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Haiti, Factor 16: Education

### **Haiti: Success and Improvement through Education**

In early 2010 conditions in Haiti were harsh due to the catastrophic earthquake that had a magnitude of 7.0 M, making the country struggle to regain the little balance it had. As the country strives to recover, food insecurity, lack of access to clean water, and critical and continual malnutrition are major issues. Rated on the Human Development Index; Haiti has the poorest life expectancy, literacy, education, standards of living, and child welfare compared to other countries. Children have a significant disadvantage in terms of growth and development. The country does not have an official health care system that is successful. The healthcare systems that do exist are insufficient and made up of scarce staff and treatments along with minimum equipment. Most of the healthcare buildings are not in good condition or in shambles due to the massive earthquake that took place in 2010. With no support from its government, Haiti's people struggle to recapture balance.

Located in the Caribbean, Haiti occupies the western portion of the island Hispaniola and has a population of around ten million (World Factbook). Its land is mostly mountainous and rough and lies in the middle of the hurricane belt, making it vulnerable to severe storms, floods, earthquakes, and droughts. Soil erosion and scarce water are age long issues that Haiti has dealt with, making agriculture (the largest sector of the Haitian economy) unsuccessful for many Haitians and their families. Haitians place great importance on family life. The average family size in Haiti is around five to six. This number has potential to rise, but due to malnutrition and diseases, children usually die at a very young age (Clean Cookstoves). In rural areas, men and women usually play complementary roles. In a household with two parents, the men are responsible for the farming. The women are usually responsible for the children, but still have opportunities to earn their own money by assisting with duties such as harvesting and selling agricultural produce. Haitians diet consists mostly of what they grow. Rice, beans, yams, and corn are some popular foods that make up their diet. They also eat chicken, eggplant, plantains, fish, potatoes, bananas, carrots, onions, and goat along with fresh fruits and vegetables. Most of their dishes are of African and French influence with a touch of Spanish and Indian culinary techniques.

Agriculture is the largest sector of the Haitian economy. It accounts for about two-thirds of the labor force, but only one-fourth of the gross domestic product, as low as some of the least developed countries in Africa (Encyclopedia Britannica). Most Haitians own and farm tiny plots of land, but great population density has caused rural poverty. This is a factor in the country's extensive deforestation, which has contributed to the degradation of agricultural land. The typical size of a farm belonging to a subsistence farm family is just less than two acres (Arthur). They usually grow coffee, sugarcane, rice, corn, sorghum, cassava, and different fruits like mangoes, bananas, and pineapples. Although subsistence farming is the one of the leading contributors to the economy, Haiti has a limited amount of cultivated land due to soil erosion and the severe weather. Most farmers practice the typical method of subsistence farming: growing enough crops for their families and having little to sell elsewhere. Major barriers to improving agricultural productivity are also issues stopping improvement for the country and its society as a whole. On the surface, issues such as inadequate education, unstable government, and a strong cycle of poverty and food insecurity contribute to limiting improvement to agriculture. Soil erosion, severe weather, and deforestation also contribute to the unsteady productivity and are barriers that Haiti yet has to overcome to secure its society and nutrition for its people.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, has long struggled to prosper (Rural Poverty Portal). It has been hard to provide the needs of the people, especially with eighty percent of the

population living below the poverty line. Food insecurity, lack of infrastructure, and devastating natural disasters are some factors that contribute to the hardships that Haiti has faced on the way to recovery and development. With the deadly and destructive earthquake of 2010, Haiti's devastated society and economy have found it hard to rebuild because of its long history of political instability and low education levels. Education in Haiti has become very hard to obtain. The literacy rate is 48.7 percent for the total population (World Factbook) making it one of the lowest in the world. Like in the U.S., there is a law that education is required for elementary age children. Although this is the law, the systems are disorganized and many students are ineffectively taught. Only fifteen percent of teachers at the primary level have basic teacher qualifications and nearly twenty-five percent have never attended secondary school. There is no government involvement in the education system and over fifty percent of Haitian children do not have access to education. The cost of education is very high and access to school is difficult, especially in rural areas. Public schools account for only twenty percent of the total demand for basic education. In addition, classroom space is limited and the majority of schools have no functioning basic services like sanitation, equipment, and supplies. Most Haitians do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills to enter into the labor force, making it hard to earn money to sustain a family or themselves. These current obstacles to general education and with less than half of the population with an inability to read and write have prevented the development of society and its people.

The massive earthquake in 2010 has made the already fragile education system in Haiti more weak and disorganized. Nearly 4,200 schools were destroyed and many of those schools remained shut down due to lack of funding. With little funding and support from the government, education is limited for the 1.3 million children under eighteen who were affected after the earthquake. The few public schools that are funded by the government are located in highly urbanized areas of the country, making it hard for rural families to access the education they need. Only the wealthiest in the nation can afford private schooling with European education and are the privileged few who reach college level education. Many who do reach college level education flee Haiti afterwards to seek out better opportunities in other countries. A family with low-income uses their salary to go towards funding their children's education, making it a financial burden for a family that usually only earns less than \$500 a year (U.S. Department of State). Along with a rural and urban difference in access to education, women often do not benefit from equal access to education as well. Twenty-five percent of women in the urban areas finish secondary schooling and less than two percent finish in the rural areas. The education level for women is lower than for males and often families with limited needs invest education in their male child instead of the female. One third of girls over six never end up going to school due to many different situations like financial issues or pregnancies. The school curriculum also reinforces the stereotype that women are inferior to men, making it more difficult to create equality between the two sexes. The Ministry of Education in Haiti runs the education system, but financial limitations have made it difficult for it to fulfill its obligations. The country only spends around 1.4 percent of gross domestic product on education (The World Bank). Many schools are managed by communities, religious organizations (NGO's) or are privately run. The estimated cost of schooling is around 130 dollars per child, which is another factor that contributes to the high dropout rates, as much as twenty-nine percent in the basic education sector. Haiti has 15,200 primary schools, around eighty percent of these schools being non-government run and non-public. Many children spend less than four years in school (U.S. Department of State) because some can no longer afford it. It is estimated that sixty percent of children go to primary schooling, twenty percent go to secondary and one percent go to universities (The Haitian Education and Leadership Organization). In addition to the limited education available, of an estimated 70,000 teachers, seventy-five percent lack adequate training for teaching.

Although there could be many solutions to Haiti's ongoing issues and struggles, one that would be effective and long lasting is providing adequate education within the country to better educate its people and create a pathway that will help maintain the economy, government, and society. Fundamental education will build a stable foundation for the society. New learning in farming techniques will also help

with agricultural productivity within the country. A stable education will bring provision and opportunity for families with children to make more money with the newly acquired knowledge and skills they have learned in school. Investing in education, training and agriculture research and technology will help improve the economic and social issues in Haiti. Access to education in Haiti is very low. Education is a key factor in improving economic development and society in a country. According to the World Bank, “education is central to development. It empowers people and strengthens nations”(The World Bank). The benefits of education in Haiti include improvements in health and nutrition, increased productivity, and strengthening equality. With education, the now dependent Haiti can start to rebuild itself for its young generation to have a better future. With proper and sufficient education, more Haitians would have an opportunity to broaden their horizons and earn a steady and sufficient income for them or their family. It will also unlock access to adequate nutrition and more opportunities outside and inside their country.

Agriculture is the basis of life. If nobody were educated in farming, the typical agricultural family would not know how to sustain themselves or their family. Education is essential for improving food security and employment and reducing poverty. Education is an important role in preparing farmers, their children, and others to make productive contributions to their society and economy. Many in rural areas do not have information on how to grow food efficiently. Improving knowledge of new techniques can dramatically increase farmers’ level of productivity and create more jobs in rural areas. A little over three years after the earthquake, education has improved substantially according to the new national survey. Haiti Demographics and Health Survey (DHS) shows 77 percent of children six to eleven attended primary school in 2012 compared to fewer than 50 percent in 2005-2006. DHS covered around 13 thousand households in the first nationwide survey. Results show efforts of different organizations, such as UNICEF and partners, have contributed to the progress and reconstruction of the educational system.

Although improving education within Haiti will eliminate the barrier that gives access to knowledge, there are still issues that could affect the movement to development. Water scarcity is a major issue that could affect the wellbeing of a typical subsistence farming family in Haiti, and their community, for decades to come. Water, the necessity for human life is not only a luxurious item, but is also made scarce and expensive for the average Haitian and worse for rural areas where the majority of Haitians live. Forty percent of people in Haiti lack access to clean water. With most water contaminated with bacteria, parasites, and in some cases chemicals, that has caused many issues within the nation.

Knowledge and education is the key to success in Haiti. Many major issues contribute to food insecurity and poverty. The first step toward development and progress in Haiti is investing more into the education system and making it a right rather than a privilege. This will not solve all issues, but will help improve its current situation of a weak education system. Lowering or having no cost to education will give many Haitians the opportunity to attend school, and giving them schools with proper education, teachers and workers who have adequate training and school supplies will lift the lid off of the system. With proper education and schooling, more Haitians will have an opportunity to better their future and make more money. For rural families, with the proper education, it will better prepare them for the labor force. Helping Haitians acquire education will eliminate the second of the millennium development goal; the eight international goals established by the United Nations in 2000, to have all children complete a full course of primary schooling.

To enact and build upon the idea and strategy of the second millennium development goal, projects like “Education for All in Haiti” by the World Bank need to be stable and steady. The main goals for this project, which is still active, are to rebuild the education system, improve access to primary education, and to have a better quality of primary education. So far, the tuition for schooling has been waived, and health and nutrition training programs are active. The close date for this project is June 30 of the year 2015. Before this time, many things still need to be done. One idea that could be used is giving the teachers more training in more subject areas. In agricultural education, teachers could be taught about new techniques to improve agriculture, like different types of farming styles, or new techniques to gaining

access to food. Overall more teachers need to be trained in teaching and the newfound knowledge will be useful to the children they teach and their families. With the new subjects that will be taught, the new generation of Haiti will have more knowledge of farming, but also other subjects so they are not limited to farming, but more opportunities for them to expand upon what they have learned from the primary level.

In order for education to play a role in improving access to food for rural family in Haiti, the government must get involved, along with major national organizations like the United Nations. The already active Endeavour and programs that are improving the education system need to be stable in trying to help them. Government spending on education needs to be increased. No child should be denied the education and knowledge that every human being deserves. With the education system improving, more opportunities will be open for more Haitians in rural and urban areas to have access to better ways of obtaining food and an overall better future. Once the education system is improved, more issues will begin to be reformed and soon things will fall into place. Overall, improving the education system will not only help to improve all issues in Haiti, but it is fundamental to having a stable government and overall society. With more Haitians being educated, they are more able and ready to enter into the workforce, or have new ideas for agriculture that will contribute the economic and social sectors of Haiti.

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