

‘Migration, Overurbanization, Informal Settlements, and Vulnerability’

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I. Introduction:

Throughout the world exists ‘the planet of the slums’ with a population of 1 billion people existing on the margin of society living in informal settlements and surviving on the informal economy. This population can be as much as 78.2% of the urban population in less-developed countries (Davis 2006). Haiti is one of these less-developed countries and is well known as the poorest country in the western hemisphere. The creation of informal settlements in Haiti, as in the majority of developing countries, is directly tied to overurbanization. Overurbanization is a symptom of development in Haiti that inevitably results in the formation of informal settlements that are left in a state vulnerable to economic, social, and environmental disaster.

II. Demographic Background:

On the Human Development Index (HDI), Haiti is ranked number 158 of 187 countries recorded in the 2011 report, which puts it in the low human development category. The life expectancy age is 61.5 years, the infant mortality rate according to the 2011 HDI report is 87 for every 1000 births, the gross national income at the purchasing power parity is \$1,123, and the poverty rate of Haiti is 0.299 (UNDP 2011). The population of the country is 9,719,932 with an urban population of 52%, predominantly located in the capital, Port au Prince. The metro population of Port au Prince is around 2.5 million with a city population of nearly 900,000 (CIA World Factbook). The population density in Port au Prince was measured to be as high as 1,500 people per hectare, roughly 2.5 acres (Fass 1988). Given the rise in population since this statistic was given, it can be assumed that urban density has increased as well. Haiti has been described as “a scattered island of wealth surrounded by a sea of poverty” (Portes 1994).

Formal sector jobs are few, 90% are in Port au Prince, 50% are in the public sector such as education, health, and justice, and the rest are in state owned enterprises such as electricity, telephone, police, and customs. The remainder of work is in the small private sector, consisting of factories, banking, commerce, and transportation. Unemployment in Port au Prince was as high as 48.8%(Verner 2008). It is quite apparent that Haiti has suffered from overurbanization and the following will explain this process, following the trend of the Caribbean Basin.

III. The Rising Trend of Overurbanization:

Since the era of decolonization following World War Two, there exists a noticeable trend following the development of decolonized states. As these nations develop and their populations begin to migrate towards the cities for economic opportunities, over urbanization begins to occur. Post-colonial industrialization contributed to the demand for inexpensive housing, and the downward pressure from these industries created an imbalance between wages and housing costs. These problems were further exacerbated by mass migration to the urban centers. In order to be in central locations and in close proximity to work opportunities, workers were forced to create squatter settlements in backyards, rooftops, pavements, government owned property, and any other available land, due to low wages, expensive housing, and land scarcity. The UN Millennium Project estimates that more than 900 million people were living in slums in 2001. Urban informal settlements and slum growth were fueled by population growth, migrations, land scarcity, and inadequate policies. All of this is the unique outcome of historical, economic, and cultural processes at the local, regional, and national level (Green 2008).

The urbanization trend in the Caribbean basin follows the following pattern: rapid urbanization, highly unequal distribution of wealth, traditional agriculture decline, and export-oriented development. Migration to the city was not gradual, but an explosion. High rents and scarcity of housing forced the poor to create their own shelter solutions, in irregular, informal settlements, and often squatting. A great dichotomy between the rich and poor formed as they lived in different worlds within the same city (Portes 1994). As the rural agriculture economy was unable to absorb labor, it caused rural out migration and the growth of the marginal masses in cities where people assumed there were more economic advantages (Shandra et al. 2003). These advantages were sought by both young and old. According to Verner, workers who migrated to the city had a higher likelihood of being employed in the non-farm sector regardless of age, which was partially due to the strong informal economy (Verner 2008). Also, the growth of export-oriented industry developed in Haiti, which attracted laborers to the cities. Port au Prince attracts as many as 100,000 people per year from rural areas. This has led to an explosion of housing for these workers as well as generated jobs in the informal economy (Verner 2008). Spatial polarization, urban primacy, and informal employment are all central features of Latin American Urbanization (Portes 1994), with Haiti being no exception.

According to Shandra et al., there are several reasons for overurbanization, rural push and urban pull, economic modernization, the neo-Malthusian perspective, and the dependency perspective; all of which are closely tied to environmental degradation. The neo-Malthusian perspective is that population growth is responsible for overurbanization. It is directly tied to over cultivation, deforestation, soil erosion, pollution, and overall environmental degradation, which lead to the urban pull (Shandra et al. 2003). The neo-

Malthusian perspective is interwoven with all of the reasons for overurbanization because population growth plays such an integral role in each area of development.

A. Rural Push, Urban Pull:

Urban pull and rural push is tied to population pressure and agriculture productivity. In the rural push, population growth outstrips job opportunity and overall agricultural productivity drops, leaving a labor surplus particularly in rural areas. In Haiti, this causes impoverishment without jobs as people are drawn to urban areas through the perception of economic opportunity in the city (Shandra et al. 2003). There are several causes for the rural push, urban pull; supply induced scarcity and environmental degradation, demand induced scarcity, structural scarcity, and environmental scarcity (Shandra et al. 2003). Scarcity is caused through the imbalance of the renewal rate of resources, increased consumption, and inequitable distribution. One practice in particular that adds to land and resource scarcity in Haiti is the division of land to each child of a family as part of the Code Napoleon (Lundhal 2010). These problems also effect income and increase vulnerability through instability and health risks (Shandra et al. 2003). The rural population becomes increasingly impoverished and urban-ward migration occurs.

B. Dependency and Overurbanization:

The dependency perspective relates overurbanization to external factors and transnational economics. Haiti took advantage of the Caribbean Basin Initiative in order to build an export oriented manufacturing sector. The export-producing zone was concentrated in Port au Prince. This location accelerated rural migration to the capital, which already had land scarcity and soil erosion. Policies established under the rule of

François "Papa Doc" Duvalier between 1950 and 1976 led to a massive population growth of more than 400,000 in Port au Prince (Fass 1988). In 1990 the urban population of Haiti was at 30.3% (Portes 1994); today that population has increased to 52%. In Port au Prince, urban space has been thoroughly invaded by the rural migrants, reversing the class polarization where the elite exit the city as migrants enter, the elite have to deal with squatters outside their doors due to the lack of space for housing (Portes 1994). Also, this invasion of the rural migrants has led to the extreme densification of former working class areas, 'bidonvilles', with as much density as 1200 people per hectare (2.5 acres) (Portes 1994 and Fass 1988). Occupation of urban space has spilled into the streets, creating markets that block traffic. Furthermore, the access to utilities such as water, electricity, and drainage is dismal or non-existent in these highly dense settlements; access is only available to the privileged. A statistic from 1988 shows that 72% of the urban population lacked running water and 92% had access to basic latrines only; also the pirating of services is frequent and dangerous (Portes 1994). With the lack of space in the capital, migrants are forced to expand outward, seeking basic services and employment. Haiti has suffered from several economic crises where the decline in agriculture could not be absorbed by any other industry, and no industry emerged to absorb excess labor; no export production zone could deal with this mass migration (Portes 1994).

Resource scarcity can be caused by environmental degradation, increased demand, and inequitable distribution. In Haiti, the environmental degradation diminishes the amount of arable land and therefore the economic opportunity in agriculture. This reduction in economic prosperity through agriculture pushes people into the cities to find

jobs. This is exacerbated by the overpopulation and excess labor force in rural areas that migrate to the cities in search of work (Lundhal 1989).

C. Environmental Degradation:

It is widely accepted that Haiti is the most underdeveloped nation in the western hemisphere primarily due to political and environmental reasons. The environmental factors are particularly influential in the process of rural migration and overurbanization. Environmental degradation has occurred throughout the history of Haiti, due to overpopulation, poor agricultural practices, and deforestation. These are all integrally linked. Since agriculture is the primary source of income in Haiti, as the population grows, the ratio of man to land increases, and therefore the need for more land is necessary and the forests are cleared. Deforestation has had the largest and most lasting effect on environmental degradation in Haiti. Haitians have cleared forests for agriculture to make space for a growing population, for exporting timber, and for fuel. Deforestation leads to soil erosion, which depletes the soil of the necessary nutrients needed for agriculture, and the silt that erodes flows into water sources, polluting water sources and depleting potable water. The process of depleting arable land is exacerbated through current agricultural practices of rural Haitians, such as not allowing the soil to rest and allowing the over-grazing of livestock, which results in bare land that is easily eroded by rains. Moreover there is a lack of economic resources to fix the problem (Lundahl 1992). Farmers are less likely to invest in agriculture modernization because they do not hold the title to the land and the lack of access to infrastructure services such as water and electricity makes their situation worse (Verner 2008). Additionally, rural and urban dwellers use charcoal for energy, furthering deforestation and land erosion.

“People living in a state of absolute poverty tend to put a much higher weight on the present than on the future when making decisions. What matters first and foremost is survival today” (Lundhal 1992, p.29). When the effects of deforestation and environmental degradation are too great, rural residents push into urban slums or flee the country (Shandra et al. 2003).

D. Foreign Dependency/ International Intervention:

Economic modernization is tied to the importance of internal economic characteristics. The global division of labor distorts economies of the developing world; it reduces the rate of economic growth and increases inequality, adversely affecting the well being of society (Shandra et al. 2003). Trade dependency aggravates this gap and direct foreign investment promotes underdevelopment, all of which lead to overpopulation and vulnerable populations. For example, multinational corporations put factories in urban areas that attract workers to these city centers, but there exists an extreme discrepancy between their product value and labor value, and they therefore do not supply their workforce with a viable income.

Foreign loans, specifically through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in addition to the underdevelopment in Haiti, and exacerbated by a predatory state led to the foreign debt crisis in Haiti. The debt and interest payments created by these loans drained scarce capital from investment in the national economy and inhibited economic development while reducing government spending on social welfare programs such as education and health (Shandra et al. 2003). Furthermore the increase of taxes caused increased burden upon the citizens, preventing the potential reduction of overurbanization. Those in power during the predatory states in recent

Haitian history mismanaged funds and took out even more loans for the personal gain of certain politicians, mortgaging Haiti's development possibilities (Lundahl 1992). During the United States occupations, debt payment was set as a priority above development.

Typically Democracies that respond to citizen protests and opinion help mitigate overurbanization more effectively; however, while Haiti has a Democratic government system, it has suffered from oppressive governments that did not have the best interest of its citizens in mind, and instead heeded to the interests of transnational corporations (Shandra et al. 2003). The predatory political forces in Haiti have further increased its social problems and the resulting political oppression has led to the increase in urbanization. For example, Haiti was indebted to France and in order to pay the indemnity, taxes were imposed on the people. Agriculture production had to be increased in order for the rural farmers to be able to afford these taxes, and therefore an increase of the labor force was needed, which led to more over-intense use of land. As earlier discussed, this perpetuates the cycle of overurbanization.

Mats Lundahl further argues the causes of economic underdevelopment in Haiti is the combination of the growth of population and soil erosion, the lack of technological progress in agriculture, and the predatory state that has occurred in Haiti on and off for the last one hundred and fifty years. The existence of the predatory state or kleptocracy has been especially detrimental to the development of Haiti. During the Duvalier of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier and later his son Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, reign from 1957 to 1986, the nepotistic hiring of political officials attracted people to the capital in attempt to gain positions in the kleptocracy of the Duvaliers; Politicking became the best way to secure income. After the fall of the Duvalier reign, as state

officials were sent into exile, some left with state revenues, a common practice in developing nations (Lundahl 1989).

E. Vulnerability:

Overall demand for land in urban areas leads to the use of unsuitable, normally unusable terrain, which is prone to natural hazards. This land tends to be below floodplains, on sandy soil susceptible to slump, and reclaimed land such as landfills (Ofori 2008). The lack of capital to build sustainably leads to inhabitants ignoring proper building codes and zoning ordinances, not using proper building technology, and not properly maintaining buildings. Additionally the government does not have the capital to manage urbanization and maintain public space (Ofori 2008). The high-density urban areas are also unsafe because the lack of economic and social capital leaves room for these areas to easily develop high crime rates and health risks. The rise in the security industry is a marker of this (Verner 2008). More particularly the openness to environmental disasters for these slums leaves them exposed to potential total collapse.

The overurbanization, or hyper urbanization leads to social and environmental degradation in and around these urban centers due to overpopulation, which in turn leads to vulnerability, especially as seen in informal settlements or slums. This time line of development and urbanization is intricately woven with the increase of vulnerability that has led to a more powerful impact of natural disasters. The poverty of developing nations and the lack of resources, such as social and economic capital, increase vulnerability weakening coping strategies and delaying the recovery process (UNHSP 2007). Rebekah Green states: “The vulnerability of unauthorized, un-engineered construction, while

varying in detail geographically, has risen in accordance to social and economic realities of development and urbanization” (Green, 2008 p.221).

One hundred of the most powerful disasters of the twentieth century occurred toward the end of the century, ten in the 1970’s, twenty-five in the 1980’s, and sixty-five in the 1990’s (Du Plessis 2001), and according to the Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank, the death rate of natural disasters in the developing world is one hundred times higher than that in the industrialized world. This lack of mitigation is an indicator of underdevelopment (Ofori 2008). It is expected for these numbers to rise, especially as the world population makes the shift to the 50% urban, 50% rural mark. As urban populations rise, we especially begin to see a rapid growth of urban cities in the developing countries; according to Degg, 88% of the world’s fastest growing cities are located in developing countries and all of these are exposed to natural disasters (Degg, 1992). Disasters cost seventeen times more between 1990 and 1999 than from 1950-1990; this appears to be a growing trend that makes a developing country, such as Haiti, even more vulnerable to devastating effects (Ofori 2008). This observation is quite relevant to the 2010 earthquake that shook Haiti. It is also interesting that the World Bank is the largest lender to national disaster relief, which according to Shandra et al. will cause further harm to development.

In Haiti, it is clear that this trend has led to one of the most devastating natural disasters in the western hemisphere. Port au Prince, Haiti had a spectacular population boom between 1950 (150,000) and 1976 (640,000) during the Duvalier reign (Fass 1988). Port au Prince was originally established as a small port town with little infrastructure to support a population over 60,000, but today the city’s population is around 1 million. As

previously stated, this hyper urbanization was caused by the lack of natural resources to support agriculture, which has forced people into the city for economic survival; it has led to the development of informal settlements built over unstable ground that do not follow codes or zoning. It is in these informal settlements where the highest percentage of vulnerability occurs, which is escalated by the economic standing of its inhabitants and the environmental degradation caused by the location of the settlements.

In developing countries, it has been shown that the indigenous architecture is resilient to some forms of natural disaster, such as in Asia and the Americas; however, in the case of the 1999 earthquakes in Turkey, the indigenous adobe construction was not resilient and failed (Ofori 2008). An important aspect of indigenous architecture is that it is culturally responsive and uses local resources. Due in part to the fear that the vernacular architecture is not resilient and due to the prestige of more modern building materials and technology, some countries have enacted policies that prevent the use of indigenous architecture, forcing the use of less desirable materials such as masonry and reinforced concrete. In India, these policies have backlashed, as buildings built using these methods were not seismically sound. The modern building materials and technologies also undercut the traditional construction methods, which can be superior in resilience, as well as undercut an age-old trade of master builders and carpenters. These master builders are forced to construct with materials and techniques that are unfamiliar to them, which leads to faulty work, all of which exists in Haiti (Green 2008).

In urban areas a shift occurs from the use of the traditional construction methods to modern methods, partly because of prestige and partly because of policies. Due to cost and economic resources, construction has developed in unsustainable ways that greatly

affect already vulnerable urban populations. Also, these populations seek out the most affordable housing possible that is nearest their place of work. Even in the upper class, people use improperly trained construction workers to build their homes because they were the only builders available; this practice has led to the poor construction of a high percentage of buildings in Port au Prince.

Since urbanization has increased drastically and the majority of the population lives in informal settlements, new social and economic patterns have arisen. Rural born slum dwellers migrated to areas populated by friends and family, and their rural social structures were modified to the urban context (Blanc 1998). Lundahl argues that many rural to urban migrants came alone, leaving family and social networks and therefore the urban economy has an individualizing effect (Lundahl 2010).

Another part of urbanization in Haiti is the loss of rural social structures that provided security. The urban economy is more and more individualistic. The indigenous economic social structures of the 'lakou', 'sang', and 'konbit' have not fared well in the migration to the city. The 'lakou' is the spatial organization of the extended family and also the social structure of the extended family with a common residence. The 'lakou' is a patriarchate cooperative; the 'sang' is the rotating access to credit within the 'lakou', and the 'konbit' is the rotating access to labor (Lundahl 2010). The 'lakou', 'sang', and 'konbit' serve to accumulate social capital and a basis for community based enterprise, but are partially lost in rural out migration because of the individualistic form of migration. These cooperative structures have had trouble surviving in modern urban society and have not turned out to become sturdy building blocks of community-based entrepreneurship. The individualistic nature of the competitive urban economy causes

mistrust and animosity (Lundahl 2010). The fall of these structures is directly tied to the political turmoil as well.

Contrary to Lundahl's views on the loss of the 'lakou's' effectiveness in creating social capital in urban areas, Blanc and Schininà et al. describe the 'lakou' as playing a fundamental role in Haitian society. As populations migrate to urban areas, there are pieces of a social network in place that help individuals find accommodations and work in urban areas. Most notably this social structure is the 'lakou,' which is a family social structure and a physical organization of extended family (Blanc 1998). The following section will go in to further detail, describing the 'lakou's' effectiveness in mitigating vulnerability.

IV. Mitigation of Vulnerability

Research has shown that the rural, non-farm sector has a positive role in absorbing a growing rural labor force and slowing rural-urban migration. This is possible through an increase in education that creates non-agriculture based employment, increasing job potential in rural areas (Verner 2008). The urban pull also has the ability to some extent to create labor shortages in rural areas, increasing the demand for labor in rural markets; the reality can be that rural workers can earn more than their urban peers (Verner 2008). Rural workers need access to land tenure in order to help alleviate the rural push (Verner 2008). Shandra et al. provide six steps that can be implemented in order to mitigate overurbanization and vulnerability: environmental programs, promoting environmental sustainability, medial programs, grassroots organizations, state society partnership for protection of environment, state society partnership for health, and propagating world wide standards (Shandra et al. 2003). International Non-

Governmental Organizations (NGO's) help to reduce urban migration through the preservation of natural resources. Furthermore, in fostering the active role of citizens in society, grassroots movements and political protests for the protection of individual rights also play an important role in reducing overurbanization (Shandra et al. 2003). Through the reduction of overurbanization, mitigation of vulnerability can occur. Green states that the need exists for local knowledge, local tradition, local resources, and local economy.

After the 2010 earthquake, displacement requires major adaptations to re-define personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical boundaries. The 'lakou' is a social support network for migrants to urban centers as well as the primary factor of resilience in disaster response and post-disaster recovery. The 'lakou' has been challenged by urbanization and migration and the loss of social connectedness but is still a fundamental part of Haitian society (Schininà et al. 2010). Urbanized communities tend to recreate the 'lakou' in urban suburbs and the same happens among students moving to the capital (McGill University). The International Organization of Migration recommends that the revitalization of the 'lakou' system is one of the main resilience factors and it needs to be implemented in the planning of settlements, both in population selection and spatial organization (Schinina et al. 2010). Furthermore those members of the 'lakou' who migrated internationally through the support of their families have the ability to send remittances, increasing the earning capacity of their families.

V. Conclusion:

Overurbanization can be a result of several different factors: the rural push and urban pull, economic modernization, neo-Malthusian perspective, and dependency

perspectives. In Haiti, the rural push and urban pull factor is apparent. The increase of population and accompanying growth of the labor outstrips the job opportunities and overall agricultural production drops (Shandra et al 2003). Due to the perception of economic opportunity in urban centers, people are drawn there; this leads to overurbanization. Overurbanization leads to people living in treacherous conditions, making them vulnerable to social, economic, and natural calamity. The loss of social capital and the weakening of indigenous social support systems in rural out migration further intensify the vulnerability of these populations. The symptoms of vulnerability can begin to be alleviated through promoting environmental sustainability, implementing medial programs, state society partnerships for the protection of the environment and health, and propagating world wide standards. The reintegration of indigenous social structures, such as the 'lakou', will further mitigate vulnerability and alleviate overurbanization.

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