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Haiti: From Seed to Harvest, Ensuring Humanitarian Aid is Effective

On January 12, 2010, Haiti experienced the strongest earthquake that ever hit the country since 1770. The earthquake measured in at a 7.0 magnitude. Almost three and a half million people living there were affected. There were fifty-nine strong aftershocks with strengths ranging from 4.2 magnitudes up to 5.9 magnitudes. The Haitian government estimated that the quake left more than three hundred thousand injured and two hundred twenty thousand dead (Haiti Earthquake Facts). Of the three million people affected, several faced nutritional problems, including roughly thirty six thousand pregnant women and up to two million children (Bassett). After the quake, several problems arose such as worse sanitary/hygienic conditions, less accessibility of nutritious food due to lack of income and poor road conditions, weaker and less accessible health services, increasing food insecurity, slightly higher acute malnutrition, intensifying micronutrient deficiencies, worsening chronic malnutrition, which likely remains the major underlying nutrition problem, and even less government capacity to address the crisis. Several of the Haitian population went to camps where diseases spread. Cholera affected two hundred and sixteen thousand people, and four thousand people died from this disease (Haiti Earthquake Facts). Haiti is not yet a fully developed country. Haiti was ranked one hundred and fourth of the one hundred and seventy-seven countries in the United Nations Human Development Index. Approximately eighty percent of Haiti's population lives below the poverty level. More than seventy percent of the population depends on agriculture for living, but only about forty percent of Haiti is cultivated (Economy::Haiti). Numerous humanitarian relief and food aid have been assisting in this disaster site; however, the effectiveness of these services could improve to better the people of Haiti.

Haitian households often consist of multiple generations. Haiti's population of 8.5 million is projected to jump to 13 million by 2050 (How Population Growth). Haitian women give birth to an average of four children. Adults and their families will live with their siblings in a common space. The Haitian home, or lakay, is structured towards the strengths and needs of the extended family. Individuals don't often separate from the lakay. Communities in Haiti consist of roughly a dozen lakay grouped together to form a lakou. The groups of families work together to complete daily life tasks, such as farming and building new houses. This is known as konbit, communal sharing of work. Several groups like the konbit because it is the most effective way to accomplish their goals. When a task becomes defined and is shared by all, the availability of people to work increases (Jacobson). This is important when it comes to harvesting and gathering food to feed a community.

The impact of the earthquake on nutrition security was dramatic. The health system in Haiti is badly weakened and precarious health and sanitary conditions put children at higher risk for malnutrition. For millions of Haitians, access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food remains a challenge. Food insecurity in the areas directly affected by the earthquake has dropped, but levels are still higher than they were prior to the earthquake. Nationally, about a third of the population, or between 2.5 and 3.3 million Haitians, is estimated to be food insecure (Economy::Haiti). From all of Haiti's population, about thirty-four percent of small farmers who live only from their agricultural activities, and thirty-four percent of wage earners engaged in agricultural activities are food insecure. About thirty-two percent whose main source of income is the sale of charcoal or transfers from other households are food insecure. Also, people living with HIV and their households experience hunger more often than the rest of the population, especially urban women and girls (Burton).

After the quake, the nation's education system collapsed. About half of the fifteen thousand primary schools and fifteen hundred secondary schools were hit in the quake creating an enormous challenge for Haiti. Joel Jean-Pierre said that the three main universities in Port-au-Prince were also "almost totally destroyed" (Cawthorne). Even now, five hundred thousand people are still officially displaced and access to health care is nearly non-existent (Haiti: Access to Health). Less than two percent of the original trees are left in Haiti. Much of the trees have been chopped down to use for charcoal to supply the country's energy needs (Edwards).

When it comes to farming and agriculture, the average farm in Haiti is two and a half acres for a small family. Haitians primarily practice growing methods catered to a monoculture, this includes growing crops such as coffee, indigo, tobacco or sugarcane. However, Haiti produces other products such as mangoes, rice, corn, and wood. The majority of these products are grown to be exported. This creates a serious challenge, in that exporting crops negatively affects the small farmer by focusing productivity outside of Haiti, rather than focusing attention on crops that will provide sustenance and support the Haitian economy (Economy::Haiti). Agricultural productivity is also a challenge in Haiti because top soil loss has come with deforestation. Approximately six thousand hectares of soil are lost each year due to erosion. Lack of vegetation also has a major threat. During hurricane season, heavy rains and storm surges on deforested slopes can cause secondary effects like landslides. The landslides on these slopes also directly affect Haitian farmers who use the slopes for cultivation. Landslides also decrease soil fertility and top soil rapidly erodes away. Because of this, Farmers turn to agricultural chemicals such as DDT which increases environmental pollution and decreases water quality, another problem in Haiti (Edwards). The year of the quake, Haiti's gross domestic product real growth rate was at -5.4 percent. To break down the gross domestic product, twenty-five percent came from agriculture, sixteen percent from industry, and services accounted for the remaining fifty-nine percent. The country's gross domestic product per capita was roughly twelve hundred dollars. Haiti has an abundance of unskilled labor and a shortage of skilled labor, so the unemployment rate is at 40.6 percent according to a 2010 study. As of December 31, 2011, Haiti was 630.2 million dollars in debt (Economy::Haiti). The earthquake caused many problems to the infrastructure causing the transporting of food to be crippled. At least three million people were in need of aid. Thousands of meals have been distributed by the US military, and Red Cross volunteers plan to deliver clean drinking water to two hundred thousand people each day by truck. Over one million liters of water had been distributed through the Red Cross as of January 21. However this is not nearly enough for three million people to survive on and it is unknown how long services like this will be able to continue. For the poor, many become ill or even die because they do not have access to safe food or clean water (Burton).

Two years prior to the earthquake, Haiti was hit by several tropical storms and hurricanes. Almost eight hundred people were killed and approximately eight hundred thousand people went missing. An estimated cost of almost one billion dollars was projected to correct the damage the storms caused to services and infrastructure. Organizations, such as the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department, donated more than four hundred thousand dollars to UNICEF to provide hygiene services, safe water, and sanitation to the people of Haiti affected by the storms (Niles). This just adds to the devastation considering that even before the quake, nearly one third of children less than five years old were chronically malnourished, and this accounts for over half the deaths among children under five (Steinlechner). There are several projects already in effect in Haiti. Some projects require residents to pay less than two cents for five gallons of water. The money raised helps pay the city water bill, covers staff salaries to run the water kiosks, and is used to fund small-scale development projects such as sports fields and health centers (Nybo).

In regards to the recent earthquake, only a small percentage of aid has actually been invested in restoring infrastructure. Without an improvement in the infrastructure, Haiti will not be able to grow and develop

as efficiently as it could. A report from Global Competitiveness Report 2010-2011 of the 2010 World Economic Forum emphasizes the importance of infrastructure.

Extensive and efficient infrastructure is critical for ensuring the effective functioning of the economy, as it is an important factor determining the location of economic activity and the kinds of activities or sectors that can develop in a particular economy. Well-developed infrastructure reduces the effect of distance between regions, integrating the national market and connecting it at low cost to markets in other countries and regions. In addition, the quality and extensiveness of infrastructure networks significantly impact economic growth and affect income inequalities and poverty in a variety of ways. A well-developed transport and communications infrastructure network is a prerequisite for the access of less-developed communities to core economic activities and services (The Importance).

Infrastructure is an important factor when developing a country especially when it comes to travel and transporting materials. More importantly, most of the foreign aid is not being invested into the Haitian economy. According to a recent investigation, for every hundred dollars funding Haitian reconstruction contracts given by the American government, \$98.40 goes into American companies. This just shows that the people donating are actually gaining from their aid. The humanitarians will receive a noteworthy reputation for being philanthropic as well as have the money goes back into their own economies (Dumpit).

Today Haiti depends on the outside world for nearly all of its sustenance. Fifty-one percent of the food consumed in the country is imported, including eighty percent of all rice eaten, based on numbers from 2005. Imports also put the country troubling with international prices. When prices spiked in 2008, rioters were unable to afford rice, so they smashed and burned buildings. Now could possibly be a repeat of the past. Imported rice prices are up twenty-five percent since the quake and would likely be even higher if it weren't for the immense amount of food aid (AP).

Haiti has the highest infant and maternal mortality, the worst malnutrition and the worst AIDS situation in the Americas. The general mortality rate was 1057 per 100,000 people between 1995 and 2000. A quarter of the children in Haiti suffer from chronic malnutrition along with the three to six percent who suffer from acute malnutrition. About fifteen percent of newborns have a low birth weight. There are complications in a quarter of the birth deliveries. Forty percent of the population has no real access to basic health care; therefore, seventy-six percent of deliveries are made by non-qualified personnel. More than half of the population has no access to drugs and medication, so consequently only about half of the children are vaccinated. It is increasingly difficult to supply hospitals with the needed drugs, medical surgical consumables, water, propane gas, and diesel. Stocks of drugs are not renewed in peripheral warehouses located in zones of difficult access. As a result, emergency care and other essential services are not guaranteed where needed. Most hospitals are older and in not well maintained buildings with decrepit water installations. Hydraulic pumps are often out of order due to a lack of electricity. Most cities such as Gonaives and Cap Haitien are supplied water through an electrical pumping system. That becomes a problem when they are without electricity, which they have been. Unfortunately, the water distributed by the public institutions is only chlorinated in Port-au-Prince (The Haiti Crisis). Expenses also often create problems with water availability. The World Bank estimates that "around fifty-four percent of the population lives on less than \$1 a day and seventy-eight percent on less than \$2". The people of Haiti often resort to gathering water from dirty rivers to supply their households with water for their daily needs. The water they gather from these unsanitary rivers is used for needs including cooking and drinking. They use this water when it becomes too expensive or they do not have access to a clean water source. Ultimately, access to clean, fresh water is a main concern in Haiti. Waterborne illnesses, such as typhoid, cholera, and chronic diarrhea, are the cause of more than half of the deaths in the country every year. Contaminated water is also one of the leading causes of childhood illness and the very high

infant death rate in Haiti. The earthquake had a devastating effect on the already inadequate clean water supply. Earthquakes often cause damage to wells and water systems, which are a major source of fresh water for the people of Haiti (Nybo).

The United States is not the only nation assisting in the reconstruction of Haiti. Maltbie said that after the quake “More than 20 countries, scores of private companies, and numerous international humanitarian groups have pledged aid to the western hemisphere’s poorest nation.” The United Nations released \$10 million from its emergency fund for immediate aid to Haiti. The Canadian Disaster Assistance Response Team left for Haiti the Thursday following the quake to begin the cleanup process as well as help with search and rescue. Despite having no diplomatic ties with the Haitian government, China made significant efforts to help the Haitian people. An Air China plane landed in Port-au-Prince with 10 tons of food, equipment, and medicine. Australia provided a 9.3 million dollar aid package. Brazil had an aircraft delivering water and food, medicine, equipment, and a search and rescue team with sniffer dogs. Israel supplied two plane loads of aid and rescue staff, including 40 doctors and nurses to set up a field hospital that was able to serve 500 people a day. 30 Cuban doctors were also available. One million dollars in support came from India. Sweden provided Haiti with 850,000 dollars, tents, water purification equipment, medical aid, and a team to rebuild the U.N.’s demolished headquarters (Maltbie).

Leadership within the government needs to be reconstructed and improved in order for foreign aid to reach its optimal effectiveness. The thousands of humanitarian assistance organizations operating in Haiti have tangible goals, but in order for them to reach these goals, the government needs to properly organize them. Dr. Philip Auerswald’s of George Mason University once said, “Haiti’s path to prosperity does not run through the halls of aid agencies, but from seed to harvest.” What Auerswald is getting at is that in order for Haiti to survive without foreign aid and humanitarian relief, they need to learn how to properly grow and harvest food and have a manner in which it can be distributed.

In order for Haiti to reach their full potential on their own, humanitarian relief and food aid needs to assist not only by supplying Haiti with adequate food and technology, but also teach the government and people of Haiti how to continue the progress. Some major steps to increase productivity in Haiti are to increase farmer income, produce nutritionally enhanced food, and to improve the environment with commercial fruit trees. Practical agricultural training and hands-on technical assistance are essential means to achieve these goals. These goals are easily achieved by assisting Haiti in improving seed quality, planting high value tree crops, and planting vegetable and tuber crops. By Haiti having access to durable crops that are high in nutrients, they will be able to create a successful agriculture system.

Along with assisting Haiti in learning proper agricultural techniques, infrastructure needs to improve. Instead of putting efforts into temporary shelter and other infrastructure, energy should be spent constructing more permanent solutions. Also, a higher percentage of money being donated needs to go directly to the impoverished nation. The aid that goes to the nations should be implemented through improving infrastructure first. Currently, Less than 12 percent of the reconstruction money sent to Haiti has gone toward energy, shelter, ports or other infrastructure. At least a third of the money went to projects such as HIV/AIDS programs that were in place before the 2010 catastrophe and had little to do with the recovery from the earthquake (Daniel). Without a proper infrastructure system, Haiti will not have an efficient way of transporting materials. Relief services need to not only supply Haiti with the needed materials but teach Haitians how to put the materials to use. Attentively learning and teaching the people of Haiti what an effective infrastructure and agricultural system consists of will improve Haiti’s ability to grow as a developing nation. Improving infrastructure will also aid itself in developing a better health care system. The availability to travel to hospitals and care centers will increase, thus decreasing the amount of disease spread.

Humanitarian aid will not always be able to assist Haiti in the future and this is why it is important that Haiti learns how to develop without the assistance of other countries. Teaching the impoverished nation proper techniques will allow them to grow and prove humanitarian relief effective. Haiti has huge potential if these humanitarian aid recommendations are implemented.

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