

*Reports from the field*

# Answering THE CALL

*January 2007*

*“...I have indeed  
seen the misery  
of My people...  
I am concerned  
about their suffering.”  
(Exodus 3:7, NIV)*



**FOOD FOR THE POOR, INC.**

# Forgotten Families: Life on “the Line”

They came running from the hills. They begged for food in guttural grunts, their bodies heaving and bellowing like animals. But they were not animals. They were little children — desperately starving little children.

Their famished mouths uttered no words. Surprised to see visitors, their expressions of hunger were limited to outstretched hands and frantic moans.

When one child was offered bread, the others fell to the ground in search of crumbs. When an entire piece of bread fell to the ground, they all aggressively scrapped for it, scratching and clawing for any

means of nourishment — for who knew how long it would be until anyone visited this desolate “no-man’s-land” again?

These starving children and their families live along “la linea,” or “the line” — the border and international road that separate the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Throughout central and northern Haiti, randomly placed cement markers signify Haitian territory, while a fence outlines the Dominican side of the island of Hispaniola.

*“...the children beg for bread, but no one gives it to them.”  
(Lamentations 4:4b, NIV)*

Locals refer to this border area as “el corte,” or “the cut” — a place where forgotten families continue to endure extreme poverty every day.

*(continued on page 4)*



Without using words, famished Haitian children beg visitors for bread. Their outstretched hands, pleading eyes and heavy grunts fully convey their desperation.



Hungry children chase after a visitor's car in hopes of receiving more bread. Visitors to the desolate region are few and far between.

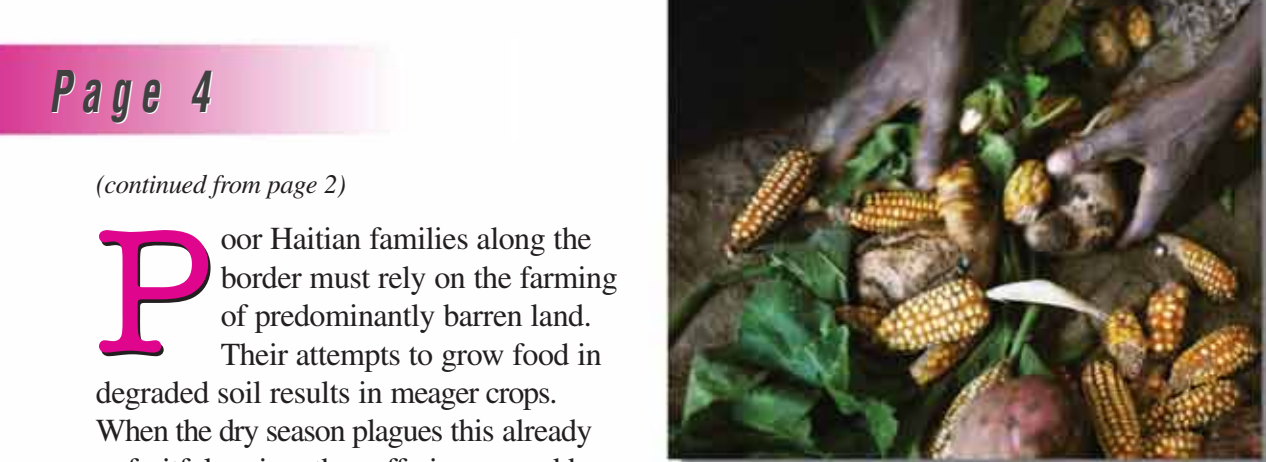


In search of nourishment, a Haitian boy humbly pleads for a single piece of bread. Starving children in the area regularly endure consecutive days without food.



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Poor Haitian families along the border must rely on the farming of predominantly barren land. Their attempts to grow food in degraded soil results in meager crops. When the dry season plagues this already unfruitful region, the suffering caused by hunger and starvation intensifies for the local people.



During these harsh times, Yanna's children become dizzy and cry often. Regrettably, Yanna claims that, to an extent, her children have become accustomed to going without food for long periods of time.

**"I know how to go to school without eating."  
- Anile, 10**

Leaning silently against a wooden pole, Yanna's sullen daughter, Anile, joined the conversation, noting, "I know how to go to school without eating."

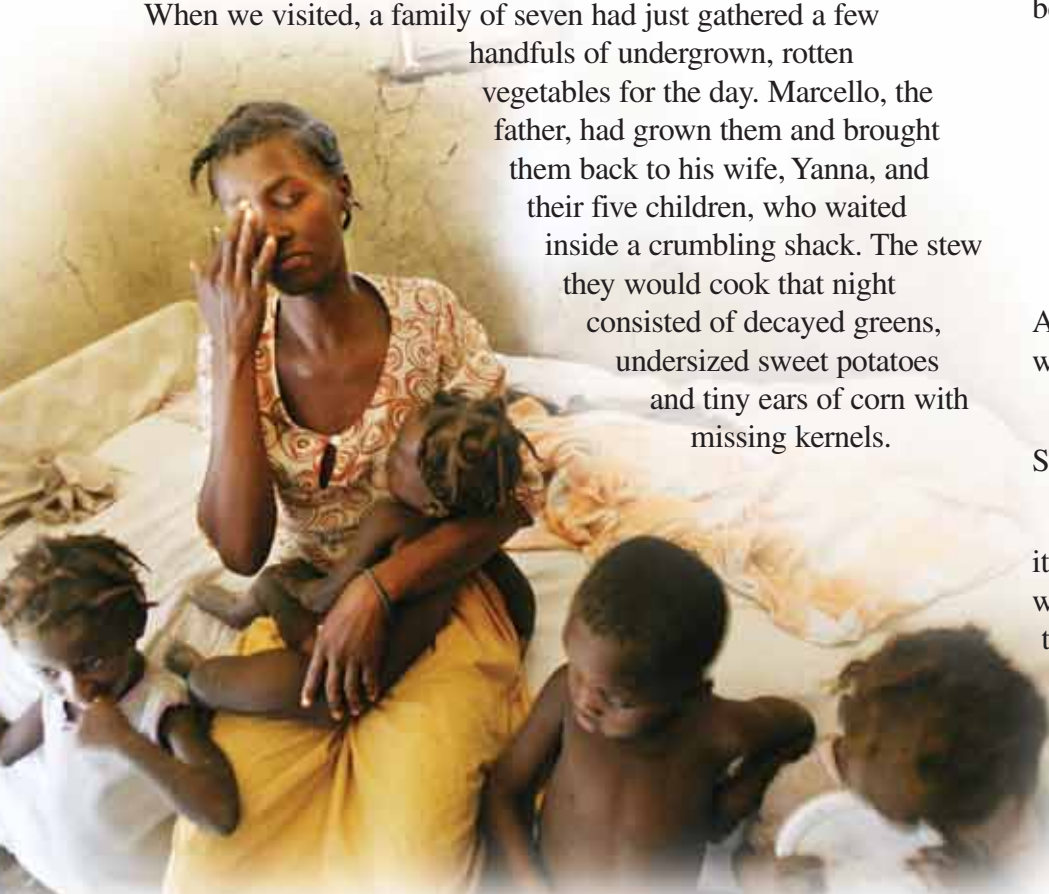
Anile, 10, is the only member of her family to attend school. She's the eldest child and is her family's hope for the future.

But, because of hunger, Anile struggles to physically make it through each day. "I feel weak," she said. "Even though I'm weak, I want to finish school every day. My stomach hurts. I learn to be strong."

Anile is currently learning how to read. If she can somehow finish school, her greatest desire is to be able to help her family. Her other aspirations include becoming a nun and working with children in hospitals.

As Yanna proudly listens to her daughter speak of her hopes and dreams, the concerned mother carefully cradles her sickly 1-year-old daughter. Her eyes crusted with mucous from a cold, little Maslin seems numb and lifeless in her mother's arms. According to Yanna, Maslin has a high fever and hasn't eaten much in four days.

"God give me strength," Yanna prays. "Please help me sustain my children." After her prayer, Yanna laments, "Nobody comes out here. No one can help. Everybody's [all the border families] the same."



Neither Marcello nor Yanna knew how long this meager portion would sustain their hungry family. Whatever Marcello is fortunate enough to grow on any given day is what his family will eat that night. "Whatever grows... whatever God gives" is how Marcello described his family's limited food supply. Last month, this desperate family reaped absolutely no harvest. They went five days without food — a sad but common occurrence for families throughout the region.

Maria Jan shares Yanna's despair. A 28-year-old mother, Maria was born and raised in "the cut." She feels horrible when her children cry for food and she can't give it to them. Distraught, she answers them, "I'm sorry. I don't have anything." She tries to encourage her little ones to persevere, saying, "You have to hold on to something."

Meanwhile, Maria's husband is out attempting to work the border region's depleted land. By harvesting peas, he can make 1,000 pesos per month — approximately \$30 U.S. This meager income helps provide the family with a small portion of rice to eat, but even then the children eat only once a day.



Among Maria's children, severe fevers and colds run rampant. Maria cries when she becomes frustrated, but she knows that all she can do is continue to pray. She repeatedly asks God to give her "faith and power" to withstand her family's hardships.

In addition to hunger, Maria's family is burdened by a dangerous lack of safe drinking water. The children often become sick and suffer from skin rashes after drinking from contaminated water sources. On rare occasion, Maria finds bleach to add to the dirty water in hopes of making it potable.



Just across the border, Viley, a 26-year-old mother of six, also struggles to find bleach for her children's water. Her struggling Haitian family migrated to Dajabón, a small Dominican town right on the border. Here Viley's children trudge up and down steep hills daily in order to retrieve dirty water.

Matlyn, 6, and Revlyn, 3, carefully step down the hillside, carrying water-filled buckets overhead. "I don't have that much strength in my head," said Matlyn in describing the grueling work.



The two sisters make the trip four times a day, returning home with buckets filled with run-off water from the mountains. As Revlyn wades through the murky waters surrounding her water source, she steps through animal feces.

These little girls bring home contaminated water every day for their family to drink; the youngest of the thirsty recipients is Sefane, their newborn baby

brother. Sefane is currently ill, and his mother is continually distressed. "We worry, but we don't know what to do," said Viley.

Viley's children suffer constantly from stomach pains and diarrhea caused by drinking the contaminated water. In describing her own condition, Matlyn said, "My stomach hurts." The young girl also recognizes her tragic plight, however; she somberly told us, "It's the only water I have."



From afar, the hills of "the cut" appear majestic and wondrous. But a closer look reveals one of the poorest regions in the world. In the middle of God's beautiful creation, His poor children starve, thirst and suffer.

We must not forget those whom the world often neglects. Jesus taught us that although a good shepherd might have a hundred sheep, he will still search for the lost one that is missing from the fold.

*"I will search for the lost..." (Ezekiel 34:16a, NIV)*

The families who are lost in "the cut" hold on tightly to God's merciful promises. Severely hungry, sick and unsheltered, they patiently wait for His saving grace.

After going five days without food, Yanna fervently prayed for her family and faithfully concluded, "Eventually God always resolves the problem."

Through your generosity for those in greatest need, you can be an instrument of God's healing mercy and love. Your gift today will help ease the suffering that sweeps across this desolate region and other areas where families desperately struggle to survive. ❖

May God bless you for reaching out to touch the outstretched hands of the forgotten poor.

