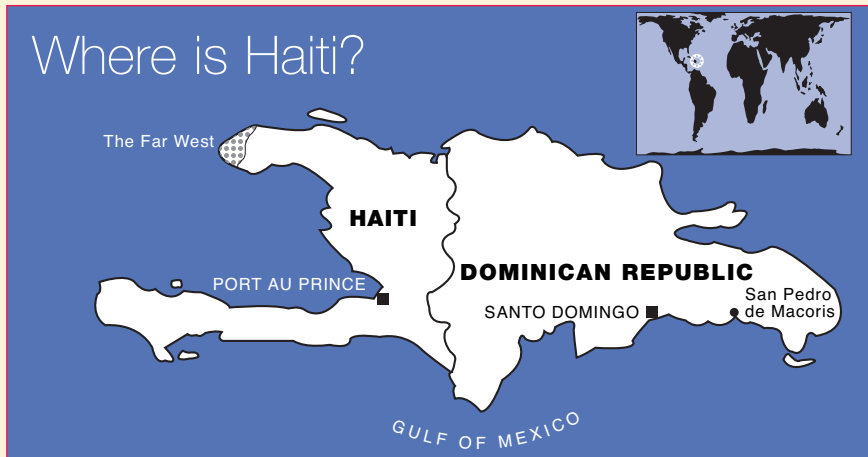


Country and community information



Haiti

ActionAid in Haiti



Haiti facts:

- The population is 8 million people
- The average life expectancy is 50 years
- 48 per cent of people are illiterate
- 1 in 8 children die before they reach their 5th birthday

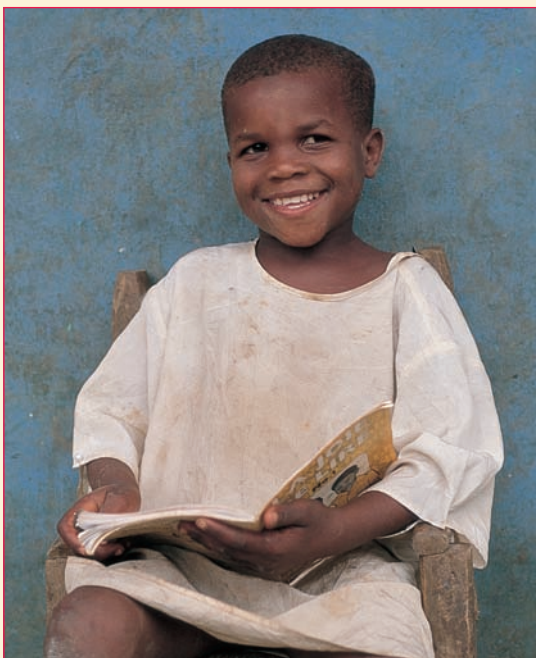
Occupying the western third of Hispaniola, the Caribbean's second largest island, Haiti is a mountainous country with a long, indented coast. It gained its independence from France in 1804, becoming the first independent black republic. The most common language is Creole, which has only recently been recognised as an official language. Previously, French (which five per cent of people speak) was the only official language.

Once one of the richest countries in the developing world, Haiti has emerged from decades of dictatorship and instability as one of the poorest. Democracy has had little effect on meeting the basic needs of the majority of the population – health and education services are still desperately inadequate. And 80 per cent of Haiti's people struggle to make a living by subsistence farming.

Where we work

Lascahobas, in the central part of Haiti, is home to 56,000 people. Most are small-scale farmers who live in extreme poverty, growing basic crops such as bananas, beans and rice. Families here have very limited access to food, drinking water, education and health care, and jobs are scarce. Poor soil quality, agricultural techniques and equipment make the situation worse, as do inadequate local roads.

Thiotte, in the south east of the country, is home to 49,000 people. Coffee is the main cash crop, but farmers also grow sweet potatoes, haricot beans, corn and a range of vegetables, like cabbage and lettuce. However, the poor road system means it is difficult to transport their produce to the main markets. Perishables are often damaged en-route, making them worthless, and many farmers are forced to sell their coffee beans to middlemen with little or no profit.





Both areas are isolated, mountainous regions of high humidity and altitude. Droughts and flash floods often lead to famine and many people are forced to flee their homes. Roads are almost non-existent, communication is very poor, and basic services are scarce. ActionAid, along with local partner organisations, is supporting the basic needs and rights of the poorest people.

Livelihoods

Life is a struggle for survival for many in Haiti. Damaged soil and the constant threat of drought and flooding means that making a living from farming is almost impossible. Families have no spare money to help them explore other ways of making a living.

ActionAid is helping women and small-scale farmers boost their income by setting up food processing schemes. Produce such as mangoes, bananas and peanuts are used to make jam, flour and peanut butter for sale at local markets or in the capital, Port-au-Prince.

ActionAid is also helping farmers improve pig and goat-rearing businesses, training them in modern livestock methods and making loans available for better feed, shelter, veterinary care and access to markets. Community banks and coffee co-operatives are also supported as ways to improve income.

In fishing communities, ActionAid is working with local co-operatives to improve boats and nets, as well as introducing ways to preserve and market the fish. In the long term, co-operatives can buy freezers and vehicles together, so they can store the fish en-route to market. We're helping to set up community shops which buy goods at wholesale prices and sell them at a small profit, providing incomes for local people and making goods available at low prices.

Education

The few schools that do exist in Lascahobas and Thiotte are understaffed and the teachers poorly trained. Local people

see educating their children as a priority, but few can afford it. We're training teachers to help improve the quality of teaching. Now they can teach a more up-to-date curriculum, helping to give children the chance of a brighter future. We are working with communities to find other ways of giving their children a better start in life.

To improve low literacy rates amongst the adult population, ActionAid has helped open literacy centres, which teach adults how to read and write. These also give people, particularly women, the confidence to participate in local meetings and plan, organise and manage development activities within the community.

I have wanted to learn to read and write for many years. With the help of ActionAid, I have finally reached my goal and can now help my children with their schoolwork.

Rosie Marie, mother of 5.

Health

For most people in the areas where we work, the nearest hospital, which often lacks even basic resources, is several hours away by foot. ActionAid is working with community organisations to improve health services for poor families.

ActionAid, together with local groups, provide training programmes within the community that help young people protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy.

Water

Many women and children used to have to walk miles to fetch water. But ActionAid, in partnership with local community groups, helped build both family and community water cisterns which are now managed by local committees. Today, the communities have improved access to water and some farmers are experimenting with



growing new kinds of crops on areas of land near to the cisterns, to see how irrigation can improve their yields.

Helping communities to help themselves

Haiti has a strong civic movement, with many local organisations made up of people determined to work together to solve their own problems. These organisations have many skills – in farming, water and irrigation, health and sanitation, education and training – but they lack resources. So ActionAid provides funding and training.

By providing funding and training, ActionAid helps local groups to help themselves. We train members of local organisations to apply for funds, write proposals, reach officials and influence local government policy so that the community's needs are addressed. The Haitian approach is summed by a local saying: "Pa kite la mize fe dedenye sou nou; an nou travay pou nou change la vie" (don't let misery take us over; so let us work to change our life).

Venèse Louissaint and her husband Rémy live in Loncy, Lascahobas with their four children. Venèse is the vice president of a local women's association and alongside ActionAid is helping the women build a better future, through small trading activities.

"I hope this activity will grow... It will help a lot of the women in Loncy because the land is not fertile any more and the harvests are mostly bad."

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, ActionAid is able to do so much to improve the lives of some of the world's poorest families. Since 1972, we've helped millions of people throughout the world, giving them the chance to enjoy a healthier, happier and more dignified future. Haiti is just one of over 40 countries we are working in.

Photo credits: Jenny Matthews/Network/ActionAid:Haiti

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