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Haiti: Issues That Need Solved

Three times a day, every day, Noel Zilice walks several kilometers to retrieve water for her family. The bucket that she carries weighs about forty-two pounds. As she makes the long trip back home, she balances the heavy bucket on her head, cautiously, because she does not want to waste any. Even though she gets the water from a government spigot, she still is not sure that the water is clean. The government water that she travels to three times daily, is contaminated by chemicals and other pollutants that come down the hill when it rains. She has no other choice, but to give it to her eight children. Zilice says that sometimes she will use lemon to chlorinate the water. She had borrowed five hundred gourdes, which is less the twenty dollars, to build a hole for a toilet. One day, a group of people showed up at her door asking for money. They said that they were going to bring water closer, if she would give them ten gourdes, less than fifty cents. That was months ago, and she has not heard anymore from them (Brown, 2004).

The Caribbean, island country of Haiti is a land with mountains, fertile valleys, large plateaus, and rural and city areas. Haiti has many issues that are often overshadowed by problems that may affect other larger, often more developed countries. Water comprises two-thirds of our bodies and our brains are essentially seventy-five percent water. Water contamination and sanitation leads too many other problems in this underdeveloped, poor country. Water scarcity is also a major problem in this underdeveloped country. If this issue was solved it would make it much easier for the country to fix other problems that they have and some that may arise. Water affects a variety of people in negative ways such as children and women. Unfortunately, stories like Noel Zilice's are true for many families throughout the entire country of Haiti. This issue is among many that may be more easily solved as water contamination and sanitation are improved.

Before January 12th, 2010, the third world country was in desperate need of attention from their government. A typical farming family in Haiti consists of a husband, a wife, and three children (Rural Haiti Team). Even though seventy percent of Haitians are farmers, they received the least amount of help and attention from their government (Haiti and the Dominican Republic). The majority of farmers grow food for their families and for money. Most farmers grow coffee, mangoes, sugarcane, rice, and corn for profit (Tufts in Haiti). The farmers devote their entire lives to farming crops, but do not get the kind of money that they deserve. They have to work really hard to get water to their farmland. Irrigation all throughout the country is considered a luxury for the extremely rich. This may not be a matter of contaminated water, but that the government in Haiti is unable to help its country make it through tough times.

The crops in Haiti are suffering from water loss and from being overuse. Haitians are not able to grow as many cash crops because of the state that their country is in. People are not able to put in the time and effort to grow the crops that used to bring them money because they have to focus on collecting water. In 1981 Haiti only had to import about eighteen thousand pounds of rice, but now the country has to import more than four hundred thousand pounds yearly. When asked what was going wrong with the country's crops seventy percent of farmers said, "Té a fatigue," which literally means the earth is tired (Joel K. Bourne). Having less food grown in the country makes it harder to do other things. Most Haitians cannot afford to buy the rice that is imported, so they go without. Going without food then leads to less energy, and that energy is needed to go and collect water. Water is connected to every aspect of life in this poor country, and this problem will one day be solved if efforts continue to be made.

Haiti's government is among one of the most corrupt in the world. Out of one hundred, sixty-three countries, their government was ranked the most corrupt (Publisher, 2010). For years the Haitian government has not been able to do many things that a democracy should. Haiti held their first presidential elections on February 7, 2006, after being put off several times. Since René Préval took office, the government has been making a turn for the

better. Préval, a former Prime Minister in Haiti, is a strong reformer, and seems to be continuing down that path (Haitian General Election 2010, 2010). When asked about corruption in Haiti's government Préval answered, "Is there corruption in Haiti's government, Yes. Are we doing something about it? Yes. Democracy is the condition for development ... We must reconstruct the entire country, not just Port-Au-Prince." Préval is disliked by many that are living in poverty in Haiti. They say that he has no compassion for those who are less fortunate. Those who live on the streets in the country's capital are upset with the way that he is handling the current situation in the destroyed country. There are also people who like the way that Mr. Préval is running the country, and think that he is doing good in the country.

Port-Au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, was the epicenter of the 7.0 magnitude earthquake. There are over thirteen hundred refugee camps in the country's capital (Haiti). Out of the approximately eight hundred, forty-six thousand people who live in the city (Haiti Answers), water is only reaching about three hundred, eighty-six thousand people a day (Port-Au-Prince, 2010). There are organizations that are present in Port-Au-Prince, but they are unable to supply the entire city with clean water everyday. Even those who do receive clean water may only get approximately thirty liters a day, but the average American uses three hundred and two to three hundred and seventy-eight liters of water a day (Water Facts). Organizations in the nation's capital are working daily to bring more water to the people who live there. Centrale Autonome Metropolitaine d'Eau Potable (CAMEP), is the country's government owned water distributor. CAMEP has problems reaching people in Port-Au-Prince because no one is actually in charge (Haiti Water and Sanitation, 2010). The government organization has a lot of issues to work on, but does not have enough time to work them out. Organizations cannot get discouraged about the amount of people that they are reaching, but they must continue to work their hardest to get water to more people.

The rural communities and other cities on the island are also in need of attention. There are fifteen thousand, two hundred schools in Haiti. Only thirty percent of the sixty-seven percent of children enrolled, reach sixth grade (Education in Haiti). Unfortunately, most children in rural communities are not able to attend school because they are busy at home. They are busy keeping the family's crops alive, walking to water sources to collect water for their family, cleaning, and cooking. The literacy rate in the United States of America is about ninety-nine percent (Literacy Rate in the US). Approximately sixty-two percent of Haitians are literate. This is partly because of the fact that children have to stay home to care for their families (Water.org). Water scarcity and contamination contribute to this staggering fact. Everyday more than two hundred million hours are spent by women and children collecting water. If the water problems in Haiti were fixed, this would be another issue that would likely fix itself.

The first step in trying to improve Haiti is reevaluating how developed countries are helping Haiti get to where it needs to be. When many people think of helping a country that has just experienced a tragedy, they think that the best thing to do is donate money. This may not have been the best thing to do in Haiti. The country does need money, but the government also needs help in knowing the correct way to spend it. The United States is the country that has donated the most money to Haiti in the past twenty years, but no one knows where that money has gone. Many resources say that the money is stolen by the country's own governmental officials (Salmons, 2010). Hopefully, if we all strive for Haiti's financial and governmental independence, they can solve some issues on their own.

Sixty percent of the people in Haiti do not have clean drinking water, which makes it the country with the highest infant mortality rate in the Western Hemisphere (Water.org). Before the earthquake, on January 12, 2010, water contamination was a problem. In Port-Au-Prince, some of the thousands of refugee camps still do not have potable drinking water. Contaminated water causes diseases such as typhoid, cholera, and Hepatitis A. All of these diseases are potentially fatal to anyone that contracts them. Everyday people who live in camps walk to get water, but that does not mean that the water is safe to drink. Noel Zilice, a mother of eight, said that the only way for her to know if her water was safe to drink was to give it to her children. If they get diarrhea and a fever, she knows that the water was contaminated. As she walks back to her tent with water, there is a sign that reads, "Women need a little bit of water so life can change" (Brown, 2004).

In the eight months since the earthquake there has been many efforts made to improve the water quality in the refugee camps. Unfortunately it took a massive earthquake to wake up the people in the world who do not normally think of anyone but themselves. There are a lot of organizations that are present in Port-Au-Prince, who are trying to bring potable water to the camps. Not only are they sending clean water to the camps, but they are also sending water purification systems (CBS News). Unfortunately, there are still people who have not received any aid, or water. Even though we have come a long way in Haiti, it will take a very long time to restore the country. Our main goal in Haiti should be to return the country to its previous state, but we want to make it a better place for its people to live; a more independent country with a sound government.

Water contamination in Port-Au-Prince is caused by the improper disposal of garbage and human waste. Human waste is washed into rivers and other water sources. The waste can contain many infectious diseases that can cause dehydration and lead to death. After human excretion is washed into the water, the diseases can spread to people who cook, clean, wash, and drink it. In the refugee camps, people are relieving themselves next to where children gather water for their families; when it rains, the water carries the waste downhill to the ponds where people collect water. Men, women, and children of all ages, are exposed to this contaminated water, and are contracting potentially deadly diseases from it. To think that a latrine is a simple solution to this terrible problem is not going to solve the entire problem. Approximately two hundred ninety-two latrines have been installed, out of about seven thousand that are needed. This number will grow if we are willing to continue working, not for our satisfaction, but doing it because you know that it will make life for someone else easier and better.

Water contamination in Haiti will continue to be a problem until steps are made to improve the quality of drinking water in the country. Water sanitation is defined as being suitable for human consumption, and for all usual domestic purposes, such as personal hygiene (Answers.com). Dr. Lee Jong-Wook, director-general, World Health Organization, has this to say about water sanitation:

"Water and Sanitation is one of the primary drivers of public health. I often refer to it as "Health 101", which means that once we can secure access to clean water and to adequate sanitation facilities for all people, irrespective of the difference in their living conditions, a huge battle against all kinds of diseases will be won."

Dr. Jong-Wook is again stating that if we can fix the water in Haiti that other problems will be more easily solved (Water Sanitation and Hygiene).

Water sanitation is achieved in several ways. One new way to sanitize water is known as a "bio-reactor". A bio-reactor is still being researched at Sam Houston State University before it will be sent to Haiti. It works by using the same bacteria that someone may find in a handful of dirt. The soil cleans and purifies the water of the waste that may have made its way into the water (Pure Water for Haiti). Another way to purify water in Haiti would be to use the "solar purification" technique. It is proven that the UV rays from the sun and the higher temperature inside of a plastic water bottle help eliminate bacteria in the water (Goodier). This seems very simple, and is becoming known in Haiti, which will hopefully save their lives. Noel Zilice said that when she sees a doctor and asks them what to do about the water situation for her family, they say, "Take precautions for the water, put Clorox in it." (Brown, 2004) This approach would be effective to sanitize the water, but what do you do when you do not have bleach, or you cannot afford to buy any? The General Comment No. 15 says, "The human right to water supplies everyone with sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses." (World Health Organization) There are many ways that water can be sanitized, but it has to be practical for a destructed, corrupted country.

Water scarcity is also an issue to Haiti because people often get into fights over it. If people do have access to clean water, they often have to pay for it. In La Saline, one of the poorest slums in Port-Au-Prince, Haitians must pay to receive water for their families. Food riots have already been a problem in Haiti in the past. Water riots may not be too far away. If water fountains in the country's capital run dry, there is potential for catastrophic outbreaks of anger (Guy). Water scarcity does not necessarily affect Haiti's crops. Most crops

grown on the island are adapted to the rainy seasons and the dry seasons. Haiti has to import more food because the earth is not able to handle the stress of raising the crops, not because of a lack of water.

Water contamination and sanitation cannot be fixed without the help of the people who live in Port-Au-Prince and the rest of Haiti. Outside countries can only do so much to help the nation fix the problems that they have. The Haitians have to be willing to do some work too. Most people are willing to work for the things that they want, but some think that it is not their responsibility. People have to be educated on what things to do, and what things not to do. It is hard to educate children in Haiti because they are often preoccupied with things in their home. There are many marketing tactics that are used to target all ages. Sayings are written on billboards, graffiti on walls, and taught in schools (Water Sanitation Haiti).

Many diseases that are spread in refugee camps in Haiti can be prevented through hygiene. Many latrines have been installed in the country, but water is still being contaminated by human excretions. People who dig their own latrines do not know where the best place to put them in. They often put them too close to the water source, and this causes typhoid bacteria and others to run into the water source (Brown, 2004). Things are being done to increase knowledge about water sanitation. Introduction to Global Health Issues created a health-science curriculum to educate children on water purification, hand-washing techniques, and the general anatomy of the human body (World Health Organization). There have been hand-washing sites set up in some refugee camps to press people to have good hygiene. It may be a slow process to teach something such as hygiene, but saving people's lives will be worth the work.

Women and children in Haiti are the people who travel to and from the water sources every day. Women are the ones who are impacted by water in Haiti the most. They collect water, cook with it, clean with water, and bathe in water. Unfortunately, women do not have the freedom to express their thoughts freely in Haiti. The government will not listen to the opinions of the women that have the most experience with the water situation in Haiti. Any issue is easier to solve if you listen to the "experts" on the situation that you are trying to improve. The Haitian government has not yet discovered that the women would greatly help them with their struggles with water. The government will soon realize that without knowing how water impacts the everyday lives of the people in their country, they will not be able to fix the individual issues that they may have. They must be able to relate to the average Haitian family, and will not be able to do that without knowing how important water is to the people.

Haiti's water issues will one day be solved. We must be patient and approach one problem at a time. If we address the issue of water contamination, then others will be more easily fixed. Noel Zilice's story is true for many Haitian families. Fixing the issues that were mentioned, and others, will help families like the Zilice's in their everyday lives. Solving the water issues will also contribute to solving the issues of education, communication, and other developmental problems that Haiti has. Water is the basis of all life. Without water nothing would be solved, everyone would fight, and we would all die. This is the sad truth that we have to face as a nation. We should want to help other countries because we want to help them, not because we want to bring attention to ourselves. Solving the issues in Haiti will make us feel joy and excitement because we made a difference. The only things we have to do now is work for what we want, and strive for a better future for Haiti.

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