

What's Happening

IN THE WORLD ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

VOL 10, NO 7 MARCH 2010

Haiti's Children Are Suffering

On January 12 an earthquake did tremendous damage to Haiti. It killed at least 200,000 people and injured many more than that.

Public buildings collapsed, and more than a million people lost their homes. Those who are suffering most, however, may be Haiti's children, who are orphaned, sick and unable to help themselves.

Even before the earthquake poverty caused major problems. Haiti was already among the world's poorest countries. It is overpopulated, and 78 percent of its ten million people were living under the international poverty line of \$2 per day. More than a million families received daily international food aid. Many Haitians lived in unsafe houses and unhealthy conditions.

The poor quality of life causes poor health in Haiti's children from birth. The country has the highest rate of infant deaths in the Western Hemisphere. Malnutrition and diseases result in stunted growth in one-third of the children under the age of one. Ten percent of children die before age four, and thirty percent of the children who reach age five are still malnourished. They suffer from diseases like diarrhea, malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. Contaminated water is probably the largest killer of Haitian children.

Aid agencies have been helping children since the earthquake. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has begun a campaign to immunize 500,000 children under the age of seven. That will limit the spread of disease. Medical teams from around the world have gone to Haiti and treated cuts, bruises and broken bones. They even have amputated arms and legs when infection has gotten out of control. Some teams also have sent children with terrible burns to hospitals out of the country for treatment.

For many years poverty has led Haitian families to give up their children. Before the earthquake almost 400,000 children lived in orphanages. Parents had sent them there because they could not afford to feed and care for them. Beyond

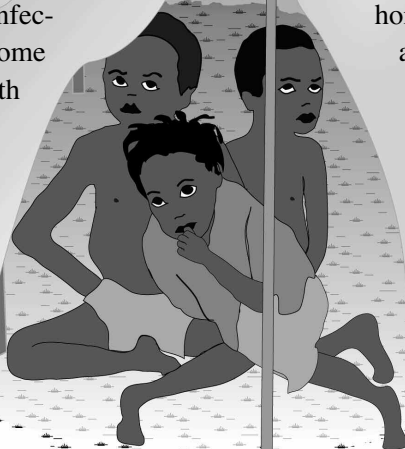
that, many poor parents simply abandoned their children.

Orphaned and abandoned children easily become victims of traffickers. These criminals find children who are alone and sell them outside Haiti. The children end up as slave laborers or, even worse, as victims of the sex trade. In recent years as many as 2,000 children a year have been trafficked to the neighboring Dominican Republic. In some cases the parents allow their children to be adopted. They believe that they are going to good families in wealthy countries, but often they end up in the hands of traffickers instead.

Every year poor parents also send thousands more children to live with wealthy families in Haiti. The children are called "restaveks." That word comes from the French words "reste" and "avec," which mean "stay with." The agreement is that the child will do work around the house. In exchange the family will feed, clothe and educate the child, who may be as young as six. However, the vast majority of these children become house slaves who work long hours and get abused.

Families in Haiti already were struggling to stay together. Now the earthquake has left up to a million children alone. They have lost their homes and parents, or at least lost touch with them and relatives. In most countries schools would look out for children. However, only about half of Haiti's children were enrolled in school. The earthquake destroyed many of those school buildings too, so there is nowhere for those children to go. They are on their own and homeless. They live under pieces of cardboard and plastic, with little to eat and little clean water. That has made them perfect targets for disease and traffickers.

Forty percent of Haiti's population is under 14 years old. A leader of UNICEF believes that disasters test a country's commitment to its children. Certainly Haiti will spend years rebuilding its capital, towns and villages after the earthquake. As it does, it would be wise also to commit to protecting, supporting and nurturing the children who are its future.



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Haiti's Children Are Suffering

On January 12 an earthquake struck Haiti. It killed at least 200,000 people and injured many more than that. Public buildings collapsed, and more than a million people lost their homes. Those who are suffering most, however, may be Haiti's children. They are orphaned, sick and unable to help themselves.

Even before the earthquake poverty caused problems. Haiti was already among the world's poorest countries. Almost 80 percent of its ten million people were living in poverty. Millions received daily international food aid and lived in unsafe houses and unhealthy conditions.

The poor quality of life causes poor health in Haiti's children. Malnutrition and diseases result in stunted growth in one-third of the children under the age of one. Ten percent of children die before age four. Thirty percent of those who reach age five are still malnourished. They suffer from diseases like diarrhea and malaria. Contaminated water is probably the largest killer of Haitian children.

Aid agencies have been helping children since the earthquake. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is giving shots to 500,000 children to limit the spread of disease. Medical teams have gone to Haiti too. They have treated burns, cuts and broken bones. They also have had to cut off infected arms and legs.

For many years poverty has led Haitian families to give up their children. Before the earthquake almost 400,000 children lived in orphanages. Parents had sent them there because they could not afford to feed and care

for them. Other poor parents simply abandoned their children.

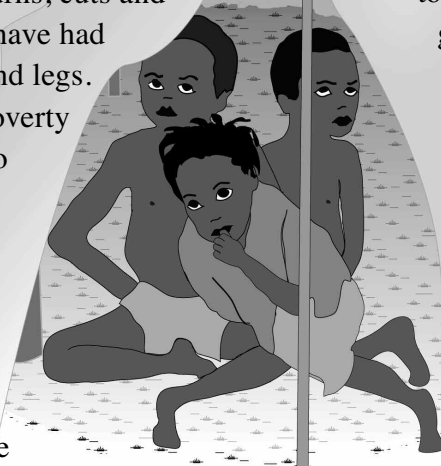
Orphaned and abandoned children easily become victims

of traffickers. These criminals find children who are alone and sell them outside Haiti. The children end up as slave laborers or, even worse, as victims of the sex trade. Around 2,000 children a year have been trafficked to the neighboring Dominican Republic. Sometimes parents allow their children to be adopted. They believe that they are going to good families in wealthy countries, but often they end up with traffickers instead.

Every year poor parents also send thousands more children to live with wealthy families in Haiti. The agreement is that the child will do work around the house. In exchange the family will feed, clothe and educate the child, who may be as young as six. However, most of these children become house slaves who work long hours and get abused.

Families in Haiti already were struggling to stay together. Now the earthquake has left up to a million children alone. They have lost their homes, parents and relatives. In most countries schools would look out for children. However, only half of Haiti's children attend school. The earthquake destroyed many of those school buildings too, so there is nowhere for those children to go. They live under pieces of cardboard and plastic, with little to eat and little clean water. That has made them perfect targets for disease and traffickers.

Forty percent of Haiti's population is under 14 years old. Certainly Haiti will spend years rebuilding its capital, towns and villages after the earthquake. As it does, it also should find a way to protect and support the children who are its future.



Background Information

Haiti was a French colony that was populated largely by Black slaves from Africa. They had been brought there to work on plantations. In 1791 a former slave led a rebellion. Thirteen years later, in 1804, Haiti became the world's first Black-led republic.

The United Nations estimates that the earthquake severely affected more than three million Haitians.

Experts estimate that it will take at least a year just to remove rubble from Haiti.

The life expectancy in Haiti is only 52 years. Almost a third of Haiti's population is either ill or underweight.

Almost half of Haiti's population is illiterate. The constitution grants free basic education for children, but no government ever has provided it.

In rural areas education is an even bigger problem. Two-thirds of the population live there, and illiteracy rates are 80 percent. Paying to send children to school requires about two months' income.

According to the U.S. State Department, most *restaveks* are girls between the ages of 6 and 14.

A research center in the United Kingdom recently developed a "water poverty index." It surveyed 147 countries, and ranked Haiti 147th.

Aid organizations asked the government to control trafficking after the earthquake. On January 29 the police arrested ten Americans who were trying to take 33 children into the Dominican Republic. The Americans claim to be missionaries, but the government is accusing them of trafficking because they had accepted the children from parents without getting proper adoption certificates. After three weeks the authorities set eight of the Americans free.

Many Haitians who can afford it leave Haiti and live somewhere else. That has removed many of its most talented people. About two million Haitians live abroad, and they send \$2 billion back to Haiti every year. That is the equivalent of one-third of Haiti's economy. Experts say that these people will have to play an important role in rebuilding the nation.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- Describe some of the images of Haiti that you have seen on television and in the newspaper.

Comprehension:

- How have children in Haiti become separated from their families?

Beyond the Text:

- How would you and your family try to find each other if you became separated after a disaster?
- How are buildings built in places like California so that they do not collapse easily in an earthquake?
- Do you think other countries have an obligation to Haiti to help it rebuild and become a better place?

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: orphan/orphaned; poverty; Western Hemisphere*; malnutrition; stunted; to immunize*; to amputate*; trafficker

High-use: to injure; to collapse; major*; contaminated; campaign*; to abandon; to adopt; exchange; vast*; majority*; target; commitment*; to nurture*

Sources

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New York Times Upfront April 26, 2004

UNICEF www.unicef.org

CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

English-Language Arts

Reading 1.0 Vocabulary Development
2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

Writing 1.0 Writing Strategies
2.0 Writing Applications

ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension
Writing Strategies and Applications
Listening and Speaking

Science

4.5; 6.1; 6.2
Physiology 10; Dynamic Earth Processes