

TOPIC: WHERE SOCIAL INTERVENTION FAILED AND SERVED HAITI  
SEPTEMBER, 2023

### Introduction

For years, Haiti has been the focus of much turmoil ranging from political unrest, natural disasters, poverty, gang violence and a Cold tug-of-War between Communism and Democracy. Haiti is now considered the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>1</sup> While other countries would have been labeled a “failed state” by now, Haiti is referred to as an “aid state” in which the international community refuses to let the country fail and continues to prop up Haiti with financial and military assistance. However, with more than \$13 billion contributed in international aid over the last decade<sup>2</sup>, the question remains, where are we helping and where are we hurting?

### Haiti’s political history and the United States involvement

Haiti’s current state did not occur in a bubble. A long history of insurrection, exploitation and natural disasters have plagued Haitians, and, for better or worse, much has involved the U.S. To understand the role of aid, it is important to first understand the history. For a more in-depth review of the five major contributions to Haiti’s current political and economic state, read Arizona State University’s historian, Leslie Alexander’s summary [here](#). The key findings of her research are as follows:

- In 1804, Haiti became an independent nation from French colonial rule after a slave revolt that led to the ruling of nonwhite and formerly captive people. The U.S. refused to recognize Haiti as an independent nation for nearly sixty years following this coup.
- France mandated an indemnity from Haiti to cover its lost assets, including slaves, amounting to what would have been billions today. The debt left Haiti economically crippled and in a cycle of exploitative relationships with French banks and the American government. In 1947, Haiti fully repaid its debt to America, but its resources had been depleted.
- U.S. occupation occurred twice during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a strategy to prevent Communist control. Unfortunately, these occupations turned into oppressive rule over local Haitians in which thousands were killed, taxed and inspired to migrate.
- U.S. endorsed an anti-Communist President, Francois Duvalier, who maintained order with violence and terror, declaring himself “President for life.” His son took over and continued his policies until Haitians pressured their new president into leaving the country.
- In 2004, the first of many natural disasters struck the tumultuous country “including hurricanes, tropical storms, an earthquake and a massive cholera outbreak that began when an U.N. peacekeeping station contaminated the country’s main river with cholera-infected waste.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Heritage Foundation, James Roberts, [The Negative Effects on Haiti of Too Much Foreign Aid | The Heritage Foundation](#)

<sup>2</sup> New York Times, Maria Abi-Habib, [Why Haiti Still Despairs After \\$13 Billion in Foreign Aid - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Arizona State University, Prof. Leslie Alexander, [5 factors that have led to Haiti's current political state | ASU News](#)

The country has been in political, economic and social turmoil largely due to these series of events while attempting democratic practices and regimes. Some compare the international community's intervention to that of Afghanistan which ultimately resulted in \$1T+ in aid and military support while resulting in military extradition and the witnessing of a renewed Taliban rule. If there are lessons to be learned from Afghanistan, now is the time to apply them to Haiti.

### The role of international aid

Some analysts suggest that the aid offered over the past ten years has served as a crutch to Haiti rather than a source of opportunity. International intervention has left the “government with few incentives to carry out the institutional reforms necessary to rebuild the country, as it bets that every time the situation worsens, international governments will open their coffers,”<sup>4</sup> says New York Times journalist Maria Abi-Habib.

However, many aid interventions have operated as a lifeline to prevent imminent starvation, such as the food sent from USAID to Haiti in 2020 totaling \$15M and the \$27M in both 2019 and 2018.<sup>5</sup> Other stories of impact focus on women's economic development programs delivered by organizations such as CARE International and village savings and loans associations (VSLAs). The CARE International program, known as Kore Lavi, helped more than 37,000 people access financial services such as small business loans. Seventy-five percent (75%) of these people were women specifically targeted to participate in VSLAs. This specific VSLA included women who chose to create a pool consisting of savings totaling \$1.6 million and a credit portfolio of \$1.2 million. These pooled funds were then allocated to pool participants as loan programs within their portfolio groups.<sup>6</sup> What made this and other programs like this one successful is that it empowered local business owners to create their own resources and enabled them to benefit from the sales directly. The criticism of international aid is that it can put local farmers out of business when they are trying to sell their crops but are undermined by food aid from outside sources, thereby decreasing their ability to generate a profit from their own food production.

Other examples of successful inventions have been “hand up” programs rather than “hand out” aid. Support that comes in the form of empowering local leaders to provide for themselves and their family, often referred to as self-sufficiency programming, are heralded as bright spots in the history of aid interventions. Examples include:

- Opening a flour mill operated by trained local Haitians that then encourages local farmers to efficiently process their own crops to create sustenance for the local community.
- Nonprofits that work alongside farmers to increase production and build overseas markets for products such as the production of mangoes that now are imported by Whole Foods.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> New York Times, [Why Haiti Still Despairs After \\$13 Billion in Foreign Aid - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/24/world/americas/haiti-foreign-aid.html)

<sup>5</sup> [Food Assistance Fact Sheet - Haiti | Food Assistance | U.S. Agency for International Development \(usaid.gov\)](https://www.usaid.gov/our-work/food-assistance/fact-sheet-haiti)

<sup>6</sup> USAID, [Supporting Opportunities for Women to Thrive in Haiti | by USAID Food for Peace | Medium](https://www.usaid.gov/our-work/food-assistance/supporting-opportunities-for-women-to-thrive-in-haiti)

<sup>7</sup> Heritage Foundation, James Roberts, [The Negative Effects on Haiti of Too Much Foreign Aid | The Heritage Foundation](https://www.heritage.org/africa/article/2019/01/the-negative-effects-on-haiti-of-too-much-foreign-aid)

## Summary

Regarding government aid, more strategy and coordination is required to ensure effectiveness. Author Jonathan Katz, author of *The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster* and past Haiti Bureau Chief, recommends that aid come in the form of building and reinforcing healthy infrastructure and society.<sup>8</sup> When a country has a broken government, international government aid needs to be used as a reward for instituting voter-led, fraud-free infrastructure and social reform that enables a strong economy. The government needs to propose systems that create accountability and coordination of aid so that maverick countries and NGOs are kept from coming into Haiti doing whatever they think is best, while ultimately disrupting society and the development of government structure.

Regarding healthy NGO interventions, author and economist James Roberts from the Heritage Foundation summarizes the positive work in Haiti as “instituted projects to develop the infrastructure and the capacity for Haitians to achieve sustainable long term, private-sector-led economic growth through the production of value-added and marketable products.”<sup>9</sup>

Haiti has had a long history of a people who created economic opportunities for themselves when they were not fighting oppression or rebuilding from natural disasters. While Haitians have this economic spirit, aid needs to work alongside them rather than assume Haitians cannot provide for themselves. There is time for aid, such as in response to an earthquake, and then there is time for empowerment.

In the old adage of giving a man to fish versus teaching him to fish, Haiti is already filled with fisherman. If we want to be helpful, aid should focus on ensuring those who want to fish have access to fishing poles.

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<sup>8</sup> NPR, [What Happened To The Aid Meant To Rebuild Haiti? : Shots - Health News : NPR](#)

<sup>9</sup> Heritage Foundation, James Roberts, [The Negative Effects on Haiti of Too Much Foreign Aid | The Heritage Foundation](#)