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### **Poverty in Haiti: the crisis that quietly eats away at hundreds of lives**

His name is J an. He lives in a village in rural Haiti. He has three children. He works all day selling firewood. J an starts his long day collecting and selling firewood by hauling the heavy cart full of firewood to the market. He stops at his stall and waits for customers to come. The hours roll on by, with the occasional customer purchasing some of his wares. Dusk arrives, and J an stops by a fruit stand to get two apples and a bottle of water for dinner with the money from his four customers that day. J an begins the two-mile walk home with his half-full cart of unsold firewood. Arriving home, he finds his wife in tears and the village's doctor present. J an's oldest son, Paul, has HIV. Apparently, he has been sick for two weeks, at least. The doctor says he only has days. The family somehow sleeps that night, with Paul occasionally having coughing fits. Morning arrives, and J an's son was feeling terrible. J an stays home that day, only once going to the market to purchase medicine. He arrives home, and Paul is on the dirt floor, coughing. Paul died that evening, the night before his fifteenth birthday. Not the ideal scenario for the eve of a birthday. A similar story is illustrated often in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. How would you feel if a child of yours died from HIV? Or a hurricane? Starvation? Rural Haiti sees starvation, HIV, and tropical storms more often than not. One problem in the world that we should refuse to put up

with is poverty in Haiti, with people dying from HIV, tropical storms and more, and one possible solution worth fighting for is to support Fonkoze.org.

### **A bit of background:**

Poverty in Haiti has been going on for quite some time, unbeknownst to most of the world. In fact, the CIA world factbook says this about the history of Haiti's poverty: "In the late 18th century, Toussaint L'OUVERTURE led a revolution of Haiti's nearly half a million slaves that ended France's rule on the island. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first country in the world led by former slaves after declaring its independence in 1804, but it was forced to pay an indemnity to France for more than a century and was shunned by other countries for nearly 40 years" (CIA.gov 1). So, there was a revolution in Haiti, but Haiti was forced to pay France for more than a century.

This means that Haiti would be very poor, and this is important because it explains a bit of background on Haiti's poverty. SSRN also has something to say about the history of poverty in Haiti: "the



Republic of Haiti is today the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and one of the

poorest in the world. The present research reveals that this country is also where income is worst distributed in the most unequal region of the world, viz., Latin America and the Caribbean” ( Jadotte 1). This says that Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, and one of the poorest in the world, and that income is not very well distributed. This shows that Haiti is poor and doesn't have a great income system.

Poverty in Haiti really

### **How on earth can this be happening?**

Haiti's poverty has a variety of causes, ranging from tropical storms to corrupt political regimes. In fact, the CIA world factbook states, “[Haiti] was forced to pay an indemnity to France for more than a century and was shunned by other countries for nearly 40 years. Currently the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti continues to experience bouts of political instability. A massive magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010 with an epicenter about 25 km (15 mi) west of the capital, Port-au-Prince. Estimates are that over 300,000 people were killed and some 1.5 million left homeless. The earthquake was assessed as the worst in this region over the last 200 years” (cia.gov 1). Since Haiti was forced to pay an indemnity to



France, Haiti was shunned by other nations for more than 40 years. There's also the little fact that Haiti has been hit by political instability and a massive earthquake. So, Haiti has had a number

of bad things happen. Naturally, an earthquake, political instability, and having to pay France for a long while, in addition to being shunned by other more powerful nations, has caused Haiti to spiral down into poverty. In a Ted Talk given by Jesse Baker, he states: “A cholera epidemic that resulted from the international aid community’s response to one of the most devastating earthquakes in human history” (Baker 1). In this excerpt from Jesse Baker’s Ted Talk, he explains that American occupation caused a cholera epidemic. In summary, multiple corrupt political times, natural disasters, and HIV has led Haiti to spiral down into poverty. Haiti’s poverty is caused by a variety of things, and they must have negative effects associated with them.

### **The Effects of the Causes**

Poverty in Haiti has several negative effects, including starvation and HIV. The NCBI (National Center for Biotechnology Information) tells us, “On October 19, 2010, the Haitian Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) was notified of unusually high numbers of patients from Artibonite and Centre departments who had acute watery diarrhea and dehydration, in some cases leading to death. Within 4 days, the National Public Health Laboratory (LNSP) in Haiti isolated *Vibrio cholerae* serogroup O1, serotype Ogawa, from stool specimens obtained from patients in the affected areas by an investigation team from MSPP and CDC Haiti. This report describes the investigation of the initial cases, the ongoing outbreak of cholera in Haiti, and initial control measures” (NCBI 1). The text states that Haiti has various diseases such as cholera running about. This shows that Haiti has diseases in their nation, infecting and possibly killing lots of

people. This is important because it shows some of the negative effects of poverty in



Haiti. According to a research paper similar to this one, some other negative effects of Haiti's poverty are: "Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere; some say the poorest in the world.' This is a quote by Helen Fisher, a professor at Rutgers University, anthropologist, and human behavior researcher. She is describing how poor Haiti is, and because of this, how they are starving too. This has been happening for the better half of a century with the end not yet in sight. The United States, as well as many other countries, are helping because of the starvation throughout this country, and them not being able to help themselves" (O'Connor 1). This quote explains how Haiti is starving as an effect from its poverty. This means that Haiti is starving, and it is important because it explains how Haiti is truly starving. Sometimes you may hear or say, "I'm starving!", but people in Haiti are really starving. The people's bellies are truly empty. Poverty in Haiti really does eat away at the lives of Haitians.

**What can we do?**

Now, after reading about the causes and effects of this problem, you are probably hoping there is a solution. There are many solutions to this problem, but the one we should pay attention to is microloans. According to Fonkoze.org, a nonprofit organization that provides microloans to Haiti, “Microfinance (or microcredit) is the provision of financial services provided to low-income individuals or groups who would otherwise have limited to no other access to these services. In Haiti, the majority of the poor live in rural areas - isolated from the world of financial institutions. As a result, they lack access to financial opportunities needed to improve their living conditions and create better futures for their families” (Fonkoze.org 1). This passage explains what microfinance is, (the financial services given to low-income people). This shows what microfinance is, and this is important because it shows microloans are a promising solution to Haiti’s poverty. Community Wealth has this to say about microloans: “Microfinance began as a series of experiments on how to use finance to empower the poor, and has now evolved into a robust movement and industry. Today, microcredit for investment (particularly for working capital) remains the sector’s core product, but other financial services such as microsavings and microinsurance are emerging as powerful complements to loans” (Magner 2) To clear up any confusion, microloans are a branch of microfinance. This text explains how microfinance began (a series of experiments on how to financially empower the poor), this shows how microfinance came around, and this is important because it shows how microloans came to be, and it explains that microloans have become a big industry. Microloans, therefore, are the solution that we need to pay attention to.

## **The Grand Finale**

In conclusion, a problem in the world today that we should refuse to ignore is poverty in Haiti. People are starving and dying from hurricanes and corrupt government, and the solution to it all is to support Fonkoze.org. If you are wondering what on earth Fonkoze.org is, here is the answer: “Fonkoze is a family of 3 organizations: Fonkoze Financial Services (Sèvis Finansye Fonkoze (SFF), S.A.), The Fonkoze Foundation (Fondasyon Kole Zepòl) and Fonkoze USA. The Fonkoze Family works in an integrated manner to offer a holistic approach to reducing poverty in Haiti. Together with other stakeholders and partners, we work kole zepòl (shoulder-to-shoulder) to provide financial and non-financial services to empower Haitians — primarily women — to lift their families out of poverty” (Fonkoze.org 1) The text states what Fonkoze is, and explains a bit of background about it. Now that you get the general idea of what Fonkoze is, I can tell you (hopefully without boring you) more about this organization and what they are doing. I reached out to Sherry Todd-Green, the director of communications and branding at Fonkoze, and asked her a few questions. What follows was her response to one of my questions: “[Fonkoze is] empowering the poor, primarily rural women, across the country to lift their families out poverty through financial inclusion (microfinance) and development services (education, health, mentoring, value chain development, business skills training). By providing both microfinance and

accompanying development services, we are tackling poverty in a holistic way.”

(Todd-Green 1). Sherry Todd-Green tells us that Fonkoze is empowering the poor families in rural Haiti to lift themselves out of poverty. This shows that Fonkoze is trying to help Haitians out of poverty, and this is important because it explains what Fonkoze is doing to help Haitians to get out of poverty. “Half of Haiti’s population can be characterized as extreme poor, and face widening gaps in equality, increasing social marginalization, no sustainable livelihood options and increasing food prices. In response to this, Haiti’s largest microfinance institution, Fonkoze, provided extremely poor households with a series of protective and promotional inputs for 18 months to help them build sustainable livelihoods” (developmentbookshelf.com 1). The text states that half of Haiti’s population can be called extreme poor and that Fonkoze is working to put a stop to this. This shows that Fonkoze has provided extremely poor homes with money, and this is important because it shows how Fonkoze is making an impact on Haiti’s poverty.

I supported Fonkoze.org by hosting a bake sale at my school, where I raised \$106. Special thanks to Broulims for donating baked goods for this sale! I don’t know how I would have raised that much money without you. Since a typical microloan is anywhere between \$45 to \$200, and I raised \$106 at my bake sale, that could be 2 entire microloans! That could bring two families out of poverty! In conclusion, you, right now, reading this article, wherever you are, YOU can donate to Fonkoze.org to help a Haitian in poverty! Poverty in Haiti is a problem that we need to fix! We can’t fix plastic in the

oceans if there isn't anybody there to fix it! Poverty in Haiti is a problem we need to fix,  
and we can fix it with [Fonkoze.org](http://Fonkoze.org).