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FITL Internship Report

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Research on the Efficacy of Payment for Ecosystem Services in Haiti

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In the Zanmi Lasante Hospital Complex, there is a balcony at the edge of the limestone cliffs that overlooks a valley in Haiti's central plateau. That balcony was the setting of many conversations, many writing sessions, and many interviews. There I awoke each morning in my hammock to watch the sunrise and prepare for my days researching the possibilities for a project that may reforest the area's denuded hills while compensating farmers in the process. It was there I wrote about the difficulties I see that are inherent in development, and reflected upon how my experiences in the field over the past few years are leading my exploration of my future career working at the intersection of humanity and the environment.

This past summer I received a grant from the Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning to work with Dr. Deborah McGrath in developing a project model for a payment for ecosystem services project. I spent two and a half weeks in Haiti continuing prior projects and conducting interviews about the efficacy of our project idea with our partner organization in Haiti, Zanmi Agrikol (Partners in

Agriculture). Previously, in preparation for the current project, we worked on developing maps for both Zanmi Agrikol and Zanmi Lasante of their school and agricultural programs. I continued this project, almost completing it, while also conducting preliminary research for the payment for ecosystem services project.

Payment for ecosystem services is a method by which some people are addressing economic externalities related to the environment. Whether these externalities are good or bad, they are not reflected monetarily in the price system. Payment for ecosystem services attempts to address this by giving payment to landowners for the ecosystem services their land provides, such as carbon sequestration, watershed protection, and nutrient cycling. In Haiti, we are trying to combat the denuded hillsides and massive deforestation by introducing a program for farmers to plant trees and make money both from the forest products and from the carbon being sequestered by the trees. Firms in the developed world can purchase carbon credits to offset their own greenhouse gas emissions.

During my time in Haiti this past summer, I wrote the beginning of a grant proposal for a fellow Sewanee student to continue my work and research after I went back to school in the fall. I traveled around the central plateau on a dirt bike with a Haitian man who was the school supervisor for Zanmi Lasante. We mapped the different schools, and Zanmi Lasante will use my maps to communicate with donors about the work their contributions have enabled. Finally, I began interviewing the different agronomists of Zanmi Agrikol about the possibility of our payment for ecosystem services project. This research has enabled my colleague

and Sewanee Environmental Institute Post-Baccalaureate Fellow Keri Bryan to continue work on the project from the states, before she was able to return to Haiti to further my preliminary research.

A difficulty I experienced in Haiti was that my time was often co-opted by the director of our partner organization to utilize my photography and video skills to document the inauguration of a vocational school and a water pump supplying clean water to the entire city of Cange. I spent a lot of time recording various ceremonies and celebrations rather than conducting research or mapping more of the schools. This is a difficulty I have often experienced in the developing world—there is so much to be done that it is easy to lose sight of one particular goal and try to do many things to the detriment of all of them.

Overall, however, I believe the internship was successful in that enable further research from the states, made great progress on the mapping project, and furthered Sewanee's relationship with Zanmi Lasante and Zanmi Agrikol. My research demonstrated the difficulty of a payment for ecosystem services project in Haiti, due to various environmental and political constraints, and Keri has been able to take those concerns and think about them before returning to Haiti, giving her a further set of questions in terms of internet and field research. Hopefully, the project will be able to continue in the future, because I believe it holds great promise for both mitigating environmental degradation in Haiti, but also providing an additional economic engine for poor farmers in the central plateau.

I learned much about the politics of working in development agencies, and the power structures existing therein. In addition, I was able to further reflect on my

own future, recognizing that I do not want to be leading projects in the developing world, or working for organizations that impose Western philosophies and priorities on communities in the developing world. I would much rather be a facilitator of open community conversations, building the local knowledge base through civic discourse, so that communities can develop their own solutions to seemingly intractable problems. This internship helped reinforce my developing belief that the way forward does not solely exist in the academy or in expert knowledge, but will be developed through the use of local knowledge and practice in conjunction with expertise. Facilitating the dialogue between the two, and collaborating to develop educational structures incorporating this sort of discourse is where I want to direct my future energy and passion. I am thankful for the FITL money to continue exploring these possibilities for my future.