Haiti: Disasters, Poverty, and Educational Inequity

Disadvantaged and Education: “RU Reaching Out Pen pals” to Haiti Renmen Foundation

Tag Words: RU Reaching Out, Renmen Foundation, Haiti

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Summary

(Lauren) "RU Reaching Out" is a group at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ hoping to help the the children of Haiti from the Renmen Foundation(http://www.renmenhaiti.org/en/-/about-us.html) by sending pen-pal letters to them in hopes to influence the children in continuing and achieving their education and providing help with their English reading and writing skills. We would like to inspire, encourage, and motivate the children of the Renmen Foundation by acting as role-models and providing them an area where they can discuss their educational and personal goals. By writing a letter to one of the children, you are not only establishing a close bond, but also a chance to positively change a child's life. “RU Reaching Out” is also interested in gathering different individuals from the Rutgers community both students and faculty that may be interested in volunteering during the summer of 2011 at the Renmen Foundation or making a donation for this exchange program and the Renmen Foundation.

Video Link

"RU Reaching Out" Pen pals: Haiti Renmen Foundation:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXZPNABAMcs
The Issue: Education in Haiti

Introduction
(Brittany) Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and one of the poorest across the globe as well. Haiti's history is one of imperialism, slavery, and repeated political upheaval and instability. Corruption, money laundering, and illegal drug trafficking are nearly ubiquitous when discussing Haiti's governmental leadership. A combination of political instability, violence, and vast corruption by the upper echelons of Haitian society have lead to and exacerbated Haiti's biggest problem: poverty. The citizens of Haiti struggle with faulty and unreliable infrastructure, including roads, running water, and electricity. Other facilities that are in disrepair are the public education system and health care system. Eighty percent of Haitians live in poverty, on less than $2 per day.

(Brittany) This pervasive poverty is terrible enough, but to add to the burdens of Haitians' daily lives, Haiti is a hot-spot to natural disasters. The little island republic's history is peppered as evenly with instances of hurricanes, earthquakes, and epidemics as it is with governmental turmoil and political violence. Recently, in 2010 alone, Haiti has suffered from a 7.0 magnitude earthquake, a major hurricane, and a cholera outbreak. These natural disasters have exacerbated Haitian poverty and intensified the gap between the rich and the poor. Children growing up in Haiti in these dark times are subject to a wilting educational system, and the gap between the rich and the poor is highly evident in the education differential between the classes. Additionally, opportunities for higher education and professional development are extremely limited in Haiti. The combination of poverty, history and continuation of severe political turmoil, and persistent natural disasters contribute heavily to educational inequity in Haiti.

A Brief History of Haiti: A Timeline of Key Events
(Brittany) In order to understand the current dismal condition of Haiti, it is important to understand its history. Colonial Haiti was a victim of slavery and imperialism. The political history of independent Haiti is onerous, peppered with revolts, coup d'etats, and foreign occupations and control. Corruption and greed of government officials pillaged the Haitian people of the little they had. Additionally, Haiti is a frequent victim of natural disasters.
(Timeline take from BBC News)

Early History
- 1492 - Christopher Columbus lands and names the island Hispaniola, or Little Spain.
- 1496 - Spanish establish first European settlement in western hemisphere at Santo Domingo, now capital of Dominican Republic.
- 1697 - Spain cedes western part of Hispaniola to France, and this becomes Haiti, or Land of Mountains.
- 1801 - A former black slave who became a guerrilla leader, Toussaint Louverture, conquers Haiti, abolishing slavery and proclaiming himself governor-general of an autonomous government over all Hispaniola.
- 1802 - French force led by Napoleon's brother-in-law, Charles Leclerc, fails to conquer Haitian interior.
Independence
- 1804 - Haiti becomes independent; former slave Jean-Jacques Dessalines declares himself emperor.
- 1806 - Dessalines assassinated and Haiti divided into a black-controlled north and a mulatto-ruled south
- 1818-43 - Pierre Boyer unifies Haiti, but excludes blacks from power.
- 1915 - US invades Haiti following black-mulatto friction, which it thought endangered its property and investments in the country.
- 1934 - US withdraws troops from Haiti, but maintains fiscal control until 1947.

Duvalier dictatorships
- 1956 - Voodoo physician Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier seizes power in military coup and is elected president a year later.
- 1964 - Duvalier declares himself president-for-life and establishes a dictatorship with the help of the Tontons Macoute militia.
- 1971 - Duvalier dies and is succeeded by his 19-year-old son, Jean-Claude, or "Baby Doc", who also declares himself president-for-life.
- 1986 - Baby Doc flees Haiti in the wake of mounting popular discontent and is replaced by Lieutenant-General Henri Namphy as head of a governing council.
- 1988 - Leslie Manigat becomes president, but is ousted in a coup led by Brigadier-General Prosper Avril, who installs a civilian government under military control.

Democracy, coup and intervention
- 1990 - Jean-Bertrand Aristide elected president in Haiti's first free and peaceful polls.
- 1994 - Military regime relinquishes power in the face of an imminent US invasion; US forces oversee a transition to a civilian government; Aristide returns.
- 1995 - UN peacekeepers begin to replace US troops; Aristide supporters win parliamentary elections
- Rene Preval, from Aristide's Lavalas party, is elected in December to replace Aristide as president.
- 1997-99 - Serious political deadlock; new government named.
- 1999 - Preval declares that parliament's term has expired and begins ruling by decree following a series of disagreements with deputies.

Aristide's second term
- 2001 July - Presidential spokesman accuses former army officers of trying to overthrow the government after armed men attack three locations, killing four police officers.
- 2001 December - 30-armed men try to seize the National Palace in an apparent coup attempt; 12 people are killed in the raid, which the government blames on former army members.
- 2002 July - Haiti is approved as a full member of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) trade bloc.
- 2003 April - Voodoo recognized as a religion, on a par with other faiths.
- 2004 January-February - Celebrations marking 200 years of independence turn into uprising against President Aristide, who is forced into exile. An interim government takes over.
- 2004 May - Severe floods in south, and in parts of neighboring Dominican Republic, leave more than 2,000 dead or disappeared.
- 2004 June - First UN peacekeepers arrive, to take over security duties from US-led force and to help flood survivors.
- 2004 July - International donors pledge more than $1bn in aid.
- 2004 September - Nearly 3,000 killed in flooding in the north, in the wake of tropical storm Jeanne.
- late 2004 - Rising levels of deadly political and gang violence in the capital; armed gangs loyal to former President Aristide are said to be responsible for many killings.
- 2005 April - Prominent rebel leader Ravix Remissainthe is killed by police in the capital.
- 2005 July - Hurricane Dennis kills at least 45 people.

**Preval wins elections**
- 2006 February - General elections, the first since former President Aristide was overthrown in 2004. Rene Preval is declared the winner of the presidential vote after a deal is reached over spoiled ballot papers.
- 2006 June - A democratically-elected government headed by Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis takes office.
- 2006 September - Launch of a UN-run scheme to disarm gang members in return for grants, job training.
- 2007 January - UN troops launch tough new offensive against armed gangs in Cite Soleil, one of the capital’s largest and most violent shantytowns.
- 2008 May - US and World Bank announce extra food aid totalling 30m dollars.
- In response to plea from President Preval for more police to help combat wave of kidnappings-for-ransom, Brazil agrees to boost its peacekeeping force.

**Tropical storms**
- 2008 August/September - Nearly 800 people are killed and hundreds are left injured as Haiti is hit by a series of devastating storms and hurricanes.
2008 November - A school in Port-au-Prince collapses with around 500 pupils and teachers inside. The authorities blame poor construction methods.

2009 May - Former US President Bill Clinton appointed UN special envoy to Haiti.

2009 July - World Bank and International Monetary Fund cancel $1.2bn of Haiti's debt - 80% of the total - after judging it to have fulfilled economic reform and poverty reduction conditions.

2009 October-November - Jean-Max Bellerive becomes prime minister after the Senate passes censure motion against his predecessor, Michelle Pierre-Louis.

2010 January - Up to 300,000 people are killed when a magnitude 7.0 earthquake hits the capital Port-au-Prince and its wider region - the worst in Haiti in 200 years.

2010 March - International donors pledge $5.3 billion for post-quake reconstruction at a donor conference at UN headquarters.

2010 July - Popular anger grows over slow pace of reconstruction six months after quake.

2010 October - Run-up to presidential, parliamentary polls due on 28 November. Concern over exclusion of popular candidates.

2010 October-November - Cholera outbreak claims over 1,000 lives and triggers violent protests.

Poverty and Inequality
(Brittany) Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with 80% of the population living under the poverty line and 54% in abject poverty. In addition to Haiti's status as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, it can also be called one of the most unequal. A small elite class of a few thousand wealthy Haitian families live the high life, including several millionaires. These families live in and around the cool mountainside suburbs of Petionville. This city caters to the rich, and its economy flourishes on expensive luxury cars, high fashion, and five star restaurants. All of the educational and medical facilities are private, and the children of the wealthy few tend to be educated abroad, in the United States of America or in Paris, for some or all of their educational careers. Ritzy vacations and shopping trips are not uncommon for this elite class, and many of these richest of Haitians have dollar bank accounts in the United States. Their lives are comfortable and even glamorous.

(Brittany) The contrast between the lives of the richest Haitians and the poorest could not be more stark. Most Haitians live in small, often remote, villages or isolated settlements, with no access to electricity, clean water, or social services. The struggle to attain an education is insurmountable for many Haitians. The travel distances to get to school, the costs of books, uniforms, and school supplies, and the need for children to work full time to keep the family fed negates the limited availability of some abecedarian education offered by churches and other charitable organizations. Over half of the adult population of Haitians are estimated to be illiterate. Health care and access to quality medicine are also a major problem for the overwhelming majority of Haitians. A family member falling ill can often mean the financial undoing of the entire family, as access to affordable health care is nonexistent and a family's net worth is often the sum of their livestock.
Existence in the bustling slums of Port-au-Prince is arguably worse than life in remote Haitian villages, with overcrowding, disease, and squalor widespread. Those who work can expect to earn no more than two US dollars per day, hardly enough to buy food, let alone other necessities. The majority, however, must scrape some sort of living from the informal sector. Figures for child mortality, communicable diseases, and life expectancy reveal the country's poverty and deprivation. According to the Pan-American Health Organization, approximately 380,000 Haitians—over 5 percent of the population—were infected with HIV/AIDS by 2000. However, living in the slums of the capital of Haiti has afforded some children the opportunity to be housed and educated by a charitable organization called RENMEN, which will be discussed at length later.

Natural Disasters of 2010
(Brittany) This year, 2010, has been one of unprecedented national suffering for Haiti. The poor of the country have always been subjected to dismally limited access to food, water, sanitation, health care, education, electricity, housing, and economic opportunity; the list could go on and on. The aftermath of the Earthquake stripped the poorest of the country of the few possessions they had, and made their daily struggles ever harder. It also contributed heftily to the conditions that lead to the cholera outbreak in October. This cholera outbreak was made worse by Hurricane Tomas, which struck Haiti at the end of November. The heavy winds and rains destroyed and flooded many camps, which sprung up as temporary housing in response to the earthquake. The flooding, in combination with the crowded, unsanitary conditions of these camps, allowed for rapid transmission of cholera. In short, poverty was the reason the earthquake was so devastating, the earthquake was the reason the cholera was so devastating, and the hurricane added again to the devastation of the cholera epidemic. The conditions of Haiti and the natural disasters added onto one another and compounded.

January 12, 2010: The Earthquake
(Brittany) On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck the capital of Haiti, Port-au-Prince. This was the strongest earthquake to hit Haiti since the year 1770. Before the earthquake, 86% of people residing in Port-au-Prince lived in slum conditions; they called tightly packed, poorly constructed and unstable concrete structures their homes. Half of the residents of Port-au-Prince had access to latrines, and only one third had access to tap water. These were the dire conditions of the poor in Port-au-Prince before the devastating earthquake.

(Lauren) The earthquake in Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010 has had a drastic impact on the lives of the Haitian people. Before the earthquake many Haitians lived in deep poverty, but now after the earthquake even more people live with poverty. The living conditions are horrendous now that the earthquake has hit. People are forced to live on the streets in extremely unhealthy conditions. Hospitals, shanty houses, and schools have all been brought to ruins. The effects of the earthquake have been so devastating that the country has been in need of international assistance since and the many problems that Haiti was facing before the earthquake have only escalated. Poverty, poor infrastructure, limited or nonexistent access to adequate health care, education, and shelter, are all problems that have grown exponentially worse since the earthquake.
Approximately 2,000,000 people were living in the most affected area. A estimated 220,000 people were left dead in the ruins of the earthquake, with countless other sustaining serious injury. Over 180,000 homes were destroyed in the earthquake, and around 1.5 million people were left homeless due to the vast destruction. These people, displaced from their homes, have moved into crowded camps, with highly unsanitary and unhealthy conditions. These camps are highly vulnerable to rapid spread of disease, and over 100,000 people are living in camps with extreme vulnerability to tropical storms, hurricanes, and flooding. Access to food and water in these camps is limited, and the inhabitants struggle daily to survive.

The earthquake has had a drastic effect on the children of Haiti and the educational system. In Haiti, only 21% of females and 18% of males attend a secondary school. However, since the earthquake 95% of school building in the immediate area of Port-au-Prince have been destroyed; approximately 5,000 school buildings have been transformed to rubble. The situation on the ground at present remains desperate, and most educational staff are still dealing with immediate urgencies, such as food and water. With no school buildings and/or educational staff, the children have no opportunity to attend school or receive further education at all. The educational sector was hit extremely hard and the recovery time will take much coordinated effort from many for years to come.

Although the majority of Haitians living around Port-au-Prince were impacted tremendously by the 7.0 Richter scale earthquake, the rich in Haiti escaped practically unscathed. The inhabitants of Petionville, a town high above the capital, suffered no fatalities, and most of their buildings sustained nary a crack in their foundations. Some homes sustained damage, but the owners can afford to rebuild and fix the damages. Many of the families who lived in this town fled the country until conditions improved, but still others remained behind, conducting their business as usual. The church had mass the Sunday after the earthquake and the hotel remained open for business. Instead of scrounging for food and clean water like the poor suffering below, the rich merely have to worry that they can't get gas for their SUVs and the golf course has been closed for the time being. The contrast between the lives of the rich and poor has become ever more stark as a result of the horrendous natural disaster.

October 2010: Cholera Outbreak

An outbreak of cholera was confirmed in Haiti on October 21, 2010. Cholera had not been documented in Haiti for decades, making cholera outbreaks seem unlikely in Haiti immediately following the earthquake in January 2010. According to the Center for Disease Control, for a cholera outbreak to occur, two conditions have to be met: 1) there must be significant breaches in the water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure used by groups of people, permitting large-scale exposure to food or water contaminated with Vibrio cholerae organisms; and 2) cholera must be present in the population. While it is unclear how cholera was re-introduced to Haiti, both of these conditions now exist. Over 400 deaths were confirmed in the country and over 6000 people have been infected.

Cholera infection is most often asymptomatic or causes a mild gastroenteritis. However, about 5% of infected persons develop severe, dehydrating, acute watery diarrhea. The first line of treatment for cholera is rehydration. Administration of oral rehydration salts and, when necessary, intravenous fluids and electrolytes in a timely manner with adequate volumes
will reduce case-fatality rates to <1%. Severe cases of cholera should be treated with antimicrobial agents to which the circulating strain is susceptible. Antimicrobial treatment is not recommended for mild cases of cholera and should never be used as “chemoprophylaxis” to prevent cholera on a mass scale.

(Brittany) As with other causes of acute watery diarrhea, the prevention and control of cholera require surveillance, heightened measures to ensure the safety of drinking water and food, and appropriate facilities and practices for disposal of feces and for hand washing. Although using vaccines to control an outbreak of cholera is complex, oral cholera vaccines are being considered for use among high-risk populations in Haiti, since the measures taken to prevent the spread of cholera are unavailable to masses of people who have been displaced from their homes due to the earthquake. These precautions are 1) Drink and use safe water. Safe water is water that is bottled with an unbroken seal, has been boiled, or has been treated with a chlorine product. 2) Wash hands often with soap and safe water. If no soap is available, scrub hands often with ash or sand and rinse with safe water. 3) Use latrines or bury your feces, do not defecate in any body of water. 4) Cook food well (especially seafood), eat it hot, keep it covered, and peel fruits and vegetables. 5) Clean up safely—in the kitchen and in places where your family bathes and washes clothes. As was mentioned in the portion about the earthquake, though, the sanitary conditions and facilities available to people forced to inhabit camps is not contusive to these measures. Even before the earthquake, only one third of Haitians had access to latrines, and only half had access to running water. The easiest and most important preventative measures for cholera are therefore unattainable for the majority of Haitians.

(Brittany) Again, though, the rich of Haiti can be safe from the spread of this disease, in distinct contrast the poor. They have access to running water, sanitation, reliable healthcare, and safe food and water to consume. If they so choose, they can leave Haiti until the conditions improve, avoiding the outbreak altogether.

November 2010: Hurricane Tomas
(Brittany) Hurricane Tomas, a storm which ranged from a tropical storm to a category 2 hurricane, struck Haiti in early November of 2010. Haiti was largely spared a direct strike by the hurricane's 85 mph core. Port au Prince, which was already devastated by an earthquake in January, had escaped wholesale disaster though areas west of the city had suffered heavy flooding, landslides, structural destruction and the loss of crops. Many of the capital's tented camps and shantytowns, which house the majority of the 1.3 million people whose homes were wiped out in an earthquake ten months ago, were however awash with mud and floodwater, which President René Préval warned could be breeding a bigger threat. The disease is spread through contaminated food and water and can spread quickly in floodwaters.

Educational Inequity
(Brittany) Education is supposed to be the great equalizer in society, meant to be a way for people born into poverty to rise above the conditions of their birth, meet their full potential, and by improving their own conditions, help to improve those of all people in their homeland. Ideally, this is the way education should work. Unfortunately, this is far from reality.
Education has always been a dominant force with the potential to increase opportunity, promote social mobility, and establish intellectual growth. However, a student's socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and community can hinder his/her educational outcomes. Despite the oratory and various policies created, educational inequity still persist both locally and internationally. Educational inequity is the lack of equal opportunities that students face as a result of differences in quality education and other factors depending on that student's socioeconomic status and upbringing. A student's socioeconomic status and community holds a drastic position in determining the overall educational ability of a student. Students of low-income communities are also primarily children of color, which gives space for "an added burden of societal low expectations and discrimination" to arise (Teach for America). Even though all students have the same potential to achieve, students in low-income communities are often challenged with insufficient housing, nutrition, health, and often lack of access to high-quality schooling. (Teach for America)

In America today, up to 13 million children are living in poverty and being faced with the effects of educational disparity (Teach for America). Imagine here in one of the wealthiest countries known for its vast opportunities, freedom, and power to achieve dreams, that this many children are still challenged with inadequate education. Now imagine a place like Haiti, known for being the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, with its continuous influence from environmental degradation, instability, and dictatorship, how many more students suffer from educational disparity than the 13 million in America (BBC news). Haiti has now been forced in dealing with the aftermath of a devastating 7.0 grade earthquake as well. Even though the earthquake happened almost a year ago, the people of Haiti are still suffering everyday and the country is still in shambles. This earthquake has put a further personal, social, and educational detriment on the lives of the Haitian people. Educational inequity lies in every crack and crevasse of the globe, in some countries more than others. However, something must be done to help alleviate and/or eliminate the educational inequity that occurs here in our backyard and around the globe.

UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: GOAL NUMBER 2:
(Brittany) The Millennium Development Goals are eight international development goals that the members of the United Nations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. These are goals that are agreed to be extremely important for the good of the world's population at large. After eliminating hunger and extreme poverty, universal education is second on this list. The very high position of education on this list indicates the recognition of the international community that education is extremely important.

(Brittany) Specifically, every child in the world should be able to enroll in and complete a primary education. The completion rate of primary education in Haiti is 27%; a pretty low rate. Also, the average years of schooling attained by adults in Haiti is 2.8 years. Haiti is definitely one of the countries that desperately needs educational equality.

THE RENMEN FOUNDATION:
(Lauren) The RENMEN Foundation is a non-profit organization in La Plaine du Cul de Sac, north of Port au Prince, which provides education, food, clothing, shelter, medical care and
recreation to the many children there. RENMEN stands for Recuperation des Enfants Necessiteux et Mal Encadres, which means the Recuperation of the Needy and Underprivileged Children. Their mission statement is, in part, "To empower minority youth and family, to recognize their talents and dreams to enable them in reaching their long term goals in order to be self-reliant; and to promote a healthy and loving home environment for the many abandoned, malnourished and impoverished children."

(Lauren) One of the future goals of the RENMEN Orphanage is to create professional school for the continuation of education. By providing an educational system, RENMEN Orphanage is helping to achieve equal educational opportunities for the children. Creating a professional school system would have a significant impact on the education and overall lives of the children and help to alleviate the effects of educational inequity. Through encouragement, the children have the opportunity to see that they can overcome the statistics of their country and achieve their future educational aspirations.

The Service Project: Pen Pal Organization

(Lauren) The focus of our project is to establish a pen pal organization with the children of the Renmen Foundation in Haiti in hopes to inspire and motivate these children to prosper in their future educational and personal goals. The letters will also provide the children with a chance to practice learning English and their English writing and reading skills. To achieve this goal, as a group we plan to devout our time in contacting various students at Rutgers University and other individuals interested in writing a letter to one of the children. We hope to attain a concrete grouping of individuals who differ in various interests but all share the common desire in providing the children with a role-model figure in which they can look up to and feel comfortable in talking to. We will discuss with the individuals that choose to write a letter the political history of Haiti and how this may correlate to why the country is so poor, which causes many of the children of the country to become homeless and have to live in orphanages, like the Renmen Foundation. We will also discuss with them the devastation of the earthquake and the outbreak of cholera that has and may affect the children of the Renmen Foundation. These individuals will then write a letter to a specific child from the foundation who had wrote to another group’s letters from last semester. There were 24 letters received from the children who wrote back, thus 24 people will each write a letter to one of the children. For the other children at the foundation they will each be provided with one letter that will be constructed that focuses on the interest of their education and everyday lives. The letter will be translated in both English and Creole.

(Lauren) In order to obtain individuals interested in writing a pen pal letter we will inform the Rutgers community, friends, and other individuals by creating a Facebook page, writing editorials to various newspapers, and attending HARU meetings. Creating a Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/home.php?sk=group_168299606526597&ap=1) discussing our mission will offer individuals direct and easy access in contacting our group in regards to becoming a pen pal and writing a letter. The Facebook page will also allow an area where individuals can comment on how they feel about our mission, provide feedback, and maybe even speak of things they have done to help the Haitian community. The Facebook page will be called, "RU Reaching Out" Pen pals: Haiti Renmen Foundation. It will contain various
pictures of the children of the Renmen Foundation found on their website (http://www.renmenhaiti.org) and also information on our mission and how individuals could further contact us to get involved. Each group member will then write an editorial to a different newspaper in hopes that it will be published in order to further inform the Rutgers community as well as a larger majority of individuals in our local communities. Lauren will write to the Rutgers Targum, Brittany will write to the Home News Tribune, and Chad will write to The New York Times. We also will compose an e-mail, rureachingout@gmail.com , where individuals who find out about our mission through our editorials and/or through their friends can contact us. As a group we will all attend meetings for the HARU association present at Rutgers University. HARU is an association on Rutgers campus composed mostly of students of Haitian descent who educate the Rutgers community about the history and culture of Haiti. We would like to involve many of the members of HARU with our project in hopes that they incorporate it as a program into their club so that our mission will continue to prosper even after the course is completed. If not, we hope to establish our own club at Rutgers University to continue to recruit students to write letters to the children of the Renmen Foundation and make our project a prominent one in the Rutgers community.

(Lauren) As a group we will stay in continuous contact with Noreen Slabotsky. She works to help the children of the Renmen Foundation from Florida and she will act as our direct link to help us in further contacting the director of the foundation, Florence Thybulle. Working with Ms. Slabotsky we will help us in asking the director of the Renmen Foundation if she would like to involve the children with our project in exchanging pen pal letters. It is very beneficial that we have someone here in the United States, like Ms. Slabotsky, that can directly contact Ms. Thybulle and provide our group with the information that we need to send the letters to the children of the Renmen Foundation.

(Lauren) In addition to sending the children of the Renmen Foundation pen pal letters, we would also like to send some donations from different organizations that the HARU association has previously worked with. One of the future projects of the Renmen Foundation is to construct a professional school where continuous education will be available for their young adults. By providing donations to Renmen Foundation, this project and their other future projects may be able to happen. We will contact these organizations through phone calls and e-mails discussing with them our group’s purpose and goals in hopes that they would like to make a donation to the Renmen Foundation so they can achieve their goal in creating a professional school for the children.

Results
(Lauren) As a group we were able to successfully acquire 24 individuals that would write a pen pal letter to each child in the foundation who had wrote a letter that was received last semester. The individuals who wrote letters were mostly Rutgers students who found out about our project by speaking to our fellow classmates, our Facebook page, and the members of the HARU association. The individuals who wrote the letters were very passionate in writing them and hope to continue their relationship with the child they had wrote to by further exchanging letters. Each individual provided information about himself or herself based upon his/her own interests and education. They also wrote about the different interests and information that each child had wrote about in their letter in order to establish a connection with that child.
(Lauren) The members of the HARU association helped us greatly in translating the letters that were written in Creole. They all seemed to share a deep common interest in our project and some of the members were willing to write letters as well. We are working with the HARU association in asking them to incorporate our project as a continuing part of their association. HARU has just recently informed us that they would like to take apart and solidify our mission so that it continues for a long time to come at Rutgers University. HARU was very humbled by our mission and have already sent us about 15 letters to send to the children of the Renmen Foundation and they will continue writing with fellow students and our group members after each round of letters even after the semester has completed. They had also been kind enough to invite us to one of their biggest events on campus, Evening in the Heart of Haiti on December 12th. As a group we will be attending the event to speak to various individuals about our mission and ask for donations for the Renmen Foundation.

(Lauren) Unfortunately, we were not able to create our own club where we could center our project as the main focus. It is a very long process to create a club here at Rutgers University and involves much funding and permission from various departments and we were not able to successfully receive all of these.

(Lauren) Although we were unable to have any of our editorials published, we were still able to notify many individuals through our Facebook group. Our Facebook group was an excellent way to provide many with the information they needed to get involved and understand what we would like to achieve with our project. The number of members we have within our Facebook group is increasing everyday and we hope that this will be a way to continue our mission as well. Many have also been e-mailing us through our e-mail (rureachingout@gmail.com) and asking us how they can further get involved with the Renmen Foundation.

(Lauren) Florence Thybulle, the director of the Renmen Foundation, was very pleased to hear that we would like to write pen pal letters to the children and said that it would be a “positive step and pleasure”. She also extended her invitation to our group members and volunteers who had wrote letters by inviting us to spend some time with the children for a few weeks in Haiti; this would serve as an exchange program in which the children could learn from us and vice versa. We are hoping to accumulate students at Rutgers University who may be interested in going to Haiti as a continuation of our mission. Lauren within our group has actually been very interested in volunteering at the Renmen Foundation and taking part in an exchange program at the foundation in the summer of 2011. She has been gathering various Rutgers students and faculty who may be interested in your going through our e-mail, Facebook page, and Youtube video. She has also been planning to create different fundraisers to raise money to fund the airfare to the foundation.

(Lauren) Our group was also informed that there was 63 children at the Renmen Foundation, thus we sent the 24 letters written to each child from last semester and also 60 copies of the one letter written for the rest of the children at the foundation. We will be sending the letters to Florida where it will then be sent to Haiti with the help of Professor Fagan. We hope that the children will write back and be inspired by the letters that were written to them.
(Chad) One thing that many people find easy to forget is that one of the greatest helps when a person is going through hard times is having a sympathetic ear to listen to your troubles. Even when you don't want to talk about your troubles, just knowing you have someone to talk to can ease your mind and it's always nice to have someone that you can have a normal conversation with without any troubles that normally make up life. By sending letters to the Renmen Foundation in Haiti, we hope to provide this for those who would otherwise be having a very difficult time. Our hope is to inspire those who are struggling to not give up and to remember that the world is not necessarily an uncaring place. They may have a lot of issues facing them, which they must overcome, but it is always helpful to know that someone somewhere supports you.

(Chad) One letter can hardly counteract the aftereffects of the earthquake Haiti faced earlier this year, or the hurricane season that periodically comes their way, or even the recent outbreak of cholera that has begun to plague their country. However, a letter is a way to remind someone down on their luck that the universe isn't against them. The world is not a cruel heartless place, and somewhere out there is a person who is willing to reach out in a gesture of goodwill.

(Chad) The best part of all about a letter is that it does not take someone with extraordinary abilities to send one. You don't have to donate money or move down in order to volunteer physical labor, which is beyond the means of many kind people who may wish to help. This is something that everyone can do without it having to be a big sacrifice in their lives.

(Chad) Furthermore by sending letters, we give them a chance to practice reading and writing in English. Many children at the Renmen Foundation are attempting to learn English well enough to be somewhat fluent in it so that they can better their situations by opening up more opportunities in other places.
References


Editorials

Editorial: “Disadvantaged and Education” by Lauren Bruscino
Submitted to Rutgers Daily Targum

Within education lies the power for much potential, growth, and achievement. As college students, we have all been given the opportunity to obtain a degree of education that unfortunately is not an option for many individuals due to certain socioeconomic constraints. A student’s socioeconomic status and community holds a drastic position in determining the overall educational ability of a student. When we had all stepped foot onto Rutgers University our freshman year, we were given the capability to progress with our educational careers and succeed beyond certain educational boundaries. However, for some students their educational journeys are stopped short before they are able to reach college and/or even high school due to the influences of educational inequity. In America today, there are still many students who are not able to further their education and are still challenged with inadequate education. Even in America, known as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, educational inequity still finds its way to prosper. Now take into consideration a country like Haiti known for being the poorest nation in the Americas with its continuous influence from environmental degradation, instability, and dictatorship, how many more students suffer from educational disparity. In the recent year, Haiti has been faced with dealing with the aftermath of a devastating 7.0 earthquake that has left the country in shambles. This earthquake has put a further personal, sociable, and educational detriment on the lives of the Haitian people. Educational inequity lies in every crack and crevasse of the globe, in some countries more than others. However, something can be done to help alleviate and/or eliminate the educational inequity that occurs here in our backyard and around the globe.

As college students, we have the ability to impact the lives of students that are being faced with such educational inequity. We can be seen as someone who these students look up to as a mentor and guide them in striving to overcome these boundaries placed on their education. We can tell them our stories and challenges we had to face in reaching this point in our education and reassure them that they too can make it to this point as well. “RU Reaching Out” is a pen-pal program currently formed here at Rutgers University in which current college students can write to students in places, which suffer from educational inequity and respond to those students and provide help and advice on educational aspects of that student’s life. This program gives these students in low-socioeconomic areas someone they can speak to about their education and obtain the encouragement to succeed in education. “RU Reaching Out” will be writing to RENMEN Orphanage, a non-profit organization in La Plain du Cul de Sac, north of Port au Prince where the earthquake had hit. The Orphanage provides education, food, clothing, shelter, medical care and recreation to many children there. One of the future goals of the RENMEN Orphanage is to create a professional school for the continuation of education. By providing an educational system, RENMEN Orphanage is helping to achieve equal educational opportunities for the children. As a college student involved in “RU Reaching Out”, you are providing those children at RENMEN Orphanage with the opportunity to discuss the changes they would like to see in their education and what can be done to achieve in furthering their education. Sometimes children just need that extra encouragement to progress to that next step in their lives, whether it is education or another obstacle. “RU Reaching Out” would like any students who would like to
participate in the program to get involved. However, the program would prefer some students who speak Creole, because many of the children at RENMEN Orphanage speak only this language. Please contact “RU Reaching Out” at rureachingout@gmail.com Thank you.

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Editorial: by Chad Weibel
Submitted to New York Times

With elections in the immediate future, there has been a lot of talk about various issues that have relevance to politics such as immigration, taxes, and health care. However one of the predominant issues seems to be that of education. All the politicians seem to agree that education is important and deserving of more funding, but none of them seem to have any idea about what to do with that funding. Speeches have been made about leaving no child left behind and plans talked of to allow a child to go to any school regardless of location or economic constraints but with the government in such high deficit and several years of similar speeches resulting in no real progress it seems clear that the government is not in a position to do anything significant.

So with education being important, yet no one able to significantly improve it, it would seem that nothing can be done. However in some ways ordinary people can make a difference that no organization can even attempt. Encouragement and support is something that is surprising helpful for a child to advance and excel in learning, and is something that anyone can supply.

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Editorial: “Education: The Great Equalizer” by Brittany Greene
Submitted to Home News Tribune via email to hntletter@mycentraljersey.com

It is very sad that the town of your birth has such an extreme impact on your access to quality education. Education is supposed to be the great equalizer in the United States, but in fact educational inequality perpetuates the divide between the rich and the poor. Students growing up in poverty already have to overcome hurdle after hurdle in life in order to find success, and their struggles are made ever-more daunting when you consider the inadequate educational resources they are provided with.

I went to a high school that served a working class and working poor population, which was under funded and wrought with disciplinary problems. At my high school if you weren't in honors and AP classes your education was horrendously stunted. I witnessed many of my peers fall by the wayside by the time they were in middle school, getting caught up in drugs, alcohol, and sex. I was one of the lucky ones who was born with natural talents for academics and had a mother who cared very much about my education. The few "college prep" classes I took were so easy it was ridiculous, and some people still failed these classes. Even my honors and advanced placement classes were a cakewalk for me, which in one way makes me very lucky but in others it is unfortunate. I graduated fifth in my class of 450+ without ever studying. This might sound impressive but it put me at a serious disadvantage when I got to college and had no idea how to...
study. I met people at Rutgers who had taken Organic Chemistry in high school, who were already familiar with the lab equipment in chemistry (I had not one chemistry lab while taking honors chemistry), and who generally had vastly superior educations under their belts. This is a pretty subjective view of educational inequality, so consider the following. Compare the educational situations of students from Camden versus students from Cherry Hill. The city of Camden, NJ is one of the most socio-economically depressed in the United States. 38.8% of residents have incomes below the poverty level in 2007, compared with just 8.6% of New Jersey residents. The vast majority of those living in poverty in Camden are school age children. Additionally, Camden suffers from some of the highest crime rates in the nation, being named Americas Most Dangerous City in 2009 by the CQ Press.

Students living in poverty and crime-stricken communities must overcome extreme challenges to reach college. Their struggles extend well beyond the classroom. They are more likely than suburban New Jersey youths to hold part time jobs to help support their families, fall victim to violent crime, and have limited access to healthcare, nutrition, or adequate housing. They are more likely to live in single-parent homes, and less likely to have a parent who attended college.

Given the struggles of its student population, it is not surprising that Camden’s public schools under perform compared with their more privileged, suburban counterparts. During the 2008-2009 school year only 19.5% of Camden High School students scored Proficient on the High School Proficiency Assessment, and 0% scored Advanced Proficient. The state average is 70.9% Proficient and 13.6% Advanced Proficient. A mere 10 miles down NJ Route 70 lies Cherry Hill East, where 63.5% of students score Proficient and 32.6% score Advanced Proficient on the HSPA. SAT scores are similarly poor, but even more concerning is the low percentage of students who take the SAT in the first place. Only 31% of Camden High School students takes the SAT, compared with 63% statewide and 78% at Cherry Hill East. Also, 0% of students attending Camden High School are enrolled in Advanced Placement classes (for which you can receive college credits), compared with 19% statewide and 26.9% at Cherry Hill East.

A dismally small percentage of Camden High School students plan to attend college; only 15.0%, compared with 73.5% of Cherry Hill East students. This is very sad considering that Rutgers University has a campus in the very city these students reside. These students must overcome extreme struggles to reach college, and also are very unlikely to have a close role model or mentor who has gone to college to encourage, inspire, and help them achieve this feat. Even in the so-called land of opportunity, in a relatively progressive state with a high median income and standard of living, educational inequity rears its ugly head. Students who attend Camden public schools are at a distinct disadvantage not only because of limited access to quality education, but because of their poverty-stricken homes and family lives as well. Encouragement and inspiration from people who have overcome similar odds could be help these students envision a different future for themselves; a college future.

Statistics in this letter were obtained from:
http://education.state.nj.us/rc/rc09/dataselect.php?c=07&d=0680&s=030&dataset=RL
Dear Pen Pal,

Hello! My name is Lauren. I am writing you from the United States in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I would like to tell you about myself. I am a student at Rutgers University majoring in Biology. I would like to become a science teacher after I graduate from college this year and hope to educate children like you about science. Do you learn about science in your classes at Renmen? What is your favorite subject to learn about in school? School is a wonderful place to figure out what interests you, and also to plan what you would like to become when you grow up. There are many opportunities when you continue going to school. If you work hard and do well in school you can become anything you would like to become. Many people have dreams of what they want to become when they get older, and when they stay in school they can achieve their dreams!

I love learning how to cook and making different types of food with my Mom. My favorite foods are rice and beans and seafood. What kind of foods do you like? I have never had food from Haiti, what does it taste like? I am Belizean and many Belizean people eat and like a lot of spicy foods, is a lot of food from Haiti spicy too?

I have lived in New Jersey all my life in a town called Secaucus, which is right next to New York City. I can see the Empire State Building from right out of my window! New York City is an amazing city where many people like to come and travel. These people are called "tourists", and they like to visit the Statue of Liberty and different tall buildings, see Broadway plays, and shop. I really like to travel! I have been to many different states in the United States and different countries. I have been to Florida, Michigan, California, New York, Maryland, Delaware, and Washington D.C. here in the United States. But I have also been to places outside of the United States, like Aruba, Bermuda, Poland, and Austria. My favorite place that I have gone to is Aruba. In Aruba there are many beautiful beaches where you can go swimming in the ocean, ride boats, and go scuba diving to see the different fish. I also love the tropical warm weather in Aruba, is it hot in Haiti all the time? Its not always hot in New Jersey, in the fall and winter it starts to become very cold and you have to wear very warm clothes to keep from getting cold.

My favorite color is purple. I like this color so much that I painted my whole room purple in my house! What is your favorite color? I also like to play a lot of different sports. My dad and brother are very good at playing sports so they have taught me how to play many. My favorite sports are baseball and hockey. Have you ever played baseball or hockey? Hockey is a sport where different people play on two teams and use wooden sticks to hit a round, flat ball shaped like a disc into a goal. People play this sport on the ice and wear ice skates to play. What is your favorite kind of sports?

I hope that after this letter I will have a friend from Haiti. I have never had a friend from another country before, but I hope after this letter I will. Please write me back and tell me about
yourself. I hope to hear from you soon and I cannot wait to learn about you! Write me back to me or e-mail me at rureaching@gmail.com.

Your New Friend,
Lauren

PEN PAL LETTER (CREOLE):

Chè Pen Pal,

Hello! Non mwen se Lauren. M'ap ekri ou nan Etazini yo nan New Brunswick, New Jersey. Mwen ta renmen di ou sou tèt mwen. Mwen se yon elèv nan Rutgers majeur University nan Biyoloji. Mwen ta renmen vin yon pwofesè syans apre mwen fin diplome nan kolèj ane sa a ak espwa edike timoun yo tankou ou sou syans. Èske w aprann sou syans nan klas ou a renmen? Ki sijè ou pi renmen aprann nan lekòl la? Lekòl la se yon kote ki bèl! Pou kalkile sa ki enterese ou, ak tou sa ki nan plan ou ta renmen vin lè ou grandi. Gen anpil opòtinite lè ou kontinye ale nan lekòl la. Si ou travay di, e fè byen nan lekòl ou ka vin anyen ou ta renmen vin. Anpil moun gen rèv nan sa yo vle vin yo lè yo vin gran, epis lè yo rete nan lekòl yo kapab reyalize rèv yo!

Mwen renmen aprann kouman kwit epi fè diferan kalite manje avèk manman m', manje ki pi renmen mwen yo diri ak pwa ak fwidmè. Ki kalite manje ou renmen? Mwen pa janm te gen manje nan Ayiti, sa fè li gou? I am Belizean ak anpil moun Belizean manje ak anpil tankou yon manje pikant, se yon anpil nan manje nan pikant Ayiti tou?


Koulè pi renmen mwen se vyolèt. Mwen renmen koulè sa a tèlman ke mwen pentire chanm antye mwen vyolèt nan kay mwen! Ki koulè prefere ou? Mwen tou renmen jwe anpil nan espò diferan. Papa m'ak frè yo tre bon nan jwe espò se konsa yo te moutre m' ki jan yo jwe anpil. Espò pi renmen mwen yo bezbòl yo ak hockey. Eske ou jann jwe bezbòl oswa hockey? Hockey se yon espò kote moun diferan jwe sou de kip yo e pou yo itilize baton an bwa frape yon won, plat boul fòm tankou yon disc nan yon objektif. Moun ki jwe espò sa a sou glas la ak mete glas woulèt yo jwe. Ki kalite renmen ou nan espò?

Mwen espere ke apre lèt sa a mwen pral gen yon zanmi ki soti Ayiti. Mwen pa te jann gen yon zanmi nan yon lòt peyi anvan ou, men mwen espere apre lèt sa a mwen pral. Tanpri ekri m
LETTER FROM FOUNDER

RENMEN Foundation, I Slabotsky, for your devotion you find a way.

I would also like to extend an invitation to volunteers interested to spend some time with the kids, as this can also serve as an exchange program in which one could learn from the other. For instance, this past June a group of 10 students from a different College and University spent 4 weeks at Renmen and were able to make a positive change in the life of many of our young ones.

The kids were happy, the experience was worthwhile and I was overjoyed. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you need additional information. You can visit us on our web: renmenhaiti.org and Renmen Foundation on Facebook.

Florence Thybulle
Founder and President

OF RENMEN FOUNDATION:

On behalf of the kids at the Foundation, I would like to thank YOU Mrs. to help the kids in Haiti, whenever it will be a positive step and pleasure, to have the student of the Rutgers University teaching our kid English by exchanging letters.

The kids were happy, the experience was worthwhile and I was overjoyed. Please let me know if you have any questions or if you need additional information. You can visit us on our web: renmenhaiti.org and Renmen Foundation on Facebook.

Florence Thybulle
Founder and President

Nurturing children to reach their full potential since 1992