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Haiti, International Trade

**Decreasing Food Insecurity in Haiti**

Haiti, a country similar in size to Maryland, is a country situated on the western side of Hispaniola. It lies near to Cuba and Puerto Rico and shares a border with the Dominican Republic. Haiti was given its name due to the indigenous people’s word “Ayiti” which means “flower of high land” or “mountainous land”, and their motto is “L ‘Union fait la force” which means “union makes strength”. (“Haiti- Places in the news” para. 1; Nguyen, 2015, para. 1; “Flag of Haiti” para. 2)

In 2024, the population of Haiti was at 11.87 million with 36% of the population being urban and 64% being rural. Fifty-eight percent of the land (27,600 square miles) is agriculturally based, and yields mainly cassava, plantains, bananas, corn, yams, sweet potatoes, and rice. The average farm size is approximately one hectare, or two and a half acres per family roughly the same size as two football fields. The climate in Haiti is hot and humid. In the summer, temperatures fluctuate from 23 to 33 degrees Celsius, and 19 to 28 degrees Celsius in the winter (“Current Climate” para. 3). The landscape of Haiti consists of mountains, coastal plains, non-navigable rivers, valleys, and a plateau; their highest point, the Morne de la Salle, stands at 2,715 meters. (“Haiti population growth rate 1950-2024” para. 1; “Country Profiles” para. 3; “Haiti-Agriculture” para. 2; “Land” para. 12; “Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing” para. 2; “Haiti” para. 2)

Haiti’s government is a semi-presidential republic. A semi-presidential republic is when there is an elected president alongside a prime minister with a cabinet that share executive powers. Although, due to a successful assassination of the president on July seventh, 2021, there is currently only a prime minister and the cabinet. Voting age for Haitians has gone down from 19 to 18 during the 2020 election. Being a republic-style government, it has three branches, executive, judicial, and legislative. (“Semi-presidential systems” para. 1; World Fact Book, 2024; “Haiti-political and electoral system” para. 1)

The average family size in Haiti is three to four children. The range of children varies in rural to urban areas, though. The more money a person has, the less children they give birth to. Kathryn Weinland, a professor at Oklahoma State University claims that, “Globally, the birth rate in countries with large, impoverished populations is much higher than in wealthier countries, indicating that income and wealth play a role in shaping family structures”. Most of the houses in Haiti are made as a two-room stay, with mud walls and floors with roofs that are covered in palm leaves or grasses; homes can also be made with plastic or have metal roofing, depending on the resources in the area. The windows do not have glass and instead have shutters. A typical Haitian diet consists of cassava, biscuit, and coffee for breakfast, and sometimes nothing until the evening, unless they can afford it, in which they eat three meals a day, per tradition, most meals include rice and beans. Thirty percent of land in Haiti is used for farming, so most meals are either staples (rice, corn, millet, yams, and beans), or animals made for the slaughter; pork and chicken are most common. Agriculture is the largest sector in Hatian economy, providing around two thirds the total amount of jobs, yet only one quarter of the GDP, or Gross Domestic Product (“Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing” para. 1; Meleen, 2021, para. 2; “Housing of Haiti” para. 1; “Haitian Culture and Tradition” para. 15; “Agroecology is a poverty solution in Haiti” para. 8)

Children who can afford to go to school from ages 6-12. Although, disease, poverty, and lack of necessities strip these children of a thriving childhood. More than 10,000 deaths occur annually due to disease and small clinics are numerous, yet they are not accessible to everyone that they are intended for. In most houses, except for the rich, there is no running water, and one might have to walk miles to get to a well for just a small amount of murky, disease infested water. Most toilets are located outside and are mostly just holes dug into the ground. Only 40% of people have access to electricity, let alone, only 64 out of 100 citizens have a cellular subscription. Deforestation, poor soil content, economic downfall, and weather have placed Haiti as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and third poorest on Earth. (“Haitian Culture and Tradition” para. 20; “Haitian Culture and Tradition” para. 21; “Haitian Culture and Tradition” para. 21; “Haiti-Energy” para. 9; “Haiti-a Study in Environmental and Economic Barriers” para. 4)

Half of the population of Haiti does not have enough to sustain themselves and 1.4 million people are facing emergency levels of food insecurity. Malnutrition occurs in 7.2 % of children under age five, and 66 percent of children under five years old suffer from anaemia, a condition where there are not enough red blood cells in the body to supply the muscles with oxygen, resulting in fatigue and tiredness. “The number of food-insecure people in Haiti has tripled since 2016”. These problems are occurring due to multiple variables. Examples include earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding, the lack of rainfall, Covid-19, the assassination of the Haitian president, and heavy dependence on imports. Seventy percent of rural Haiti is chronically poor, while only 20% of city dwellers experience the same type of poverty for urban. Chronically poor means when one lives life under the budget of two dollars a day and lacks the access to goods and services. (“Haiti|World Food Program” para. 2; “Haiti|World Food Program” para. 3; “Food Insecurity in Haiti” para. 2; “Living Conditions in Haiti’s Capital Improve, but Rural Communities Remain Poor” para 10;)

There are major issues in Haiti with international trade. Trade in Haiti relies heavily on importation, and not nearly as much on exporting. Imports account for more than 70% of all the goods bought and sold in Haiti. From the year 2010 to 2020, Haiti has been given over 13 billion dollars in aid from other countries and organizations. When a country has a heavy reliance on imports, there are many drawbacks. Too much importing causes a trade deficit, which can make imports more expensive, causing the country to spend even more money for a smaller amount, which is also known as inflation. Inflation can and does also change the cost of labor and materials which then makes both importing and exporting cost more while also decreasing efficiency. All of this causes Haiti to have little to no economic independence, which means that two sides (in this case, Haiti and another country or organization) have the ability to depend on each other for the exchange of goods and services. (“Haiti-Country Commercial Guide” para. 9; Roy & Cara Labrador, para. 5; Kramer, para. 3)

A solution that could decrease the reliance on imports is to increase the number of exports and Haiti has the resources to achieve it. The crops that they are currently growing do not pull in a steady income due to the seasonal hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and droughts. A more stable, steady plan would be to export their oil and gold. Both of these resources are plentiful. World Atlas says that “It is also estimated that undiscovered reserves could hold as much as 941 million barrels of crude oil. The Global Risk Insight states that, “there is an estimated 20 billion dollars in gold reserves”. (“Food Insecurity in Haiti” para. 2; What Are the Major Natural Resources of Haiti” para. 2; “Haiti’s Gold Problem” para. 3)

# Ideally, a country could sponsor or fund the creation of the gold mines and oil extractors, and the in return, could get a portion of the gold and/or oil. In order for this to work efficiently, there would need to be a policy in place that doesn’t allow a monopoly over the oil. For instance, in Norway, they made “Oil Fund 2.0” in which they gather the profit from their vast oil supply in the North Sea and send it to other countries that are struggling. Haiti can do something similar, where they also share their profit, but instead of just oil, it is oil and gold, and instead of sending the money to other developing countries, they can share the revenue with the citizens of Haiti. In return, this would allow, not only the farmers to create better, more sustainable farms, but also to create a more reliant food source. Since the number of exports would be going up, the price of imports will go down, it allows for more product with the same amount of money. In addition, corn could even further sustain Haiti, corn makes up around 40% of the world’s ethanol, a growing form of fuel, and is created with the goal of less pollution. As previously mentioned, one of Haiti’s leading crops is maize, or corn. After this potential business progressed , they could open factories to make ethanol, which could also provides the civilians with much needed jobs. (“How Corn Ethanol for Biofuel Fed Climate Change” para. 2)

Investing in the extraction of oil and gold from underground is beneficial as it creates new jobs, provides more exports, lowers inflation, upgrades farming resources, allows for more sustainable nutrition, and raises economic independence. Countries should be lining up to invest in a future gold mine, metaphorically and literally. Haiti has been a struggling country for a long time, and extracting the surplus of natural resources they possess is a reliable way to get them pointed in the right direction.

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