the phenomenon, (c) reflectively write about the text, and (d) interpret the lived experiences using imaginative variation. This process was repeated continuously throughout data analysis.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) addressed trustworthiness when conducting qualitative research. Credibility and dependability were established through triangulation of the data and peer debriefing with the research assistant as well as the other researchers. Transferability was established through thick description and confirmability was established through an audit trail. Additionally, van Manen (1997) suggested using orientation, strength, richness, and depth as quality markers for conducting hermeneutic phenomenology. When referring to orientation, the researcher should be involved in the participant’s world and stories. Strength refers to the ability of the text to represent the intended meanings of the participants. Richness refers to the text which describes the meaning of the participants and depth refers to how the interpretation accurately matches the intention of the participant. The four criteria outlined by van Manen (1997) were achieved through reflective practices, hermeneutic interviews with the participants at the conclusion of the interview, and the use of the hermeneutic circle during data analysis.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

The lead researcher has extensive experience in Haiti through involvement in an NGO which works to provide educational

and vocational experiences to both youth and adults in the Cap-Haitien area in the North Department of Haiti. Through these experiences, the lead researcher perceived unequal distributions of aid between different socio-economic classes, many caused by governmental policies or disorganized NGO work. Dialogue with the research team throughout the analysis and interpretation process was used as a tool for limiting the influence of personal bias.

### **Findings/Results**

Data collected from the interviews, hermeneutic interviews, and lead researcher reflective journal were analyzed using thematic analysis. From the data sources, 24 initial themes emerged and were summarized to create four essential themes. The themes will be further explained through anecdotes and significant statements in the following sections.

#### **Necessity Breeds Collective Action**

Throughout the interviews, change agents in the study made mention to the path which led them to their current positions within their organizations. A common theme throughout these narratives was how change agents perceived a need and desired to fill the need through a collaborative manner. Ermano described his path to becoming a change agent as a logical next step. He stated, "I finished school recently and we found that we were not doing anything even though there were a lot of needs within our community, we decided to form a group, a small collaboration." Ermano continued to describe how this organization was created to bring other men together to *mete tet ansanm*, a popular Haitian-Creole saying meaning to work together.

Other change agents were motivated to engage in their current positions since no one else was going to step in and help them and they recognized the need for help. Isaac

mentioned, "when you're alone you cannot do anything, but when you work together everything goes well." Similarly, David stated, "You do not have the government that is your parent, you need to find help." The necessity he saw drove him to create his konbit.

Emiles, the leader of a larger grassroots organization, was led into his position from the needs he saw within his community. The injustices moved him to help found the organization he helped lead. Emiles shared the following anecdote:

Well ever since my youth, I've been in the community. I was a poor child, needy poor, a peasant. When we observed an injustice occurring during the time of Duvalier in 1984, we saw a lack of solidarity. They considered peasants like animals. We gathered together and created a movement, we did not realize the dimension of how it would grow.

The perceived needs of the peasant class within Emiles' community caused him to act. It is important to note that the logical steps for the change agents were to work together to address the needs they perceived. In a final reflection, the lead researcher noted, "their instincts led these individuals to work together rather than try to accomplish anything individually."

#### **Collaborative and Mutually Beneficial Environments**

Change agents within this study identified various experiences which described collaborative and mutually beneficial environments. Participants continually made reference to a well-known proverb, "*men anpil chay pa lou*" or many hands make light work. As change agents within grassroots organizations, the participants were well acquainted with the

difficulties of poverty. The participants all had their own lands to tend to and through their involvement as change agents, the participants were able to share in the benefits of working in konbits.

The konbit system which a majority of the participants were involved with was described as a process where “everyone in the group gathers to help one farmer on the farmer’s land” (Marc) each designated day. The change agents were responsible for recruiting members to the konbits and orchestrating the organization for tending to each other’s lands. Change agents were able to themselves benefit from the group’s work. When commenting on the mutually beneficial nature of his work, Marc stated “what we do is something that makes a round trip, you come help me, we help someone else.” Another change agent, Jean, commented, “well, [konbits] allows you to work faster and work more. You, yourself with your parcel of land cannot do a lot of work, but when you have a konbit, you work more.”

In addition, change agents commented on the emotional benefits of working with small scale farmers in the grassroots environments. Working together afforded the change agents an opportunity to benefit from help and also to enjoy the company of like-minded individuals from their communities. These experiences were accented with music, jokes, and singing. Participants noted that gathering together to eat added to their experiences. The resulting feeling was one of “happiness” (Jean). Jenny, the only female in the study, said it was a “beautiful thing” when her konbit worked together. Participants spoke about the light-hearted environment when they worked together in the fields with the other farmers. Wilner stated:

We will talk, we will eat together,  
we will tell jokes, we sing. It’s good

because we know we are making money, for everyone in the group. .... Everyone takes part. We feel more relaxed because we know we are working faster when we work together.

Change agents within the study also took on the role of creating these collaborative environments even in the midst of problems. Change agents mentioned moments of discord between members in their organizations. These moments of discord were addressed through dialogue and parties were allowed to share their grievances. Jean mentioned how it was “important to appreciate every person” in their konbit. One participant, Ronald, recollected an instance between two members of his organization and stated the following:

Well, for example, there was this one time, one person was upset about the lack of members present for the day when they were going to help him on his farm. He was angry at everyone and it made it difficult to work. I had to stop everyone and bring them together to talk about it. When we finished talking about it everyone was calm and went back to work. That’s how I solve the problems in our group – talking.

The hope for the future of Haiti through collaborative processes reflects the cultural ideals even found on the Haitian flag, which states unity creates strength. The experiences of change agents within grassroots organizations allowed for a glimpse into what could be possible for the country as a whole. As Michel stated, “if Haitians become conscious and we return to the affairs of working in konbits, that could

help organize the country in order to advance.”

### **Lack of Appropriate Support**

The difficulties faced by change agents ranged from lack of resources, no educational support, lack of infrastructure for agricultural services, inadequate tools to deal with weather, and unequal distributions of services within their communities. The overarching theme pulled from these experiences is the lack of support for change agents. The common thread throughout the interviews was an absence of governmental services. Change agents in this study used phrases such as “they do not care for us here” (Samson), “they do not see us” (Emiles), and “you try to find someone to come, but you cannot find them” (Pierre).

Change agents in this study were also aware of the resources they were lacking in order to complete their tasks within their organizations. Some participants were aware of help happening within their community, but felt slighted by the way they were treated. Participants felt ignored by larger organizations and even the government. Many participants desired to have support through agricultural knowledge as they were farming. Yvenel mentioned the following instance when describing how he felt towards government workers:

There is this man who is responsible for giving advice. When he walks everywhere in every area, he gives great advice. I know this. One day I encountered him at my church and he didn't look at me at all. I said to myself, why don't you look at me? (Yvenel).

Yvenel described how the government does the same to the *peyizan*, the peasant. According to Ronald, “the government does

not have any effect on me, it is primarily God that we have.”

Other organizations, which include large international NGOs, are among those offering help in the region. These NGOs have not yet reached many change agents in this study. Luckson mentioned, “I am always looking for NGOs to come help, but I do not find them.” Another change agent, Jacques, explained:

There are some NGOs that I know of that work in the area. I do not see what good they do, instead all I see is negative effects for the country. They make the peasants neglect their work and give peasants money, they [the peasants] begin to think that if they do not work, they will always touch money. These organizations have a negative effect.

From this statement it is apparent that even if some organizations are providing financial resources, it is not what the change agents perceive as helpful to their roles in their organizations.

### **Family History**

Past familial experiences losing loved ones, influences to pursue agriculture, educational pursuits, and poverty. These experiences had an impact on the role change agents played in their communities, were shared by all participants, and were included in narratives outlining paths to current roles as change agents.

The hardships faced by many change agents while growing up led them to choose agricultural paths. For example, Pierre stated expressed his desire to attend school but lack of funds kept him from pursuing his education. He instead went to work on his grandfather's land:

When I came to [location], I started to work on the small piece of land because I was my mother's firstborn. We went through a lot of hardship and could not attend school. I continued to work the land even until this day I still desire to go to school (Pierre).

Lack of resources to attend school was a past struggle for many change agents within the study. Ronald similarly stated, "when I couldn't continue school, I entered into agriculture." Yvenel reflected a positive outlook on his life in spite of the absence of thorough schooling:

My parents did not teach me how to write well, but they did teach me something. They taught me how to watch, they taught me how to farm, how to be a farmer. The money I have now is because of what they taught me. That is what I have seen.

Not all change agents in this study lacked education. Some change agents attributed the opportunities they had to attend school as assisting them in their current roles. Jonny was able to attribute his education to allowing him to view small-scale farmer practices in a new light. Jonny noted, "I now see how the traditional behaviors of farmers in the community need to change."

Education was not the only past experience which impacted the current roles of change agents within this study. In addition to educational levels, family involvement in agriculture was a constant presence throughout the interviews. Many participants grew up working the land with their parents. The influence of agriculture in their youth had lasting effects on their current role as a change agent in their community. When referring to his current

educational pursuits, Michel stated, "I learned I loved agriculture from working with my parents on our land everyday." His current pursuit to become an agronomist can be traced back to his family's influence. Similarly, Ermano noted how his father's involvement in a konbit system led him to start his own:

My integration into this system came while I grew up and saw our parents in the same activity. It is now also my own necessity. Agriculture is an activity that I love very much. I remember since I was a child working with my father and this is why I love agriculture.

Similarly, Samson noted that his current role in agriculture came from his parents' influence but is now a journey of necessity. Samson said, "I followed my parents, but now I am obligated to continue." The role of parental influence in current change agency positions of the participants, as displayed in these examples, reveals that although some participants chose their role as a desire, others came into their role out of necessity.

### **Conclusion, Recommendations, and Implications**

The change agent experience in this study is collaborative, mutually benefitting, deeply cultural, and built out of necessity. The difficulties experienced by the change agents served to create a foundation for collaborative action to impact the lives of those in their communities. The lived experiences of the individuals in this study reveal strength and resilience in the face of difficult situations. Despite their lack of resources or support, the change agents in this study work together to improve livelihoods. Change agents in this study have found that by working together, they

are able to fill in the gaps left by unequal distributions of resources within their communities such as tools, money, advisory services, or even basic agricultural knowledge. Despite holes within the agricultural support services in their areas, the change agents have mobilized community members to work together to move their communities forward.

The findings from this study affirm various research studies surrounding the function of grassroots organization within rural communities. Uphoff (1993) found that grassroots organizations filled in governmental service gaps. Although the government did provide some resources to address the needs of agricultural workers in Haiti, these services were not reaching all members of this population. Change agents within this study collaborated with other small-scale farmers in order to provide services for each other and meet their needs as a collective, community-based group. The actions of the change agents in this study affirm the conclusions of Smith (2001) where community-based groups in Haiti formed on the basis on collaboration and mutual help while providing a needed service within the community. Although the grassroots organizations were meeting needs within their communities, change agents still experienced lack of resources to adequately provide needed assistance. The lack of resources experienced by the change agents in this study affirms the findings of Mazzeo and Chierici (2013), where grassroots organizations in Haiti experienced lack of money and access to tools as a barrier.

The perception of change agents as being ignored or forgotten by NGOs and governmental agencies found in this study is notable. Although change agents had knowledge of organizations offering support to farmers in communities in the North Department, they felt as though these organizations did not want to interact with

their communities. Change agent perceptions of being less worthy of extension services creates a potential barrier for change agent work. If change agents in community-based organizations continually feel as though they are not integrated within the larger NGO community, their motivation may begin to wane (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). Additionally, feelings of mistrust towards governmental organizations and NGOs may continue to grow. Feelings of mistrust towards NGOs and governmental agencies are already high within rural Haitian communities (Schuller, 2007). Growing mistrust will only increase the divide between community organizations and large-scale organization.

The study also confirmed previously stated assertions of NGOs as organizations that cause negative effects within communities (Spencer, 2012; Themudo, 2014). Participants in this study felt as though NGOs added more difficulties to their positions as change agents due to the reinforcement of learned helplessness through handouts. Handouts were seen as a deterrent from work within the communities in this study. In opposition to these negative effects, change agents in this study focused on mobilizing local members to work for themselves instead of becoming reliant on outside assistance. In a sense, the negative presence of NGOs acted as catalyst toward community organization (Smith, 2001).

This study also exemplifies how change agents who share similar attributes to the communities they work in can have positive impacts within their communities. The similarity among change agents and their constituents is an example of change agents as localites within their communities (Rogers, 2003). All of the participants in this study had been in their working communities for an extended period of time. Their connections within the community allowed them to create collaborative groups

which benefitted multiple members in their communities.

The needs of change agents within the North Department of Haiti should be taken into account when planning for the allocation of services and resources. Change agents in any community are better equipped to meet the needs of community members when given appropriate resources (Rogers, 2003). The negative perception of NGO impacts within the region is also an important aspect to address. Trust needs to be established in order for future partnerships to emerge between agencies and change agents in community-based organizations. Partnering with change agents within the North Department of Haiti would provide motivated individuals with the knowledge and resources to impact more lives and, ultimately, improve the livelihoods of rural Haitians.

The use of hermeneutic phenomenology was helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of change agents in the North Department. Further use of hermeneutic phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of small-scale farmers in the North Department may add to the research presented in this study. Additionally, further research can be done with small-scale farmers in different departments throughout Haiti in order to address similarities and differences among the regions within Haiti. Replication of this study can also provide for greater understanding of the attitudes, perspectives, and experiences of small-scale farmers in the North Department of Haiti.

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