

Haiti Earthquake Advocacy briefing

This briefing was completed by Simone Di Vicenz, Head of Humanitarian Programme Policy Practice and Advocacy and Fiona Smith, Head of Global Policy and Advocacy at Christian Aid.

On Saturday 14th August a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck southwestern Haiti with devastating consequences. The most regions of Sud, Nippes, and Grand'Anse. Jérémie (Grand'Anse department) and Les Cayes (Sud department) were the most affected and recorded the most infrastructure damage. A week after the disaster OCHA have reported over 2,200 dead, 12,000 injured, 130,000 houses destroyed and 500,000 people directly affected (PAHO, 2021; OCHA 2021)¹ Public buildings, including hospitals and schools have been damaged while Hospitals that are still functional are overwhelmed and lack medicine and equipment to treat critically wounded patients. The earthquake has struck the country during the bean, maize, and yam harvest in the southern peninsula. This is likely to increase food prices and reduce availability, potentially increasing the number of households experiencing food insecurity and deepening the conditions for those already food insecure² (FEWNET, 2021; OCHA 2021).

With a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$1,149.50 and a Human Development Index ranking of 170 out of 189 countries in 2020, Haiti remains the poorest country in the Latin America and Caribbean region³. The earthquake is not the first crisis Haiti faced, the county has not yet fully recovered from the earthquake of 2010, which wiped out hundreds of thousands of lives and 120% of GDP. This was compounded by a disastrous externally led, top-down relief and recovery intervention⁴ (OECD 2017; Arroy 2014; Piquet 2013). In 2014 the severe Hurricane Matthew in 2014 devastated infrastructure and agricultural crops destroying natural ecosystems left. Since 2018 the political instability has led to increased insecurity and violence across the country. The recent assassination of the president Jovenel Moise on July the 7th has only increased this chaos⁵ (AA, 2021, PAHO 2021)

The southern peninsula, including areas affected by the earthquake, already is a hotspot for gang-related violence has been very difficult to reach for two months prior to the earthquake (OCHA, 2021). In many areas of the country people live in poverty and suffer from food insecurity due to lack of pro-poor opportunities and investments.

The Climate emergency is evident in Haiti⁶ (CCS, 2012) with an increase in severity and recurrence of extreme weather events such as Typhoons, flash floods and droughts which have often localised negative impacts especially in rural and poor areas of the country setting

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Earthquake%20Haiti%20-%20-%20Sitrep%20N.1.pdf>;
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Business%20Guide%20-%20Haiti%20Earthquake%20Humanitarian%20Response%2C%20August%202021.pdf>;
[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/haiti_earthquake - flash update no. 3 18 august 2021.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/haiti_earthquake_flash_update_no_3_18_august_2021.pdf)

² <https://fews.net/central-america-and-caribbean/haiti>

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview>

⁴ https://groundtruthsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/OECD_Haiti_affected-people-staff-survey.pdf; <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13623699.2014.904642?journalCode=fmcs20>;
<https://journals.openedition.org/poldev/1600>

⁵ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/americas/haiti-descends-into-chaos-after-killing-of-president/2297626>

⁶ <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2012/02/01/climate-change-in-haiti/>

gains back. Finally, the COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted health and the economy of the island⁷ (UNDP, 2021).

The impact of the earthquake is just another disaster affecting the resilience of Haitian population and institutions which has been consistently eroded by regular crisis. These are not distinct events but should be seen as a series of interconnected drivers eroding local capacity and efforts to escape poverty and promote a healthy society (Arroy 2014; UNDP, 2021, CCS, 2012). However, the humanitarian sector, due to the nature of its short term and output focus funding environment, has in the past systematically been unable to make links across different technical and sectorial work, this is missing important opportunities. It is vital that the humanitarian community moves in the direction of longer-term more holistic funding that better integrates different sectors, phases, and dimensions of Haiti recovery. Nevertheless, despite poor governance and the low capacity of the authorities, they are doing their best to rescue the people that are under the houses and buildings.

The national system for disaster risk reduction managed by the direction of civil protection (DPC) is mobilized, searches and rescue operations are ongoing trying to save more lives and evacuating people under the rubbles. Local communities are always the first to mobilise in a crisis and pictures in media have shown the proactiveness of people attempts to rescue neighbours, share the little items available such a food, water building materials for makeshift shelter to spend the night. Solidarity is widespread. National and local civil society is vibrant and confident. A number of local organisations, such as Koral, FNGA and SJM, were already responding on the same day of the earthquake with passion and professionalism. Compared to 2010, things have changed for the better in Haiti. We must learn from the past and build on the small but important progress that has been achieved since then. Local populations and civil society do not want to be seen as without agency or as passive victims of their destiny. Instead, they are now asking loudly to be part of their development, to have agency and ownership⁸ (Reuters, 2021).

CA worked in Haiti since 1980 with the aim of strengthening national and local organisations and leadership and with empowering approaches that put affected population in the driving seat of programmes. Examples of our approaches are cash programming, the [survivor and community led response](#) which will be utilised in the earthquake response, community based psychosocial support and [resilience programming](#). These have shown not only the ability to address basic needs, but also to promote togetherness, solidarity, voice, activism, and long-term community plans. For example, Christian Aid and other international and local organisation have invested in earthquake proof houses in the reconstruction of the 2016 Matthew typhoon. These have not only resisted the earthquake this August saving lives, but

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https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/Socioeconomic-Assessment-of-the-Impact-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-in-Haiti.html

⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/haiti-quake-revives-anger-over-aid-response-past-disasters-2021-08-16/>

also became shelters for wider community during recent typhoons. FNGA⁹ put it: 'With this activity we start to see the relaunching of *aktivite kominotè*, a traditional approach of community mobilisation and self-help'. All of these require addressing the risks holistically instead of narrowing down needs and allow survivors to be the decision makers.

Haiti remains a fragile democracy facing many interrelated challenges; based on our programmatic and learnings we would like to make the following recommendations to donors and international actors:

- a) Donors should act fast and step up their efforts both in terms of quantity but also to deliver multi-year and quality of funding to address the earthquake crisis and its long-term recovery.
- b) Given the multi-sectoral nature of the crisis it is vital that the humanitarian community and donors moves in the direction of long-term more holistic funding; that better integrates different sectors, phases, and dimension of Haiti recovery. It must involve community philanthropy, religious leaders, and private sector in a nexus approach.
- c) Donors must continue to invest in disaster risk reduction programmes in order to strengthen national, local and community preparedness towards multiple risks. Reconstruction should focus on this type of long-term intervention instead of short-term fixes.
- d) The UN and other INGOs should abide to their Grand Bargain commitments and support local agency by working through, strengthen and not replace, national and local civil society who will continue the reconstruction efforts in the long term. It is fundamental to include local civil society and local government departments into decision making processes and coordination systems as well as access to quality funding as they are more able to work culturally sensitively and based on strong knowledge of the context

⁹ FNGA: Fondation Nouvelle Grand-Anse