

High Illiteracy Rate in Haiti

INTRODUCTION

Haiti has a unique history. It contained numerous natural disasters, poverty, and political instability. Haiti is the second oldest independent country in the Western Hemisphere and is the oldest black republic in the world and was also the only country who successfully carried out a countrywide slave rebellion. Even though they have gained their independence, they were ruled by many dictators. During the colonial times, they were one of the richest agricultural land in the Americas but has sadly, now become the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. They have been unable to produce enough food to adequately feed its people, where most are malnourished. Their life expectancy is now low and infant mortality is high. 12 percent of babies die before their first birthday and one third of all children die before their fifth birthday. Today, Haiti's population is about 9.8 million people, with 77 percent of the people living in poverty, earning less than \$2 per day and their minimum wage only a mere \$0.25 per day. Their literacy rate is at a low 49 percent, meaning people from ages 1 and older cannot read or write a simple statement on their everyday life. Education has always been known as a way to make a better living, to improve your society, which is why UN Millennium Development Goal 2 is to achieve Universal Education. With education, you can find better jobs to provide for yourself and your family, to find better ways to make a living and pull yourself out of poverty.

OBJECTIVE

Determine if Geospatial Technologies can model potential factors contributing to illiteracy in Haiti, analyze situations of causes of illiteracy, and use it to develop potential solutions to solve illiteracy in Haiti.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ILLITERACY

There are many factors that contribute to Haiti's low rate of literacy, all are difficult to tackle. Most factors are linked to poverty that reigns throughout the whole country. Factors include: the government lack of contribution to education, lack of public schools which leads to more private schools, insufficient amount of qualified teachers, lack of physical access to education, school expenditures, language barriers, access to credit and insufficient amount of income.

GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION

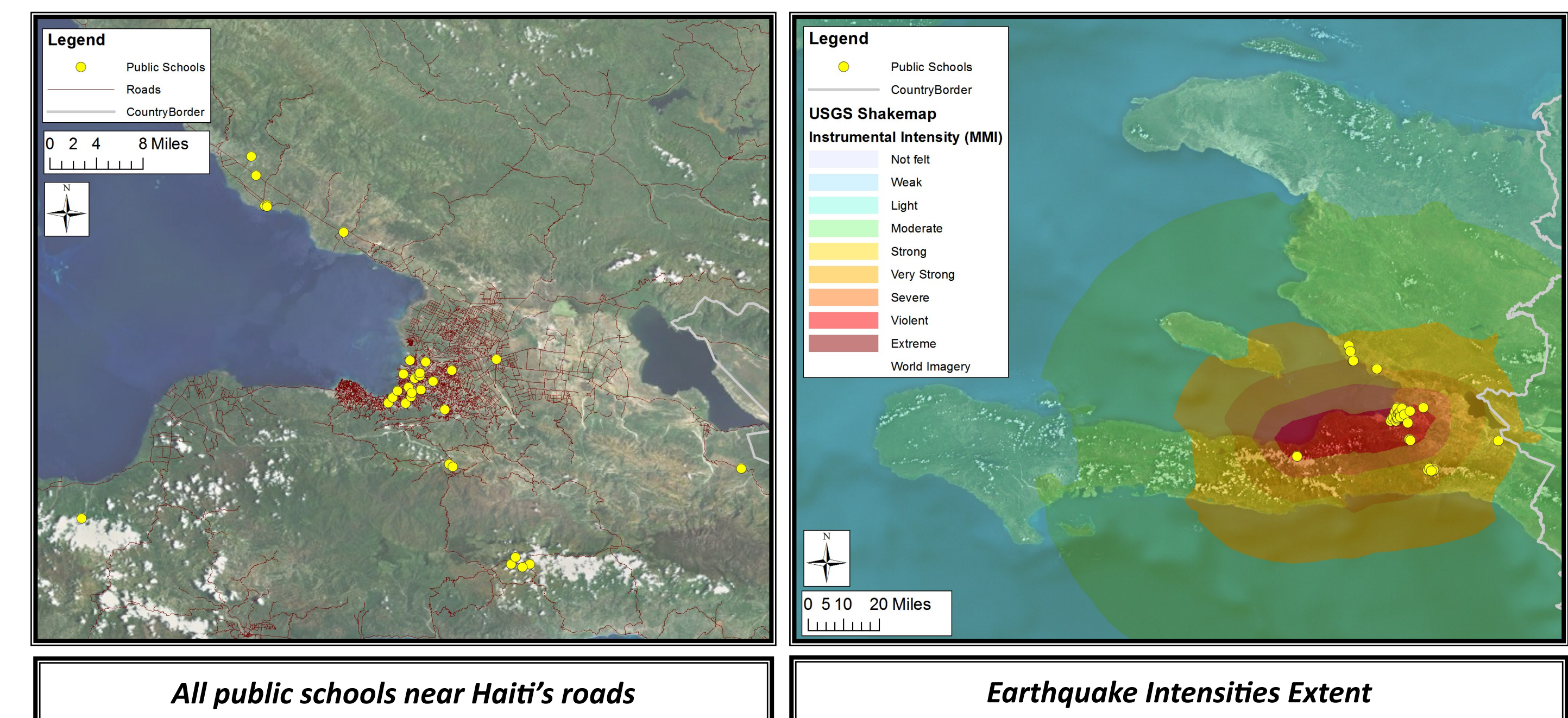
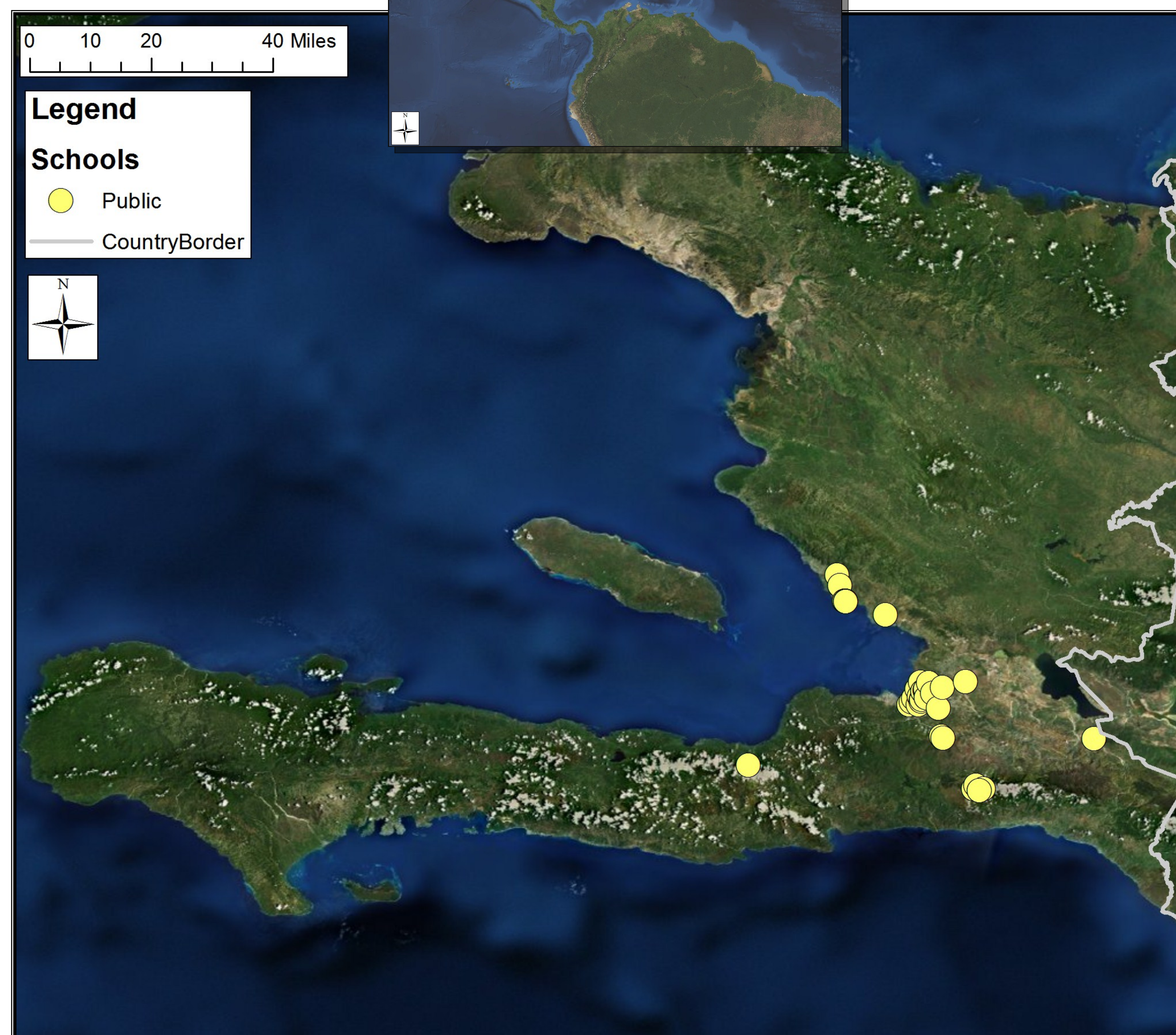
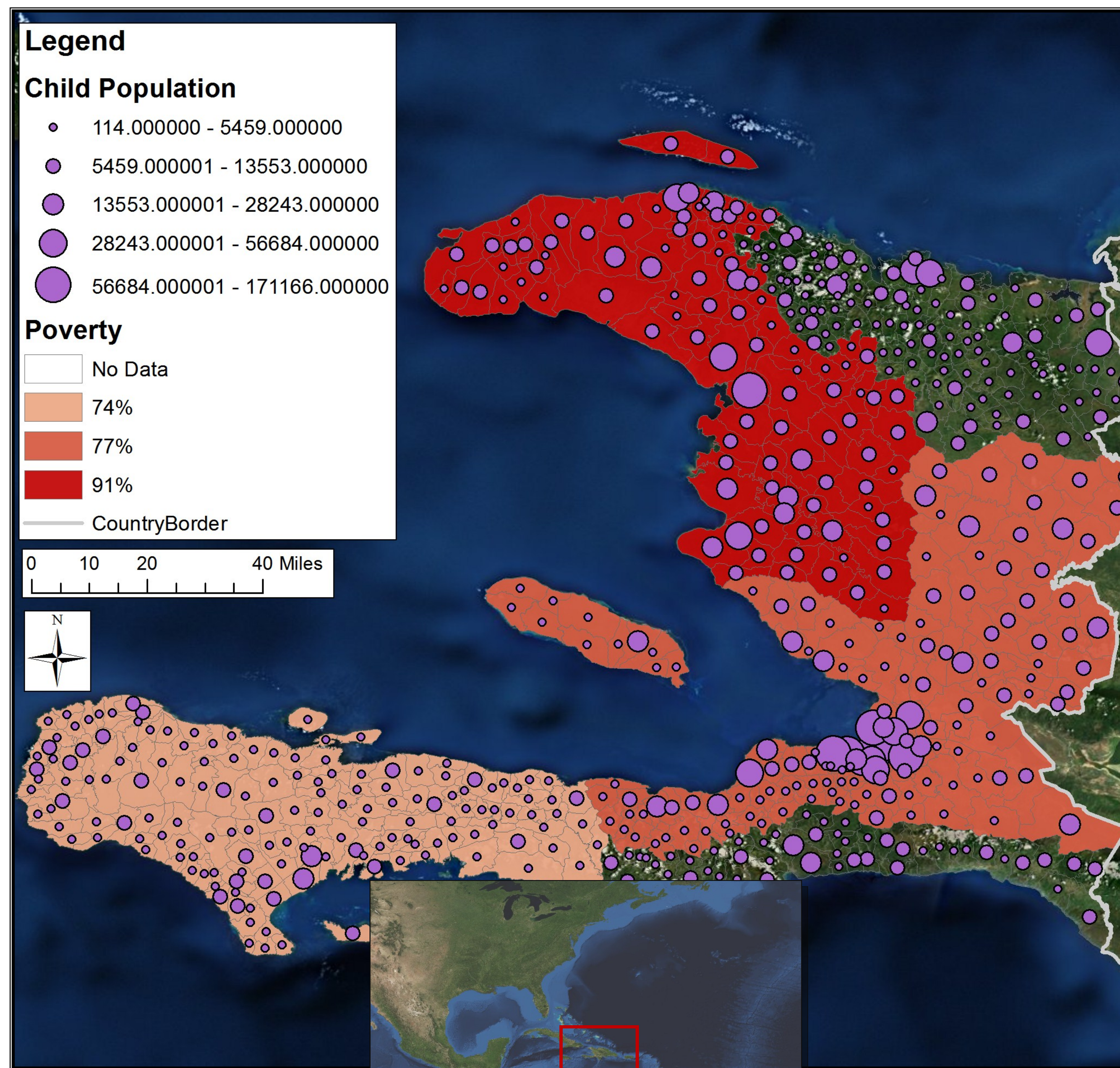
Even though the constitution of Haiti states that every child will be granted free basic education, it is not often ensured nor granted. It is stated that every Haitian has the right to 9 years of compulsory education, without school fees or costs for textbooks and other materials. Of course, this is far from reality, where only 10% of Haitian schools are public and still not free. Even with public education, parents still have to pay fees for uniforms, textbooks, supplies, and other materials. Haiti is one of the countries who has the lowest percent of government funding contributing to education with a mere 15% of total government expenditures, where 30% - 40% of government funds are from international aid. Haiti has also faced numerous corruption accounts where some of the funding for education has been pocketed.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Because of the lack of contributions made by the government of Haiti, private schools outnumber public schools, 90% of the schools are private. The few public schools are only built near the capital of Haiti, Port au Prince. The rest of the population does not have any access to any education nearby. Access is difficult for the children when they have to commute to schools that are more than miles by foot. For those children that are lucky enough to live near a public school might not even be lucky enough to be able to afford it. Since most of the population live in poverty, it is more important to pay rent and put food on the table. Expenditures are far more expensive for private schools, which are more spread throughout the country.

INSUFFICIENT AMOUNT OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS

There are a scarce amount of qualified teachers to teach students lucky enough to be able to afford education. Most of the teachers that are hired have only been to school a few grades above the students they are teaching now, some only have high school degrees. Even though being a teacher is a job that is considered a higher paying job, teachers still need a second job to pay for living expenses. Teachers are usually underpaid or have late paychecks. Because of this, they have to find second jobs which takes up the time that they should use to improve their teaching skills.



ACCESS TO CREDIT

Many Haitian families live on their income from agricultural farming. Because families do not get their bigger income until the harvest, they cannot make the deadline to pay for school for their child. School expenditures are to be paid earlier than when most Haitian families can come up with the large amount of income. Many Haitians state that if there was a way they can obtain credit, they can pay the school with credit and when their bigger income arrives, they can pay off their credit.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

All of Haitians speak and understand Creole. Officially the language for the country of Haiti is French, where everything is official is written in French and business is handled through the French dialect. The schools are also taught in French, which provides an extra barrier as to why it is hard for children to move on to the next grade. The insufficient teachers would also have a hard time teaching in this language, causing children who are able to take exams (when able to afford exam fees) to fail most of the time. The government of Haiti refuses to make Creole an official language.

SCHOOL EXPENDINTURES

As mentioned above, school fees are very expensive, where most Haitian families are not able to afford it. Public school fees are around \$2.5USD per year, but the costs rises when adding costs of a uniform, materials, textbooks, and exams. A few Haitian families would be able to afford to give their child a year of education but once the exams come around, they are not able to afford the exam fees, causing repeating grades or dropouts. Private schools are around \$64USD per year for admission and an additional \$9USD per month throughout the year plus uniform costs, textbooks, materials and exams at the end of the year.

LOW INCOME

Poverty is the main issue as to why the country has a low rate of literacy. 77% of the Haitian population live in poverty, \$2 or under a day. Their minimum wage is only \$.025 a day. Because so many families are living under poverty, they cannot provide expenses for education and cannot afford extra help during the harvests or whenever needed. If a child is lucky enough to go to school, he or she might miss class for a couple of weeks or longer to help parents during the harvests. This causes the child to miss out on a large amount of learning to where they cannot catch up and pass exams or just to simply later dropout. Some parents are also willing to send their child across the border illegally to work in the Dominican Republic because there are more jobs and higher wages. There, a child can face harassment of all kinds and will be unsafe because of discrimination.

CONCLUSION

To tackle such a simple yet complex problem, you would have to first fix their government. To have a stronger government that is more contributing education and more concerned about their people would help immensely. Once the government contribute more to education, there would be more public schools that the people can access that might actually be free to go to so families would not have to worry about expenditures. Once there is more education, there will be more children graduating and staying school, getting a higher education. The higher education will provide more sufficient teachers where the cycle of teaching will continue. With more funds, teachers will not be underpaid and will have more time working on their teaching strategies. With more educated children, there will be more adults with higher paying jobs that will help the economy grow. Of course, it is easier said than done, Haiti still has a long journey to travel before getting rid of this problem.

SOURCES

ESRI (<http://www.esri.com/data/free-data/index.html>) • ArcGIS (<http://www.esri.com/software/arcgis/index.html>) • Re-building Haiti Now (www.RebuildingHaitiNow.org) • Haiti Humanitarian Response (<http://haiti.humanitarianresponse.info/Default.aspx?tabid=94>) • World Bank (www.WorldBank.com) • CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ha.html>) • Haiti Earthquake Data Portal (http://cegrp.cga.harvard.edu/haiti/?q=resources_data) • USGS (<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/recenteqsww/Quakes/us2010rja6.php>) • Fafo (<http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/755/755.pdf>) • Global Security (<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/haiti/intro.htm>) • Earth Trends (<http://earthtrends.wri.org/povlinks/country/haiti.php>)

