

EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

CASE STUDY

Haiti factbox

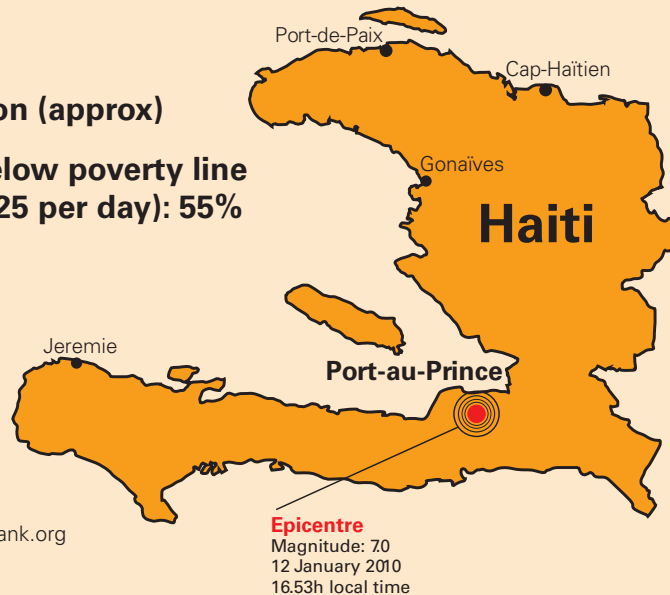
Population: 10 million (approx)

**Population living below poverty line
(on less than US\$1.25 per day): 55%**

**Life expectancy
at birth: 62 years**

**Adult literacy rate:
49%**

Data from undp.org and worldbank.org



Background

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere and faces big challenges to development and economic growth, including deforestation, political instability, the decline of farming and widespread poverty. Before the earthquake, 86 per cent of people in the capital, Port-au-Prince, were living in slum conditions – in tightly packed, poorly built, concrete buildings – and half of the people in Port-au-Prince had no access to toilets and only one-third had access to clean running water.

Film clips exploring the earthquake in Haiti are available to download from christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary

cont...

Environment



- Haiti is located in the Caribbean and shares the island of Hispaniola with its richer neighbour, the Dominican Republic. The location of this island on a series of fault lines and in the hurricane belt makes it vulnerable to earthquakes, tropical storms and hurricanes. The impact of disasters in Haiti has been made worse by poverty, climate change and the effects of deforestation.

The earthquake



- On 12 January 2010, an earthquake of magnitude 7.0 Mw struck Haiti. It was the strongest earthquake to hit the country for more than 200 years, and the quake's epicentre was only 16 miles west of Haiti's heavily populated capital city, Port-au-Prince.
- Around 220,000 people died, a further 300,000 were injured and more than 1 million people were made homeless in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The emergency response



- The scale of the devastation made it very difficult to provide emergency relief for those affected because communication systems, transport links, hospital buildings, and electrical supplies were damaged. In the first few days and weeks after the earthquake, Christian Aid's partner organisations focused on the immediate needs of people injured and made homeless by the earthquake. They provided medical care and emergency items such as food, tents, blankets, hygiene kits and water cans to more than 15,000 people.

Recovery and risk reduction



- Recovering from such a large disaster would challenge any country, but many people in Haiti were living in conditions of extreme poverty even before the earthquake struck. Christian Aid's aim is that the long-term disaster recovery in Haiti should help people to not just recover from the earthquake, but to develop ways to work themselves out of poverty and improve their lives.

Moving out of the city



- One of the reasons that the earthquake killed so many people was because many were living in overcrowded conditions in poorly built houses. After the earthquake struck, more than half a million people moved away from the capital to other parts of the island where they felt safer, often moving back to the areas where they grew up. The government has encouraged this migration away from the capital city as an opportunity for Haiti to develop in new areas and to reduce the risk of another earthquake becoming such a major disaster. Christian Aid has supported this by helping people who fled the chaos of Port-au-Prince to seek refuge with families in the countryside.

Supporting people in camps



- Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed by the earthquake, leaving more than 1 million people homeless. Many people were forced to live in whatever shelter they could find, which was sometimes just a tent or plastic sheet. These makeshift homes left many people vulnerable to disease and crime. Christian Aid's partners have worked hard to bring peace, stability and sanitation to makeshift communities left homeless by the earthquake and living in refugee camps.

New, safe homes



- Hundreds of families who lost their homes have now received permanent, hurricane- and earthquake-resistant houses, which provide much needed shelter and security.

Dealing with trauma



- Christian Aid's partners have helped people to cope with trauma and loss through individual and group therapy. Christian Aid's partner MUDHA has also helped communities become fairer and more secure places to live by holding workshops on issues such as human rights, gender equality, dealing with violence, and responsible parenting.

Building new livelihoods



Christian Aid/Susan Barry

- Thousands of people have received training and support to help them make a living again – some families have been given livestock and tree saplings and many people have been taught new agricultural and artisan craft skills.

Environmental sustainability



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez/Noelle

- Tree-planting and reforestation help to reduce the risk of land slides and soil erosion. Forests also play an important role in reducing the vulnerability of communities to disasters. They can physically shelter communities from storms, but also provide them with the livelihood resources to withstand and recover from crises. For example, when the trees start to bear fruit, they are another source of income for families.

Looking to the future



Christian Aid/Matt Gonzalez/Noelle

- Despite big challenges in Haiti, Christian Aid works to find the most effective and creative solutions to help people rebuild their lives. Christian Aid believes the best way to do this is to work through its partners in the country, who are grass-roots community organisations, spread across Haiti, with lots of experience of responding to disasters. Their staff are based in the communities with whom they work, and are experts in understanding and addressing the needs of the people they support. By working through local partners, Christian Aid was able to respond quickly and effectively to the earthquake, reaching people in great need.



Christian Aid/Prosperity Raymond

- Working through these organisations, Christian Aid has been both providing short-term emergency help to communities affected by the earthquake, and also support to help people to take charge of their own recovery in the long term. Despite the pain and trauma of the past three years, Haitians continue to show extraordinary strength and determination. Through building secure homes and livelihoods across the country, Christian Aid's work will bring about a better Haiti in years to come.

Earthquake in Haiti: eyewitness account



Originally from one of the rural areas of Haiti, Regeane Civil lived in Port-au-Prince at the time of the earthquake. She lost everything she had on 12 January 2010. She used the money she'd earned that day on her market stall to get herself and her two children back to her parents' home. Regeane says:

'I didn't realise it was an earthquake at first. I was sitting on my stall, in front of the things I sold. I felt the ground shaking and I started to run. I saw other people running and houses collapsing. I saw houses

collapsing on top of people. I saw people dying, people missing pieces of their body. People were walking over all the dead bodies. I was afraid – I started shaking and couldn't move any further so I sat down. I knew I had to go and find out what had happened at home so I got up again. When I got home it was difficult to get to it as the corridor entrance had collapsed. My two children were there, waiting for me, but I couldn't even reach the house; I just saw it from afar.

'I lost everything in the earthquake. My savings and the products I was selling: they were stolen. I grabbed my children and spent the night at Champs de Mars, the park that surrounds the National Palace.

'I wanted to come home immediately, but we were told that there would be more aftershocks. We were disturbed by the aftershocks, and people were spreading rumours about a tsunami which made people panic – the rumours were started in the hope that people would run away so their belongings could be looted. There was a shooting between the police and thieves; they passed through where people were sleeping in the park.

'We decided to leave Port-au-Prince but we couldn't find a bus so we had to come in a truck that usually carries charcoal.

'There was no communication so I couldn't tell my family we were arriving – it was impossible. My mum cried when I arrived because she thought we were dead. I was happy to come back home, when I realised other people were dead. But we arrived with nothing, just the clothes we had on.

'There's not enough food here, but what we have we use. I would prefer to live in Port-au-Prince, but I am going to stay here because in Port-au-Prince I saw too many things happen in front of my eyes.'

Regeane was provided with seeds by Christian Aid partner GRAMIR, and has now joined the local network of peasant farmers.

Look at the **Haiti case study** and **film clips** (christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary) and then answer the following questions.

- **What were the immediate impacts of the earthquake?**

- **What have the longer-term impacts been?**

- **What were Christian Aid's priorities after the disaster and how did its partners act to help people?**

- **Why have people moved out of Port-au-Prince?**

- **What are the advantages/disadvantages of this migration?**