

HUNGRY FOR SELF-SUSTAINABILITY IN HAITI

By Emily McIntyre

When a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince in 2010, the population was pushed deeper into its battle with poverty. Thousands of people died, families were separated and the country's free market economy plunged. Nonprofit organizations, charities and relief efforts flooded into Haiti for support, and though six years have passed since the earthquake, the country is still picking up the pieces.

Before the Children's Nutrition Program of Haiti/Kore Timoun, which means caring for, or supporting, children, was established in 1998, the acute malnutrition rate was an alarming 24 percent for the region of Léogâne, located in the Ouest Department of Haiti. Today, that rate has dropped to approximately less than 3 percent, according to Taryn Silver, the country program director of CNP.

Malnutrition also affects Haitian children to the point where oftentimes their hunger distracts them from learning at school. In Ouanaminthe, located in the Nord-Est Department of Haiti, is Institution Univers, one of the top schools in the country.

The Coalition of Children in Need Association founder Hugues Bastien started a farm to operate in tandem with the school's lunch program. The local crops grown there include sweet potatoes, mangoes, coconuts, cashews and limes, and they are harvested to feed more than 2,300 students ranging from preschool to high school.

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"They were seeing not only kids who were malnourished, but even just because they were so hungry, they couldn't learn," said COCINA communications director, Anna Lile.

Aside from the wreckage following the tragedy, Haiti has suffered from massive deforestation. Part of the reason for this is producing and relying on charcoal for fuel, which requires cutting down trees. Deforestation has also forced farmers to abandon or give up agriculture.

"With deforestation, there's more malnutrition and ... there's often no rain because there are often droughts,*" said CNP program manager, Rose Elene Veillard.

Silver explained that Haiti is frustrated with the food shipments that constantly pour in from other countries.

"It puts a lot of people out of business," she said. "When you go to the market in Haiti to buy rice, you can buy a bag of American or Taiwanese rice for maybe half the cost of Haitian rice."

Tania Bernard, accounting manager and official of Haitian Ministry of National Education and Professional Training, le

Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle, agreed; she thinks that instead of the U.S. and other countries shipping metric tons of food as a form of aid, they should lend assistance in helping to reform the nation's economy.

"I think the development of our country must first go through projects ... Agricultural reform projects, projects that are taking shape in the rural section, with farmers and with communities in order to arrive at large-

scale development of our national economy," Bernard said.

The Haitian population can only hope to make baby steps toward becoming a more sustainable nation once their new political leaders

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take office.

"They want to have hope for their future. They know that their country is broken, and they want to be able to take care of themselves," Lile said. "They've almost created this generation of 'We live off of aid.' The people don't want that. They want to be a strong, proud country."

**Some quotes translated by the author.*