

MEMORANDUM

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Record

DATE May 19, 1977

FROM : Assistant Director
Field Services Division, BE

SUBJECT: Current Status of Epidemic Aid to Haiti

SUMMARY

Three major problem areas are of current interest in Haiti. Only one--the urban electricity shortage in Port-au-Prince--is regarded by the government as an acute problem. Even then, the government seems concerned only with the potential political consequences of upper class and military disaffection, not with the adverse effect upon health that resulted from a secondary severe shortage of potable water. A major opportunity presented by this situation has been recognized and a Haitian-American working group has been formed with the charge to quantify the relationship between water and health. Such data are preliminary to appropriate economic investment in basic sanitation. Incredibly, no such studies have yet been carried out.

My current understanding of the situation in the Republic of Haiti is probably best described in terms of three major problem areas.

Problem One: The rural drought affecting the north, the northwest and the Ile de la Gonaive.

A normally expected winter rainfall for December of 1976 did not materialize in sufficient quantity to provide for agricultural crop production in these areas with the consequence that the corn (maize) crop failed. Corn is the staple of the rural peasant diet. The peasant, therefore, was forced to obtain more expensive grain. However, the peasant in rural Haiti already uses all of his barterable resources for food under normal circumstances. Thus, when he is forced to buy a more expensive grain than corn, he ends up with less food. Kwashiorkor, marasmus, and the resultant high infant and child mortality normally present can be expected to be increased under these circumstances. This year there was competition with successful coffee farmers from the south who, because of a rapid rise in the world market price of coffee, were able to buy much more rice than normal, thereby artificially inflating the internal price of rice in Haiti. All this was at a time when the