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Haiti, Factor 16: Education

### **Haiti: Educating Haitian Children**

Walking down the hallway of a financially well-off school, you might hear Jill complaining to Sara about how much chemistry homework her overbearing teacher assigned during class, Shane talking about how “dumb” school is, or teachers and staff complaining about the slow the classroom technology. Although these minor setbacks are inconvenient, millions of people all over the world, including the United States, will never complete nor begin their education. Some people never learn how to read and many will never own a book of their own. Sadly, many of the people privileged enough to go to school take it for granted while the less fortunate face the reality that they will never have the opportunity to.

The Lamour family is a typical representation of a large portion of the Haitian population. Marie Lamour; her recently deceased husband, Jean, their five children, and with their grandmother, Marie’s mother, all live and sleep on a small plot of land just outside the village of Jeanette. Their home is made of woven leaves with a dirt floor (Rural Life). Their farm is reflects a typical Haitian farm in many ways. One is that it is situated a on a piece of land less than two acres in size, and their house is 12 by 15 feet with dirt floors and only two bedrooms to house their family of eight. Because there is neither running water nor electricity, cooking is done outside over a fire, and washing clothes is done by hand (Rural Life). Marie Lamour’s family is part of the one in five families that rely on raising livestock and crops as a source of income in Haiti, and like 75% of the Haitian population, they live on less than two dollars a day (HRI). Marie and Jean like many Haitians have a less than fourth grade level of education, and their children are likely to reach similar levels of education. Even before Jean’s death, Marie’s job was to raise the family, crops, and livestock (Women). Luckily Marie’s five children are healthy, but if her children are unable to, it is also becomes her responsibility to gather water and wood to fuel the fires while she cooks meals. Her meals typically consist of rice, beans, corn, bread, and coffee (Schwartz). According to custom, Marie is also in charge of trading and bartering. This trading typically involves selling grains such as corn and other items from the farm for a profit. Her husband, Jean Lamour, was in charge of tilling and using other heavier farm equipment (Women) before he died. According to statistics, Jean was supposed to live to be approximately 63 years old, but the symptoms from cholera were too much for him and now the burden falls to Marie and her two oldest sons (World Factbook).

In Haiti, access to health care is nearly impossible, and as a result, Marie lost her husband Jean. Haiti’s healthcare and availability of doctors is so poor that Jean was unable to receive any medical attention for his illness. To put into perspective exactly how poor Haiti’s health care program is, it is best to compare it to the United States’ healthcare. The Haitian government spends approximately \$76 on each person’s health care in comparison the United States spends \$8,233 per person each year (Kane). If Jean had been able to make it to a hospital in Haiti, he most likely would have died waiting to be seen by a doctor or nurse. For every 100,000 people in Haiti, there is only 25 doctors and 11 nurses (United States). If each of those 100,000 people say a doctor once a year, those 25 doctors and 11 nurses must provide medical attention to approximately 274 people each day. This number of people is almost impossible in itself, but then consider the fact that those doctors and nurses could never have a day off or break in order to ensure that they meet the needs of all 100,000 people, and the 100,000 people would only be allowed one doctor visit a year, a sharp contrast to the United States where doctors’ visits seem to happen bi-monthly during cold and flu season.

Another health problem that the Larmor family faces is malnutrition. Children and adults alike battle malnutrition every day, and it’s this malnutrition that can impair learning. Malnutrition can cause

permanent damage to a person's brain. While Marie's children were in the womb, the baby's brain was growing and developing by taking in the necessary nutrients that are found in the food Marie ate in her daily diet. The neurons in the child's brain are what help the child in all ages make connections and respond to events going on around them. The neural connections form what are known as synapses. Synapses develop and change as the child grows and matures. However, if the child is not well nourished in the early stages and years of life, their ability to conduct these complex brain functions is limited. This can lead to learning disabilities, mental retardation, and cognitive impairment in people 65 and older (Morgan).

Rice is the most consumed food in Haiti because when paired with beans, it can sustain a person's diet. However, 60% of the food consumed by Haitians is imported (Rural Poverty). In the mid 1990's, the United States, led by President Clinton stepped in to help Haiti by drastically cutting tariffs on American rice imports into Haiti. Because of the foreign aid imports, Haitian farmers were unable to establish and expand their own farms causing Haiti to become further impoverished (Katz). In this example, it is important to note that foreign aid is not necessarily beneficial to an economically struggling country. Marie and Jean's children, along with fewer and fewer other children are able to attend school in Haiti. The Lamour's children began attending school at age six and should finish their elementary schooling around age fourteen. However, due to Jean's recent death, the two oldest boys must quit school to help their mother at home.

Even without their father's death, it was unlikely that Marie's children would continue much longer than the fourth grade in public schooling because there is very low availability for public schools causing children to attend private schools where tuition costs are significantly higher. Out of all of the schools in Haiti, 92% of them are non-public (Suzuta). Only 30% of elementary students do move on to secondary school, and only eight percent of Haitian people graduate. Why are these statistics so low? Natural disasters, like the 2010 earthquake, have caused over 3,980 schools to be damaged and destroyed. In addition, these disasters have killed over 4,570 students and educators, including their aunt Sara who was teaching in Port au Prince during the 2010 earthquake (Suzuta). It is nearly impossible for parents to send their children to school. Like the Lamour family, 75% of Haiti's people live on just two US dollars a day (HRI) which is why Marie must ask her boys to stay home from school to help at home.

In the Lamour's village, and all throughout Haiti, the poverty gap continues to widen. Due to high unemployment, a majority of Haiti's skilled workers leave Haiti in search for better jobs and a better life. Many people enter the Dominican Republic to find jobs in factories. Their income is then sent back home to their families (United States). Only 6% of the country's income belongs to the poorest 40% of the total population. In comparison, 26% of the country's national wealth belongs to the richest 2% of Haiti. Families like the Lamours living in rural areas make one dollar for every three dollars people living in urban areas make (Rural Poverty).

Haiti as a whole has many social and economic issues that cause them to be food insecure. There is not one right way to improve Haitian living conditions, but one could make a strong case for improving education for youths and educating Haitian farmers on modern farming practices. The Lamour family currently uses traditional farming practices such as using a hoe, pruning knife or machete to tend to their crops (Oxfam). The boys help Marie grow rice, beans, plantains, and tropical fruits (Haiti). It is also the boy's responsibility to tend to the family's chickens, goat, and cow (Rural Poverty). Their family used to have pigs, but they had to sell them for profit after their father passed away.

The two oldest Lamour boys would like nothing more than to complete their education at their local public school. However, their little rural school is having some trouble staying open. Public schools like the one the Lamours attend have a difficult time getting the resources that they need. Sponsors privately fund many schools in Haiti with little to no government involvement (Purveyer). In order for Haiti to

educate its children, the government needs to promote the sponsorship of public schools. As stated earlier, 26% of Haiti wealth belongs to the richest 2% of people in Haiti. If the government reaches out to the more wealthy citizens, they could slowly begin creating a sustainable public school programs with donations and grants. However, nothing comes without a price. The government would have to pay back the initial investors within a number of years. The money would come from the revenue made off of the student's tuition once the school system was well established and many more children were receiving an education.

Another way to improve the quality of education for the Lamour children and all children in Haiti, is to set curriculum standards for all classes and ages. It is difficult for teachers to teach their students if there is no set curriculum. Standards should include proficiency in basic subjects such as math, reading, and general sciences. Students who receive a basic education would be able to take their knowledge to the next level and possibly engineer inventions that would improve the quality of life in Haiti. As years go by, the poverty gap would decrease and the hope would be that the graduated students would help sponsor education for other students. Studies show that girls who stay in school are more likely to be able to provide food for their family in their adult life. In one Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations study, malnutrition in children was reduced by 43% when the mother was educated in contrast to reduction of malnutrition by 26% when food availability was improved (qtd in Smith and Haddad 2000). Because malnourishment and food insecurity is such a crucial problem in the Lamour's village and all throughout Haiti, schools should put an emphasis into agriculture education programs. Village and town leaders should reach out to schools and institutions and invite them to send their trainees to their area. Although the Salesian Missions Agriculture School in Cap-Haitien provides an education to farmers, one school is not enough. This specific school provides a three-year program that is geared toward helping students with poor farm families (Mission).

Educating farmers on modern farming methods is huge step in the right direction to diminish food insecurity. One might recommend that the government of Haiti and the wealthier population invest in a government-sponsored agriculture program. Educators on modern farming methods involved in this program would be required to keep up to date on modern methods of farming and go into communities to teach farmers these more efficient methods. It would also be the responsibility of the educator to show families, similar to the Lamours, how to implement new farming techniques into their everyday lives. With the help of farm machinery manufacturers, the program would be able to help farmers get their hands on equipment such as tractors, well drills, and other machinery. The equipment wouldn't have to be new. In fact, if farmers in the United States donated their old, but well-kept farming machinery, it could potentially be more economical. By donating their old farm machinery, the farmers are getting rid of what they don't need, and the Haitian farmers can become more advanced in their farming practices. Newer machines and technology would also be very beneficial. Establishing factories that specialize in farming machinery and technology in Haiti, such as John Deere, would allow Haiti to make products and machines thus resulting in more jobs and eliminating shipping prices. The more jobs there are, the more people there are with a source of income. More people in Haiti would be able to purchase items such as food, helping the country to become more food secure. This chain of positive outcomes would help ensure a better life for the Lamour children and their future generations to come.

The U.S. government has partnered with scientists, donors, and other people in the agricultural field to teach Haitian farmers effective farming methods through their Feed the Future program. Their goal is to help improve the crop's productivity and yield as well as strengthen agricultural infrastructure. U.S. Aid workers have taught the Haitian people how to manage watersheds and have also helped repair roads and irrigation systems. U.S. government workers and Haitian farmers developed new grafting techniques for mangoes along with better centers for exporting. These changes allowed sales to increase by 25%. Other technical improvements include: new green houses, nurseries for plants and trees, and structures that conserve soil and water. The United States government provided the people of Haiti with improved seeds

and fertilizers. Since these improvements were made, crop yields have increased significantly. Plantain, bean, and rice yields have increased by 56% to 139%. Most impressively, however is corn with yields increasing by 448%. As a whole, this partnership has provided more than 22,000 families with monthly food stubs (Feed).

By improving the education system in Haiti, the country will become more independent and food secure. People will be able to come up with new and better ways of farming. A boost in the economy will open up more opportunities for jobs to be created and employers to hire more employees. With a greater number of the population having a source of income, the government will be able to tax more people, resulting in more government income. With that income, the government will be able to start and fund research projects, more educational programs, and also agricultural study programs. Ignorance is not bliss. By educating the people of Haiti, the Haitian government is investing in its people and its future. Education opens the door to opportunity, improvement, and most importantly, food security for not only the Lamour family, but Haiti as a whole.

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