

Harnessing Human Potential in Haiti

Building back a better Haiti will require a radically different approach to education. A review of secondary sources and statistics from international organizations reveals a dysfunctional educational system that is vastly insufficient to cover the country's development needs. The reconstruction of a competitive Haiti can only succeed by harnessing the country's most valuable asset, its human talent. A combination of improved funding, smart allocation of resources, and use of low-cost modern technology may allow Haiti to leapfrog to significantly higher performance levels.

INCREASING FUNDING

Haiti's foremost problem in terms of primary education since well before the 2010 earthquake has been severe underfunding. Government expenditure in education, about 2.5 percent of GDP prior to 2007, is among the lowest in the world. It is almost half the average for Latin America and the Caribbean, and even sub-Saharan Africa manages to spend 3.4 percent¹—this despite the fact that Haiti displays one of the most expansive population pyramids in the region, with children and youth age 0–14 making up 43 percent of the population.² The single most important intervention necessary to build a better education system is a dramatic increase in available funding—to rebuild not just the physical infrastructure but also the administrative and delivery capabilities, maintenance costs, and family support and incentives, as discussed below.

Ángel Cabrera is the President of Thunderbird School of Global Management. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a regular participant in the World Economic Forum. The World Economic Forum named him a Global Leader for Tomorrow in 2002 and a Young Global Leader in 2005.

Frank Neville is Associate Vice President of Marketing and Communications at the Thunderbird School of Global Management.

Samantha Novick is a Public Relations Specialist at the Thunderbird School of Global Management.

Cabrera was the topic leader of the “Harnessing Human Potential” action area for the Clinton Global Initiative’s 2010 Annual Meeting.

CREATING A NATIONAL SYSTEM

Over the years, lack of funding for public schools has been compensated for by private expenditure and an oversized, underregulated private sector. Between 80 percent and 90 percent of all primary schools in Haiti are private and operate largely outside of government regulation and accreditation. Zimbabwe is the only other country in the world with a similar ratio of public to private schools.

High non-public-sector enrollment in primary education, inadequate regulation, and lack of standardization makes it difficult to guarantee quality. More than 70 percent of private schools function illegally, without a permit or license from the *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale*, and the government rarely inspects them. Because there is no national curriculum, religious groups, NGOs, and for-profit ventures run these schools pretty much as they wish. The resulting diversity is enormous, ranging from international schools attended by the country's elite to extremely low-quality schools attended by the poorest.³

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Creating a national system of education is imperative as a means to ensure school quality and effectiveness. A coalition of private actors convened by the

Clinton Global Initiative, in consultation with the Ministry of Education and Quisqueya University, is working to develop a National Institute of Teacher Education in Haiti, expected to be operational by year's end. This institution will develop a national curriculum, teaching standards, and a certification program for Haiti's teachers. It will have an accreditation body and a Haitian governing board, which will ensure that this project becomes fully embedded within the Haitian education system.

The National Institute of Teacher Education offers a good start, but it is unrealistic to expect the government to do the job alone; it will most likely need to build on a combination of public, charter, and fully private schools. Whatever the mix, any new national standards need to be applied to both public and private institutions. In addition, any new curriculum standards should be established around skill sets that are critical to rebuilding Haiti's infrastructure and will boost its national economic competitiveness.

WORKING TOWARD 100 PERCENT ENROLLMENT

Education is highly valued in Haiti, but free or low-cost public schools are scarce and are located for the most part in urban areas. Private schools, while more numerous, are prohibitively expensive, costing on average \$70 to \$80 per child each year in a country with a per-capita GDP of \$716.⁴ UNICEF has reported that poor

families spend up to 70 percent of their income on education.⁵ These barriers often force parents to delay education until they can afford it or their child can make the journey to school independently. Nearly 75 percent of all primary school students are two years older or more than is usual at their grade level.

A direct outcome of this system is dismal enrollment numbers. Before the earthquake, 71 percent of children aged 6–12 were enrolled in school. At least 500,000 children across the country were not receiving any education at all, and just over half of those who started school would ever finish.⁶ The problem of low enrollment is compounded by a widespread system of domestic indentured servants (*restaveks*, or “stay-with” children) that dates back to the country’s independence and is estimated to affect more than 200,000 children.⁷

Pervasive malnutrition impairs students’ cognitive and learning capabilities, a problem compounded by the physical demands of often having to travel great distances to get to school. In rural areas, 72 percent of children aged 6–12 suffer from iodine deficiency, a clear indicator of malnutrition.⁸ Only 800,000 students, out of about two million, received meals in 2002, and only 400,000 did in 2006. For many, the food they receive at school is their only meal.⁹

The allocation of aid to families can be used as a powerful tool to mitigate some of these deficiencies. Conditional cash transfers, where cash welfare payments to families are linked to evidence of regular school attendance, visits to health clinics, and improved nutrition, have proven to be an effective mechanism. Mexico’s Progresa-Oportunidades system is widely credited with reducing poverty and increasing educational attainment in that country. Any such plan in Haiti will have to address the increased vulnerability of more than 100,000 children who do not have a family due to the earthquake, as well as thousands of newly disabled children and children forced to take care of younger family members.¹⁰

QUALITY AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The majority of children who are enrolled face schools that are overcrowded, poorly managed, low on materials, and disorganized. Even before the earthquake, a high percentage did not meet basic sanitary and safety standards: 16 percent were located in houses, 33 percent in churches, and 9 percent in the open air. Approximately 80 percent of teachers do not have official teaching certificates and a majority of them do not have more than a ninth-grade education.¹¹ Lessons usually are conducted in Creole and in French, and are mainly “chalk and talk”—focused on

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recitation and writing words and phrases that the students often don't understand.¹²

The earthquake added further pressure, as nearly 80 percent of the educational institutions in the Port-au-Prince area were destroyed, leaving about 1.5 million children without a school. Additionally, the premises of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training were entirely destroyed, along with irretrievable records and educational data.¹³

The government's Haiti Action Plan recognizes school reconstruction as a top priority and is working with international organizations to rebuild physical infrastructure rapidly. The Digicel Foundation has provided facilities and equipment for about 500 Ministry of Education staff to resume work. The American Institutes of Research's Emergency Education Response in Haiti is building temporary schools that are earthquake and hurricane resistant, and providing school supplies, water and sanitation systems, classroom materials, nutrition, and teacher training for up to 600 children per structure. About 321 classroom units have been funded and designated so far. The Digicel Foundation is setting up a fabrication facility in Haiti to build container classrooms, along with an apprenticeship program to train young Haitians in their construction. The Foundation, which originally began the initiative in 2008, has extended its commitment to rebuild at least 30 new schools. Unfortunately, while schools housed in temporary shelters and new buildings began opening to students intermittently in April, displacement and lingering social trauma have kept enrollment numbers low.¹⁴

Ideally, a new Haitian school system should be built around new information technology, which could dramatically increase the quality, access, and even cost of delivery; it would also help bridge the digital divide by increasing computer literacy. Experiences such as NIIT's Hole in the Wall in India have demonstrated that minimally invasive exposure to computers in a protected, collaborative environment can have dramatic results, even in the absence of robust basic education or teachers.¹⁵ Intel's experiences in Africa and Latin America show how holistic interventions that deploy the technology in partnership with local organizations not only can improve educational effectiveness but also build local capabilities, create jobs, and promote an environment of entrepreneurship around the use of information technologies. Technology should not be seen as a luxury for a latter stage of development but as a tool to address current basic needs and accelerate schooling.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Before the January 2010 earthquake, the Haitian system of higher education was comprised of at least 159 public and private institutions that served about 40,000 students. The vast majority of these schools were located in the capital, with few options elsewhere. A mere 1 percent of Haitians between the ages of 18 and 24 were enrolled in university, the lowest rate in the hemisphere.

Dramatically underfunded (only 0.4 percent of the government's budget was allocated to higher education before the earthquake), Haitian universities lacked capable professors and facilities. Just like primary schools in the country, 90 percent of the university system was compromised of loosely regulated private schools, many of which operated without government accreditation.¹⁶ Only 11 percent of Haitian professors held advanced degrees, and many schools did not have adequate textbooks, libraries, or laboratories. The average instructor earned less per year than a bricklayer, and they were rarely evaluated.

Private universities were costly and scholarships rare. Those who could afford to do so, and who were accepted, attended universities outside the country. More than 15,000 Haitians are currently enrolled in universities in the Dominican Republic.¹⁷ Lack of incentives prevents many from returning. Conor Bohan, the founder of the Haitian Education Leadership Program (HELP) estimates that 85 percent of Haitians with a university degree have emigrated, removing some of Haiti's brightest young minds from their country's future.¹⁸

Because the majority of Haiti's universities were located in Port-au-Prince and thus close to the earthquake's epicenter, the damage to the country's higher education sector was especially intense. Around 87 percent of the country's universities were leveled or seriously damaged, and as many as 6,000 college students were killed. An estimated 121 to 200 university professors and administrators also lost their lives.¹⁹

Haiti needs a new system of higher education, one that can be deployed quickly and provide broad access and scale at a reasonable cost, and that focuses on the areas of priority for reconstruction and productivity. Given its own efficiency issues, the American research university is unlikely to provide an adequate model for Haiti, at least in the short run and, perhaps, ever. Haiti may instead have an opportunity to deploy an alternative model, drawing from some of the breakthrough solutions emerging around the world. In the U.S., the University of Phoenix—a profitable publicly traded company—has become the largest university in the country in number of students through a combination of low-cost campuses in key markets and online delivery. Western Governors University in the U.S.—an online not-for-profit university created by a coalition of state governors—and TecMilenio University in Mexico—a “base-of-the-pyramid” initiative of the elite Tecnológico de Monterrey—are examples of practical, efficient, and effective competency-based learning models that can be deployed in a short period of time. Opening up the local market to initiatives by foreign nonprofit and profit providers and creatively leveraging the growing pool of open-source tools and available online content may also help find a unique model of higher university that is both realistic in a relative short period of time and effective in meeting the growing demands of highly trained talent in the country.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE ACTIONS

The Haitian government's Action Plan recognizes that a knowledge-based society with universal access to basic education, a relevant professional training system, and an efficient university system are key priorities for the future of the country. That's an important starting point. But to get there, the focus should not be on rebuilding a system that was broken prior to the January earthquake but on creating a dramatically different model that will enable Haitian society to build a competitive economy and put their economy on a path to sustainable development. While there are many forms this model could take, any lasting solution will require the following elements:

- A dramatic increase in funding allocated to education
- The creation of a national system, which should leave enough room for diverse models and experimentation but within clear standards linked to the nation's reconstruction and competitiveness needs
- A conditional cash transfer system to turn welfare distributions into incentives for improved enrollment and health
- A smart use of technology—from radio and TV to cell phones and low-cost computers—which can help tap increasingly available open-source content, increase quality at a reduced cost, and dramatically increase computer literacy
- The adoption of new, scalable, low-cost models of higher education that have demonstrated success in other developed and developing environments

Given the magnitude of the destruction from the earthquake, the low level of resources available domestically, and the tremendous number of competing priorities, a solution will of necessity be a joint effort among the donor community, the Haitian government, Haitian civil society, and private capital. No one group has the ability to resolve the situation, but together they can achieve much of what needs to be done.

The Haitian government's stated goal of creating a free and comprehensive publicly funded education system can serve as the cornerstone of efforts to remake Haiti's education system. It can, and should, also be the focal point of international assistance for Haiti's education sector.

The establishment of the National Institute of Teacher Education and the development of uniform national standards will be critical to the success of a new education system, for without proper regulation and consistent national guidelines, even a fully accessible public education system will fail to produce the desired outcome of truly preparing Haiti's children to compete in the global economy.

A key element of any new structure must also be a vision for using technology that will allow Haiti's educational institutions to tap into the knowledge resources of an interconnected global community. To promote the necessary investments in technology, tax breaks and other types of incentives should be developed to encourage the private sector to invest in education and educational technology.

Finally, in order to ensure that the Haitian people take advantage of the benefits of any new educational structures, the Haitian government should direct some

of its welfare spending to a new conditional cash-transfer system, possibly also funded in conjunction with international donors.

While the challenges facing Haiti's education system are significant, the rebuilding process offers Haiti an opportunity to start over. By pooling the resources and aligning the efforts of the government, private sector, and donor community, Haiti can jettison a failed education system and build a new, more effective structure that truly serves the future needs of the Haitian people.

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