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### **Haiti: Transforming nation or disaster zone?**

Three weeks ago my boyfriend dumped me and lately I've been drinking, a lot. In this time I have consumed 18 unnecessary cups of Pepsi out of self pity. Now, while I've been crying over my summer fling I realized that the death rate in Haiti was 72 children five and under out of every 1,000 births dying. Hearing this I decided to make some calculations, each pop I purchased cost \$.63, so in total I spent \$11.34 drowning my sorrows in liquid tooth decay. With that money I could have helped at least a few of those children. I am very aware that this doesn't sound like the typical essay but as Albert Camus said, 'Nobody realizes that some people expend tremendous energy to be normal.' So being the energy conserving student that I am, I decided to save that extra energy and write a 'fun' essay. So far I've established that the people of Haiti need our help. So I shall continue on that theme and throughout this paper tell you why that is, how their numerous natural disasters have affected them and their food security, or lack there of, and what can and should be done to assist them. The point of this writing is not to preach to American teenagers about how spoiled, self-absorbed, and entitled we all are and if we all just stopped to think about someone else and not buy that next pair of shoes we could save the world. It is to merely present the facts to you in a way that, hopefully, won't put you to sleep. Now, to conclude my earlier anecdote, here is my new plan: Step one, every time I feel the urge to have another cup of liquid perfection, don't. Step two, put that money I saved in a jar to be given to Haiti. Step three, being the spoiled, selfish teenager I am, consider what is in it for me. The answer, I'll get healthier, hotter, make less hurried trips to the bathroom, have whiter teeth, and get the obvious good feeling of doing something for someone else. This plan appears to be a win for Haiti and a win-win-win-win-win for me. Plan Stop Drinking is officially ago.

To understand the typical family in Haiti I think it's easier to first learn about their social construction and government. The social construction of Haiti is similar to the shoe market. In the shoe market there are Christian Louboutins, which are the most fabulous shoes known to man kind, in my opinion. These shoes obviously represent the super rich of Haiti. There are also the Wal-Mart shoes in the shoe market. These shoes represent the poor population of Haiti. Now, I don't mean to put down Wal-Mart at all, because they have very cute shoes there, which I love! I am merely saying comparatively speaking the prices of the shoes represent these different Haitian social classes. You may have noticed the lack of the middle of the road shoes like Nine West, Jessica Simpson, and Nike. These shoes are not super expensive nor are they exactly cheap. In this analogy they would represent the middle class family, which Haiti incidentally is lacking. This is because of their corrupt government. Transparency International (TI), a global civil society organization aimed at ending government corruption throughout the world, has ranked Haiti as the fourth most corrupt country on their Corruption Perceptions Index. Keeping with our shoe theme TI would be the quality control of the shoe world making sure each shoe store's or each country's shoes are up to par. They have defined corruption as the abuse of trusted power for private gain. Now, how do these two concepts relate? Well, the Haitian government is corrupt, resulting in the powerful people gaining all the wealth. This creates a small, super rich population of Christian Louboutins in Haiti. The

rest of the population basically falls into the Wal-Mart category of poor, struggling families. Finally, like I stated earlier, there seems to be a lack of middle class families, or Nine West shoes, in Haiti.

Now that we have established that over 80% of the people in Haiti, according to GlobalSecurity.org, live in poverty I think it's time to discuss the typical Haitian family. The average family of five in Haiti lives in a two room house that is generally 10 feet by 20 feet. The house is made up of sticks, dried mud and sometimes, if you're lucky, a salvaged piece of cardboard or wood. A thatched metal roof completes what can only best be described as a hut. Since these 'houses' only have two rooms the kitchen and bathroom are both outdoors. As I was trying to come up with a relevant-to-today example I found this a very difficult task. Living in the United States it's hard to even imagine this sort of dwelling because most of our parents would not let us even set foot in this type of house let alone live in it. But unfortunately this is a reality for most Haitians. The best way to visualize the homes is to take yourself back to the third grade when we studied Native Americans. They lived in houses much like those of the Haitians only lacking the metal roofs and occasional pieces of wood, metal, and cardboard often thrown into the outer walls. The gender roles in Haiti mirror those of the early United States, where the male is the chief bread winner, if he is lucky enough to have a job, or he tends to the fields. The woman raises the children, cooks the food, and keeps the home. Jobs much like in the U.S. have become somewhat of a scarcity so even when food is available many still cannot afford it. The diet in Haiti consists of their food staples rice and beans. Though as food prices continue to soar mud cakes have become a new emerging food staple. "It stops the hunger," said Marie-Carmelle Baptiste, a Haitian, for an article in [The Guardian](#). "You eat them when you have to." Again, this seems somewhat unbelievable to me because the only time I can ever remember eating dirt was when it was thrown in my face at the babysitters house or it was kicked in my face because I felt the strange need to sit in the middle of the kickball field during a game. Even in those two instances it was not eaten by choice. Finally, the typical Haitian children do not receive any sort of education. Now, I know what you are thinking, how fast can I get on a plane to Haiti so I don't have to go to school! Trust me, those were my initial thoughts also, but the daily grind of high school doesn't seem so bad when you consider the fact that without school many of these children don't get meals for days on end. My next thought was why can't Haiti just build a couple of crappy public schools like good ole Boone High and call it a day? The answer, they have public schools but for most people they are sadly out of reach, due to the high costs. This is reflected in the literacy rates of Haiti, where about 50% of the population is illiterate. The other form of schooling is in private schools. But now the question is how can Haitians afford private school if they can't even afford public school? They can't. Many of the students in private schools are sponsored by families from other countries. In this program the student is educated and receives two meals a day.

As you can imagine fixing Haiti's problems will not be easy. It is like a race with hurdles in track. Each hurdle represents another obstacle in Haiti's path to becoming a more secure nation. This race could also be described in terms of a designer sample sale, an analogy that makes more sense to me. Each challenge facing Haiti is like a fellow fashionista in line for the same sale. As you stand there you consider the way you plan to knock each girl down in the pursuit of those amazing designer items just beyond your reach. Haiti faces many fashionistas, so to speak, on it's path to greater country security. But before I get into the actual logistics of how I plan to push, shove, and scratch my way to the pair of Louboutin peep-toe booties, I should probably identify all the problems facing Haiti. The first and most obvious barrier to me seems to be the government corruption. This issue hinders the abilities of Haitians to do many things. One

of them is buy food. Another is send their children to school. If a family cannot afford adequate food then they certainly can't afford expensive public school. As Howard in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* said, "I can't take blood from a stone." And neither can the Haitian people. Another obstacle facing them is their prime location on the hurricane belt. The affect of natural disasters on Haiti was the focus of my research because it has such an affect on them. The impact these catastrophes have on the nation will be discussed in more detail later, but for right now a basic understanding will suffice. The final barrier is overpopulation. There are about 330 people per square kilometer in Haiti, which is just smaller than Maryland. So logically one could deduce that it would be difficult for a nation where most of the people lack electricity in their homes to support that many.

As I promised before, I will describe the effect that natural disasters, humanitarian relief, and food aid have on Haiti. The most recent of these disasters, as you probably know was the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck south Haiti on January 12th, 2010. This will be the jumping off point for us to understand the effects natural disasters have. By January 21 the United States as well as many other nations had already begun massive relief efforts to help the Haitians. Over the days following the earthquake the United States in particular had distributed more than 600,000 bottles of water and over 400,000 meals. They also had delivered 9 water treatment units to distribute 900,000 liters of drinking water to 90,000 people a day. Just to put that in perspective if you are using a low flow shower head you could take about 9,782 16 minute showers with that amount of water. As you can imagine relief efforts had a tremendous affect on the ability of people to get adequate food and nutrition. These measures taken by countries to help Haiti have improved the ability of poor Haitians to get proper food and nutrition, but having said that they are still not all the way there. More assistance needs to be given to the farmers that grow the food because most of the response has been focused on the urban areas affected. The trends are showing improvement, measured by the amount of Haitians that have been given assistance. The figures are also projected to improve even more. The Ministry of Agriculture has distributed agricultural supplies to 72,000 families and are hoping to reach 80,000 more by the next growing season. The improvement of humanitarian relief should make finding adequate nutrition and food much easier for Haitians. As well as finding jobs, currently 35,000 people are employed by the United Nations World Food Programme and that number is expected to raise to 140,000 by the end of this year. It seems for now Haiti is on the right track.

Just because Haiti is on the right track now doesn't mean they are safe forever. A climate change could negatively affect Haiti's crops. If it gets too hot, the country could enter into a drought and if it gets too wet, their crops could get flooded out. Population growth and urbanization could also have negative effects on their progress. With only so much farm-able land, too much urbanization could have terrible effects on the country's developing food supply. This is much like a current situation facing a well known US clothing retailer, Pac-Sun. Before the recession hit they were doing just fine, but once our economy took a turn for the worst things got bad. They couldn't support all of their stores so they had to close the ones in smaller malls. This is relevant to Haiti because the condition of the economy was out of Pac-Sun's control but once it slowed they needed to adapt quickly to stay in business. This is a skill Haiti will need to gain because, the things I mentioned earlier would also be out of their control. They cannot manipulate the weather, so if it changes they will need to be on their toes and ready to adapt with it. This will greatly help Haiti on their road to becoming a stable country.

Based on my research I have concluded to effectively address natural disasters Haiti will need two things. First, is something mentioned above, the ability to adapt when needed. This will come from the government as well as the people themselves. The government should be ready at all times for another disaster to strike and they should have a plan to fix it when one does. In addition to a plan they should also be prepared to change it, if and when it's necessary. The second thing Haiti needs is a strong core. They need concrete aspects to build on, such as a strong central government, and strong infrastructure. This is so that as they begin and continue to advance they already have a foundation to add to. Once this foundation is in place Haiti can begin to advance technologically, economically, and socially.

During this essay I have established many things about Haiti. First, Haiti is a country in need. This is something you may or may not have known but now you know why as well. It's because, they have a very corrupt government, a prime location on the hurricane belt, and are suffering from overpopulation. Another thing we discussed was the fact that saving Haiti is not a one woman show, so to speak. Helping them takes everyone. Who are we helping anyway? In Haiti 80% of the population needs assistance. Finally we discussed how Haiti could be on the right track, with all the humanitarian relief bringing them more jobs and farming supplies. However, they still need a lot more. Now, earlier I was telling you about Plan Stop Drinking, and I'll be honest it's going a little rough. However, with the pop prices rising on Friday to \$1.06 I think resisting the liquid-y goodness will be much easier. This leads me to a flaw in my plan, how am I going to cope without my precious Pepsi? I think I have found a way, singing. That sounds lame I know, but I'm not talking about the choir type of singing. I'm talking about the loud, obnoxious, no-one-is-listening-so-who-cares singing. So I think I need to re-name my plan. Plan B: Stop Drinking and Start Singing. Last but not least, I have a moral obligation to pre-apologize to anyone who has to hear this phase of the the plan, I'm very sorry.

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