

Estelle Ralston  
Iowa City City High  
Iowa City, IA USA  
Haiti, violence and poverty  
February 2, 2025

## **Haiti: Violence, Poverty, and a Growing Hunger Crisis**

Haiti is a small nation located on the island of Hispaniola, shared with the Dominican Republic. It has four principal mountain ranges, and a warm, tropical climate. Its population is approximately 11.72 million people (Worldometer, 2023). Previously San Domingue, a French colony, Haiti was founded on January 1st, 1804, and is the only nation in the world to be born from a successful slave revolt (Casimir, 2020). Currently, as a relatively new country, Haiti faces economic, political, and environmental instability, as well as an increasing threat of gang violence.

The average family in Haiti has four to six members, and about half of adult Haitians work in commercial or subsistence agriculture. The average Haitian makes just under 1,760 USD annually. Between 58%-59% of the population is urban, and approximately 41% of the population is rural (World bank, 2018). A large part of the Haitian workforce is employed in industry. The largest part of the Haitian industry is textile production. Apparel makes up around 85% of exports (2021). An increasing mining industry is a growing area for Haitian job creation. Many Haitians, especially rural Haitians, obtain a large portion of their food from subsistence farming. Rice, maize, millet, yams, and a variety of beans are the most popular crops for both exports and local use. Many types of poultry, seafood, and farm animals are available in Haiti, but the average citizen cannot afford to include meat in their daily diet.

Perhaps because of the country's turbulent beginnings, Haitian people have an extremely rich culture and history. Haitians speak Creole and Haitian; French is spoken in formal settings (Casimir, 2020). Most Haitians are Catholic, and a unique religion that stems from the syncretism of Catholicism and Voodoo ("vodou") is practiced in some regions. An ongoing protestant missionary effort has also sprouted a growing protestant population. Many types of dance and music originate in Haitian culture, such as the Yanvalou, Rara, and Kreyol (Chambers).

The social and physical infrastructure of Haiti is deteriorating. Only 50 percent of school age children attend primary school. Of that fifty percent, only about twenty percent continue their education in secondary school. Haiti has a literacy rate hovering at 61 percent, significantly lower than the average 90 percent in Latin America and surrounding Caribbean nations. The health care system in Haiti has both private and public sectors, but only around sixty percent of Haitians have access to healthcare. Similarly, only 60 percent of the population has consistent access to drinking water, and just 49 percent of Haiti has electricity (United Nations, 2024). The roads and bridges in Haiti are largely unmarked and unkept.

The primary sources of all these issues lies within two main and intertwined issues, political instability and extreme poverty. The majority of families live under the poverty line, and nearly 25

percent of the population falls under the extreme poverty line (Loanes, 2023). In 2021, the GDP of Haiti only grew one percent. One fourth of Haitian children are critically malnourished (Patterson, 2024). Clear cutting is common practice on farms, both commercial and private, due to its cost effective nature. The desertification of Haiti is an increasing issue as a result of farming practices, and erosion has led to the susceptibility of Haitian farms to the consistent flooding and hurricanes of the region (Bargout, 2013). Economic situations have prevented many farmers from changing their cultivation practices, and continue to compound the issue. The lack of proper protection from erosion has also left much of Haiti's soil bare and stripped of nutrients, due to the country's mountainous nature. Only one fifth of Haiti's soil has a healthy amount of topsoil and nutrients, while two fifths are currently being cultivated. The strained agricultural sector has worsened the poverty of rural communities and families that rely on farming for a primary source of food and income.

On top of environmental issues, Haiti also faces deep-rooted political instability. Since the independence of Haiti, they have gone through a multitude of different governments, many ending in corruption, coups, protest and civil violence. The previous president, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in 2021 (Caple 2024). Without a clear or effective line of succession, the country has fallen under gang control. The current government is an ineffective, semi-presidential republic. The current president of Haiti is Leslie Voltaire. Despite Voltaire's proposed plans to hold elections in 2026, (Frilet, 2025) the government is severely underfunded. The military is weak, consisting of just 2,000 soldiers. This issue has allowed the nation to fall even further under gang control and severe violence. There are believed to be over 200 active gangs in Haiti currently. Two principal groups control the nation, G-pep and G9. These two gangs are at war and currently struggle for control of the country's capital, Port-au-Prince. Today, an estimated 60 percent of the capital is under strong gang control (Loanes, 2023).

Gang presence is strong throughout much of Haiti, and few attempts by the government to ease the situation have had any impact. Voltaire has threatened to involve the nation's military, but the threat has not been effective to control the gang war and state of lawlessness within cities. This lack of intervention is due, in part, to the current fragility of the government system and also chronic underfunding. Of the normal twelve Haitian justices, only three remain in service. The police force is only 14,000 strong. The issue of gang violence is a dire threat to the wellbeing of civilians, because people are unable and unwilling to leave their homes in order to access food and drinking water. In 2024 alone, 5,600 people were killed directly by gang violence and shootings. This violence is being directed at civilians, as well as women and children. Rape, sexual assault, and kidnappings have become common occurrences and continue to worsen so far in 2025 (United Nations 2024). This problem is especially prevalent in urban areas, where people lack independent sources of food to rely on. However, this issue also affects rural populations through the inability to work on farms and secure necessary tools, equipment, and seeds. Gangs have taken control of main roads and highways, and have implemented toll booths that charge anywhere from 500 to 5000 Haitian Gourdes per passage (\$3 - \$40 USD.) They have also started to ambush trucks and confiscate food and goods headed for cities. In turn, food prices are skyrocketing due to scarcity, affecting an already marginalized and poor population. As of 2025, maize prices have risen 10% from last year (Moyo, 2024). Gangs are also targeting farms and farmers directly, demanding fees,

threatening farmers, and taking cropland from families, particularly in Artibonite valley, the largest agricultural center of Haiti.

The violence in Haiti is also affecting imports, a vital source of food for the urban population. An estimated 50-85 percent of Haiti's food is imported, depending on the season (International trade administration, 2024). Frequent violence and shootings in Port-au-Prince, the nation's largest harbor, consistently force the bay to close, delaying or stopping necessary imports from the United States and the Dominican Republic, the largest exporters to Haiti.

Several solutions to Haiti's multitude of issues have been presented and implemented. The United States has sent much aid to Haiti, but the lack of internal infrastructure has made it so aid has not been implemented in substantial or direct ways. There has also been ongoing dialogue about deploying US troops to Haiti in an effort to return power to the government and install stability, but many US citizens and politicians are against this effort in the wake of the repercussions of America's military involvement in the Middle East.

The complex and multi-faceted situation in Haiti will require a multitude of solutions. At present, Haiti is in a near-crisis condition, and civilian lives are in dire need of supplies and protection that their current government cannot provide to them. The United States has sent \$161 million dollars (as of 2021, the most recent figure) to Haiti for humanitarian support, but without necessary structure, distribution, and effective supply chains, much of that money has been given to private sectors to aid the public. Much of these funds have also been used to rebuild the country after large earthquakes struck in 2020 and 2021, and have since been depleted; the nation is in \$5.5 billion dollars of debt. An already malnourished population is now on the brink of starvation in many urban centers due to the danger of leaving their homes to secure food.

In the face of both food insecurity and scarcity, the Haitian people need a short term and reliable way of accessing food with minimal movement out of their homes. Because of the nature of the situation, indoor crops are a realistic and relatively self sufficient solution. Potted plants and hydroponics could provide individuals and families with subsistence that is exponentially more self-sufficient and local than traveling to access food from markets or stores, potentially being put in dangerous environments. While indoor crops may seem a menial solution, they have potential beyond their traditional applications.

In other resource scarce countries, indoor and vertical farming have been proven useful to increase food production. In Kenya, many areas struggle with nutrient deficient soils and urban sprawl. Stemming from a project implemented by the students of the University of Nairobi, many Kenyan farmers have moved their traditional farmland into either vertical gardens or indoor hydroponic systems. Students from the University of Nairobi distributed indoor garden systems to farmers in the Akuru region, and constructed two gardens to showcase how to utilize them. In the Akuru region, there are now over fifty of these types of gardens. Kenya projects that locally grown food will double by 2050 because of these new urban farming techniques (Farming in Kenya consultancy, 2024). While Kenya's success was not borne out of the same situation that Haiti is

currently facing, the benefits of indoor farming are being proven substantial, and could be used as a guiding model for new practices in food-scarce and low resource areas.

Of the most consumed vegetables in Haiti, maize, beans, cabbage, rice, yams, and radishes are most prominent, and are already ingrained within Haitian culture, knowledge, and dishes. Subsistence farming is also a well established practice in Haiti, in both rural and more urban settings. Haitian homes, though small, around 300 square feet, are commonly constructed of a mixture of mud and grasses, and have an open-air construction, allowing for warm air and sunlight to reach interiors (Ferguson, 2025). This construction is conducive to the potential for indoor crops. While maize, and rice are large and difficult to grow in small quantities, many varieties of beans, radishes, and potatoes/yams grow well, and even excel within indoor containers, and can produce yields within just three to nine weeks. Radishes (*Raphanus sativus*) are an exceptionally fast growing crop that can be consumed at all stages of its maturity. Radishes in warm climates take from 20-30 days to mature. Most varieties of radish are low sun or shade tolerant plants, ideal for an indoor setting, and require only 6 inches of dirt to grow to full size (Boeckmann, 2019). Radishes can be grown in a rudimentary hydroponic system, with plastic containers suspended over a container of water. A metal, plastic or glass container could be filled with water or dirt, and left in a sunny spot on the floor of a home, or just outside a doorway. Watered once every 3 days with grey water, from dishes or cleaning, radishes could provide individuals within family units with a source of high fibre and nutrient dense food.

Beans are also a common legume in the Haitian diet. Red, black, navy, and green beans are of the most common varieties. While beans take more time to mature than radishes (50 -100 days), they are more calorically dense (The Spruce, 2019). Black beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) have 277.04 calories per cup (boiled), and red beans have 613 calories per cup (raw) (Mayo Clinic, 2014). Beans, specifically red (commonly known as kidney beans) and black beans, do need more sun than radishes, but they could be left outside near doorways or easily accessible close spaces. Bean plants do not require more than seven inches of dirt, and a space only about six inches in diameter. Similar to radishes, beans can also be grown in a homemade hydroponics system. Leftover or discarded cardboard and plastic packaging can be suspended over a container of water and it will not affect the bean's yield, allowing for rain water or water used for cleaning/cooking to be utilized in place of soil, if soil is not readily accessible in a household. Generally, black beans produce around one half cup of beans per each fully germinated plant. This means that 20 bean plants in a home could produce 5,540.8 calories in their lifespan, and feed an adult person a full 2,000 calories for 2.7 days, if the individual solely consumed black beans grown at home. Additionally, beans can be planted every two weeks next to each other to create an ongoing rotation of producing plants. These crops could provide supplemental calories and stability at times when it is especially unsafe for citizens to leave their property.

Soil, rainwater, and plastic containers are readily available resources, and would not require a system to distribute. However, it is unlikely that many homes have bean or radish seeds at their disposal, and even rural farmers have a severe shortage of seeds at present. To solve this problem, the United States could purchase black bean seeds, red bean seeds, and radish seeds, and partner

with the large system of churches affiliated with the United States within Haiti to distribute seeds to citizens. In 2020, there were over 1,700 christian missionaries in the US who already frequent Haitian homes and partake in community service. While the figure of missionaries may have fluctuated since 2020, there is still a large church presence in the country, especially in Port-au-Prince. This large missionary system could be utilized as a way to distribute seeds and share knowledge of indoor hydroponics to church-going families or while they visit homes. Additionally, Haiti has a very high number of people that own cellular phones, around 86 percent of the population. Churches, charity organizations, and individuals could utilize social media to spread information about indoor hydroponics. Information about area resources, seed pick-ups, and how to build a homemade hydroponics system could be shared to a mailing list in Haiti, or posted on web pages and social media accounts. This information could be spread in Haitian, French and English to reach the broadest audience. This could be a useful way to spread information remotely, minimizing citizens time spent outside of their homes.

Bean and radish plants are also good candidates for indoor growing because they are affordable and hardy in transport. Bean seeds average \$0.08 per seed, and radish seeds average about \$0.003 per seed, based on the largest seed company available at American retail stores. This price point fluctuates, but generally decreases as the volume of seeds increases. The distribution of seeds would need to be ongoing for radishes, because it is difficult to gather radish seeds for replanting. However, bean seeds could be a one time purchase, as it is simple to allow beans to dry out in order to be re-cultivated at a later point in time. Both radishes and bean varieties do not need to be pollinated in order to fruit, so they are ideal for an indoor setting.

While Haiti faces food scarcity due to poverty, violence and political instability, the effects of these issues are not impossible to overcome. With international support and sharing of information within local communities, indoor hydroponics could provide aid to citizens affected by Haiti's current political climate. It is vital that citizens have access to a supply of food that does not hinge upon external forces. The ability of citizens to grow their own crops, such as beans and radishes, is important to ensure the immediate welfare of citizens during this tumultuous period in Haiti. While not an encompassing solution, indoor hydroponics offer the potential to aid families in a substantial way, and help to bring stability to both rural and urban communities.

### References

“Average Household Size - Area Database - Table - Global Data Lab.” *Globaldatalab.org*, Global Data Lab,  
[globaldatalab.org/areadata/hhsize/?levels=1&country\\_order=by-continent&interpolation=1&extrapolation=1&extrapolation\\_years=3&nearest\\_real=0](https://globaldatalab.org/areadata/hhsize/?levels=1&country_order=by-continent&interpolation=1&extrapolation=1&extrapolation_years=3&nearest_real=0).

Accessed 8 Mar. 2025.

“Average Household Size in Haiti.” *Arcgis.com*, 2022,  
[www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=c960b357ca004a66a331eaf42e15eced](https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=c960b357ca004a66a331eaf42e15eced).

Bargout, Remy N, and Manish N Raizada. “Soil Nutrient Management in Haiti, Pre-Columbus to the Present Day: Lessons for Future Agricultural Interventions.” *Agriculture & Food Security*, vol. 2, no. 1, 29 July 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1186/2048-7010-2-11>.

- Boeckmann, Catherine. "Radishes." *Old Farmer's Almanac*, 4 July 2019, [www.almanac.com/plant/radishes](http://www.almanac.com/plant/radishes).
- Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. "U.S. Relations with Haiti - United States Department of State." *United States Department of State*, 6 Jan. 2020, [www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-haiti/](http://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-haiti/).
- Caple James, Erica. "Insecurity and Democracy in Haiti | the Harvard Kenneth C. Griffin Graduate School of Arts and Sciences." *Harvard.edu*, 2024, [gsas.harvard.edu/news/insecurity-and-democracy-haiti](https://gsas.harvard.edu/news/insecurity-and-democracy-haiti).
- Casimir, Jean, et al. *The Haitians : A Decolonial History*. Chapel Hill, University Of North Carolina Press, 2020.
- Chambers, Camille. *The Role of Dance in Haitian Vodou*
- Frilet, Corinne, and Jean-Michel Hauteville. "Haiti's Transitional President Leslie Voltaire Announces November 2025 Elections." *Le Monde.fr*, Le Monde, 31 Jan. 2025, [www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/01/31/haiti-s-transitional-president-leslie-voltaire-announces-november-2025-elections\\_6737642\\_4.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/01/31/haiti-s-transitional-president-leslie-voltaire-announces-november-2025-elections_6737642_4.html).
- James A. Ferguson. (2019). Haiti - Housing. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Haiti/Housing>
- "Haiti - Agricultural Land (% of Land Area) - 2023 Data 2024 Forecast 1961-2020 Historical." *Tradingeconomics.com*, Mar. 2025, [tradingeconomics.com/haiti/agricultural-land-percent-of-land-area-wb-data.html](http://tradingeconomics.com/haiti/agricultural-land-percent-of-land-area-wb-data.html).
- "Haiti: Country Data and Statistics." *Worlddata.info*, Global Data Lab, [www.worlddata.info/america/haiti/index.php](http://www.worlddata.info/america/haiti/index.php). Accessed 8 Mar. 2025.
- Mayo Clinic Health System*, 2024, [communityhealth.mayoclinic.org/featured-stories/black-bean-benefits](http://communityhealth.mayoclinic.org/featured-stories/black-bean-benefits).
- <https://www.facebook.com/thespruceofficial>. "How to Grow Your Own Green Beans." *The Spruce*, 2019, [www.thespruce.com/how-to-grow-green-beans-1403459](http://www.thespruce.com/how-to-grow-green-beans-1403459).
- International Trade Administration. "Haiti - Agricultural Sector." *Www.trade.gov*, 27 May 2024, [www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/haiti-agricultural-sector](http://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/haiti-agricultural-sector).
- Loanes, Ellen. "Haiti's Gang Violence Crisis, Briefly Explained." *Vox*, 26 Mar. 2023, [www.vox.com/world-politics/2023/3/26/23657163/haitis-gang-violence-crisis-explained](http://www.vox.com/world-politics/2023/3/26/23657163/haitis-gang-violence-crisis-explained).
- Moyo, Shannon. "Situation Update: Haiti Agriculture." 2024.
- Mullins, Amy P., and Bahram H. Arjmandi. "Health Benefits of Plant-Based Nutrition: Focus on Beans in Cardiometabolic Diseases." *Nutrients*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1 Feb. 2021, p. 519, [www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/13/2/519](http://www.mdpi.com/2072-6643/13/2/519), <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13020519>.

Patterson, Kenneal. “Over 5 Million People in Haiti Experiencing “Crisis” Levels of Hunger or Higher, New IPC Report Shows | Action against Hunger.” *Action against Hunger*, 30 Sept. 2024,  
[www.actionagainsthunger.org/press-releases/over-5-million-people-in-haiti-experiencing-crisis-levels-of-hunger-or-higher-new-ipc-report-shows/](http://www.actionagainsthunger.org/press-releases/over-5-million-people-in-haiti-experiencing-crisis-levels-of-hunger-or-higher-new-ipc-report-shows/).

Sabrie, Roble . “Average Household Size - Area Database - Table - Global Data Lab.” *Globaldatalab.org*,  
[globaldatalab.org/areadata/hhsize/?levels=1&country\\_order=by-continent&interpolation=1&extrapolation=1&extrapolation\\_years=3&nearest\\_real=0](http://globaldatalab.org/areadata/hhsize/?levels=1&country_order=by-continent&interpolation=1&extrapolation=1&extrapolation_years=3&nearest_real=0).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.” *Churchofjesuschrist.org*, 2019, [www.churchofjesuschrist.org/?lang=eng](http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/?lang=eng).

Together Women Rise. “Customs and Cuisine of Haiti | Together Women Rise.” *TOGETHER WOMEN RISE*, 2023,  
[togetherwomenrise.org/customsandcuisine/customs-and-cuisine-of-haiti/](http://togetherwomenrise.org/customsandcuisine/customs-and-cuisine-of-haiti/).

U.S. Department of State. “Haiti - United States Department of State.” *United States Department of State*, 2019, [www.state.gov/countries-areas/haiti/](http://www.state.gov/countries-areas/haiti/).

United Nations. “Haitian Capital’s Crippled Health System “on the Brink” | UN News.” *News.un.org*, 28 June 2024, [news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1151621](http://news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1151621).

“Urban Population (% of Total Population) - Haiti | Data.” *Worldbank.org*, 2018,  
[data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=HT](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=HT).

“Vertical Farming in Kenya: A Growing Trend for Food Security.” *Farming in Kenya | Farming in Kenya*, 17 Oct. 2024, [farminginkenya.co.ke/vertical-farming-in-kenya/](http://farminginkenya.co.ke/vertical-farming-in-kenya/).

Worldometer. “Haiti Population (2019) - Worldometers.” *Worldometers.info*, 2023,  
[www.worldometers.info/world-population/haiti-population/](http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/haiti-population/).