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A COUNTRY'S HOPE:

The Haiti Scholarship Program

American Institutes for Research

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The Haiti Scholarship Program is a USAID/Haiti-funded Education Quality Improvement Program 1 (EQUIP1) Associate Award, managed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and implemented by Le Fonds de Parrainage National.

AIR's International Development Program seeks to enhance the capacity of developing countries to improve the quality of life through education and social development. In collaboration with local partners we work to:

- Ensure children's equitable access to all levels of education;
- Improve the quality and relevance of education; and
- Empower individuals, communities, and institutes as agents of social and behavioral change.

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I. BACKGROUND

Development Context

For a child growing up in Haiti, the challenges to living a healthy, happy, and productive life are both numerous and daunting. Haiti is an extremely poor country, with a majority of its population surviving on less than \$1 a day. Few countries score worse than Haiti on measures of human development such as infant mortality, life expectancy, child immunization, and adult literacy. Among Haitian children, 1 in 9 is expected to die before age five, and the overall life expectancy for the entire population is just 52 years.

Children who survive through infancy are faced with challenging living conditions that do little to support healthy growth and development. Just over half the population has access to clean water, and even fewer people use adequate sanitation facilities. The situation is more acute in the country's rural areas, where only 14% of the population benefits from adequate sanitation infrastructure. In addition, children's health is threatened by malnutrition. Nearly half of the entire Haitian population is undernourished.

Added to these myriad difficulties, Haiti's children also face risks from HIV/AIDS, dangers from gang violence, and human-rights violations that include child-trafficking and child labor—notably domestic work away from their families. The challenge to improving children's development is punctuated by the fact that there is no single cause for the difficulties. The poor development context that persists in Haiti results from a mix of poverty, income inequality, political instability, and inefficient and ineffective public institutions.

Education in Haiti

The same set of factors which has constrained Haitian development in general, has plagued the education sector as well, resulting in an education system that is ill-equipped to provide quality instruction to the vast majority of Haiti's children. Historically, the small number of public primary and secondary schools served a bureaucratic elite living mainly in the country's urban areas. As late as 1970, the enrollment rate of school-aged children in rural areas was just 12 percent.¹

¹ Bernard Hadjadj, *Education for All in Haiti Over the Last 20 Years: Assessment and Perspectives* (Kingston, Jamaica: Office of the UNESCO Representative in the Caribbean, 2000) 16.

Despite the current global push for universal education, launched by the World Conference on Education for all in 1990, the Haitian government has been unable to initiate and support large-scale improvements in education enrollments and quality. One major obstacle has been a transition from dictatorship to democracy characterized by 20 years of near constant political turmoil resulting in the lack of consistent education policy and leadership at the national level. State funding for education is another obstacle. The projection for public financing of education in 2006 was just 1.7 percent of GDP, compared with a Latin America and Caribbean regional average of 5 percent.² This lack of funding is evidenced by the low number of public schools—a total of 1,240. In contrast, there are 14,424 private schools in Haiti which enroll 82 percent of all primary and secondary school students.³



The predominance of private education is perhaps the most defining feature of educational services in Haiti. More than half of Haiti's non-public schools are run by nongovernmental associations such as religious associations, independent operators, and communities. This private sector support has helped to raise student enrollments, but research suggests that the present structure perpetuates inequality and inefficiency. First, rather than supplementing the public school system, as is the case in many countries, the private sector in Haiti fills an existing gap in services. No additional places in the public system are freed up by the availability of private education. Second, given that private schools are often the only available schools for poor and rural students, parents of these children are continually burdened by the financial responsibility of paying school fees higher than those charged by the public schools. Finally, private schools, due to the limited resources of their clientele, cannot raise sufficient funds for adequate instructional facilities or properly trained teachers.⁴

² World Bank, "Social Resilience and State Fragility in Haiti: A Country Social Analysis," World Bank Report No. 36069-HT (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), 43.

³ MENJS, Direction de la Planification et de la Cooperation Externe, *Recensement Scolaire* (Port-au-Prince: Government of Haiti, 2003).

⁴ Jamil Salmi, "Equity and Quality in Private Education: The Haitian Paradox," World Bank Human Development Department, LCSHD Paper Series no. 18 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1998), 8-11.

Indeed, despite the existence of private schools, access, retention and quality continue to be tremendous challenges, especially for Haiti's most vulnerable populations. Approximately half of primary-age children from the lowest income quintile do not attend school, due primarily to the prohibitive cost of school fees.⁵ For these poor families, school fees for each child can represent as much as 20 % of the family household income.⁶ Moreover, the quality of the learning environment in many Haitian schools is in desperate condition. Data from 2003 showed that less than a quarter of schools had electricity, less than half had running water, more than 10% did not have latrines, and only 12% had a library.⁷

Impacts on Education of Recent Political Violence

In 2003 a growing movement of protest and violent political uprising culminated in the forced exile of President Aristide in February 2004. A UNICEF report, released in mid-2004, documented the results of a rapid nationwide assessment of the impact of the political violence on children.⁸ The assessment showed that children were severely victimized by the events—many were killed, others wounded by gunshots or beaten by armed gangs, and still others were the victims of rape, particularly in urban areas with the most violence. In many locations, children were recruited into armed gangs. Schools also suffered, as targets of violence and looting. Many schools closed for several months during the violence. The trauma to students and their families jeopardized a successful start to the 2004/05 school year in many Haitian cities. In July 2004, USAID launched the Haiti Scholarship Program to support students made vulnerable by events of that year.

⁵ "Haiti: Options and Opportunities for Inclusive Growth," Country Economic Memorandum (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), 123.

⁶ "Haiti: Options and Opportunities for Inclusive Growth," 125.

⁷ MENJS, *Annuaire Statistique des Ecole Fondamentales* (Port-au-Prince: Government of Haiti, 2005).

⁸ UNICEF, *Les Enfants D'Haiti Face A La Crise: Situation Et Realites: Evaluation rapide de l'impact de la crise actuelle sur la situation des enfants en Haiti* (Port-au-Prince: UNICEF, 2004).



II. THE HAITI SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Haiti Scholarship Program is a USAID-funded effort managed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and implemented by local Haitian non-profit organization *Le Fonds de Parrainage National* (FPN) to provide scholarship support to more than 15,000 students in the five Haitian cities of Petit-Goâve, Port-au-Prince, Saint-Marc, Gonaïves, and Cap-Haïtien—sites of the worst political violence and civil unrest in 2003 and 2004. It is a unique program of educational support, based on FPN’s own scholarship model which targets the country’s private schools as the foci for program interventions. The program supports public and private schools to retain needy children in school and create the conditions for their academic success through supplemental tutoring and school improvement projects.

A School-Based Model

In Haiti, approximately 500,000 school-aged children do not attend school (roughly 50% of the school-aged population). This low level of access to schooling, however, is not reflective of a lack of interest within the population or a lack of parental appreciation for the value of education. Rather, for most families, the direct and indirect costs of education such as tuition fees, uniforms, supplies, and shoes are prohibitively expensive. Public schools, which charge lower fees than private

schools, are not available to most families. The need for scholarship support in Haiti is therefore very high, and with this high need, the task of identifying the most disadvantaged students becomes both difficult and complex. Any open solicitation for scholarship candidates would elicit an overwhelming response from parents—far more interest than the program could hope to support. Moreover, there are few, if any, good measures to accurately determine family economic status. With no tax records, it is impossible to determine family revenues, and simply visiting a family residence may not give a fool-proof indication of a family’s ability (or inability) to pay for school.

To avoid this administratively complex situation, FPN targets schools, instead of individual children. Private school owners and directors are invited to learn about the program and to apply to participate. In order to be accepted into the program, schools are scored against a standard set of nine criteria, focusing on items such as the qualifications of the director and teachers, learning conditions such as the student-teacher ratio, community and parental involvement, and measures of the physical condition of the school building and grounds, including the presence of potable water, latrines, and a library. Schools that do not meet the minimum set score for these criteria are not accepted into the program, save for the occasional situation in which FPN staff believes that a school—with FPN support—will experience sufficient improvement in the first year to warrant participation.

Schools which are accepted into the Haiti Scholarship Program are then required to nominate at least 50 of the neediest students to receive scholarship support. To determine the neediest students, school directors are asked to review records of school fee payments and identify those students with delinquent accounts as well as those who have not paid to retrieve their end-of-year report cards. School directors are also asked to pay attention to gender parity in the selection of students.

Identifying and supporting at least 50 students in each school is important to the success of the program’s school-based model. Each participating school represents a substantial investment by the program, given that participation entails much

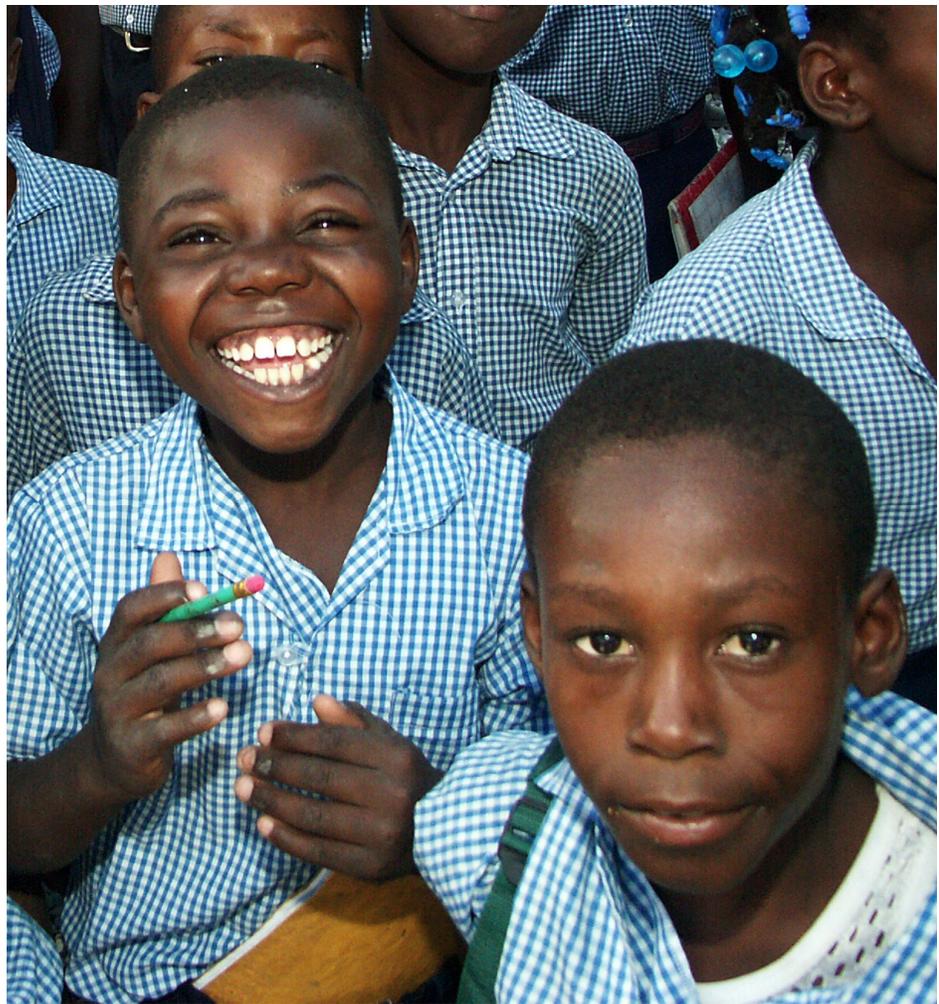


more than covering the cost of children’s school fees. Under the Haiti Scholarship Program, supported students receive tuition support, school supplies, and weekly after-school tutoring in math, French, and Creole. In addition, teachers receive compensation for the extra tutoring and educational supplies, and school directors receive payments on a per-student basis to defer administrative costs of running the school. The school also receives a supply kit containing items such as clocks, maps, and trash cans, as well as support for a small infrastructure improvement project. The program must therefore support a minimum number of students per school in order to warrant the provision of all the additional support features.

Promoting Learning Achievement

Ensuring that supported students are benefiting from their time in school is one of the most important aspects of the Haiti Scholarship Program. Unfortunately, the quality of private schools in Haiti varies tremendously. In many of the poorer schools, under qualified and unskilled staff fail to impart even the most basic knowledge and skills to their students. By employing the minimum school criteria, the Haiti Scholarship Program is able to control for some of this variability. However, to ensure that scholarship recipients are receiving adequate instruction in the basic subjects of math, French, and Creole, the scholarship program includes a tutoring component.

Provision of tutoring services is one of the requirements in the contract that all participating schools must sign with FPN. Under this agreement, scholarship recipients receive three hours of after-school instruction every week—one each for math, French, and Creole. Students are tutored by their normally assigned teachers, who receive compensation for





these services. Payment is based on the number of scholarship recipients each teacher tutors. Like the school directors, these teachers must also sign a contract with FPN, outlining their individual tutoring responsibilities.

It is the school directors, however, who are ultimately responsible for the academic achievement of the sponsored students. At the end of each school year, participating schools must submit to FPN the academic results for each sponsored student. In general, schools are expected to have an overall pass rate for supported students of at least 75-80%. Failure to meet this pass rate results in meetings with FPN staff to determine the underlying causes, and can jeopardize a school's continued participation in the program.

Student achievement is measured not only by the school's own academic results, but also by FPN's annual independent testing process, which tests a sample of students at each grade from each of the participating schools. Through this independent testing, FPN is able to corroborate the information received from schools, as well as to track the performance of supported versus non-supported students. Participating schools are able to use the independent testing results to compare their performance against other schools in the program.

Encouraging Civic Participation in Education

A long-term objective of the Haiti Scholarship Program is to encourage and enhance FPN's ability to involve parents and communities in ensuring the academic success of scholarship recipients. This objective aligns with FPN's own key organizational goal of stimulating greater civic participation among the citizens of Haiti, notably within the education sector. Both aims are addressed, under the Haiti Scholarship Program, through the creation and promotion of school committees.

It is a condition of each school's contract with FPN to have a functioning, legitimate school committee. The capacity and legitimacy of committees are measured against FPN-established standards for committee membership and operating procedures. And where such committees do not already exist, FPN staff work with school directors, teachers, parents, and students to create them.

School committees play an important role under the Haiti Scholarship Program. Committee members, for example, must be present to sign for receipt of the school kit, and members—especially parents—are vigilant in ensuring that the materials and equipment provided to schools under the program are properly used and maintained. School committees are also critical to the development of school improvement projects. Under the scholarship program, participating schools may apply for school improvement projects, which may take the form of equipment purchases, materials for improvements to school infrastructure, or training funds for school staff or committee members. All applications for such projects must be prepared by the school committee, in cooperation with FPN staff. Upon receipt of the equipment, materials, and or funds, it is the school committee which signs for and takes responsibility for the ultimate end use.

Entrusting such responsibility to the school committees has had a beneficial impact on the degree to which parents feel invested in the school and in their children's education. Indeed, the program has witnessed many examples where parents and community members have taken the initiative to improve the school and its environs. In one community, for example, parents noticed the sewer near a school was full of garbage, and thus worked together to clean it. In another, parents purchased garbage cans for the school, in order to keep the school yard clean. In yet another community, parents used their own time and money to repaint a classroom which needed to be brightened.



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III. IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM DESIGN: ADVANTAGES OF THE HAITI SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM MODEL

Responding to Local Contexts

Scholarship programs, through their targeting of beneficiaries, implementation models, and support features, can impact important educational concerns that may be specific to a community, region, or even a country. Some programs, for example, provide needed support to HIV/AIDS orphans and children made vulnerable by the pandemic. Others include means to encourage changes in conservative community attitudes related to the education of girls. In each case, program success is dependent upon knowing and responding to the local educational context and needs.

In Haiti, the dominance of private education is a result of initiatives by the private sector to fill the gap left by a public system with too few schools to meet the high demand. Not only has the government been unable to adequately provide this public good, but so too has it struggled to adequately monitor the quality of the education services provided by the private sector. At present, only 13% of all private schools in the country hold government licenses. The Haiti Scholarship Program therefore fills a unique need to encourage and support improvements in the country's private schools.

The Haiti Scholarship Program is recognition of the fact that if educational services to the vast majority of Haitian children are to improve, financial, material, and technical inputs are needed. For many schools in poor, rural areas of the country, the amount of money that school directors can obtain from tuition fees is insufficient to properly outfit the school with the staff, materials, and infrastructure needed to support a quality learning environment. The program has been able to provide 175 schools with inputs to address these needs. So too has it, on occasion, provided technical inputs, when for example schools model their own exams on those used by the program for independent testing of sponsored students.

The Haiti Scholarship Program also capitalizes on another unique feature of the Haitian context—the existence of a business sector and Diaspora with a potential to provide substantial support to Haitian education, far exceeding the limits of what the government itself can presently provide. By leveraging the funds available through USAID to reach larger numbers of children and to become more visible within the country, FPN is trying to foster greater investment in education by these interests.

Addressing Quality Concerns

It is well known that access alone does not guarantee a child's educational achievement. School quality is of critical importance if children brought into school are to learn and benefit from their time in the classroom. The Haiti Scholarship Program is an interesting example of how a comprehensive scholarship model can not only stimulate educational quality improvements, but also build a stronger sense of accountability among parents and community members for ensuring quality education for their children.

The use of criteria in selecting schools is the program's first method of addressing and encouraging quality. Directors of private schools in the targeted cities are very eager to be accepted into the program, given the financial and material benefits that come to participating schools. Moreover, schools that participate in the program are more attractive to parents, and in an educational context dominated by private schools, school directors are dependent upon parents' choice of schools for their children. By using standard evaluation criteria to score and select schools, the Haiti



Scholarship Program provides a benchmark for quality that all schools must strive to meet—if they hope to join the program. Using criteria to select schools is also important in terms of the commitment that the program has to the supported students. The Haiti Scholarship Program has no interest in supporting children to go to schools where there is little or no hope for learning achievement.

The second important method used by the program for addressing quality issues is the school contract. Schools that refuse to sign contracts are denied entry to the program, and any school which breaches the terms and conditions of the contract is subject to expulsion from the program. The school contract is therefore a means by which the Haiti Scholarship Program can compel schools to abide by good operating procedures and ensure that school directors and teachers adhere to appropriate standards of conduct.

Several of the key conditions of the contract are meant to build degrees of transparency and accountability into school operations. For example, schools are required to provide end-of-year academic results for each supported student. Similarly, schools must notify FPN when a supported child is

absent from school for more than three days per month. In such cases, FPN staff follow up with the families of these children, to determine the causes of the absences. Transparency in operations is further ensured by the requirement that schools be open at any time to visits by FPN supervisory staff.

The openness of schools to visits by FPN supervisors is important, particularly for monitoring behaviors of school directors and teaching staff. A condition of the Haiti Scholarship Program is that supported students be treated with appropriate respect and concern for their well being and academic achievement. There is a no tolerance policy for violence or abuse of students, and indeed some schools, on rare occasion, have been expelled for such violations.

Perhaps one of the most important conditions of the school contract is that schools must undertake efforts to apply for a license from the Haitian Ministry for Education and Vocational Training, if they do not already hold one. Through this initiative, the Haiti Scholarship Program is building compliance with the Ministry's own effort to better monitor and manage the quality of private educational services throughout the country.

Empowering an Indigenous Scholarship Program

One criticism of scholarship programs, particularly those sponsored by international donor agencies, is the finite nature of the support; that such programs are not a sustainable means for supporting increases in access to education and educational quality. A common approach by international NGOs and donor agencies to build a degree of sustainability into scholarship programs is to engage local organizations as the implementing partners. Local organizations, often well known and trusted by the target population, are also more likely to be familiar with the realities of local educational systems and the specific cultural and social contexts that affect community support for education.

In Haiti, FPN stands out as an organization respected for its dedication to providing educational opportunities for Haiti's disadvantaged children. FPN was established in 1992 by a consortium of leading citizens from government, not-for-profit, business, and religious organizations seeking to deliver scholarships and other badly needed support to disadvantaged schools and students. Respected by



the government and private sector alike for its professionalism and integrity, FPN has received funding in recent years from a variety of Haitian and international donors, including USAID and UNICEF.

As a prominent indigenous Haitian non-profit organization working on education assistance programs, FPN plays an important role in facilitating the concept of national solidarity in the struggle to develop Haiti's human resources. FPN represents the effort of the Haitian community to aid its vulnerable members.

Under the EQUIP1 Haiti Scholarship Program, FPN receives the technical assistance and financial resources needed to expand its capacity to bring scholarship support to greater numbers of needy students. With program support and training from AIR, FPN has upgraded its financial management systems and procedures, allowing it to accurately track larger amounts of funds while still adhering to the stringent accounting requirements of USAID and other foreign donors. In addition, AIR staff have worked closely with FPN to provide technical support in such diverse areas as organizational management, program strategy and implementation, monitoring and evaluation and marketing.

FPN's resulting enhanced capacity, coupled with the increased visibility accorded to the foundation based on the size and scope of the scholarship program, has secured FPN's position as a leading implementer of scholarship programs within Haiti. Moreover, FPN is better prepared and able to source additional funds from both within and outside of the country to continue its support programs.



CLOSING REMARKS

In Haiti, the predominance of private education provides a unique challenge which sets the nation apart from most other countries, where international aid donors can work in close cooperation with governments to improve educational outcomes. While the Haitian government continues to work to improve its oversight of private schools, and to establish systems to ensure quality within these school, the present education context demands an approach that can penetrate the private sector and work directly with private schools to effect improvements in educational quality and children's achievement. The Haiti Scholarship Program is a strong demonstration of just such an approach.

By encouraging whole-school reform, the Haiti Scholarship Program extends beyond the primary effort of most scholarship programs to enable children to enroll and remain in school. Attention to children's learning, through weekly after-school tutoring, has helped to ensure that the students supported under this program achieve basic competencies in math, French, and Creole. Moreover, the program's focus on building parental and community participation in education, through the empowerment of school committees to take ownership and responsibility for school improvement, is a positive step in ensuring students benefit from a quality learning environment. Perhaps most importantly, the Haiti Scholarship Program demonstrates that by using selection criteria and school contracts to formalize relationships with schools, a program can build a degree of accountability among private school directors and staff for improving school quality.

As a result of USAID's Haiti Scholarship Program, thousands of Haitian children have benefited from the opportunity to attend school. The work of FPN staff, especially the team of supervisors who work directly with the participating schools, has been instrumental to this success. Also important has been AIR's effort to build the capacity of FPN to support such large numbers of students and to increase its ability to encourage businesses and community members to invest in education. Together, these advancements contribute to empowering the Haitian community to take responsibility for the education of its children. Faced with many difficult challenges to their health and well-being, education is one tool that Haiti's children have which holds the possibility of providing a brighter, healthier, and more productive future.

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