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Haiti, Factor 16: Education

Haiti: Funding the Future Through Improved Education

Haiti is located in the Caribbean on an island shared with the Dominican Republic. The population as of the end of 2013 was 10,317,461; 55% of people live in urban areas. An average household is made up of four people. Land is nearly evenly distributed, with each landholder owning about three acres. Most households own their own land. Many of these properties are “privately held, though there is a category of land known as State Land that, if agriculturally productive, is rented under a long-term lease to individuals or families and is for all practical purposes private” (Schwartz).

Haiti relies heavily on imports from the United States, as well as other countries, and have since the 1960s. These imports are their main sources of food, especially rice, flour, and beans. They also receive goods such as clothes, bicycles, mattresses, and motor vehicles from the US and cement from Cuba and South America. In the 1800s, they exported a lot of goods, especially wood, sugarcane, cotton, and coffee. However, “by the 1960s, even the production of coffee, long the major export, had been all but strangled through excessive taxation, lack of investment in new trees, and bad roads” (Schwartz). Today, Haitians still export, coffee yielding to mangoes as the largest export; along with mangoes, they export cocoa and oils that are needed in cosmetics (Schwartz).

In urban areas, rice and beans are the most commonly eaten dish. Rural staples include “sweet potatoes, manioc, yams, corn, rice, pigeon peas, cowpeas, bread, and coffee” (everyculture). Most eat two meals a day: a small breakfast of coffee and bread, juice, or an egg and a large afternoon meal dominated by a carbohydrate source such as manioc, sweet potatoes, or rice. The afternoon meal always includes beans or a bean sauce, and there is usually a small amount of poultry, fish, goat, or, less commonly, beef or mutton, typically prepared as a sauce with a tomato paste base. (Schwartz)

Fruits are only eaten as a snack in between meals. Family meals are not common except in the elite class; people usually eat individual meals when they are hungry. It is common to eat a light snack before bed (Schwartz). However, this diet does not provide all necessary nutrients, and “half of children under 5 are malnourished” (“Haiti Statistics”).

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, with "gross national income per capita [at] US\$660...78% of Haitians are poor ([approximately US\$2.11] a day), and more than half (54%) live in extreme poverty (less than US\$1 a day). In rural areas, poverty and extreme poverty rates are estimated to be 84% and 69% respectively” (“Haiti Statistics”). Of the poorest Haitians, 80% “live in the countryside, where access to water, sanitation and health services is limited” (Schaeffer). Forty percent of all Haitians are in need of better access to public clinics (Schaeffer). Approximately 150,000 people are living with HIV, 130,000 of those ages fifteen and older (UNAIDS).

The largest issue facing Haiti today is the expansive poverty gap. The income inequality in Haiti is still the largest of the Americas, making it one of the most incommensurate countries in the world. "The richest 20% of households earn 64% of the country's total income, while the poorest 20% makes do with just 1%" ("News"). An average family of six makes less than \$500 a year. Because of this, many are lacking in basic necessities, especially when "looking at access to services. Only 16% of people in rural areas have access to improved sanitation, compared to 48% in the cities" ("News"). Port-au-Prince, the nation's capital, is the largest city, about five times larger than the next biggest city. The financial and size gaps between Port-au-Prince and the rest of Haiti continue to increase ("News"). Social statuses are marked by amount of French known, Western style, and straightening of hair. The wealthiest tend to have fairer skin (Schwartz).

Haiti published a poverty diagnosis on December 11, 2014, the first in over ten years. It has been over five years since the devastating earthquake, and poverty has dropped, especially in the Port-a-Prince region. However, if there is a decrease in international aid and an increase of political instability, the achievements Haiti has earned could be reversed. "Between 2000 and 2012, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty —with one dollar or less a day— dropped from 31% to 24% at the national level, and from 20% to 5% in Port-au-Prince. More than 200,000 people have climbed out of poverty" ("News").

Still, there is vulnerability that has potential to undo this progress. Nearly 2.5 million Haitians struggle in basic nutrition, and one million find themselves close to poverty. Most of the poverty decrease is due to "international aid (following the earthquake), remittances and an increase in well-paid jobs in construction, transportation and telecoms, sectors that also received a significant amount of investment from the international community as part of the reconstruction process" ("News"). As years pass since the earthquake, foreign aid decreases. If this trend continues and growth does not resume, everything could return to the way it was five years ago. Although Haiti has made recent increase in its focal social security network, its coverage still remains minor. "Barely 8% of all Haitians received non-contributory social assistance benefits in 2012, while even [fewer] salaried workers have access to social security" ("News").

Over 80% of people in poverty live in rural areas. These rural farmers are not subsistence farmers and sell most of their harvest in open-air markets to buy other food. While families in the north and southwest regions endure laborious attempts to grow food, they still struggle with earning enough. Only 30% of land in Haiti is fit for agriculture, yet over 40% is used, causing severe erosion (Schwartz). These family farmers face many inhibitions, including but not limited to a constrained market; severe meteorological events; and limited pesticides, fertilizers, and seeds. "The situation is difficult for us farmers because we cannot purchase seeds," says Marie Helene Jean Louis, the owner of a small banana farm. "Sometimes we want to grow certain plants but do not have the money to buy seeds" ("News"). In fact, most malnutrition is not a result of faulty knowledge of nutrition, but of impoverished conditions (Schwartz).

Many families seek migration as an escape from poverty. During the years 2000-2012, 20% of people relocated within Haiti's borders. It seems to be effective, as "migrants working in Port-au-Prince on average earn between [20-30%] more than if they had stayed in their town or city of origin" ("News").

However, there is still an issue of unemployment, which affects “40% of the urban workforce and nearly 50% of the female workforce” (Schaeffer). “[Sixty percent] of youth are unemployed and only 60% of people of working age are active” (Schaeffer). Some even emigrate out of Haiti in search of work. More than one million Haitians live in a different country, most often the United States, though in Canada and France as well (Schwartz). This trend is increasing, and “the share of households receiving private transfers in Haiti rose from 42 to 69 percent between 2001 and 2012. Worker transfers from abroad have represented more than a fifth of Haiti’s GDP in recent years, mainly coming from the Dominican Republic and the United States” (Schaeffer). Nearly 80% who emigrate are from the “educated middle and upper classes, but very large numbers of lower-class Haitians temporarily migrate to the Dominican Republic and Nassau Bahamas to work at low-income jobs in the informal economy” (Schwartz).

Even as Haiti progresses towards closing the poverty gap, there are still actions recommended by the poverty report released by Haiti in December of 2014: “creation of jobs, increased access to health and education, and protecting the poor and most vulnerable from unexpected economic events” (“News”). The most important of these is increased education, as it ties into many of the issues still found in Haiti today. In Latin America, Haiti contains the most adults without formal education. This greatly affects health, as “34% of children whose mothers have no education are stunted, compared to 12% of children whose mothers have secondary or higher education” (Schaeffer). According to the UNDP, though education has improved over the years, it is still not sufficient enough to improve the other factors keeping Haiti in poverty. Those of age 25 or older “received on average only 4.9 years of education and only 29 percent attended secondary school” (“Education”). Because of this, an entire generation is lacking in the necessary knowledge to improve the country (“Education”).

Public education is especially insufficient, as “more than 80 percent of primary schools are privately managed by nongovernmental organizations, churches, communities, and for-profit operators, with minimal government oversight” (“Education”). Private school expenses are often much too high for most families (“Education”). The actual expenses are mostly the tuition itself, which can range anywhere from “USD 50 in rural areas to USD 250 in cities” (McNulty). However, since most families have more than one child, this can take up to 50% of their salary. That percentage comes not just from their disposable income, either, but from their net annual income, which averages around 400 dollars (McNulty).

Schools in Haiti receive little support from the government, another reason as to why there are so few public schools and tuition fees are so high. The Government of Haiti spent “roughly USD 100 million per year on schools prior to the earthquake, not quite 2 percent of GDP” (McNulty). Because of lack of funding, and because they are privately owned, nearly all schools pay their expenses, including electricity, water, and sewage, with money from the owners’ (most often NGOs) own pockets. There are also no governmental school standards for private schools, and

to be a private school in Haiti, you need little more than to create a name (e.g., École Superior d’Haiti or maybe Einstein College) and a bucket of paint to draw Disney characters on the street-facing wall of your building. There are no certifications required of the instructors, no permits for the buildings, and there is no standard curriculum. (McNulty)

Private schools also do not have to report to a central governing body of any kind (McNulty).

Perhaps the greatest concern with Haiti's education system, however, is not found in the schools themselves, but in the instruction behind them. Teachers are often unqualified, and "almost 80 percent of [them] have not received any pre-service training" ("Education"). To specify, most private school teachers barely receive nine years of education. About one-third of all teachers have even less than that, and there are even some that are fundamentally illiterate (McNulty). Those who do have the proper qualifications do not receive fair pay, as the salary for teachers is incredibly low (\$100-\$165 a month), even though they have some of the greatest responsibilities for getting Haiti back on track ("Teacher's"). This is true for both private and public school teachers. Because of the significantly low pay, many educated Haitians best qualified to teach leave the country, most often for the United States or Canada, in search of better work (McNulty).

Some progress is being made on the education system in Haiti, though; as the poverty decreases, the number of children enrolled in school increases. The number of students has "increased from 78% to 90%, very close to the goal of universal child enrollment. However, many children abandon school or have to repeat years. Less than 60% reach the last year of primary education; and low educational achievement is one of the main factors behind unemployment" ("News"). About 62% of students ages 6-14 "are in a grade too low for their age" (Schaeffer). There are some programs that help counter this, such as the one Clement Renold's (a Haitian resident) family benefits from. "This is a great relief because sending a child to school is the greatest possible present," he says (Schaeffer).

Other programs are in place to improve education in Haiti; examples are ToTAL (Tout Timoun Ap Li: the All Children Reading program) and the Room to Learn initiative, both of which are supported by the U.S. Government. The Haitian Government's top priority as of now is to make all education free and make it so every child can attend, and through continued funding to these programs, they can achieve their goal. ToTAL is especially focused on proper training of teachers and faculty, and has "provided technical assistance to build the capacity of MENFP [(ministère de l'Education nationale et de la Formation professionnelle)] to plan, implement, and evaluate reading programs" ("Education"). Room to Learn is more oriented towards providing access to education for every child; Haiti is one of the countries selected for this program through the USAID (United States Agency for International Development). Both ToTAL and Room to Learn have the potential to fix the poverty gap in Haiti ("Education"). A similar program, created by the World Bank, is the Education for All program, which not only finances government education subsidies, but also actively improves teacher training ("Haiti Improves"). Efforts should be placed into programs like these three.

These three programs, however, are just a stepping stone into solving the education issue in Haiti. One crucial action to take is to standardize education in Haiti, even for private schools. As of now, "the primary tool by which the GoH monitors the standards of its public schools is through annual national exam testing" ("Importance"). However, as stated, this is only for public schools, and is not enough. The curriculum by which students are taught itself should be standardized, much like the education of many developed countries. Teacher training needs more regulation, as educators in Haiti still do not need any certification whatsoever (McNulty). By standardizing more than just the testing aspect of schools, the Government of Haiti can ensure quality education for all who attend.

Another concern with the education system is the distribution of the schools themselves. The Government of Haiti, as well as any other organizations working to improve the education system, should focus on creating more affordable schools in rural areas. There is a much lower concentration of schools in rural areas than there are in urban areas. There is also a considerable lack of public schools, which are much less expensive. While there may be a school within a thirty minute walk of their house, it is many times too costly and they have to enroll their children in less costly schools even farther away. This is, in fact, one of the main reasons students drop out of school, especially in rural areas: the distance to get there. Many parents feel concern over sending their young children on long walks, or letting their daughters walk alone. It also increases the incentive to keep older children at home to help with domestic responsibility, as they are wasting more time than needed getting to and from school. There is also a considerable lack of access to education beyond that of the primary level. For many rural children to continue to seventh grade, they either travel long distances on a daily basis or arrange boarding with other families nearer to central areas. In most cases, the boarding is with family or close family friends, but there are some that stay with complete strangers, adding the cost of room and upkeep of the household to their school fees (“Importance”). It is quite obvious to see that there should be much focus on creating more accessible schools in rural areas. It will add to the appeal of school, if the walks are much shorter and the fees are much lower. If schools are affordable and within reach geographically, there will be a much lower dropout rate and children will finally be receiving the education they need.

Even when schools are close enough, many times the cost of tuition and supplies is too prohibitive and families choose not to send either any kids to school or are forced to choose which kids to send, depending on income situation. Due to cost still being such a prohibitive factor, it is important for both IGOs and NGOs to continue to help subsidize the cost of schooling. This needs to go not only towards the cost of public education, but also to private, as many times that is the only option close enough in location.

Still, the greatest issue to be addressed regarding education may be financing education in general. Most schools simply do not receive the funds needed to operate, as they receive little to no support from the government and make less money off of tuition fees as students drop out. This reduces the quality of already existing schools, and in fact reduces the rate of the creation of new schools; since nearly all schools in Haiti are privately owned, the founder of a new school will have to pay everything out of pocket (McNulty). It also creates less pay for teachers, and therefore, provides a lack of qualified teachers, as many people do not want to work for such little salary. The solution lies not in redirecting funds within the Government of Haiti, but instead lies within the aid of NGOs and IGOs, especially the World Bank. There are already many organizations in place to help Haiti, and support should be placed within these organizations. They run a wide variety of programs to provide aid to the education system in Haiti, like the World Bank’s Education for All program. By utilizing and supporting NGOs and the World Bank, it should not be too difficult to find sufficient funds for education in Haiti.

Universal education is the most important step in solving the poverty gap in Haiti. Education is well proven to affect many factors of food security, and many of these factors are found in Haiti. If the education in Haiti were to improve, incomes would increase, and, as a result, so would standards of living. Even adult education on modern agriculture and nutrition, for the rural population, would be incredibly beneficial, as they would gain a better understanding of how to efficiently grow their own food

and sustain their own families. Education in Haiti is incredibly necessary to the growth and development of the country, and to the solution of the poverty gap as well; if the rural population receives the same education as does the urban population, they will have the same qualifications and therefore will have equal opportunities of employment and income. Research has shown that in developing countries for each year of schooling they receive it translates to a 10% increase in earnings (“Education on”). At the same time educating females specifically about more productive farming methods has accounted for a 43% decline in malnutrition. It is through better education leading to growth and development that food security for Haiti can be achieved.

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