



# Haiti Fact Sheet



## Geography

Haiti is 800 miles southeast of Miami, between the Caribbean and the Atlantic. It occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola; the remaining two-thirds belong to the Dominican Republic.

Area: 10,741 square miles, slightly smaller than the state of Maryland.

Population: 7.8 million.

## Religion

80% Roman Catholic; 10% various Protestant churches.

Vodou is widely practiced. Most Haitians who practice Vodou consider themselves to be Roman Catholic as well. Vodou is a religion of African origins which revolves around family spirits and ancestors.

## Culture

95% of Haitians are of African descent, the rest mostly of mixed African-Caucasian ancestry.

## Language

Kreyol (Haitian Creole). Less than 20% of the population speaks French, the official language and the legacy of colonial times.

**Haiti is the world's oldest black republic, established in 1804 after a revolt led by slave leader Toussaint L'Ouverture.**



## Economy

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and one of the poorest countries in the world. One percent of the population controls 40% of the wealth.

## History

Haiti is the world's oldest black republic, established in 1804 after a revolt led by slave leader Toussaint L'Ouverture.

The US invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Haiti suffered through a string of dictatorships, the most brutal being led by the Duvalier family. François Duvalier was elected President in 1957. Known as 'Papa Doc', he terrorized the country through his private militia, the fearsome *tontons macoutes* (Kreyol for "uncle boogeyman"). His son Jean-Claude, or 'Baby Doc', viciously followed in his father's footsteps. With US support, the Duvalier regime lasted until 1986, when Baby Doc was overthrown by a groundswell of popular protest and fled the country.

In 1990, former Catholic priest Jean Bertrand Aristide was elected President by a 67% majority in Haiti's first democratic elections. An army coup forced him to leave the country in September 1991. A disastrous spell of political and criminal violence descended upon Haiti.

Aristide was returned to power in 1994, but Haiti has continued to be mired in political turmoil and economic decay.

**8 out of 10 Haitians in the countryside live on less than \$150 a year – the average American lives on 200 times that amount.**



## Health

Life expectancy is a mere 54 years, compared with 76 in the U.S. and 70 in the neighboring Dominican Republic.

About 35% of the population has access to safe drinking water, 15% in rural areas. Most families do not have electricity or running water, and sanitary facilities such as sewage disposal and flush toilets are nearly non-existent.

## EDUCATION

Less than half the population is literate. One child in five reaches secondary school.

## Environment

Deforestation claims 30 million trees per year, and 25 of the 30 major watersheds are almost devoid of forest cover. The country loses approximately 15 million cubic meters of soil per year due to erosion. Despite this, 70% of fuel needs are supplied by charcoal.

Only 29% of Haitian land can support agriculture, as the rest of the country is mountainous. The loss of fertile soil means less food to go around.

Only 100 square kilometers (.4%) of forest land is currently protected.

## The Creole Pig Repopulation Program

The Creole Pig Repopulation Program is a collaboration of two groups, one in the US and the other in Haiti. Grassroots International is a human rights and development organization doing outreach in the US to raise awareness and funds for the repopulation program. In Haiti, the Peasant Movement of the Papaye Congress (MPNKP) is an experienced and well respected organization that is implementing the program.

With the money provided by Grassroots International, the MPNKP buys pigs that closely resemble the lost Creole pig, including pigs from other Caribbean islands as well as mixed breed pigs bred by Haitian agronomists. The MPNKP then distributes the pigs to community groups, called *gwoupmans*, made up of 10 to 15 members. Pigs are distributed to community groups rather than to individual families in order to strengthen ties within local communities. The MPNKP also carries out leadership training and other skills-building. The program thus acts as a tool to strengthen local capacities and unites people around a common struggle. This aspect of the program puts it a cut above other livestock programs that do little to build power at the grassroots level.

The *gwoupmans* share responsibility for raising their own pig and for breeding it with a male pig in their area. When a litter is born, half the piglets are distributed within the *gwoupman* and the other half are distributed to other *gwoupmans*, spreading the program across the Haitian countryside. Veterinary services, including training, is provided to help pigs stay healthy.

A contribution of \$45 will allow the MPNKP to purchase a pig for a new *gwoupman* and provide them with leadership and other training as well as support Grassroots International's continuing education and outreach efforts for this project.

## Grassroots International

Grassroots International is an independent human rights and development agency working for social change. The agency provides financial and material support for community-led development in Brazil, East Timor, Eritrea, Haiti, Mexico, and Palestine. In the US, Grassroots International educates and advocates on issues of concern to our partners. Its partnerships at the grassroots level provide the organization with a unique basis to inform the American public about poverty, power, and social change. Grassroots International accepts no government funding and is supported entirely by tax-deductible private donations.

Grassroots International  
179 Boylston Street 4th floor  
Boston MA 02130, USA  
Tel 617.524.1400 Fax 617.524.5525  
pigs@grassrootsonline.org

[www.grassrootsonline.org](http://www.grassrootsonline.org)