

**Desperate Times:** A week ago, two sail boats filled with desperate Haitians and families, left Point a Raket in the dark headed west for a "better life." The Coast Guard intercepted them just west of Cap Haitian and put them ashore. Lost was 2 or 3 thousand Haitian dollars but at least the waves did not break the boat.

I asked Louis if everyone knows when boats are leaving? He tells me, "yes, but most don't have the \$2000 Haitian dollars to go, and it is too windy." The majority are young people and young families from the mainland that come here because of access to open sea and reduced security.

Now their money, probably borrowed, is gone. The dream of finding work and education for children is ended. They had to be desperate as most Haitians I've met are fearful of the sea, especially those living on the mainland.

These are desperate times for Haiti. A drive around Port au Prince reveals fine cars and nicely dressed people. Shopping at the Caribbean market seems a world away from the thousands selling washed shoes, phone chargers, mangos and shoe shines on the streets. The "street sweepers" pull pounds of rebar along the curbing, yet streets remain lined with rubbish and rat food.

Food costs remain high; there are no government social services; the percentage of students in school has dropped greatly; and many are sick and without water. Thousands spend their day walking between the crowded tap taps selling plastic bags of water for a nickel. Good jobs are available if you "know someone."

Remote areas and our island communities are dotted with little stands; one selling grapefruit, one cookies, one peanut butter on casaba bread, and there is generally some vender with sweet soda pop and little bags of water. Income will not pay school tuition, buy clothing or aspirin for the fever of chronic malaria. Children in tattered T-shirts, green snot filled noses, hold your hand and smile as if the world was a wonderful place. Clothing that fits them is three sizes below their age.

Desperately, the overgrowth, inedible by livestock is made into charcoal for the bigger markets on the mainland. The income is divided between the boat owners, the farmers and the helpers and little profit rewards very hard work. We watched one day as a loaded burro, laid down, probably to never rise again.

Laundry done in small mud holes gets t-shirts sparkling white. Powdered soap is sold in tiny plastic wrapped balls. They sing while they wash, while they walk, and it is a different kind of desperation. It is a way of life. Small pans of water provide baths for entire families and rice or corn is purchased in tiny bags about the size of a sausage. Home may have a thatch roof or rocks holding on the rusty tin, and holes in the wall can be covered with old curtain.

Young handsome Luke stands around, unable to go back to high school or find work and the boat is a possibility. \$2000 H won't pay his tuition and he says he will pay us back, when he finds work. We just hope another boat isn't leaving soon.

Shirley, LaGonave, February 3, 2009. Check out <http://gbgmlagonave.blogspot.com>