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Haiti, Factor 19: Foreign Aid

Haiti: Providing Foreign Aid

Imagine being part of the one billion people waking up, so sick to your stomach you could not stand up on your own, not knowing where your next meal will come from. While we were deciding what to have for breakfast this morning, a Haitian woman and her children were living outside in mud, with no access to clean water and had not had a meal for days. Sometimes as Americans we do not pay attention to what life is like in third-world countries, we cannot wrap our minds around not waking up in a bed and a refrigerator full of food. While our biggest worry is about whether or not we will get what we wanted for Christmas, a child in Haiti just wants to be able to not wake up hungry every morning. Millions of dollars are used every year in aiding foreign countries, but what can you and I do as individuals?

1. 2010 The Earthquake

Haiti, located just west of the Dominican Republic became the first independent Caribbean state after it acquired independence from France in the early 19th century. Unfortunately, decades of poverty, environmental deterioration, violence, instability and dictatorship left this potential tourist spot the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Haiti seems to be prone to natural disasters ranging from, seasonal hurricanes and tropical storms to flooding and drought. At 4:53 pm on January 12, 2010, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.3, the most powerful earthquake to hit Haiti in over 200 years, struck near Haiti's capitol, Port au Prince, and lasted for 35 seconds. There was an estimated over 230 thousand dead, 300 thousand injured and 2.3 million displaced, making this the most deadly earthquake in decades. To this day there is still 347 thousand people homeless or living in relief camps around Port au Prince. (USAID)

Right after the earthquake, Haiti was overcome by a food crisis. Millions of Haitians who had lost everything, no longer had access to food. Every year Haiti depends on imports for more than 50 percent of its food. Rice is Haiti's primary food source and the country relies on imports for up to 80 percent of this product. The port in Port au Prince, which contributes to 65 percent of all imported rice was severely damaged in the earthquake, leaving the country without an abundance of rice. One month after, only 2,495 tons of rice were imported, in comparison the usual monthly amount of 35,000 to 40,000 tons. Eighty percent of small wholesalers in the area who were directly affected lost their storage facilities. As a result they were unable to re-enter the market due to lack of capital and lack of access credit, which led to only being able to sell small quantities at a time. (World Food Programme)

Haitians described the struggle to feed their families after the earthquake. The price of food; rice, beans, cornmeal, cooking oil, and charcoal has risen from 15 to 30 percent since the earthquake. Meanwhile, Haitian's sources of income had diminished. Only those receiving funds from families overseas were able to purchase food, otherwise finding food was unending labor. Coupons were given once weekly at relief camps, however not to everyone. Women who were unable to get coupons would have to travel to a different site, miles away. If they were lucky they would receive a 50 pound bag of rice, but then they would have to carry it back to where they were living. The next day would bring the same procedure but oils were often times located in completely different locations than rice. More often than not, these long ventures led to nothing. Haitians faced many factors such as, there may not be coupons available, the rice would run out, the distribution center would be relocated, or it would not open due to security reasons. When money ran out, young women and girls participated in prostitution because this was the only way to obtain money to feed themselves and their families. Haitians described these experiences with horror. (Global Research)

The World Food Programme immediately came to Haiti's aid. They delivered rice, beans, oil, sugar and salt to hospitals, orphanages and affected neighborhoods in Port au Prince, and surrounding affected areas. The World Food Programme used emergency food stocks of which were prepositioned each year in four logistics bases across the country. A humanitarian bridge was established to transport large quantities of emergency supplies by air, sea, and land from a logistic center in the Dominican Republic. Despite having to operate in an almost completely destroyed area, a distribution operation was put in place that ensured basic food was available to more than two thirds of the population of Port au Prince and surrounding areas. The World Food Program, under the direction of the Ministry of Health, organized the distribution of fortified foods for all pregnant women and children from 6 to 59 months, to prevent malnutrition among the most vulnerable groups living in relief camps. (World Food Programme)

Not only did the World Food Program provide aid, the Food and Agriculture Organization also provided high-yielding seeds and planting materials, tools, veterinary care, training on improved agronomical techniques, animal husbandry, and disaster preparedness. (FAO) The Food and Agriculture Organization is now supporting small seed growers' associations in Haiti, to produce corn and bean seed. The seed growers associations not only ensure a supply of income, but it also provides seed to farmers in Haiti.

A food survey conducted in February of 2010 showed that 1.3 million people lived food insecure, in areas affected by the earthquake. An additional 600 thousand people living in affected rural areas, were insecure. In June 2010 another survey was conducted and showed that the number of people living food insecure had dropped from 1.3 million to 1.1 million in areas affected by the earthquake. This would not have been possible without foreign aid. (World Food Programme) Agriculture also helped cushion the shock of the earthquake, thankfully 2010 was a good agriculture year and total food production was just under the record high from 2009, agriculture was Haiti's safety net. However just when things were starting to get better, Haiti would encounter a Cholera Epidemic in October 2010 and then two years later, Tropical Storm Isaac and Hurricane Sandy would leave behind the food crisis of 2012.

2. Cholera Outbreak

The first case of cholera appeared in Haiti around mid-October 2010 in the Centre and Artibonite departments. Haiti had no history of a cholera epidemic before a fecal specimen appeared toxigenic. Within one month cholera had spread from 2 departments, to all 10 departments in the country. For a cholera outbreak to occur, there must be a significant breach in water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure used by groups of people, permitting large-scale exposure to food or water contaminated with *Vibrio cholerae* organisms. Also cholera must be present in the population. This would be the worst cholera outbreak in history. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Cholera is often asymptomatic, yet about 5 percent of infected people develop severe, dehydrating, watery diarrhea. The first option for treatment is rehydration. With the administration of salts and electrolytes, fatality rates can be less than 1 percent. Cholera can be easily controlled, however because of poor water and sanitation left by the earthquake, Haiti was an ideal location for cholera to spread and in the first year it killed five thousand Haitians.

Even though it has been three years since cholera first broke out in Haiti, the epidemic still continues and clean water is scarce. As of June 2014, cholera was still an ongoing problem. An estimated 700 thousand cholera cases and an estimated 8.5 thousand deaths were reported. The fatality rate is steady, at 1.2 percent and other locations ranging 0.6 percent to 4.4. percent. The humanitarian needs in Haiti because of the cholera outbreak are: water, sanitation, and hygiene. In fact, only 64 percent of people have access to an improved water source and clean drinking water, whereas 26 percent of Haitians have access to improved sanitation.

The American Red Cross responded by providing an estimated 91,385 households with increased availability to drinking water. In addition, 39,010 households were provided with access to an improved sanitation facility. 6,931 water ports were rebuilt or rehabilitated and 63 new water systems were installed and the number of improved sanitation sites reached 20,769. The number of patients treated in cholera treatment centers by the Red Cross was an astounding 51,004 patients. (IFRC)

3. 2012 Food Crisis

The year 2011 had yielded no major natural disasters, but 2012 was marked by many, more than 1.1 million people were affected by drought and Tropical Storm Isaac and Hurricane Sandy. Price instability as well as poor national harvests, would result in increasing food prices on consumer sides of the market. Hurricane Sandy damaged roads, leaving many inaccessible to food, for weeks.

With an unexpected drought and the passage of Isaac, the spring 2012 crop season was impacted tremendously. There was a decline of 42 percent in corn production, 33 percent in sorghum and rice, 37 percent in plantains, and 22 percent in tuber crops and 6 percent in pulses; when compared to 2011. Cash crops such as coffee, bananas, avocados, mangos, and citrus were also affected by strong winds. Lack of rain before Isaac negatively impacted pastureland and resulted in the reduction the commercial value of livestock. Estimated losses from the drought were at 80 million United States dollars. The additional loss of 70 million United States dollars was the result of Tropical Storm Isaac. (World Food Programme)

Hurricane Sandy came next, causing widespread flooding in the southern peninsula. Three days of heavy rain fall produced agricultural losses. Losses were estimated at 104 million United States dollars. Newly planted winter rice, summer corn, bananas, yams, as well as cash crops were affected. A total of 254 million United State's dollars were lost in the agriculture sector alone from the drought, Isaac, and Sandy. (World Food Programme)

Increasing food prices did not help the matter either. Wheat and corn prices increased sharply in June 2012, up 23 percent from 2011. Rice prices remained stable, and accounted for approximately 60 percent of all food imports to Haiti. (World Food Programme)

Surveys showed that the food security situation in Haiti deteriorated, resulting in food insecurity as high as 39 percent among rural populations affected by Isaac. With Another 17 percent being affected by Sandy. After Tropical Storm Isaac and Hurricane Sandy hit, 1.53 million people were living food insecure compared to the .8 million in 2011. A nutritional survey performed after Sandy showed that the number of moderate malnourished children below the age of 5 was 4.8 percent, while it was 2.65 percent in April 2012. Severe malnutrition amongst children below the age of 5 reached 1.5 percent, whereas it only reached 0.8 percent in April. (World Food Programme)

4. How I Plan To Provide Foreign Aid

As a child I always found myself wanting to make sure that the hungry people in foreign countries got what they needed. One time, when I was younger, I actually asked my dad why we couldn't just send helicopters full of food to them. Now that I am older, I realize that its not just about making sure they have food, they need to be educated on many subjects ranging from economics to farming. We live in one of the richest countries in the world and we can't limit ourselves from helping others, we can find solutions to feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless.

I have been involved in FFA for three years now, and we are encouraged to live by our FFA Creed. The last paragraph of the creed mentions "exerting an influence in my home and community which will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task." I found myself wondering what I could do that would leave an everlasting impact on individuals in my community. I stumbled upon the FFA to Haiti trip. My older sis-

ter had traveled to Haiti two years before me, and I thought it was my turn. I found the application and filled it out, and I would find out that I was selected to be a member of the FFA to Haiti team.

The goal of the FFA to Haiti trip is to provide homes to Haitians. After the January 12th earthquake, Ken DeYoung, a farmer from Laurens, Iowa began to transport doctors and needed supplies to Haiti, while Brett Nelson, safety director and grain bin builder for Sukup Manufacturing in Sheffield Iowa, contacted DeYoung's team about his plan for the SafeTHome. He then decided to design the shelter out of grain bin components. After seeing the destruction and after contacting the Haiti Relief Fund for media help, the Sukup SafeTHome was born.

The Sukup SafeTHome is a highly modified 18 foot steel grain bin. The system has a double roof system that functions as a heat shield and rainfall collection system. It also has built in solar panels that power a set of LED lights. The anchor system uses three ballast boxes around the outside of the home. The boxes can also be used as a raised garden. The SafeTHome has been tested to endure up to 130 mile per hour winds, and has a zero seismic load making it practically earthquake proof. I traveled to Haiti June 22-30 to build a SafeTHome and spent a lot of time at the orphanages the Global Compassion Network sponsors. Dana Arcuri once said, "We each have the power to give. It's the most gratifying feeling ever. By reaching out to help another human being you're sending ripples of positive change." (Harvest of Hope) I hope to spread ripples of change by transforming the perspectives of others in my community and also educate them about life in developing countries and what they can do to help. By traveling to Haiti to provide humanitarian relief, I hope to start a trend in my hometown.

5. Solutions Proposed From My Experience To A Third World Country

On June 23 2015, as we fly over Haiti I notice how beautiful this country is, a country whose stereotype is dirty and poverty stricken. When I was fundraising for this trip I often got questions such as, "Of all the places in the world, why are you traveling to Haiti?" We flew into Port au Prince, where the earthquake hit the hardest. As I stepped outside, I could tell how much damage had been done, although improvements had obviously been made. There were beggars on the streets, but you saw hundreds of people trying to be entrepreneurs and sell clothing and various other necessities. As we drove down the road, I noticed that many of the houses were in good shape, however, I would later find out, the more wealthy people live near the road. You really had to focus on what was behind those houses. When you looked a mile back, you saw houses made out of bamboo and tarps being thrown over what looked like a frame of a house, which was made out of sticks. There were still USAID tarps and tents, more towards the center of the city as well. It was then, that I knew why I wanted to travel to Haiti. I wanted to make a difference in the lives of Haitians and help educate them on more sustainable practices, so that someday, Haitian's basic needs will be met like most Americans.

A huge problem that I noticed, right when I got outside, was that there were unhealthy amounts of garbage in the streets. This probably has to do with all the debris still left from the earthquake. On the outside of Port au Price, I saw one landfill, and that was the only one I saw during the whole trip. I watched countless Haitians toss their wrappers in the streets when they were done eating. Every morning when we left for the orphanages, you would see Haitians burning their trash, because they had no other place for it. There is a fairly easy solution to this problem; we need to educate Haitians on better sanitation practices, which would lead to a healthier lifestyle and cleaner living conditions. If they were to collect garbage and use better waste management practices, Haiti would be a much cleaner, healthier country. This would also create more jobs, as the waste management companies would need workers.

When we arrived in Torbeck, a small town just outside of Les Ceyes, our first stop was the Center of Help. The Center of Help is where the girl's orphanage is located. There is also a school and medical clinic, which is open to the public. When we reached the Center of Help, we were shown the shade house and other agriculture projects. A shade house is basically the opposite of a greenhouse, it provides relief from

the sun, for plants. Inside this house they were growing Amaranthus, which is commonly known as “pig-weed.” They were also using an aquaponics system, raising Tilapia, using fish water waste to fertilize plants. Once the Tilapia reached maturity, they would be harvested as food for the orphanage. When the Amaranthus plant grew to a desired height, it would be transplanted outside, where it would continue to grow and also be harvested as food for the Haitians. However, this can only be possible if there is an abundant source of water available to all Haitians. Many Haitians are already traveling miles to reach a well, so that they can have enough water for the day. While I was in Haiti, we were told that they hadn't had rain in months, wells were drying up and they didn't know if they could continue the Tilapia project. Haiti was in a drought and they hadn't even reached dry season yet. In order to make sure that a food crisis, like the one in 2012 doesn't happen again, we will need to make sure that there is water available to Haitians at all times of the year. I propose that desalination plants be built in Haiti's departments. Desalination is an expensive project, but it would benefit the country and help Haiti get back on its feet. Many organizations such as the World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization could come together to help to make this possible. This would lead to Haitian's being more self sufficient, because they could grow their own food, without worrying about the lack of water.

Later that week I was asked by our group leader, Dennis, if I would like to do some plowing in the cornfield behind the center. I didn't turn the offer down, because, this would be an amazing experience. Not everybody can say they've plowed a cornfield in a completely different country! I plowed the field with a little John Deere tractor and a moldboard plow. Yes, I said moldboard plow. This was completely different from anything I had ever done on the family farm. The soil was also very interesting. There was black dirt for about two inches, then it turned to complete rock. I would later find out that a soil sample taken from that field came back with zeros in some very important categories. The soil outside the center had little to no nitrogen and phosphorus in it. Haitian's needed to find ways to get these nutrients in the soil. The center had rabbits. They would take the rabbit manure, and apply to the Amaranthus plants in the shade house. In order for Haiti to develop high yields, I suggest continuing on the compost system path. They can collect manure from goats, cattle, sheep, and hogs to better their soil, as well as composting other waste.

While I was in Haiti, I never encountered anybody who had, or was suffering from cholera. Solving the cholera outbreak would be no easy task. Haitians use a lot of water, which has been bottled or put in little pouches that look like ice packs. I figured this was to help maintain better sanitation. To ensure that a cholera epidemic doesn't happen again, I believe that they should try and use more of the water, which has been filtered, such as bottled water. The Center of Help recently built their own water filtration system. In order for this to be beneficial, Haitians need to be educated on how drinking filtered water would keep them from becoming sick and later lead to living a healthy life. Not only should Haitians use filtered water, I think they need to be educated on better sanitation practices to prevent other diseases.

My participation through foreign aid will not stop here. I plan to be an advocate for Haiti and all things dealing with foreign aid. I will take every chance I can get to talk to political leaders about making sure we educate others on sustainable practices. I will share my experiences with younger members of my community and strive to expand my knowledge pertaining this topic. Not only will I increase compassion for people in need overseas, I will also do so here at home. Although many of us have never experienced a famine or been without clean water, that does not mean that this is a problem we cannot solve. The woman who yesterday was living in mud with her children, could tomorrow, be living in a brand new house with clean water, a bed, and a refrigerator full of food. The child waking up so hungry every morning that it hurts to sit up, could finally wake up for once in his life with a full stomach. This can all be possible if we all come together and provide education on sustainable practices, while also sending aid to foreign countries.

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