

Henriette Lunde

# **Youth and Education in Haiti**

## **Disincentives, vulnerabilities and constraints**

Haiti Youth Project



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Disincentives, vulnerabilities and constraints

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## Executive summary

The current state of the Haitian education sector is a reason for grave concern, both for national authorities and the international community. On a national average, only 60 percent of Haitian children between 6 and 11 are enrolled in school. While three of four children in urban areas start in primary school, only around half of the children in the rural areas are given this opportunity.

The objective of this study is to identify the main factors which prevent children from being enrolled in school, the circumstances which cause them to drop out during the school year and to identify factors which make children more prone to fail their exams and hence have to repeat or drop out. The findings presented in this paper are based on qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted in four different regions of Haiti during November and December 2007. The study is a part of a larger project focusing on different areas of youth involvement. The project also includes two additional qualitative studies focusing on the issues of youth's involvement in armed violence, and youth and labour migration respectively, as well as a quantitative, nationally representative youth survey. The final report will include recommendations and advice on a relevant mix of policies, based on findings from both the qualitative studies and the quantitative survey. The project is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Haiti is a country struggling with grave and widespread poverty, and more than half of the population tries to make a living on less than one dollar per day. The Haitian state has failed in its obligation to offer the population education free of charge as is stated in the constitution, and private actors dominate the education sector. More than 90 percent of the schools are non-public, with most of them not receiving any state support. The education system is primarily based upon private financing from the households of the individual students. For some families sending all, or even one, of their children to school is simply out of economic reach. For these families, poverty is a binding constraint, making it impossible for them to send their children to school. Other families have the option of enrolling their children in school, but because they are balancing on the margins; even minor education expenses need to be prioritized against other household spending. In order to understand the low rates of enrolment within such a context, it is necessary to analyse the households' incentives (or lack of incentives) to send their children to school, as well as their ability to do so.

Education in Haiti is highly valued and being able to read and write is perceived as much sought-after assets in a country where more than half of the population is illiterate (SEA 2000). However, despite the general value given to education, respondents also expressed lack of faith that enrolling their children in school will substantially increase their chances of finding qualified work afterwards. Only a few of the children who start school are able to continue to a level where they qualify for skilled work.

One contributing factor to this is the government's lack of control over the individual schools' system of promotion. While promotion from one grade to the other is supposed to happen automatically at the primary level, with the exception of entry to the 5th and 7th grades, the reality is rather that children are the subjects of extensive evaluations beginning at the entry level of primary school. The end of the year exams represent an economic burden

for the children's families. Many households are unable to cover the additional cost of exam fees, with the result that their children drop out at the very end of the school year or have to repeat the same grade the following year.

Children also frequently have to repeat grades or drop out because they have not received adequate teaching to be able pass their exams. One of the main problems in the Haitian education sector is a lack of qualified teachers, which seriously affects the quality of the education received by many of the students. In particular, the low quality teaching is a problem in the many unregulated private schools, from which the teacher themselves have graduated only a few grades above the students they teach to. The quantity of the teaching students receive is also another reason for concern. The teachers' salaries are low, making it attractive or even necessary for teachers to engage in additional income-generating activities, sometimes at the expense of the time spent teaching and learning their craft.

Teachers both in the public and private sectors experience that their salaries are delayed and, at times, react by going on strike causing schools to close down for shorter or longer periods. Haiti is also particularly vulnerable to hurricanes and environmental disasters. Damaged school buildings and impassable roads frequently prevent children from attending school during and after the yearly hurricane season. The high risk of dropout and repetition due to factors outside of the control of the households makes education a risky investment and is likely to work as a disincentive for poor families to enrol their children in school.

The structure of the Haitian education system does not adequately take into consideration the fact that very few Haitian children are able to complete primary and secondary education. The system offers few alternatives at an intermediary level of education, and instead encourages a path that is too long and theoretical for all but the privileged few. Only a small minority of the children who are admitted reach an educational level where they actually qualify for skilled work. Moreover, even then their chances in the job market may be more dependent upon *who* they know than *what* they know.

Without any access to formal credit, insurance or welfare benefits, poor households find themselves vulnerable to risks like a failed harvest, unemployment or illness in the family. In order to mitigate such potential risks, not enrolling all children in school may be a part of social risk management for the individual household. Often the resources for education are concentrated on one or a few of the children, while other children may either be working at home or elsewhere, participating in labour migration or staying with other households. In this way the households diversify both the risks and the income and may also create important links to other households.

The rural population find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation as a result of their dependency upon unpredictable agricultural harvests. In recent years, Haiti has been hit harder by natural disasters than normal. In large areas, complete harvests have been destroyed and hundred of thousands of people left homeless. These disasters obviously have a huge impact on the enrolment of children in school. Haiti is also one of the countries that is most severely affected by the global rise in prices of food and oil. The increased costs of living have resulted in massive protests and general discontent in the population and are very likely to lead to massive dropouts of school children if precautionary measures are not initiated.



# 1 Introduction

Around 500,000 Haitian children of compulsory school age have never been enrolled in school (UNICEF 2007). Most of these children are the sons and daughters of peasants in the Haitian countryside. According to the Haiti Living Conditions Survey, only 54 percent of rural children between 6 and 11 are enrolled in school (IHSI/Fafo 2003). The rate of school children is somewhat higher in the urban areas: 72 percent in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area and 75 percent in other urban areas. Nationwide 60 percent of the children in this age group attend primary education.

More than half of the Haitian population lives under the absolute poverty line of one dollar per day (Egset & Sletten 2004). Considering that the majority of the Haitian schools are private, financed through school fees and additional fees collected from the students, school expenses comprise a major expenditure for many households. Not surprisingly the poorest families are the ones least likely to send their children to school (IHSI/Fafo 2001). Poverty and lack of money for school fees are often presented as the main reasons for the low enrolment rate among Haitian children, especially within the NGO community. There is no doubt that poverty is a big constraint on children's access to education in Haiti, but it is important to take into consideration how poverty interacts with other factors, like household vulnerability, and incentives and disincentives to education. More money for the families does not necessarily mean more education for the children. In some cases it actually means less, as extra income may be invested in work intensive assets such as farmland and livestock (Kielland 2008). Children, who have previously been enrolled in low cost schools, may now be needed as labour at home. In order to avoid interventions with unintended consequences it is crucial to have a context-specific understanding of factors that may influence household behaviour and decisions.

This paper primarily focuses on structural factors inherent in the Haitian education sector which may work as disincentives for parents to invest money in their children's education. It also focuses the attention on specific conditions, particularly in the Haitian countryside, which make it difficult for parents both to enrol their children, but also for their children to proceed and succeed in school. This report is first and foremost an issue paper identifying main factors preventing Haitian children from being enrolled in school, the circumstances which cause them to drop out during the school year and some of the factors which make the children prone to fail their exams and hence having to repeat or drop out.

This study is a part of a larger project focusing on different areas of youth involvement. The project also includes two additional qualitative studies; the first focuses on youth's involvement in armed violence and the second on youth and labour migration, as well as a quantitative national youth survey. The findings from the qualitative studies will feed into the design of the survey and make it possible to substantiate and quantify the preliminary results. The final report will include recommendations and advice on a relevant mix of policies, for example social policy initiatives vs. education policy initiatives, labour market initiatives and judicial policy, based on findings from both the qualitative studies and quantitative survey. The project is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## 2 Methodology

The data presented in this study was collected during a qualitative fieldwork carried out in November and December 2007. The fieldwork was conducted in cooperation with University Quisqueya in Port-au-Prince, represented by Charles Arthur who provided general research assistance throughout the field operation, in addition to acting as interpreter during interviews. Four different regions were visited during the field trip: the urban and rural Jacmel region along the coast in Département du Sud-Est, the rural Maissade region in inland Département du Centre, the town of Belladere on the Haitian border with the Dominican Republic and the surrounding rural areas, and the metropolitan Port-au-Prince area in Département de l' Ouest. Both rural and urban areas were visited during the fieldwork, but a priority was given to the rural areas. The reason for this was that the enrolment is dramatically lower in the rural areas and the dropout rates higher. This report analyses some of the particular problems people encounter in the countryside, which can explain this discrepancy.

The main respondents for this study were parents, since they most often are the ones who cover school expenses and make the decisions about their children's schooling. There was an emphasis on including respondents who had chosen different strategies with regards to their children's education, or lack thereof. In all places visited, parents with all, some and none of their children in school were interviewed. The majority of interviews took part as group interviews. This was chosen because the group dynamic sparked interesting conversations that raised concerns to the surface that were not likely to have come up in individual interviews. The group discussions were kept semi-structured with topics introduced by the researcher, but there also was an emphasis on creating a relaxed atmosphere which was conducive to making people speak freely. Separate group interviews were held with women, men and youths, to facilitate discussions on topics that respondents felt uneasy talking about in mixed groups.

An important part of the fieldwork included home visits to families both with and without children in school. The visits were prearranged by local facilitators. During these visits interviews were made with the whole household or individual members, and the setting was helpful to gain a general impression of the situation of the specific household.

Talking about poverty and not being able to send children to school is difficult and painful for many parents. The respondents in this study reacted differently to the sensitive topics that were raised. While some saw the interviews as an opportunity to have their voices heard and draw attention to a difficult life situation, others reacted with shame and withdrawal. This was always respected, and respondents were not pressured into speaking about issues that they found uncomfortable.

The fieldwork started in the Jacmel region where families both with children in school and with children who were not in school were interviewed individually and in groups. School directors for private and public schools in the rural and urban areas were interviewed, as well as community elders, representatives from Fondasyon Limyè Lavi, a local NGO working with education issues, and Joseph Flambért, the senator of Département du Sud-Est and the president of the senate at the time of the fieldwork. The work in Jacmel was facilitated by Drian Joseph, a local elder and community leader. In Maissade, Alix Wilner, Patrick Sylvestre and other staff at the local Save the Children office facilitated our stay, arranged meetings

the necessary introductions. The local assistance was organized by Janet E. Bauman, Deputy Director - Programs, Save the Children in Haiti. As in the south-east, interviews were made with households both with and without children enrolled in school, school directors and teachers in public, private and community schools, community leaders and religious authorities. Households without road access are easily excluded in research projects. To prevent this, donkeys and motorbikes were used to ensure a broad representation that would also include these households. In Belladere the fieldwork was facilitated by Techelet Anger, a local Oxfam employee. In addition to households, school directors and teachers, interviews were also conducted with a local journalist, a high-ranking police officer, an immigration officer and religious authorities. In Port-au-Prince families, school directors and university professors were interviewed and meetings were held with the Ministry of Education, international and national NGOs and finally, IGOs working on education issues.

A big thank to everyone who has contributed to this fieldwork, either through facilitating and organizing or through sharing their thoughts and experiences.

## 3 Incentives and disincentives to education

In a western context with free education and nearly universal enrolment, whether a child should go to school or not is not a decision of the parents. Education is compulsory by law, and parents who prevent their children from attending school could face legal sanctions. Incentives for basic-level education are as such not decisive for whether or not a child will be given schooling. The value of education is taken for granted. Education is perceived as instrumental in terms of social mobility, as essential in terms of socializing children into good citizens, as well as having an intrinsic value for the child. Very few parents would question the importance of sending their children to school.

When it concerns higher education on the other hand, incentives become important. Whether a young person chooses to proceed with higher education after finishing compulsory schooling may depend on whether he or she is accepted to the preferred school, the cost of the school and the expected loss of income during the time of study. He or she also needs to consider to what extent completing a higher education will lead to an advantage in the labour market, and perhaps most importantly – the alternative to continue with schooling. If the outlook of getting a better paid job is not improved after additional years of education, the incentive to start working right away may be stronger than investing time and money in further schooling. Still many proceed with long educations that do not necessarily pay off in monetary terms in search of a job they find interesting, higher social status or because education is perceived as a value in itself.

In a context where education is costly, access limited and enrolment in practice optional, the incentives for parents to enrol their children in school become important as early as at the primary level. Whether families with limited resources prioritize sending their children to school will be influenced by the perceived value of education, the quality of the educational system and the alternatives available, for instance the demand for child labour. If the children after finishing years of expensive schooling are still badly equipped for finding a skilled job or if the education system is structured in a way that makes it difficult to advance, the incentives for enrolling children in school are weakened. If the reasons for low enrolment are weak incentives for education, social protection initiatives (i.e., cash transfers and subsidized school fees) are not likely to have the desirable effect. Instead solutions should be explored in improved education and labour market policy.

### 3.1 The state of the Haitian education sector

In the Haitian Constitution of 1987 it is established that everyone has the right to free basic education.<sup>1</sup> Formally every Haitian child has the right to nine years of compulsory education, without school fees, and free of costs for text books and other didactic material. This is, however, far from the reality of the Haitian population. A decade after the Ministère de

<sup>1</sup> The Haitian Constitution of 1987, article 32-3, states that “*Primary education is compulsory under penalty of sanctions to be determined by the law. School supplies and teaching aids will be provided by the government for pupils at the primary school level.*”

l'Education Nationale de la Jeunesse et des Sports (MENJS)<sup>2</sup> outlined the Haitian state's official education policy in the *Plan National d'Education et de Formation* (PNEF) and after millions of donor dollars have been invested to achieve the goals, the Haitian education system is still in a state of disarray. Rather than being a constitutional and institutional right, basic education in Haiti has become a costly privilege, only offered to around half of the children of compulsory school age in the rural areas and three out of four in urban areas (IHESI/Fafo 2003). Around 500,000 Haitian children aged 6 to 11 do not attend school at all (UNICEF 2007). Among the children that do go to school, around half of them are already delayed when they enter primary school, and on average they spend less than four years in school. After four years in school, many of them may not even have obtained the most basic skills of reading and writing. Only one out of three of the children who start in primary school finish the 6th grade (Bernard Hadjadj 2000). As such, the Haitian education sector is one of the weakest in the world.

### **3.1.1 Structural disincentives to education**

The legal age of admission to school in Haiti is six years, and the length of compulsory primary education is nine years. Primary education is divided into three cycles; the first cycle is four years, the second cycle two years and the third cycle three years. Promotion *within* each cycle is, according to the legally binding PNEF, supposed to happen automatically. At the *end* of each cycle, hence in the 4th, 6th and 9th grades, there are mandatory national exams which the students need to pass to be allowed to enter the next cycle. This system was not followed in the schools visited during the fieldwork. Rather the schools to some extent seem to design their own systems for promotion. This situation applies to both private and public schools. One of the directors of a public primary school visited in Jacmel explained that they had automatic promotions only from the first to the second grade. After that, the students were tested every month and had exams every trimester. The average result of the trimester exams decided whether the child was seen fit to continue. Keeping in mind that the legal age of admittance to first grade is six years, this means that the children are evaluated for promotion by extensively examining them beginning at the age of seven. Another school in the same region reported that they had admission tests even for entering the first year of primary school, and then annual end of the year exams every year thereafter.

As will be further explored later, children frequently drop out or are forced to repeat, both because their families are unable (or unwilling) to pay the fees that allow them to sit for the exams or because they are failing. Public schools are not allowed to dismiss children because they are failing, but they do so because their capacity is overstretched. Despite feeling uneasy about denying failed students the opportunity to try to improve their results, one of the school directors argued that it was better to let another and perhaps more talented child be given a chance. One of the fathers interviewed explained that his son had been kicked out of school after failing only one class. Eager to let his son continue his education he had now managed to get his child into a private school. Instead of paying 100 HTG<sup>3</sup> (\$2.5 USD) per year as he had done in the public school, he was now paying 2500 HTG (\$64 USD) for admission and an additional 350 HTG (\$9 USD) per month for his son to continue his fourth grade in a

<sup>2</sup>Now, Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle (MENFP).

<sup>3</sup>The national currency is the Haitian gourde (HTG). 1 USD  $\approx$  39 HTG. The expression "Haitian dollar" is however commonly used in everyday speech, and might be quite confusing to visitors. One Haitian dollar refers to five gourdes and is a remnant from the time when the Haitian gourde was pegged to the US dollar at a rate of five to one.



private primary school in Jacmel. Needless to say, this is an alternative which is open to only a small portion of the parents of children who fail in public schools.

It is reasonable to expect that the system of extensive examination for promotion combined with the high dropout rates in the primary level is a disincentive for parents to enrol their children in school. The risk that the children will not be allowed to proceed to the next grade after the family has paid schooling costs for the full year is likely to make parents less willing to invest in education for their children. This was confirmed by the parents interviewed. A common strategy among our respondents who were financially struggling to keep their children in school was to concentrate on one or a few children and increase the chances of them being able to continue, rather than trying to enrol all and risk seeing them fail.

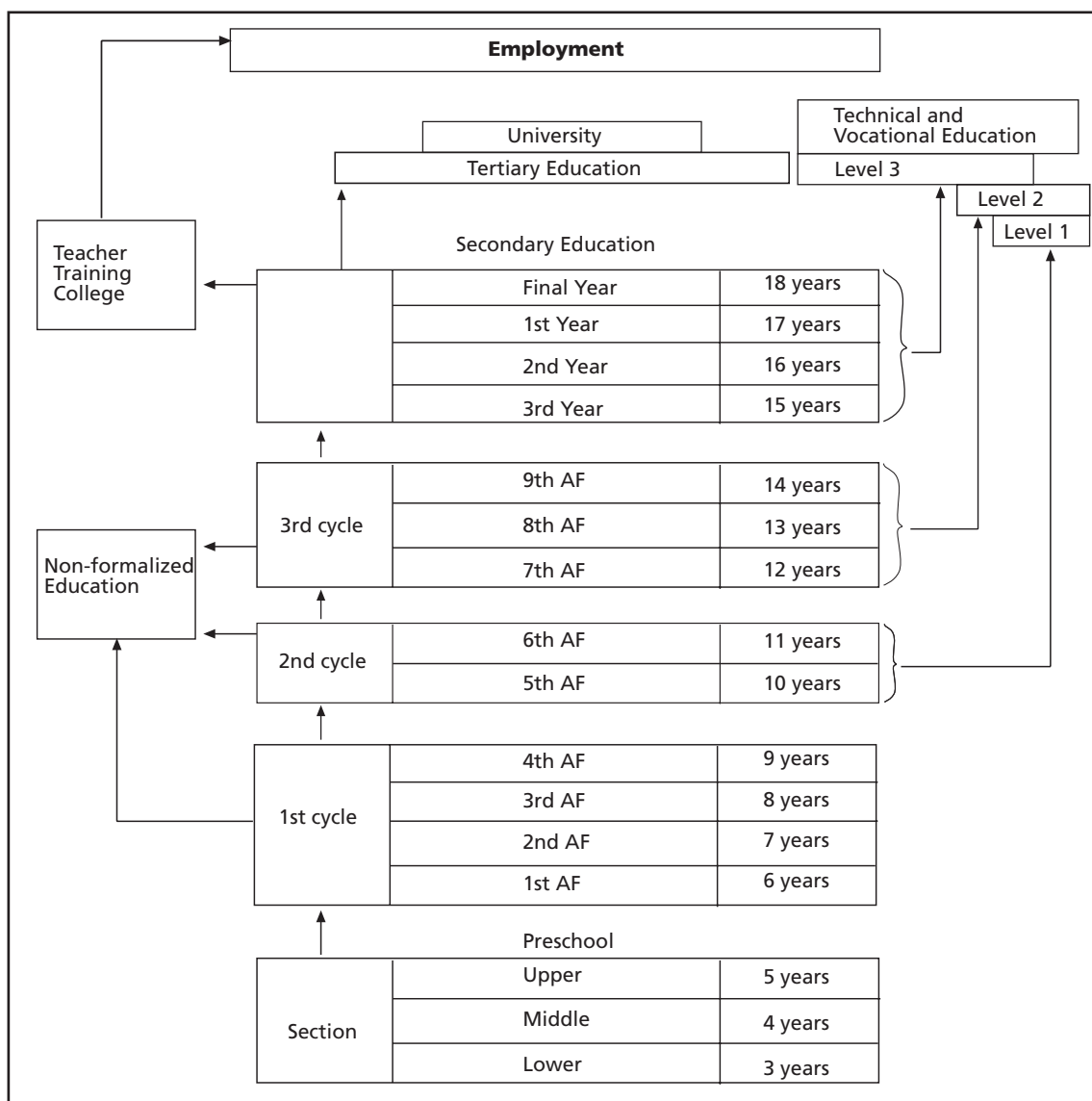
Pre-school is available for children from the age of three to five, but is not compulsory according to the PNEF. In reality, completing pre-school does seem to play an important role for children's possibility to enter the primary level. Insufficient coverage of primary schools breeds strong competition for admission, and it is not unusual to require that children know how to read and write before being accepted in primary school. This has created a market for expensive, commercial kindergartens that prepare children for entry to the more popular primary schools (Salmi 2000). According to our respondents the practice is the same in both private and public schools. The importance of sending children to kindergarten was confirmed by a pre-school director interviewed in Port-au-Prince. Pre-school attendance is not formally compulsory, but in practice the primary schools will demand an evaluation from the pre-school before accepting the children. A primary school director explained that in some cases he would make an exception for a child who did not attend pre-school but belonged to a family he knew, but that the general rule was to enrol children who had completed, preferably three years of, kindergarten. This shows how informal criteria are introduced to differ between the children when the availability of school places is limited. The importance of personal relationships to make one's way through the system will be discussed in more depth in chapter 5.

What our findings indicate is that for some children, their window of opportunity for an education in the future *may* close at the age of three or four. It is nevertheless important to stress that based on the limited empirical data available, we are not able to say anything about the extent of this phenomenon. In some of the rural areas visited, for instance, there were no pre-schools available; hence the matter was not relevant.

After completing nine years of primary school, the students can continue to secondary.<sup>4</sup> Secondary education lasts for an additional four years, after which the students are qualified for university and professional training. The vocational and technical training falls into three categories. The most advanced are the Technical Education Institutes, which require completion of secondary education, hence 13 years of formal education. The second group consists of Vocational Education Schools. These are more practically oriented than the schools belonging to the first group and require the completion of the second cycle. The biggest category of vocational training is the Skill Training Centres which often do not require any prior educa-

<sup>4</sup>The current education system was introduced in the *Plan National d'Education et de Formation* in 1997. In the previous system, primary education was six years, followed by secondary school, corresponding to what today is referred to as third cycle of primary school. The implementation of the education reform has been slow and incomplete, and many are still using the old system as reference when talking about education. This is especially the case in the rural areas. Hence it is important to make sure, both when talking to people and reading references to secondary education, whether what is referred to is secondary according to the new system, hence the grades from 10th to 13th (the two last commonly referred to as Rheto and Philo), or what is now referred to as the third cycle, grades 7th to 9th.

**Figure 1 The Haitian education system**



Source: UNESCO/MENJS 2000

tion. The biggest group comprises the Skill Training Centres, and the vast majority of them are private, operating outside the control of the government.

The vocational training centres are a heterogenous and largely unregulated group, and no attempt was made in this study to obtain an overview of the sector. However, the lack of access to vocational training was a recurring concern we found in all the rural and semi-rural areas we visited. According to our respondents the training centres are concentrated in the urban areas, and strict requirements for admission made these inaccessible to the vast majority. The recommendation repeated most often was to establish practical skill training centres with low formal requirements in the rural areas. If the educational path to a practical skill qualifying for a job is seen as too long and theoretical, this can work as a disincentive for parents to enrol children in school in a country where most students do not advance further than fourth grade.

## 3.2 Weak public education sector, mixed private education sector

To provide children with access to education is, by law, an obligation of the Haitian State. It is however a responsibility the weak state, marked by decades of dictatorships and economic mismanagement, has not proved capable, or willing, to take on. The government's weak involvement in the education sector has created a huge market for private actors. Only 8 percent of Haitian primary schools are state-run (MENFP 2007). The remaining 92 percent of the schools are non-public; the vast majority of them do not receive any public subsidies. More than 80 percent of Haitian children currently enrolled in school are in private schools.

Education in Haiti is a business, encompassing both serious and not so serious actors. The high number of private education institutions, combined with the weak capacity of the MENFP, has left the Haitian government with little influence over the education sector. According to the Ministry's own numbers, more than 75 percent of the private elementary schools do not have the mandatory licence, and are operating, unsanctioned, outside of government control. For these schools, the government has control of neither the quality of the education they offer nor the fees they charge.

Among the schools in the private sector we find the very best and the very worst of what the Haitian education sector has to offer. At the top of the scale we find a category of well-reputed, elite schools, what Haitians call "*Lekol Tèt Neg*" or "big-shot schools". Most of them are religiously founded and almost all of them are urban-based. They are well equipped, have the best teachers, and are the obvious choice for the privileged families who would never consider sending their children to a public school. However, the private schools are also to be found at the very bottom of the scale. In the capital, Port-au-Prince, private primary schools are found on almost every street corner. Because of the density of them, people condescendingly call them "*Lekol Borlette*", literally meaning "lottery schools", named after the small lottery stands that are also found on every corner. Another explanation given for the name is that students in these schools are assumed to have the same probability of graduating as winning the lottery (Salmi 2000). These urban, private schools are usually short-lived and do not have the necessary competence and resources to provide quality teaching.

For some of the schools, the objective is clearly more directed towards making money than towards educating children, and often the classes are overfilled and the teachers unqualified. There are formal criteria set by the government to be followed when establishing a new school, hiring qualified teachers being one of them. However, as the majority of the private schools are operating unlicensed, getting around the formal criteria and starting up a new school is not too difficult if one has some resources and a few good contacts. According to some of our respondents, establishing a school is seen as one of few available alternatives for people with a basic education to make a living for themselves in a country where access to formal employment is very hard to get. With only a minimum of education one can become one's own school director, regardless of teaching qualifications or experience.

In rural areas, community schools are often established by NGOs, local associations or simply a local initiator with some basic schooling. Local churches are frequently used as facilities, or the teaching takes place in someone's backyard or *anba tonèl*, under a makeshift roof without walls. The community schools make an important contribution in an area where the public sector is failing. However, they are struggling to get qualified teachers, learning materials and suitable school buildings and are often incapable of offering teaching of acceptable quality. Often they will only teach the first cycle, from first to fourth grade. Higher grades than that



will in many cases exceed the teachers' own level of education. The very low salaries make it impossible to attract qualified teachers to these rural positions.

The private schools are heterogeneous, not only in terms of quality but also in terms of ideology, organization and motivations. While some private schools are established primarily for profit, many schools are also established for non-profit reasons by local initiators in communities where no public school is available, or the local public school does not have sufficient capacity. A number of schools are also run or supported by local or international NGOs, or religious communities. Some of these schools subsidize the students and have beneficial arrangements for marginalized families. However, in a context of such widespread poverty, the non-profit actors are not able to fill all the gaps.

One possible explanation for the low enrolment rate is that considerable variation in the quality of education is weakening the parents' incentives to enrol their children if a high quality school is out of reach because of economic reasons or due to geographical distance. If this is the case, simply increasing the number of schools will not necessarily lead to an improvement in the number of children enrolled in school if not steps are taken to also improve and level out the quality of education provided in the schools.

### **3.2.1 Lack of qualified teachers**

The lack of qualified teachers is one of the main problems in the Haitian education sector. The education sector suffered a serious blow during the time of the Duvalier regimes, when large parts of the educated elite escaped to the US and Canada.<sup>5</sup> Two decades later, Haiti is still suffering from the consequences of this void of professional capacity. There are few qualified instructors available to teach the next generation of teachers and other professionals. Among the few who do complete a higher education, many intend to leave Haiti and find a more prosperous future in the US, Canada or Europe. The 'brain drain' from Haiti is one of the most serious obstacles to reform and improvement within the education sector. According to the World Bank, a staggering eight out of ten Haitians with college degrees live outside of Haiti (Schiff & Caglar 2005). The fact that human resources in the country are so weak makes it very challenging to rebuild and improve the education system. In order to rebuild the education sector, as well as to strengthen the national capacity for development in general, it is essential to enact the constitutional changes necessary to allow double citizenship for Haitians settled abroad and encourage the return of the Diaspora.

When UNESCO conducted an evaluation of the teachers' competence in 1997, 25 percent or almost 11,500 teachers had not completed a primary education, a level equal to 9th grade. The majority of unqualified teachers were to be found in private schools. While 48 percent of the public schools teachers were qualified at the time of the survey, only 8 percent of the teachers in the private schools were qualified. Knowing that the number of unlicensed private schools has increased during the eleven years that has passed since this survey was conducted,

<sup>5</sup> François Duvalier, better known as a 'Papa Doc', was the President of Haiti from 1957 to 1971. His rule was marked by corruption, oppression and autocracy. In 1964, he had himself inaugurated as 'President for Life'. His son, Jean Claude Duvalier, known as 'Baby Doc', replaced his father after his death in 1971 and was the ruler of Haiti until he was overthrown by a popular uprising in 1986. 'Papa Doc' was the first black President of Haiti, and came to power on a *noiriste* strategy of gathering his support among the poor, black majority and stirring up the masses' grudge against the privileged, educated mulatto elite. 'Papa Doc' used his private militia 'Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale', commonly referred to as 'Tonton Macoute', to persecute political opponents and members of the educated elite. A large part of Haiti's educated class escaped during the Duvalier years, establishing themselves mainly in the US or French-speaking Canada. Very few have returned. This has led to a serious deficit of educated professionals like teachers and doctors, which Haiti is still suffering the consequences of.

it is more likely that the number of unqualified teachers in Haitian schools has increased rather than decreased. Although international donors like the World Bank have committed to increase the capacity of the teaching colleges, it will still take a number of years to fill the gap between the supply and demand of qualified teachers.

A national test of the teachers' knowledge in the subjects they are teaching was recently conducted by IHFOSED.<sup>6</sup> The preliminary results are depressing, revealing that large parts of the profession are not sufficiently trained to be able to teach the curriculum to the children.<sup>7</sup> Often the teachers themselves have only completed a few grades more than the classes they are teaching, and without appropriate teaching material, they are ill equipped for providing the students the necessary teaching to obtain a satisfying level of knowledge and prepare them for their final exams.

Teachers' salaries are low, making the profession unattractive to educated professionals. Teachers in public primary schools earn around 4000 HTG (\$100 USD) per month. The salary is regulated according to a national wage system and adjusted depending on experience. The salaries for teachers in the private sector vary according to the quality of the school, but in the rural areas it is normally considerably lower than in the public schools. We were told that private rural teachers on average make around 1500 HTG (\$38 USD) per month, but one of the teachers we interviewed in a community school in Source Ignama in Département du Centre made as little as 500 HTG or around \$13 USD per month.

If the quality of education is weakening parents' incentive to send their children to school, resources need to be directed towards teachers' training. However, educating more teachers will not be sufficient if low wages in the education sector make alternative livelihoods more attractive, hence preventing teachers from working with education. In particular it is challenging to make teachers stay in the rural areas. In the experience of NGOs who provide teachers' training, teachers who receive training find themselves qualified for better paid jobs in the cities and may chose to relocate, leaving the area even more deprived of teaching resources than before.

### **3.2.2 Insufficient amount of teaching**

To be able to make a living, many of the rural school teachers need to supplement their salaries with agricultural activities. This means that the time they have accessible for teaching is reduced, in particular during the sowing and harvesting season. In Maissade it was also a concern that teachers cross the border to the Dominican Republic to work on the sugarcane plantations during the harvesting seasons. This may leave the children without teachers for weeks and months at a time.

In order to pay the teachers, the schools are dependent upon collecting school fees from the students' parents. As a significant number of the children who gain admission at the beginning of the school year drop out during the year, the total amount of income to the school is steadily reduced while their expenses remain the same. The result is often delays in the payment of the teachers' salaries. Teachers we spoke to say that when this happens, they have to stay away for a while to put pressure on the directors to provide their pay. In the meantime the children are missing out on their teaching and the preparations for their exams.

<sup>6</sup>Institut Haïtien de Formation en Sciences de l'Éducation, an Haitian research institute working on education issues.

<sup>7</sup>The final results were still unpublished at the time of writing.

Moreover, it is not only in the private schools that teachers experience not getting paid. During our field trip to the Jacmel region, parents we spoke to were frustrated and resigned after their children had been kept out of school for months as the public school teachers were on strike because their salaries were paid late, or not paid at all. The children were missing out on all their teaching and had no chance of passing the national exams. According to the parents in the area, public teachers frequently experience delays in their payment and strikes were a common occurrence. If this is the case, it is a responsibility of the Haitian state which needs to take the situation seriously.

That children enrolled in school do not receive a sufficient amount of teaching is a serious concern, which gravely influences their ability to pass their exams and proceed to the next grade. However, it is not only the teachers' absence which deprives the student of time in school. The rainy season is another factor causing problems for school attendance. The children in the rural areas often have to walk a long distance on dirt roads to get to school. During the rainy season, these roads get so muddy at times that they are impassable, even on foot, and the children have to stay at home. The condition of the schools also sometimes makes it impossible to continue regular education. This is particularly the case for the community schools, which are often located in constructions of a makeshift character. UNESCO reports that 7 percent of the schools in Haiti are located under a simple roof, without walls (Bernard Hadjadj 2000). These poorly constructed schools are easily destroyed during the hurricane season, and the teaching can be further delayed because the structures need to be rebuilt before the children can return.

When children in school are excluded from teaching, and for that reason are likely to fail their exams and be forced to repeat the class, this is a strong disincentive for parents to invest money in their children's education.

### **3.3 Lack of physical access to education**

Lack of physical availability of schools is a problem in some of the more remote rural areas. In some areas one is unable to find any schools within reasonable reach. More often there is a lack of access to affordable schools. The density of schools in the rural areas is much lower than in the urban areas. In particular there is a lack of public schools, which is the only type of schooling many of the rural households can afford. Most Haitian households have access to a primary school within five kilometers. For 92 percent of the population it takes half an hour or less to walk to the nearest primary school (EMMUS III 2000). What this number conceals is that the low capacity in the local schools may make it necessary for children to enrol in schools further away from their homes. The nearest school may also be out of reach due to economic costs. Less than 10 percent of the schools are public and, as is the case with all public infrastructures in Haiti, the public schools are concentrated in the urban areas or in the regional centres. The further away from the centre one lives, the less the chance of finding a public school within your area. The private schools often cost more per month than the public do per year. For many parents the only way to get their children into school is to try to get them into one of the public schools, even if that means that their children will have to walk for hours every day.

In Jacmel we visited a public primary school in Meyer, an area outside the town centre. The school was the only public primary school in the Meyer region. The students came from all

across the region, many of them from areas far away. More than 20 of the students were living in area called Cap Rouge. The walk from Cap Rouge to Meyer takes approximately 2.5 hours each way. To be able to reach school in time for their morning classes, the children have to get up before dawn. Some of them, in particular girls, also have to help with domestic tasks before leaving their home in the morning. As a result the children are tired and hungry when they reach school, making them unfocused and inattentive during classes. The teachers claim that the children are so tired from walking and getting up early that they fall asleep during the classes. During our fieldtrip we also witnessed young children sleeping on their desks during the short breaks in between classes.

The story repeated itself in other public schools we visited. According to the teachers, children as young as the first grade will walk for hours in order to get to school. The school director in Meyer argued that the long distance is the main reason why children drop out during the school year, not economic concerns. “*Some of the parents will tell you that*”, he said, “*but the real reason is that the children are just too tired.*”

In September, at the beginning of the school year, the public school in Meyer had 416 students. At the time of our visit in early December this number had dropped to 370 students. In addition many of the children had a low attendance rate. Since Meyer is a public school, the school fees are paid at the beginning of the year, instead of in monthly rates which is the practice in private schools. It is reasonable to expect the long distance to be an important reason for children to stop coming to school. When the walk exceeds several hours every day, it does become tiresome, especially for the youngest children. Some of the families try to solve the problem by sending their children to school only some days a week, but without sufficient attendance, the children risk failing their exams and find themselves in a situation where they have to repeat the class the following year.

The long distance is also likely to be a contributing factor why many Haitian children are over-aged at the time of enrolment. Parents do not want to send their six years olds out on long daily walks, and instead delay their entry until they are older. The long distance to school is a disincentive both for the parents to send their children and for the children to attend. The parents may be concerned about sending their youngest out early in the morning while it still is dark, in particular they may feel uneasy about letting girls walk alone. Concerning older children, these are likely to have more responsibility within the household. The more time the children spend away from home for school, the less time they have available for performing domestic tasks, working on farmland or helping out with family business. If the family is dependent upon the help from the children, the additional time spent on getting to and from school will strengthen the incentive to keep them at home. Long daily walks may also weaken the children’s motivation for going to school.

### **3.3.1 Access to the complete cycle of education**

While most Haitian households do have a primary school teaching, the first, and often also the second cycle within physical, although not necessarily economic reach, the schools teaching higher grades are more strongly concentrated in the central areas. According to the Demographic Health Survey from 2000, only 28 percent of the rural households have schools that teach the third cycle within five kilometers, while for 26 percent the nearest school that



teaches the third cycle is more than 15 kilometers away (EMMUS III 2000).<sup>8</sup>The lack of access to schools teaching higher grades, in addition to a steep increase in costs when students move on from the second to the third cycle, have led to an huge gap in third cycle enrolment in urban and rural areas. While more than 40 percent of the children in and around Port-au-Prince continue to 7th grade, less than 10 percent of the children in the rural areas do so. For the other urban areas, the enrolment rate is around 30 percent (IHSI/Fafo 2003).

In order to continue education beyond the 4th or 6th grade, the rural children will often have to travel long distances daily or go and stay with urban households in Port-au-Prince or other central areas. These boarding arrangements take many different shapes. Often the host families will be relatives or close friends of the family, but boarding is also arranged with strangers through intermediaries. In its strictest sense, parents pay the child's school expenses, in addition to board and upkeep to the household where the child is staying. In other cases the parents will donate gifts and shares of the agricultural harvest to the host family, while the students may be contributing to the household with domestic work. This should not be confused with *restavek*-arrangements where children from poor families are placed in (at times marginally) more prosperous households, with hopes that they will be given an education in exchange for domestic work. These children are usually denied schooling and simply end up as unpaid domestic workers (Sommerfelt 2002).

Several of our respondents expressed unwillingness to send their children to school in Port-au-Prince because of the high levels of political unrest and violence the capital has experienced during recent years. They were concerned both about the safety of their children and worried that they might get involved in crime and fall into delinquency. In general, in all places we visited outside the capital, people portray a negative picture of Port-au-Prince as an unsafe place they would not go if they did not absolutely need to. Rather than sending their children to Port-au-Prince in order to pursue their education, they want the possibility of letting the children complete their studies in their area of origin.

### 3.4 Expectations of education

The Haitian education system is designed so that students need to complete both primary and secondary levels, altogether 13 years of schooling, before they can apply for a technical school or university. For most Haitian children this is far beyond their reach. Still Haitian parents have very high expectations about how far their children will continue with their education. When discussing at what level education starts to pay off and how long the children need to stay in school to be able to find a qualified job afterwards, most of our respondents replied that they would need a university degree. "*To complete primary school is of no use*", one of our rural respondents argued, "*you can have a conversation, but you can't get a job*". Literacy is recognized as an important and highly valued skill, but being able to read and write was not seen by our informants as sufficient for achieving an advantage in the labour market. For the vast majority of the people we interviewed for this study it would demand a dramatic improvement in their living conditions to be able to support their children all the way through university. Nevertheless, the people we interviewed in the rural areas both in the south and

<sup>8</sup>The numbers originally refer to what was then termed 'secondary schools'. There is a considerable amount of missing data (i.e., a rate on 12 percent) which makes these numbers somewhat uncertain, but they can still be seen as useful indicators.

in the central areas assigned a high priority to giving their children the opportunity for an education. Some argued that the *“soil does not give anything back anymore”*. As the agricultural output is decreasing with deteriorating soil quality, the need for parents to make their children capable of finding a job outside the agricultural sector becomes more pressing. There are few jobs available on the countryside and it is hard for rural migrants to succeed in the cities.

The reason why Haitian parents have such high expectations regarding their children’s education needs to be seen in relation to the lack of an intermediary level of education discussed previously. Another reason for the lack of value assigned to lower levels of education is the importance of personal connections in getting a job. *“It is an illusion that education leads to employment”*, one of our respondent uttered in resignation. *“It is just a trap. Something they want you to believe. The only thing that leads to employment is knowing the right people”*. It is a discouraging fact that having the right connections is an important asset in gaining access to work, but also in many cases to education. This will be explored further in the following chapter. Nevertheless, these statements made up the exceptions in our interviews with informants. The general impression is that people place a high value on education and are willing to go far in order to give their children the opportunity of schooling.

From townspeople in Port-au-Prince and NGO-workers it is sometimes argued that people in the countryside do not see education as important and place too low priority on sending their children to school. This is seen as a contributing factor to the large discrepancy between enrolment in rural and urban areas. The underlying assumption is that rural people are ignorant and unable or unwilling to make the right decisions for their children. If this was to be the fact, judicial interventions sanctioning parents against not sending their children to school could be an appropriate response. It is an uncomfortable truth that not all parents always act in the best interest of their children. This can have a number of idiosyncratic causes like substance abuse, mental illness or simply a lack of altruistic disposition towards their own children for unknown reasons. Child abuse is taking place in all societies at all times. Parents cannot always be trusted to protect the interests of their children, which is why children are entitled to legal protection both through national laws and the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Nevertheless, in a Haitian context where the education sector is unable to absorb the number of children of compulsory school age, the quality of education often is not up to standard and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, widespread poverty is making it impossible for many to pay the school expenses of their children, sanctioning parents is not the way to go. First of all education needs to be made physically and economically accessible. Secondly, the education provided needs to be made relevant. It is important to note that marginalized families’ actions are motivated out of survival of the household, sometimes at the expense of the well-being of the individual member. Will investments in education lead to jobs for household members and increased income to the household? If the answer to these questions is no, it may be a rational decision by the poorest households not to spend money on sending children to school, but instead prioritize the limited resources towards food, fertilizers and medicines to ensure household survival. As will be discussed in the next chapter, marginalized households need to engage in a number of strategies to ensure the survival of the household, sometimes at the expense of opportunities for the individual members.

## 4 Vulnerabilities and constraints

Poor people normally have low resilience to risks threatening their well-being. They often lack economic buffers like savings or access to credit, as well as access to formal risk management arrangements like insurance or welfare benefits (Holzmann and Jørgensen 2000). A failed harvest, for instance, can be disastrous to a farmer without savings or access to credit.

Some of the risks that make households vulnerable are idiosyncratic, like illness or death in the family, crime or unemployment. Others risks are threatening on a community or macro level, like natural disasters, epidemics, riots or war. Whether the risks are unforeseen or predicted might be of less relevance if a household lacks resources to prevent or avoid the events. The household remains vulnerable, but may engage in different mitigation strategies to decrease the potential impact of a future risk. Examples of mitigation strategies may be to diversify agricultural production, vary different sources of income, participate in informal saving arrangements or extend social networks, for instance through child placement or marriage. To not enrol all children in school, but instead have some work at home and let some live with other households may be a part of such a mitigation strategy. When the harmful events occur, households engage in coping strategies to relieve the impact of the risk. Examples of coping strategies may be to sell assets, borrow money, migrate, sell labour, reduce consumption by, for instance, reducing food intake for some or all household members or take children out of school.

To understand the behaviour and organization of poor households, it is important to identify what kind of risks they are vulnerable to and what strategies they engage in to ensure the survival of the household. If non-enrolment of children is a result of household poverty or a part of a risk management strategy for vulnerable households, this calls for social policy interventions that can increase the households resilience to risks, for instance access to credit or insurance arrangements.

It is important to recognize that the options available to the poorest households are severely limited by their lack of resources. For the most marginalized households the money needed to send their children to school may exceed the total income of the household. Not enrolling children can as such not be seen as a part of a household strategy. Instead the lack of economic resources is a binding constraint that does not allow enrolment of all children as an option to the household. In these cases cash transfers to the households may be a way of ensuring education for the children, under the assumption that households place a high value on the education of their children. The high rates of dropout and failures can be interpreted in this direction. Enrolling children in school is a risky investment if you know chances are they will not be able to complete the full year or be allowed to proceed to the next grade. Alternatively it can be interpreted in the opposite direction that education is not given a high value, and that taking children out of school in difficult periods as such is not seen as entailing a high cost. How households prioritize taking children out of school in comparison with alternative coping strategies gives an indication of how important education is perceived to be. This will be further explored in the forthcoming Haiti Youth Survey.

## 4.1 School expenditure as a constraint to education

Being one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, Haiti is the only country in which more than half of the students are enrolled in private schools (The World Bank 2006). The consequence of the privatization of the education system is that private households are carrying the economic burden of both the real cost of education and the private actors' profit. The fact that more than three quarters of the population live in poverty (defined as less than \$2 USD per day) and more than half of the population lives in extreme poverty (defined as less than \$1 USD per day) makes it evident that the cost of schooling is a major obstacle to universal education for Haitian children (Egset & Sletten 2004).

The percent of people living in poverty is twice as high in the rural areas as in the metropolitan area (82 percent vs 41 percent) and the share of people living in extreme poverty is three times higher (59 percent vs 20 percent). The population in urban areas other than the metropolitan Port-au-Prince area finds themselves between these two extremes.

The difference in urban and rural income is also reflected in the enrolment of children in primary education. According to the Haiti Living Condition Survey, half of the children of compulsory school age in rural areas are not in school, while the corresponding share for the urban areas is one out of four (IHESI/Fafo 2003).

In public schools the school fees are paid at the beginning of the year, as opposed to private schools where the students pay every month. The school fees for public primary schools are set by the government to a total of 100 HTG per year, a little more than \$2.5 USD. For private primary schools the fees vary significantly, from a few hundred gourdes per year for community schools to several thousand per month for the more well-reputed urban schools. The household also needs to cover the costs of uniforms, shoes, books and other learning materials. The expenditures for text books alone can easily exceed 1000 – 2000 HTG per grade. For the poorest half of the population this equals around 10 percent of their income per child per year in text books only.

Despite the school fees for public primary schools being regulated by the state, we did encounter cases where the fees the parents ended up paying were substantially higher. For instance, in one of the rural communities visited in Département du Sud-Est, parents reported that the director at the local public primary school demanded 400 HTG per year in school fees. No attempt was made to justify to the parents why they were charged fees four times higher than what has been decided by the national government. Due to the lack of capacity in the public schools and since private schools are even more expensive, the parents feel that they have no other option than to comply and pay what is asked of them. The parents' lack of alternatives makes them vulnerable to exploitations from opportunistic actors, both from public and private sectors.

Parents with children in private schools have the monthly obligation to pay their children's school fees. Many fail in doing so, with the result that their children are forced to drop out, and, if lucky, only get a chance to try again the following year. However, among children in public schools as well there is a high dropout rate during the year. The parents we spoke to reported that it was the exam fees at the end of the year which caused them the most problems. If they are not able to raise the money necessary to pay for the exams at the end of the year, the children are not allowed to sit for their exams and the whole year is lost. This contributes to the high dropout rates, as early as the first years of primary school. In several of the household visited, children had been denied promotion from first to second, or second to third, grade because of their parents' lack of ability to pay for their exams.



The school directors interviewed explained that they were trying to be flexible and sensitive to the families' situation when collecting school fees and examination fees, but also emphasized that their budgets were so tight that to be able to pay their teachers, they could not accept long delays in the payment. As mentioned previously, the system of promotions from one grade to the other depends upon passing a number of exams and is in conflict with the state's official education policy outlined in *Plan National d'Education et de Formation* (MENJS 1998).

Other costs may also surface during the year which can make it difficult for families to continue sending their children to school. One of the households we visited told us that during the previous year one of their children had to drop out of school in the middle of the last term because her shoes had ripped. The parents had bought the girl a pair of sandals at the beginning of the school year and paid her school fees for the whole year, but it was not possible for the household to raise the extra money for an additional pair of sandals in the middle of the year. The mother argued that the condition of the road made it impossible for the girl to walk to school without shoes and that she, for that reason, was forced to drop out. Some of our other respondents also mentioned lack of shoes as a reason for dropouts. In particular, this is a concern for children who walk long distances in order to get to school.

On the other hand, in this specific case the school was close to the house, and it is likely that the social stigma of arriving at school without shoes also had an impact on the parents' decision to take their daughter out of school. Other people we interviewed emphasized the importance of 'appearing well in the society', arguing that some parents would keep their children home from school if they did not have soap to clean their clothes, for instance. It is essential to note the importance for people to uphold one's dignity in the face of poverty. It also needs to be recognized that the potential social costs of being singled out as belonging to the 'most vulnerable' may be high in a context such as Haiti, where personal networks are crucial to survival. This needs to be kept in mind when designing social policies directed towards social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

## **4.2 Prioritizing within the household**

Because of the economic constraints of the households, families are often forced to make the difficult decision about which children to send to school. When resources are limited, money spent on education needs to be prioritized against other forms of consumption. Marginalized families are often not able or do not prioritize sending all their children to school. The families we discussed this matter with had chosen different strategies to deal with this sensitive dilemma. The dominating response from the households we interviewed which had children both in and out of school was that they had chosen to concentrate their limited resources on one or a few of the children. The other children would help out in the households, and several of the households also had older children who were staying with family members in other households or working in the Dominican Republic. Rather than attempting to give all their children some education, they prioritized getting a few children as far through the education system as possible. Among the rural respondents this usually means the end of the first or second cycle, depending on how many grades are taught at the local schools. To enter the third cycle was then considered to be out of reach for most of the peasant children we met, but both they and their parents expressed optimism about being able to do so in the future. In practice, unfortunately, the fees to enter the third cycle are so much higher than for the two

first cycles that it creates a barrier few of the peasant children are able to overcome. In addition, enrolment in schools teaching the third cycle or secondary level will often imply that the children either will have to commute or move to one of the more centralized areas.

Families that have a bit more resources may prioritize sending one child to a private school, while the other children are enrolled in public schools. One of the households we interviewed that had chosen this strategy had one child in a private school. The boy was currently in 6th grade, the last year of the second cycle. His younger siblings were enrolled in the 1st and 4th grades at the local public school. *“To get a good education you have to go to a private school”*, the father explained to us. He said that he was working hard to also be able to send his other children to private schools, but currently he only managed to pay school fees for the oldest one. He argued that it was very difficult to enter secondary school with graduation papers from a public primary school, and to ensure his child the opportunity to proceed beyond the third cycle he had transferred him from a public to private school as soon as the household income made it possible. When asked why he had chosen to prioritize this particular child, he replied that this child was the brightest one. Several of our respondents replied that they would try to send all of their children to school to see how they perform, and then invest their resources in the one that shows the best performance.

Nevertheless, in practice it is often the oldest child or children who will be given the best opportunities for education. As one of our respondents stated, *“it is not really a choice you make, but a result of the family getting poorer every time a new child is born. When my family was small, I could afford to send my children to school. But now with every child we are getting poorer and poorer”*. Often families will prioritize letting the oldest child continue if he or she does reasonably well at school and shows progress, and then delay the enrolment of the younger children. Some of the parents expressed hope that when their oldest child completed his or her education, he or she will get a job and be in a position to help support the younger siblings through school. *“The children are their parents’ bank accounts”*, one of our respondents commented while discussing investments in children’s education. As in other developing countries, children are seen as a guarantee for old age. The families have high expectations of the children who are given the opportunity of schooling that they will be giving something back to the household.

We asked parents about whether gender was a factor that was taken into consideration when deciding which children should be allowed to start school or to continue when the economy becomes strained. None of our respondents uttered any preferences in terms of sending daughters or sons to school. The available data on enrolment confirms the lack of preferential treatment. Through all three cycles of primary education the enrolment rates show no significant gender discrepancy, and there is nothing indicating that girls are either less likely to be enrolled or more likely to drop out (MENFP/DPCE 2003). When it concerns secondary education, boys are slightly overrepresented, but there is no real gender gap. Interestingly, there are more girls enrolled in private secondary schools in urban areas than boys. In the rural areas and in the public school, on the other hand, the boys outnumber the girls.

#### **4.2.1 Socializing as an incentive to education in urban areas**

To concentrate the resources on one or a few children was the most widespread strategy among the households we interviewed. However, not all families chose this strategy to cope with the limited resources available for schooling. We did also meet families that, rather than prioritizing education for one or a few of their children, alternated between them. One year

they would send one child to school and the next year another. In this way all the children get the experience of being in school, but the lack of continuity makes it very difficult for the children to do well. One possible explanation for why some families choose this solution is to get around the dilemma of giving differential treatment to some of their children at the expense of the others. Another explanation might be found in the socializing effect that education is perceived to have on children. “*Children out of school are lost in a jungle*”, one of our respondents told us. “*They are a menace to society*”. Implied in this is the importance of acquiring knowledge, but also the importance of integrating the children in the group of ‘school children’, rather than in the ‘drifting’ children who are not in school. Local authorities we spoke to like village elders, priests, police officers and school directors all expressed concern about how children not in school were more prone to fall into delinquency than children in school. Some said that non-enrolled children were a bad influence on the ‘good children’, who in this case were seen as synonymous with school children. The children themselves do not see themselves as behaving worse than the children in school, but expressed that they felt ashamed of not going to school. The children’s feeling of shame was also an issue raised by parents. Nevertheless, in the poorest rural areas where the majority of children are not in school, they did not experience that there was any division in the social interaction between children in and out of school.

In the urban areas the division between children in and out of school is more evident. Children in rural areas who are not in school will help out with domestic tasks in the household, work on family land or seek work outside the household. Urban children, who do not have the opportunity to go to school because of poverty in the household, also feel pressured to contribute to the family income. With few alternatives available they often end up working in the streets or begging. Some of these children end up spending more time in the streets than in their homes. It is striking that children who regularly sleep in the streets define themselves as *timoun lari* (children of the street) in contrast to *timoun lekol* (children in school), rather than in contrast to *timoun lakay* (children in homes) (Kovats-Bernat 2006). The reason for this is likely to be found in the fact that many of the children who define themselves as belonging to the streets do have families which they visit, and sometimes also bring money to and stay with for a night or more. As such they do have a link to a household, although the link may be weak, and they do not see themselves as that different from children who sleep at home, although they may still spend most of their days in the street. The children in school on the other hand are perceived as substantially different. They are also easily identified, wearing their school uniforms and carrying their school books. When interviewing children working or living in the streets in the slum areas in Port-au-Prince, they express a strong desire to wear a uniform and become one of the school children. The urban school children, on the other hand, see themselves as having little in common with the children in and of the street and will not be associated with them. In an urban setting where the enrolment rate is higher, the stigma of not being in school becomes a lot bigger than in the rural areas where half of the children are in the same situation. A father of three school children in Jacmel summarized what he thought was the opinion of the society by arguing that “*if you can’t read you are less than dirt. You are garbage*”. Putting such a strong stigma on not being in school is likely to provide parents with a strong incentive towards enrolling their children when the possibility is there.

### 4.3 Non-enrolment and dropouts in rural areas

The population in the rural areas comprises mainly peasants, who are trying to make a living from small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry. The life on the Haitian countryside is hard, and keeps on getting harder as the fertility of the soil is steadily declining with the environmental degradation. The income from agriculture is unpredictable and dependent upon factors outside the control of the farmers. With low income and limited access to credit, the households are poorly equipped to absorb even minor economic shocks. The main risks facing the peasants are the ones threatening their livelihood. If the rain does not come when needed or an animal disease strikes the area, the whole community is affected. Haiti is also regularly hit by hurricanes and tropical storms which can destroy the complete harvest for all peasants in large areas.

These kinds of simultaneous risks make it difficult for peasants to rely on communal risk-management strategies like assistance from neighbours or informal insurance arrangements. The ones who are best able to cope with such risks are the ones who engage in risk-spreading strategies and manage to diversify the income to the household. The widespread practice of child placement is an example of such a strategy, both in rural and urban households. Placing children with other households within or outside the family can relieve some of the pressure on the original household and also establish important social and economic linkages with other households in other areas. This is also a way to provide education to children when the households are not able to cover the cost of schooling. Children living and working with other households are according to tradition supposed to receive boarding and schooling in return for their work. Unfortunately this is a social contract which is often broken.

Children and youth also participate in other mitigation strategies within the household. Seasonal migration to the Dominican Republic for the purposes of agricultural work on plantations or construction work, is a frequent occurrence among rural Haitian youth. Some leave on their own initiative while others leave after pressure from family. Remittances from family members working across the border in the Dominican Republic or in urban areas like Port-au-Prince are important for survival of rural households. Finding work in Port-au-Prince is difficult for people from the countryside without any education or good contacts, but work in the Dominican Republic is perceived as an opportunity for everyone who is willing to take the risk of crossing the border illegally, and face the risk of harassment, abuse and deportation. Sending family members to the Dominican Republic is a way of mitigating potential risks to the household and coping in the times of crisis. The increased costs stemming from the global increase in prices on food and fuel has led to a steep increase in illegal border crossing. According to GARR,<sup>9</sup> 12,000 Haitians migrated to the Dominican Republic to search for work in the period between January and May 2008. The vast majority of these are young men in their late teens or twenties, but some are also children as young as ten years old.

Haitian farms are run as family businesses and children participate in both domestic and agricultural work. This does not necessarily prevent them from being enrolled in school, but might mean that they are absent during the most labour-intensive periods. Parents may choose to send their children to school when they do not need them at home, but withdraw them in periods when their labour is needed. When we talked to school children and parents of children in school about school attendance, they all stressed the importance of regular presence at school. The school directors and teachers, on the other hand, expressed concern that

<sup>9</sup> Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés, a local Haitian human rights organization working on migration issues.



the students' absence was too high because they were kept home by their parents. In the rural areas this is particularly a problem on market days. The parents need the children's help to bring goods to the market and assist them in the trade, thus keeping them away from school one day a week. A school director in Jacmel told us that by looking at the students present in school, he could tell us which day it was. The children at his school came from different rural areas, each having their own market day and the children would not show up on the respective day of their area. That children do not show up for school during the most work-intensive agricultural season is also widespread. "*Their parents cannot afford to rent farm help*", the headmaster at a public primary school in Meyer told us, "*and when a donkey gets a foal it is to rest its own back*".<sup>10</sup>

For many households, the money made from agricultural production is simply not enough to send their children to a school within reach. The ones that do manage to enrol their children face numerous challenges keeping them there. Most vulnerable are the households without or with few farm animals. In general, farm animals function as a source of savings and an economic buffer for the household. The households with animals have the possibility to make money on the sale of livestock or meat in case of a failed harvest or to cover extra expenses such as a funeral. To be able to pay the necessary inscription and school fees at the beginning of the school year, many households are dependent upon having an animal to sell. It cannot be expected that households will be willing to sell larger animals like cattle, horses or donkeys in order to send their children to school. These animals are too vital in the running of the farm and represent too high an investment. Small stock like chickens, on the other hand, which easily reproduce are more likely to be sold to raise the money for school costs. Households dependent upon selling animals for paying extra costs like school fees are vulnerable to animal diseases. One of the respondents interviewed in Maissade described how she had to take her three children out of school after all her chickens died during the previous year. The household's main livelihood came from small-scale cash crop on family land, but this income was only barely sufficient for basic household consumption and necessary agricultural input. The household had not been able to replace the chickens and found themselves in position where they saw no other opportunities for raising the amount needed for school fees. Animal diseases and failed harvests are the kind of circumstances which may make rural children drop out of school. In the forthcoming youth survey we aim to gain more knowledge on how taking children out of school is ranked in comparison to other coping strategies for households like reducing food consumption and selling animals or assets.

For some peasants, the problem of not being able to enrol their children in school seems to be more related to the lack of access to credit than to poverty as a binding constraint. One of our respondents in the Maissade district explained that the peasants in the area receive the main income from their harvest in October, while the school fees for the full year are to be paid in September.<sup>11</sup> For him personally this was not a problem since he belonged to one of the more prosperous households in the area and had a number of animals on his farm. He had the option of selling animals to pay for the enrolment fees, but for peasants solely dependent upon income from cash crops to pay for the school fees, the problem of timing for the payment of school fees in relation to the income from harvest was an impediment to enrolment.

<sup>10</sup> "*Bourik fe pitit pou do'l poze*". This is a Haitian proverb stating that children are supposed to help their parents and support them in old age.

<sup>11</sup> These farmers had their children enrolled at a public school where the annual school fees are paid at the beginning of the year. Families with children in private schools pay monthly school fees all through the year, but also need to raise an extra amount at the beginning of the year for inscriptions fees, uniforms and learning materials.

Both the number of harvests and the time for harvests varies to a great extent across the small country. While peasants along the southern coast can achieve four harvests of cash crops like tomatoes within one year, the peasants in the more barren and mountainous central region will only have two. The problem of timing of income from harvests and paying school fees are likely to be particular to certain areas of the country. For these areas, simple access to credit or pre-payment arrangements may be sufficient to increase the rate of enrolment, supposing there is capacity in the local schools.

Even when the farmers are able to sell their crops before the start of the school year, the surplus is often not enough to set aside money for school fees. Other expenses must be covered first, like paying workers who have assisted during the harvest and buying fertilizer. The price of fertilizer, which is essential to ensure a good harvest, has multiplied over the last couple of years. For our rural respondents the steep price increase was a great concern. Although none of our respondents made the explicit link between the increased input costs on agricultural production and lack of money for school fees, there is good reason to believe that the high increase in costs of fertilizing, in combination with the increase in prices of food and fuel, have forced rural children out of school in Haiti, or prevented them from starting.

The peasants' income is low and fluctuates. How much they can harvest from their fields depends to a large degree on circumstances outside of their control, like the soil quality and the rain. If the rain does not come when needed, the harvest fails. When the harvest fails, there is no crop to sell on the market and hence no money for school fees. The low productivity caused by deforestation and topsoil erosion has already been mentioned. Another major environmental risk facing Haitian peasants is the threat of hurricanes. Hurricane season is from June to November, and tropical storms and hurricanes hit the island almost every year.

Although the hurricanes are expected, the peasantry is in no position to protect themselves and their harvests against the storms. When we visited the rural areas along the coast in Département du Sud-Est in the beginning of December 2007, the peasants in the area found themselves in an extremely difficult situation. According to the agricultural calendar it should have been harvesting time, but the southern coast had been hit by two particularly hard hurricanes that season and for many of the peasants, the complete harvest was lost. For those who had not been able to put anything aside from the previous harvest, this meant that they were left without their main staple foods to eat and crops to sell until the next harvest in March/April the following year. The peasants found themselves in a situation where their whole predicted income from that season was lost.

Although last year's hurricane season was harsher than normal, these cases are by no means exceptional. When these circumstances occur, the households are left with very limited alternatives for coping with the situation. Some may have animals or assets to sell, but the sudden need for cash distorts the market as all sell at once and there are few potential buyers. The poorest households have nothing but their labour to sell and for the rural population that often involves migrating to an urban centre or the Dominican Republic. Without income the families are unable to pay school fees and have no other option than to take their children out of school, and hope that the next harvest will succeed and that they will be able to re-enrol their children next year. Chances are that the ones who do have access to credit will borrow money or essentials to make ends meet until next harvest. After next season's crops have been harvested and sold on the local market, the creditors will have to be paid before money can be

set aside for school fees. This might mean an additional season before the household is able to send one or more children back to school. For the households without access to credit, the situation is even more difficult. In a situation where the expected income is lost, marginalized households may find themselves left with few other alternatives than to send children out to search for work, or place them with other households.<sup>12</sup>

The fact of whether parents have the possibility to send their children to school or not is so closely linked to the unpredictable agricultural situation leaves many of the rural households caught in an *education investment trap*. Living on the margins, they are striving hard to be able to raise the exact amount needed to pay for inscription fees, school fees, uniforms and learning materials to enrol their children at the beginning of the school year. When they are not able to pay the monthly school fees, exam fees or other additional costs, their children are forced to drop out in the middle of the year, before they have had a chance to take their exams. As a result they will have to repeat the class, and start all over the following year. The money that has been invested in that school year is lost and the next year the household will struggle to enrol the children in the same grade again. It is a vicious circle that is making the households poorer at the same time as they are reaping a very low benefit from the money they invest in their children's education. The low returned benefit from investment in education is expected to be a clear disincentive for parents to enrol their children in school.

When talking to parents about when education starts paying off, their views greatly differ, but there seems to be general opinion that the children have to at least complete the first cycle from 1st to 4th grade for education to be of any practical value. If children drop out before the end of the first cycle, they will often not even have learned how to read and write. Many children drop out as illiterates after their families for several years have prioritized spending large parts of the household budget on trying to give them a good education. For the families, this money is lost. The poorer families are more likely to invest money in education that does not pay off than families belonging to the more affluent parts of the society. In addition to their children dropping out because they fail to pay the school expenses, the schools in which these families can afford to place their children are of inferior quality; the children are hence more prone to fail their exams and eventually drop out.

## 4.4 Dropouts in urban areas

Many of the urban poor face the same kind of difficulties as the rural population. Without a steady income, people are dependent upon informal activities like street vending or artisan work to make a living, and their income from one day to the next is hard to predict. Within this segment of the urban population we find many children who are not in school, and children who drop out for financial reasons during the year. In the urban areas there is also a higher concentration of unpaid domestic workers than in the rural areas. These children spend the day working in the household and are compensated with board and lodging. It is rare that these children are enrolled in school, although some may be attending an evening school.

Nevertheless, despite considerable urban poverty, the household incomes in the urban areas are still substantially higher than the ones of their rural counterparts. The access to low cost education is also better, although low cost in general also equals low quality education. Ac-

<sup>12</sup> For more background on the practice of child placement and the situation for unpaid domestic workers, *restaveks*, in Haiti see Tone Sommerfelt (ed.) 2002 "Les fondements de la pratique de la domesticité des enfants en Haïti", Fafo/ Ministère des Affaires Sociales et du Travail.

According to school directors we interviewed, dropouts in urban areas are more often linked to sudden changes in the circumstances of the child's family. It can be the death of a family member or a caretaker losing his job, which makes it impossible for the family to continue supporting their child's education. Contrary to the rural areas where the children are vulnerable because their schooling is dependent upon the unpredictable income from agricultural harvests, the urban poor are more vulnerable to idiosyncratic risks. When children drop out because of deteriorating economic conditions in the urban areas, they rarely return according to school directors we interviewed. "Their economic situation doesn't change from one day to the other", one teacher at an urban secondary school in Jacmel pointed out, "when they first drop out, we don't see them again". His point was that a bad harvest can always be followed by a better, but if people lose their source of support, they will have to be very lucky to find a new one.

When discussing reasons with teachers for students dropping out in the third cycle of primary and secondary schools, they list pregnancy as one cause, but no one considered it a main reason for dropping out. That girls drop out of school because of pregnancy is a bigger problem in the urban and semi-urban areas because this is where the schools teaching higher levels are concentrated. One of the school teachers in urban Jacmel argued that dropouts because of pregnancies were more prevalent among rural girls coming to study in town than for the urban girls. In his opinion this is because the rural girls are not used to the urban life of parties and alcohol, and they find it hard to draw the line. In particular, the annual one-week carnival is a peak season for teenage pregnancies. According to him, every year girls get pregnant during the carnival season and are unable to complete their studies.

The political instability and recurring violent conflicts have also had a detrimental effect on children's access to education. During the period of the most intense violence in 2004 the schools in Port-au-Prince were closed for several months. A specific occurrence, which made it difficult for many children to return to school after the situation calmed down, was the dismissal of thousands of government employees after the departure of former President Aristide in 2004. When conducting interviews with children who are now working and living in the streets of Port-au-Prince, several of them tightly involved in gang-related activities, it was a recurring theme that they had been enrolled in school under the former government. Their school fees had been paid by supporters of *Lavalas*, Aristide's political party, either by family members or friends of the family, who now found themselves without an income. These interviews all took place in Bel Air, a slum area known as a *Lavalas* stronghold which was particularly affected by the mass dismissal.

## 4.5 The importance of personal connections

Haiti is perceived as one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International 2007).<sup>13</sup> After inhabiting the very bottom position on the Transparency International's global ranking of corruption in 2006, Haiti managed, in 2007, to escape the position as 'the world's most corrupt country' by ranking ahead of Iraq, Myanmar and Somalia for the year. Bribes and paying for services are institutionalized practices, but even more important than

<sup>13</sup>In Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2007, Haiti is ranked as number 177 with a 1.6 score on a 1 to 10 scale. The only countries receiving lower scores are Iraq, Myanmar and Somalia. In the CPI for 2006 Haiti was rated the most corrupt country of the 166 countries in the index (Somalia was not represented then in the index, while Iraq and Somalia shared the second worst score). See <http://www.transparency.org/>



the ability to pay the extra 'service fees' are personal networks. One hears told over and over while in Haiti is that *"it's all about who you know"*. The general attitude is that to get things done in Haiti one needs to have personal contacts in influential positions. If a person does not know someone, they need to 'know someone who knows someone' who is willing to argue their case for a small fee or a returned favour.

Who one knows is also important when it comes to getting one's own children into school. With a high demand for school places, the ability to pay school fees and additional costs are in many cases not enough. Personal connections are also necessary. Several of the people we interviewed stressed the importance of a *marraine* or a *parrain* in order to make sure that one's child will get one of the few available chairs in the class room.

*Marraine/parrain* is a concept every Haitian knows.<sup>14</sup> Literally it means godmother/godfather, but in practical terms it describes a person who is placed above them in the intricate social networks that make up Haitian social reality, with whom one has a relationship. A *marraine/parrain* is a person with influence that can either make a favourable decision for them or plead their case to the person who can. During a group interview in Département du Sud-Est all eight parents present who had children in school explained that they had paid an intermediary to ensure their children's enrolment. If one does not have a personal relation to a *marraine/parrain*, they most likely will need to pay someone who does, in order to introduce them to the right person. Depending on their place in the social network their requests may pass by a number of intermediaries on their way to the final decision-maker, with every person involved claiming his or her fee. A young man in the border area in Belladere used a metaphor to explain the destructive situation. *"Haiti"*, he said, *"is like a big rope. If we could pull the rope together we could help the people, but everyone has a little knife that they use to cut for themselves"*.

The parents who are dependent upon personal contacts in order to ensure their children an education find themselves in an extremely vulnerable situation. In one of the focus groups held with parents in the rural areas outside Jacmel, one of the women openly stated that it was not unusual that a *parrain* would demand sexual favours from the mother in exchange for a school place for their child. The other women in the group confirmed that they knew about such cases, while the men avoided commenting upon it. The same issue was raised by a group of teenage girls in Maissade. One of the girls told us that her cousin had been denied entry to a university in Port-au-Prince because she had *"kadmase kòl"*, refused to have sex with the school director.<sup>15</sup> According to them, this is a widespread problem which girls face when they want to continue with higher education. From the basis of this study it is not possible to say anything about the extent of sexual exploitation that happens in relation to the restricted access to education, but we did establish that this is a very serious concern that should be given attention in the near future.

<sup>14</sup> Another important concept in Haitian social reality is *moun pa'm*, which translates directly as 'person for me'. Whereas a *marraine/parrain* is primarily an exchange-based relationship based on both parties mutual benefit, *moun pa'm* is a person who is more emotionally related to you and who will help one out, because of for instance obligations to one's family, without expecting any direct or immediate compensation.

<sup>15</sup> Literally meaning put a padlock on her body.

## 5 Conclusion

In September 2000, the largest-ever gathering of world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration. The Declaration, endorsed by 189 countries, was then operationalized into eight Millennium Development Goals to be reached by 2015. One of them was to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Halfway into the period, Haiti is one of the countries which shows that there is a long way to go before every child can enjoy the benefits of education.

Access to education is a human right, it is a constitutional right, but it is far from being an enforced right. When looking at the state of the education sector in Haiti, the impression given is of a state that has completely renounced its responsibility to provide education to its population and left it all in the hands of the private sector. The private sector fills an important void where the state is failing, but operates largely unregulated; the private education sector has become an area for numerous unqualified and, to some extent, also unserious actors. Many of the schools lack the most basic infrastructure and the teachers have often not even finished primary school. There is no control over the fees schools charge and the teaching they offer is often insufficient for the students to be able to pass their exams. The result is a high rate of dropouts and repetition. That already disadvantaged families are paying for enrolment in the same grade over and over again, without their children being able to proceed, is a pervasive reality and leaves many households caught in an *education investment trap*.

Lack of qualified teachers is the main bottleneck within the Haitian education sector. This has been recognized by the World Bank, which recently granted \$6 USD million dollars for teachers' training in an attempt to reach the 2015 goal of universal enrolment. If channelled to its specific purpose, this can lead to an important improvement in the quality of Haitian education, but the salaries and working conditions of the teachers also need to be improved in order to ensure that the trained teachers actually stay within the education sector.

There is an urgent need for the state to increase its control over the private actors within education. It is also necessary for the state to take on the responsibility of providing schooling to the children belonging to the most marginal groups, either through an increase in the number of public schools or by providing scholarships to children in private schools. With the inequalities and disparities that exist in Haiti, and a population where more than half are living in extreme poverty, only the state can guarantee an "education for all" policy. For this reason it is crucial that the donors cooperate closely with the state actors in the education sector, as well as in building the necessary competence within the Ministry of Education (MENFP), where there has been a high turnover of decision-makers over many years. It is paramount that the Ministry seize the momentum stemming from the donors' willingness to fund projects that can bring Haiti closer to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. The initiatives should come from within the Ministry itself. However, the Ministry also needs to demonstrate its willingness to cooperate openly with the international donor community, as well as to monitor, and if necessary, reevaluate their current practices.

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# Youth and Education in Haiti

The objective of this study is to identify the main factors which prevent children from being enrolled in school, the circumstances which cause them to drop-out during the school year and to identify factors which make children more prone to fail their exams and hence having to repeat or drop-out. This paper focuses on structural factors inherent in the Haitian education sector which may work as disincentives for parents to invest money in their children's education. It also brings the attention to specific conditions, particularly at the Haitian countryside, which makes it difficult for parents both to enroll their children, but also for their children to proceed and succeed in school.

The findings presented in this paper are based on qualitative interviews and focus groups conducted in four different regions of Haiti during November and December 2007. The study is a part of a larger project focusing on different areas of youth involvement funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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