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### **Haiti: Improving Humanitarian Aid and Relief After the Earthquake**

Haiti, whose population is projected to reach 10.2 million in 2015, is home to around nine million people (World Factbook). It is one of the most densely populated nations in the Western Hemisphere. It is also the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere (World Factbook). About 80% of Haitians live in poverty (World Factbook). Haiti is a country that is troubled by natural disasters, such as the devastating earthquake of January 2010, along with economic, political, and social turmoil that have led many Haitians to move to different Caribbean nations and the United States. It still struggles with poverty, political intervention, and foreign intervention. It lacks good health care and sanitation. It is crucial to focus upon Haiti because of its uncertain future.

The recent earthquake has cast a new light on the struggles of the Haitian people. "By now people are used to living in the camps but it's because they have no choice, not because it's a good situation. The government didn't take any responsibility, all this aid came in, but nothing happened with it. It's difficult to swallow," said Gilbert Gregory, a Haitian father of three (Speri 2010a). Daily, Haitians are struggling and fearing new disasters, with very few prospects of work.

One of the struggles Haitians face is food insecurity. Approximately 52% of households and 69% of families suffer from food insecurity (Haiti Earthquake). Causes of food insecurity in Haiti that need to be addressed are the scarcity of government aid, the growth of tent camps, and lasting, persistent effects from the earthquake of January 2010. These factors correlate with each other because Haitians have become more and more disillusioned with the government, which cannot go any further without addressing the earthquake's effects. The earthquake ravaged the already weak government. 17% of the Haitian government workforce was killed, while all ministry buildings were destroyed except for one (Speri 2010a). First world countries need to step in and help Haiti to rebuild the entire country by providing effective humanitarian relief and food aid.

A typical Haitian family would live in the rural areas, along with about 79% of the population. This family lives in a small village and makes its living by farming. This family has parents who are both in their early twenties. The parents are worried for their children's futures, which have been jeopardized after the earthquake. They have two boys who are nine and six years old, and one girl who is four. They all witnessed the floods of refugees that migrated back to the rural areas after the earthquake. This family cultivates a family farm that was inherited from past generations.

This family's farm is barely two acres and its soil is overworked and eroded. 66% of the labor force also works with this soil, but it is difficult (World Factbook). The family uses simple tools, such as shovels and picks, to plant and harvest crops. They plant typical subsistence crops such as maize, rice, yams, beans, and tropical fruits. The parents are worried that they will not have seeds to plant for the next harvesting season. The earthquake caused farmers to lose access to agricultural inputs. 57% of affected farmers had seeds before the earthquake, but after, only 23% reported to have seeds (Haiti Earthquake).

An obstacle to improving this family's agricultural capacity is its limited technology. The family must do everything manually. Animals, such as oxen are still being used on Haitian farms, rather than tractors, which are much more efficient. Tractors and other technology are much more efficient than traditional techniques. If farmers were given tractors and other technology, they could collaborate and share with each other to reduce the costs and upkeep. Another problem for this family is its lack of good farmland. There is little rich soil, or it is washed away when it rains. Less than four percent of Haiti's forests remain

and in certain places, the soil has been eroded down to its bedrock (Bourne). There is also only 28.11% arable land in Haiti (World Factbook). It has not been estimated how much is still available since the earthquake.

If the family produced a surplus of crops, the mother would sell or trade the excess for household necessities. They do not receive an income from any other source. The family has no social security or savings. This family owns a few chickens, while other Haitians also own pigs, goats, cows, or mules.

The family's diet consists of mainly what it harvests. But Haiti also imported close to 400,000 tons of rice annually (Bourne). The price of rice has risen up by 14% since the earthquake (Haiti Earthquake). Rice makes up 20% of the typical Haitian's diet. People eat Creole dishes, featuring rice, beans, potatoes, mangoes, plantains, and other fruits.

Seafood is also available, because other Haitians make a living by fishing along the coast. The fishing successes have declined due to overfishing and pollution. Some Haitians even turn to cakes made of clay, salt, and shortening because they cannot afford imported food. These cakes are a traditional dietary supplement for pregnant women (Bourne). The family eats enough food to sustain them, but this food does not necessarily contain proper nutrients. One in five Haitians is chronically malnourished (Bourne).

The family lives in a small room made of cinder blocks or wood. Their roof is made of grasses and sticks. Their house has no electricity or running water. They have also witnessed thousands who live in tent camps because their homes were destroyed in the January earthquake. These makeshift homes are flimsy and hardly protect against the wind and the rain. The United Nations estimated that the quake destroyed more than 100,000 homes and damaged more than 200,000 others (Haiti). There are more than 1300 refugee camps with about 1.6 million residents (Haiti Earthquake).

Tens of thousands of those living in these refugee camps may become homeless once again when they are forced out of their temporary homes by government officials and landowners (Speri 2010b). Landowners are clearing their land to sell it on the real-estate market or to build new homes. This causes a problem because more than 2.1 million people were left homeless (Speri 2010b). 42% of the homes that were damaged have been assessed and been proclaimed safe, but only half of them have been reoccupied (Speri 2010b). Many Haitians can no longer afford the rent.

The family's little boys still attend school, but in a few years, they are both likely to drop out. Public school is free and open to both boys and girls but a large percentage of Haiti's children do not attend school. Only 22% of Haitian children are in the primary education system (MDG Profile). The boy's parents were only educated until they finished elementary school since their parents believed that their educations were not important to be able to work on the family's farm. Secondary education is more rigorous, lasting as long as seven years. The main choice for university is The University of Haiti, which is free. The parents of this family know that they will never be able to afford for their son to study abroad. The parents are also illiterate despite having gone to elementary school. They still cannot read or write because they were poorly educated. Only about half of Haitians over the age of fifteen can read and write (World Factbook).

The family also does not receive high-quality health care. In 2006, it was reported by the World Health Organization that Haiti only had about eight doctors and ten nurses for every 100,000 inhabitants (Goldstein). This was one of the lowest ratios in the world. In July of 2010, about 90% of Haitians had nearby health care. This shows the humanitarian response to the earthquake, but medical professionals need to remain in Haiti to be able to provide health care even now.

Health care is important because there is a high rate of HIV/AIDS in Haiti. An estimated 120,000 people are living with AIDS (World Factbook). The World Food Programme states, "In the countries most heavily affected, HIV has reduced life expectancy by more than 20 years, slowed economic growth, and deepened household poverty (Hunger Stats). There is also a high degree of risk for infectious disease, such as hepatitis A and E, typhoid fever, and malaria (World Factbook). Thankfully, there have been no major epidemics in the tent camps (Haiti Earthquake). But these camps are still overcrowded and they have inadequate sanitation facilities.

A barrier to employment in Haiti is education and government assistance. There is a shortage of skilled labor. Not only is there a lack of opportunity for jobs because of the earthquake, but Haitians are not being educated well enough to be able to gain employment. The average income per person in Haiti is about four hundred dollars a year, which is little more than a dollar per day. More than two-thirds of the labor force does not have formal jobs (World Factbook). The wealth of the nation is also not spread evenly because about five percent of Haitians own about half the country's wealth.

Four tropical storms in 2008 caused damage to the transportation and agriculture industries (World Factbook). The government needs to rebuild these industries by employing Haitians and providing them with opportunities to rebuild their lives and the Haitian economy. This will allow Haitians to provide for their families, but also reduce poverty and unemployment.

The massive earthquake that struck Haiti in January of 2010 was assessed to be the worst in this region over the last 200 years (World Factbook). The earthquake was estimated to have caused about \$7.8 U.S. billion dollars of damage (PDNA). Haitians lost their families, friends, houses, schools, churches, jobs, and so much more, in just 35 seconds (Haiti Earthquake).

In the capital of Port-Au-Prince, the earthquake's destruction is one of its most prominent features. Chunks of concrete, mounds of rubble, and other signs of ruin litter the land. So far, only two percent of the debris has been cleared (Lush and Sanon). The earthquake had a magnitude of seven and killed more than 300,000 people. More than 1.5 million were left homeless (Klarreich). Fewer than 6,000 homes were built since the earthquake occurred (Klarreich). There is a scarcity of available land to build. More than \$98.5 million has been spent attempting to remove the rubble (Lush and Sanon).

There is also the problem of where to dump the debris, because some of it is contaminated. This rubble is being stored wherever there is room available, but this makes access to certain areas of Haiti difficult. We cannot allow loose rubble to be randomly dispersed because it creates additional problems. This debris creates the problem of mixing debris with other waste. There are hazardous and toxic chemicals in all of this. Contamination and pollution increases the pressure on the environment and natural resources.

The environment before the earthquake was extremely damaged with forests that were less than 2% of the territory (Haiti Earthquake). Haiti was already exposed to dangerous natural phenomena which disrupts and deteriorates the land. This includes cyclones, high winds, flooding, landslides, and mud flows. Haiti is also in a seismically active zone and it contains four fault lines that can produce high magnitude shocks (Haiti Earthquake). Forty million cubic meters of debris was created by the earthquake (Haiti Earthquake). Haitians depend on their island's natural resources for their industries.

Haiti has been identified as a country that is very vulnerable to climate changes, which make the island's natural assets more vulnerable. While helping to reconstruct Haiti, organizations must protect and regenerate the environment. This might include reforestation, decreasing the dependency on wood, and managing the rubble from the earthquake properly. The damage done to the environment should be reversed or reduced as much as possible.

Subsistence farmers should be educated by the government about better ways for agriculture. Better utilization of the land can lead to less dependence on food imports. But distribution of food needs to be improved as well. Transportation routes should be established to efficiently share food and goods to all parts of Haiti. Building and paving these roads can provide more jobs for Haitian workers, and decrease unemployment. Being able to use these roads will improve the Haitian economy.

More organizations need to step forward and help manage the refugee camps. Meals that have been packaged and are ready for people to eat need to be provided to Haitian communities, especially to hospitals and orphanages. More people die of hunger yearly than from AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined (Hunger Map). The World Food Programme states, "While people are hungry, all other development activities are thwarted. The hungry can concentrate little other than their next meal. Hungry mothers give birth to hungry children, who, if they live long enough, grow into hungry adults" (Hunger). Children and their parents should have access to food. Worldwide, one child dies from hunger-related causes every six seconds (Hunger Map).

Besides providing meals and other food sources, vitamins and minerals should be distributed. For example, it has been estimated that 684,000 child deaths could be averted by allowing greater access to vitamin A, iron, iodine, and zinc (Hunger Stats). Lack of Vitamin A kills a million infants a year (Hunger Stats). Vitamin A is associated with blindness, susceptibility to disease and higher mortality rates. It leads to the death of approximately 1-3 million children each year (Hunger Stats). If new schools are built, free meal programs should be started. These programs should provide free nutritious meals along with supplements.

Along with new schools, shelters and buildings need to be built. Lack of proper facilities causes challenges for Haitians. Thirty out of the forty-nine hospitals in affected regions need to be rebuilt (Haiti Earthquake). Basic public health programs that will provide aid for Haitians and their health need to be continued. Organizations need to ensure that injured patients receive treatment, rehabilitation, and the necessary drugs that are needed. New water sources or improving accesses to these sources should be established.

The congestion of the tent camps can lead to disease outbreaks. These need to be surveyed and recorded. Conducting surveys would be informative because the results would show where attention needs to be focused. These results could show the greatest malnourished populations in areas where vaccinations and potable water are most needed. Malnourishment results from unsafe or insufficient water supplies, poor hygiene, and inadequate sanitation. Malnourishment causes women and children to be at a disadvantage. Supplementary food and infant formula should be provided to ensure the healthy growth of children and babies.

Malnourishment also prevents children from reaching their complete development and cognitive potential (Hunger Map). It causes problems for other groups, such as the disabled and elderly, as well. Port-au-Prince today has more drinking water and toilets than before the earthquake (Speri 2010a), but progress still needs to be made.

Yearlong help especially during the hurricane and flood season is crucial. We cannot leave the Haitians to do all the work themselves. They require international guidance. But the challenge of helping Haiti is greater for just a single organization or group to handle. Former United States President, Bill Clinton, and the current Prime Minister of Haiti, Jean-Max Bellerive, are the co-chairmen of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission. They stated, "Our mandate is to coordinate the efforts of government donors, nongovernmental organizations and the business sector to ensure that reconstruction projects are aligned with the priorities of Haiti's development plan. It is also to see to it that the work takes place with the full transparency and accountability that Haiti's leaders are committed to maintaining, and that donors have every right to expect" (Bellerive and Clinton).

Only 10% of the \$5.3 billion that was pledged by nations has actually been given to the Haitian government. How are Haitians supposed to continue rebuilding when they have no financial support? Humanitarian aid programs cannot effectively respond to the urgent needs of Haitians without this money. The World Bank and worldwide organizations need to encourage others to continue donating.

These organizations should propose and submit project plans to the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC). The IHRC assesses where money is the most crucially needed. By submitting their plans, organizations can help make the most efficient recoveries in the lives of Haitians. These partnerships between Haiti's government and organizations are essential because they cannot allow money to be diverted. We must take the earthquake as a wake-up call. Not all of us can actually go to Haiti, but donations can be made. It has been estimated that only \$0.31 is needed to assist orphans and vulnerable children per day (Hunger Stats). Thousands of lives could be saved with the accumulation of small donations. Donors who have already pledged money should honor these commitments. Any financial shortcomings are bound to cause many problems in the lives of thousands of Haitians.

But Haitians cannot depend too highly on donations. These donations will not be able to provide for them for the rest of their lives. They must revive their economy, and with this, companies should introduce jobs and industries. Entrepreneurs and organizations can begin very successful companies in Haiti. Many Haitians will be grateful to make money with which they can feed their families and build homes. This would reduce the amount of poverty in Haiti. These companies cannot exploit their employees. They should be regulated by the government's standards and should provide for a better future of the Haitian workforce.

These companies should be established in new areas. More than 500,000 people moved away after the earthquake (Haiti Earthquake). This provides an opportunity to create new economic hubs. These rural refugees need opportunities to repair their livelihoods. Not only is Port-Au-Prince congested, but it contained 65% of Haiti's economic activity. An aim should be to spread out the finances. Another alarming factor is that Port-Au-Prince is located directly on one of four the earth's fault lines that are located in Haiti (Haiti Earthquake).

Along with better employment for Haitians, there needs to be a focus on education. Basic education should be free and available to children of all ages. There should also be equal opportunities for boys and girls. The youth should be shown ways to participate in rebuilding the country, such as career advice when they become old enough. They should be taught things that will be useful and that they can implement at their homes. An example is promoting clean water, good sanitation and hygiene to prevent disease. Schools cannot be entirely about learning. There should be sports and other forms of recreational activities as well. This can lead to a reduction of youth stress levels, which would be beneficial.

Along with education, wavering and belated aid should be sped up as well. Perhaps much of the response to the earthquake was quick and helpful, but now we still cannot allow global attention to shift from Haiti. We should not allow all of our news to come from celebrities or private news crews from donor organizations. We need to survey the tent camps for ordinary citizens and ask what else is needed. We need to provide for those still struggling to restore and improve their lives. We cannot measure the success of restoring Haiti by how much money has been donated or how long it has been since the devastating earthquake. But we can see the changes and improvements in Haitians' lives. The average Haitian family will have a source of income if companies are begun, an opportunity for education, and overall, the chance for a better future because of improved health care and food security. International governments and organizations can help Haitians all over the country by emphasizing these factors. By resolving many of the dilemmas presented after the earthquake, we not only help Haitians, but we prepare for future disasters and build beneficial global partnerships. Once Haiti is rebuilt, we can use it as a model for the future. We must strive to make Haiti, and in turn, the world, a better place for today's people and future generations.

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