



## 1) Political

### **Unstable government**

After the January 2010 earthquake, the Haitian government was as crippled as the Haitian populace. Many government buildings were destroyed, and the administration was incapable of action for some time afterward. Animosity between Haitian government officials and abdication also slowed progress. For example, Prime Minister Garry Conille resigned in February of 2012, after just five months in office. Without a Prime Minister to oversee the disbursement of earthquake recovery funds for more than 6 months after Martelly became president, international donors withheld billions of dollars for reconstruction projects. And this is just one example of funds being withheld due to government instability; there are many others.

### **Weak infrastructure**

Haiti, unlike other countries in the Western Hemisphere, lacks modern systems of sanitation and transportation as well as a functional military, sound judicial system, and police force. Many parts of Haiti also lack roads, electricity, and clean, running water. Drug-trafficking has also corrupted both the judicial system and the police force which endangers the population. Without such systems in-place, relief work and daily life activities are understandably more difficult.

### **Corruption**

Although \$4.5 billion dollars in cash was pledged to Haiti for 2011 and 2012, the U.N reports that only \$2.38 billion had been disbursed by the end of 2011. Reconstruction in Haiti has been highly privatized, outsourced, or taken over by foreign NGOs, which has admittedly complicated the appropriate use of funds given to the Haitian government. However, with a great deal of aid money 'disappearing' over the course of decades, many donations have undoubtedly found their way into the pockets of corrupt government officials. Drug-trafficking and insidious political operations have also sullied the reputations of many Haitian figureheads. Such actions have made many donors, investors, and tourists hesitant to invest in Haitian projects, products, and services.

### **Poor national security**

In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, the UN deployed a 10,500-member peacekeeping force to Haiti, as part of MINUSTAH (United States Stabilization Mission in Haiti), a force that remains in the country today. The United States also deployed some 22,000 troops to Haiti at that time, which led to some chaos and less-organized relief efforts. Although the U.S has since withdrawn its troops, there continues to be tension between MINUSTAH and the Haitian populace.

Many argue that this peacekeeping force—which has occupied Haiti since 2004—has 'overstayed its welcome,' however, the UN argues that early departure would leave densely-populated areas like Port-Au-Prince vulnerable to exploitation by armed gangs. Many local government officials

agree that Haiti's limited police force cannot protect its citizens without UN support. Current Haitian president, Michel Martelly is working to reconstitute the Haitian military which was disbanded in 1995 for a myriad of alleged human rights abuses. Some observers believe that his proposals will create jobs and boost the Haitian economy, but others are concerned that the resurgence of the military could lead to political violence, which Haiti has experienced under past regimes.

## 2) Economic

### **Weak economy**

Haiti was already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere before a 7.0 magnitude earthquake in January of 2010 caused billions of dollars of damage and the country's GDP to contract a staggering 5.4%. Despite foreign debt forgiveness after the quake, Haiti maintains more than 600 million dollars of external debt. Although there is potential for strong agriculture and tourism in Haiti, there is very little direct investment made due to Haiti's weak infrastructure, poor security, and long history of political corruption. Tourism is virtually non-existent due to concerns about safety and drug-trafficking. Existing agriculture is based heavily in small-scale subsistence farming and is a source of income for two-fifths of the Haitian population; however, farms remain vulnerable to natural disasters and deforestation.

Although more than 80 percent of the Haitian population lives in poverty, and more than 50 percent, in abject poverty, a group of French-speaking mulatto elite that constitute less than 1 percent of the national population control more than 50 percent of the Haiti's wealth, a problem that remains largely unaddressed.

### **Need for native philanthropy**

During the Duvalier years it was especially difficult for Haitians to organize any sort of not-for-profit or grassroots organizations in their own country. There has recently been an explosion of these types of organizations in Haiti, but more are needed. Thousands of Haitians have struggled for decades to improve their country and rid it of poverty, with isolated successes. Haitian leaders are needed to found native humanitarian organizations, and their input is also imperative for the success of international non-profit groups.

## 3) Social

### **Displaced citizens**

The Haitian population affected by natural disaster, disease, and unemployment is so large and dispersed that relief efforts are much more difficult to coordinate. The 2010 earthquake in particular displaced some 1.5 million people and hit hardest in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti's capital. Thousands of earthquake victims are still living in makeshift shelters and/or in dilapidated buildings in and outside of the city, some due to direct loss of homes and others, due to loss of land. Many government buildings in Port-Au-Prince were damaged in the quake, which had led to the loss of important administrative records such as land deeds. Consequent

land disputes have hindered housing development and left many Haitians destitute and living in camps scattered throughout the city and countryside.

## **Marginalized populations**

Post-earthquake, many women in Port-Au-Prince are vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual abuse. In return for sexual favors, many receive food, water, shelter, and/or protection for short periods of time. Women living in tent shelters in the nation's capital are especially vulnerable to these types of crimes, which affect women of all ages, even young girls. "The dangers stem from lack of lighting, lack of security, lack of shelter and the fact that family and social networks that once offered protection were destroyed in the disaster. Underlying all of these conditions is life-threatening discrimination of women that results in rape and sexual abuse," affirmed Ms. Yifat Susskind, Executive Director of MADRE, a human rights advocacy group for women, in 2012.

Many Haitians with disabilities are also vulnerable to exploitation since they are subject to discrimination and do not receive appropriate medical care. The 2010 earthquake left thousands of Haitians disabled, both young and old, which ensures that greater prevalence of disability in Haiti will be a long-term phenomenon. Post-2010 earthquake, the Haitian government estimates that between 6 and 8 thousand Haitians lost limbs or digits. Thousands of others had complex or compound fractures, spinal cord injuries, extensive burns, or massive trauma with long-term implications. In the past, Haiti had very little legislation and few services for individuals with disabilities. 'Disability rights' were almost unheard of. As a result, there are a myriad of social stigmas that Haitians with disabilities face today. They have limited access to transportation, buildings, and homes and have significantly fewer opportunities for meaningful employment.

## **4) Healthcare**

### **Inadequate healthcare**

Poor infrastructure does not allow the vast majority of Haitians access to healthcare. Many Haitians living in rural areas have no access to clinics or hospitals for lack of transportation. Most Haitians do not have cars; some have motorcycles, but even with such transportation, healthcare often remains hours away, sometimes due to sheer distance and other times, for lack of traversable roads. As a result, the vast majority of Haitians do not receive basic medical care, dental care, or important immunizations.

In contrast, diseases spread rapidly in Haiti for lack of modern systems of sanitation. Haiti has the highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean, with some 300,000 cases, which constitutes nearly 5 percent of the population. Hepatitis, tuberculosis, and cholera are also prevalent in Haiti. Cholera is believed to have been first introduced to the Haitian population by UN workers in Port-Au-Prince and has since sickened over 500,000 people, with that number climbing in the aftermath of Hurricanes Isaac and Sandy. More than 7,000 Haitians have died as a result of this water-borne disease, which is highly treatable, if patients have rapid access to modern medical care. Many other illnesses and injuries would be highly-treatable, even curable, if all Haitians had access to modern, preventative medicine.

## 5) Education

### A need for reform

Haitian schools, both public and private, suffer from a dearth of materials, expertise, management, and organization that has been exacerbated by natural disaster, disease, regional conflicts, political upheaval, and a lack of funds. Currently, less than 50 percent of eligible children attend primary school, and less than one-third of these children will reach the fifth grade. Some cannot afford to continue their schooling, and others are ill-prepared and therefore unable to pass necessary exams. In general, high dropout rates are not attributed to disinterest in education but rather to limited family resources.

Of the students that complete their primary education, only about two-thirds complete their secondary education, and even fewer are able to enroll at universities. Haiti has one government university and approximately 200 privately-owned institutions, of which less than 50 are accredited. Worse still, a staggering 85 percent of college-educated Haitians are estimated to live abroad. This phenomenon, experienced in Haiti more than any other Caribbean country, is referred to as 'brain-drain' since the population that remains is largely uneducated.

By mandating the use of French rather than Haitian Creole in the classroom, the current Haitian education system discriminates against students of lower socioeconomic status, the majority of whom are not fluent in French, the legal and administrative language of Haiti. As a result, many students never learn to read or write in either language and contribute to the adult illiteracy statistic, which is roughly 50 percent. Many also assert that Haitian education system is antiquated and that more funds need to be put forth for vocational education, which is arguably more practical for many adults and youth living in Haiti.

Historically, the Haitian government has played an unusually low role in the primary education of its youth: of the world's poorest countries, Haiti is the only country in which more than 50 percent of primary school students are enrolled in non-state schools, the majority of which do not receive state subsidies. Current president, Michel Martelly, is increasing government involvement in this sector by providing many youth with free education. However, educators like Jean Moreno, the principal of the Andre Malraux primary school retort: "Sweet Micky is giving them free school? I am the one who is paying for this school." Moreno accepted 200 new Haitian students in October, and has yet to be paid for their enrollment, despite government promises. Many external benefactors also fail to provide pledged funding, which perpetuates this problem at educational institutions throughout Haiti.

## 6) Environment

### Natural disasters

In 2008, several hurricanes pounded Haiti. Collectively, the storms destroyed 15 percent of the country's GDP or the equivalent damage that would be caused by 8 – 10 Hurricane Katrina's if they were to hit the U.S. in the period of one month. These hurricanes created flooding everywhere, a food shortage, and breeding grounds for disease

In 2010, the largest earthquake Haiti has experienced in over 200 years struck the nation's capital, Port-au-Prince. Eighty-percent of the population was already living in poverty, and this earthquake only exacerbated this statistic. As many as 250,000 Haitians were estimated to have been killed in the disaster, and one year later, roughly 634, 000 people were still living in displacement camps within or outside Port-Au-Prince. Over 19 million cubic meters of debris littered the streets of Port Au Prince after the disaster, and less than 50 percent of this debris has since been removed.

In August of 2012, Hurricane Isaac whirled across quake-battered Haiti, causing strong winds, and mudslides. In Port-au-Prince, trees and power lines were knocked down, tents were shredded, and streets were heavily flooded, which left some 400,000 survivors of the January 2010 earthquake miserably soaked. Haiti's southern peninsula experienced the brunt of the storm, and 60 mph winds blew the roofs off many houses. Ten Haitians were reported to have lost their lives as a result of the violent weather conditions.

Hurricane Sandy, Haiti's most recent disaster, killed at least 58 people and caused major flooding. Government officials have reported that Haiti's entire southern portion is now 'underwater' as a result of this tropical storm. Many communities have been isolated by flood waters, and some 17,800 people have had to move to temporary shelters. In some areas, 80 percent of crops were wiped out, especially staple foods like corn, beans, and bananas. This has left many hungry, and the extensive rainwater has spread cholera, a water-borne disease believed to have been introduced to the island by foreign peace-keeping forces in 2010.

Johan Peleman, head of the UN's office for the co-ordination of humanitarian affairs makes an important point: "Haiti is trying to get its house in order, but each time disaster strikes, the progress is interrupted. This country is exposed to devastating consequences by each storm. With every burst of rain, entire mountains are washed away."

Natural disasters will continue to strike Haiti. Hurricanes are commonplace, and seismologists predict that the next few years will yield significant seismic activity in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Seismic activity often comes in cycles, and many experts believe that the tectonic plates below the Dominican Republic and Haiti are beginning a new cycle of activity after being dormant for almost 200 years.

Two years after the 2010 earthquake, there remains no centralized plan, rules, or governing bodies that ensure that structures in Haiti are built to withstand earthquakes and other natural disasters. In order to implement these sorts of changes, additional funds and education must be made available to Haitians. However, seismologist Cossu reminds us that: "Despite the greater awareness of earthquake risks today people are confronted with hard choices: those who have the means, will accept spending money to live in a 'safe' house, where as the majority of the population will have to make do with what they can. Until the next earthquake."

## **Depleted environment**

According to an AID report, Haiti "is suffering from a degree of environmental degradation almost without equal in the entire world." Forests that were once thick and lush now cover only 4 % of the nation's land area as a result of centuries of massive deforestation. Foreign powers have exploited Haiti's natural resources, and impoverished Haitians continue to use the limited lumber that is left, such that 3% of additional forest is lost each year. Although efforts have been

made to reforest large regions of Haiti, the majority of suitable land has already been privately cultivated, and in most cases, unavailable for use.

Deforestation has also caused massive erosion which has reduced soil fertility and ruined roughly two-thirds of what was once fertile farmland. Erosion now contributes to massive flooding post-hurricanes and post-earthquakes, since there is little topsoil to absorb groundwater. Uncontrolled groundwater floods cities and towns and also breeds water-borne diseases like cholera. Harmful pesticides like DDT, a chemical currently banned for agricultural-use in the U.S, can also be found in water that has inundated Haitian farms. Since 94 percent of freshwater in Haiti is used for farming, less than half of Haiti's rural populations have access to clean drinking water. And since there are no standard systems of sanitation, garbage, excretory matter, and other contaminants are present and wreak havoc upon Haiti's already-polluted rivers and lakes.

## 7) Relief

### Ineffective relief efforts

Many charitable organizations exist in Haiti, but a great number of them compete for the same resources and/or fail to work effectively together. The United Nations Foundation has investigated this issue and concluded that both the U.N and other non-profit groups have been unable to implement information and communication systems that encourage coordinated actions. If efforts were more coordinated, a great deal more could certainly be accomplished.

*“The next step towards making aid to Haiti more efficient is a need for a larger umbrella organization for the NGO’s. In some areas, you have 5 NGO’s all working to solve and help the same problem, all doing little projects to shunt the issue. If there were a larger umbrella organization, to connect these NGO’s and make them collaborate and work together, perhaps even doing a more massive project, the issue may be able to not only be shunted, but be eliminated. The Haitian proverb “Men anpil, chay pa lou” means “Many hands [make] the load lighter.” Which is exactly what the situation with NGO’s need. With many hands helping with one load, the load is lighter.” –Jesse O’Shea, Director, Students for Haiti, Inc.*

Although coordinating the thousands of development projects that currently exist both inside and outside of Haiti is a daunting task, by utilizing networks, databases, and social media Students for Haiti hopes to encourage further collaboration and communication between Haiti-based organizations. Although students are not ‘professionals,’ they are an outspoken source of information whose words, actions, and principles affect outcomes in this country.

