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### **Educational Focus in Haiti Can Improve Agricultural Knowledge and Help Rebuild a Country**

“Education is the transmission of civilization”, -- Will Durant. Haiti will be the focus of my paper. I will be demonstrating the typical farm family, and the major barriers to improve agricultural productivity and employment opportunities, which in turn affects education.

These could be the basis to the agricultural and food scarcity problems in Haiti. Haiti, deriving from the Arawak word Ayti meaning “mountainous land”, is located in the Atlantic Ocean bordering the Dominican Republic. Haiti remained under French rule until it gained independence in 1904. Haiti has a population of around 10 million people and is roughly the size of Vermont which has a population of 626,000. Haiti is 10,695 square miles whereas Vermont is 9,614 square miles. In retrospect, Haiti is jammed full of people. The ethnic groups of Haiti consist of 95% black and only 5% white or mullato. The population of blacks is so much higher due to the fact that when Haiti was first discovered, it immediately became an outlet for slavery due to the large quantities of sugar cane to be harvested. Much of the population is made up of people between the ages of 15 through 60. Only 24% of Haiti is urbanized in the context of having safe, clean facilities to dispose of human and animal waste, to somewhat contain the spread of disease. This means that the other 76% of persons in Haiti live in unsavory environments where they struggle with the necessities of life. In 1999, the most current data, the unemployment rate was 7.7%, which provides a sufficient income only adequate for survival. The government and people of Haiti are in a distrustful relationship due to past altercations. The Haitian government is very corrupt due to manipulative leaders coupled with a lack of educated citizens, which leads to not having federally funded facilities to access.

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Much of the county is rural. A large portion of the population lives in abject poverty. To make this more meaningful, they have a minute amount of resources and thus must figure a way to cope with day to day life. Haiti’s population and geography contributes to this poverty issue. A great quantity of the land in Haiti is uninhabitable because of the numerous mountain ranges. The result is all of the resources have to be divided among vast numbers of people. At one point, the land in Haiti was plentiful but over the years, the population has increased. Currently, the resources are very scarce. In the 1950’s all of the American land holders were expelled from the country and the Haitians were left alone, unknowledgeable of how to manage their crops and land. Deforestation occurred as the wood served as fuel to the people. Due to the lack of information and education the consequences of this effort to survive was not realized. Along with deforestation the animal life has also been decreasing because they have been hunted to provide food. The rivers in Haiti are not easy to navigate, which makes it very difficult to be used for transportation with ease. It also is very unsanitary water, as 37% of the nation’s water is not drinkable. This is a problem because of some of the waterborne illness including but not limited to include bacterial diarrhea, hepatitis A and E, and also leptospirosis (flu like sickness) which can lead to death.

Healthcare in Haiti is virtually nonexistent. Many of the people in Haiti die from simple diseases every day. This is because there is not a medical system aside from volunteers from other countries. In addition, there are no organized hospitals and transportation accessible. This causes a very high death rate in Haiti.

The rates of birth and infant mortality are high, and roughly two-fifths of the population is under 15 years of age.

Agriculture is the main source of income for Haiti. Their main cash crops are coffee, plantain (banana family), yams, and sugar cane. The environment and weather allows for these crops to grow better here than in most other countries. Only one-fifth of the land in Haiti is able to sustain crops. There are few natural resources, although there are some small deposits of copper and gold but not necessarily a sufficient amount to mine.

The educational systems in Haiti are virtually nonexistent. The educational system, that does exist, is held together by volunteers from outside of the country such as church organizations. Over half of Haiti is illiterate. Because of this, Haiti lags behind in information and use of technology. This causes them to be behind in the agricultural area and access to information to improve farming practices to increase crop yield. Not only are they agriculturally behind but also have a weak government structure because they don't understand their choices of political leaders.

In a typical Haitian family, men and women both have a fairly equal status. Normally, the males deal with farming and physical labor, as the females deal with childcare. They both have a full commitment to family. Families with children are very common and parents take pride in their children. Children do work when of age and help contribute to the family. Most rural families are illiterate so many concepts are very naïve to them. There are not many opportunities for sanitary living.

Normally the males cultivate the land and the women take the goods to the market to attempt to sell to provide income for the family. If the crops don't go to the market they go toward feeding the family. The typical home is a very crude shanty built with whatever materials were available at the time it was constructed. Many Haitian families rely on help from extended family. They believe that it is easier with the help of a large group than on their own. It is very difficult for the Haitian families to sustain a livable life because of their lack of access to education.

In Haiti there are many problems that take an educated mind to start to analyze and formulate a solution. Haitian families can't produce a sufficient amount of food because of the way the land is being utilized and irrigated. Haiti does not have a lot of tillable land, and the land that is available is being destroyed by the primitive farming techniques utilized. If there are no crops there is no source of food. Also the food that is produced is not nutritious enough to keep the citizens healthy. There are few nutrients in the crops grown which leads to malnutrition. According to the Global Hunger Index, Haiti is in serious danger of more starving people. Haiti is at a huge disadvantage because there is no help from the government and the people cannot self-govern themselves. Haiti is still a developing country and has been struggling for a long time. The trend in improvement is minimal and resources continue depleting. Considering these factors are worsening, the typical rural family stands little chance. This is because they have few options to go to escape the circumstances. A combination of large population with limited space, limited outside support, weak government, and poor literacy presents staggering obstacles.

If Haiti were to implement a basic educational system for everyone, the country would improve. The citizens would gain knowledge to understand how to reuse fields every year rather than using it one year and then leaving it desolate. Increased knowledge about agriculture would improve the quality of food and therefore nutrition which would lead to a longer life expectancy.

The environment would be salvaged for future generations. A foundation has to start somewhere for the nation to grow and move forward. Educational investment would be most beneficial to the children because they are much easier to teach and they will retain the information taught. The older generation is likely stuck in their ways, therefore it would be difficult to completely educate them but one could do so to a certain extent.

There are also other factors that will affect the country of Haiti. Over the last one hundred years Haiti has been hit with many natural disasters such as hurricanes and floods. Erosion of the land has eliminated space for crops. Furthermore, inadequate shelter and water are the result of the disasters. Previous to the disasters, shelters were poorly built. When these disasters occur, they displace many resources when there are not many to start with.

Most importantly, living situations and population are going to effect the future generations. If the populations continue to grow at the current rate, then Haiti will outgrow its land in no time. If this is the case, this will be devastating for all of the country because they will run out of resources.

After all of my research, I have concluded that the most effective way to help Haiti is the collaboration of organizations to establish a strong educational system to educate current and future generations. The rural families have few resources as well as insufficient knowledge and materials. I feel that the most important Millennium Developmental Goals that Haiti needs to reach in the next three years include primary education, medical care, environmental sustainability and food security.

I would approach the situation as if I were building a house. I would begin with the primary education factor. Primary education would be a good blueprint. I need to have a blueprint and a foundation then I could build the house and sculpt it the way it is meant to be. If I were to just start building the frame, the house would fall.

The cooperation of many organizations working together is important. Church and nonprofit organizations would play a large part in this process, as well as an improved Haitian national government. Necessary components would include doctors, teachers, and volunteers to commit their time to agricultural research and education. Experts from the United Nations would aid in the rebuilding of the Haitian government. If the Haitian government does not take the lead, the citizens will suffer. It would give the Haitian people the opportunity to reform their government and have some say in what happens in the country. It takes more than one rain drop to fill a pail. I feel that many countries would need to contribute. As long as everyone works together we can reach our goals.

There are simple short-term solutions to aid some problems such as bucket drip irrigation and solar cooking boxes. The bucket drip irrigation system consists of a large container such as a trash can elevated off of the ground which lead to a series of connections that distributes a consistent amount of water to the crops. This is most ideal for smaller gardens for individual farmers and their families. Another solution is the solar box cooker. It is a double lined, insulated box that uses reflections of the sun's rays to cook food and disinfect water (much like a crockpot). This would take less time as well, which would give women and children the same opportunities as men to access education. These are both inexpensive, practical solutions for individual farmers which would provide safe water and an efficient way of cooking meals without depleting resources.

There are certain steps that have to be followed. If we invest time, money and commitment to Haiti, I feel that we could make huge steps toward the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. If we can educate, the other factors will fall into place. "I am but one member of a vast team made up of many organizations, officials, thousands of scientists, and millions of farmers - mostly small and humble - who for many years have been fighting a quiet, oftentimes losing war on the food production front,"—Dr. Norman E. Borlaug. It takes a team to change a nation and every person counts.

Education is the basis to all successful people and civilizations. If we were to educate the citizens of Haiti, they would have the chance to change the life that they have known for so long. Here in America, many students take their education for granted. Even elementary education would be appreciated by those who don't have access. As people of the world and the human race, it is our responsibility to take care of each other. If we pull together, we can help a struggling country reach simple goals that every country should have.

The personal connection that I have to Haiti is one that makes me very passionate about future generations. My mother's siblings were adopted from Haiti at a young age. They were homeless and starving children fending for themselves in intimidating circumstances. I am inspired by the words of Dr. Borlaug when he says: "... We must maintain a reasonable balance between population growth and our ability to produce those necessities essential for a decent, human life. This begins with food, the first basic necessity. Without food, all other things we take for granted—clothing, housing, education, and employment—are of secondary importance."

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