

act:onaid



Haitians rebuilding Haiti: progress six months after the earthquake





Cover photo: Community members build a transitional shelter in Mariani. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid

Dabady Gina Fils, 31, from Jacmel, lost her house and small business in the earthquake. Six months on, supporting people to move from tents into transitional shelter is one of ActionAid's top priorities. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid

On January 12, 2010, an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 on the Richter scale rocked Haiti. It was the most powerful earthquake to have struck the country for 200 years. The epicentre of the earthquake was near the town of Leogane, approximately 17 km southwest of the capital Port-au-Prince. An estimated 230,000 people were killed, with a further 310,000 left wounded, many thousands with permanent disabilities.

The UN called the disaster “the worst ever confronted”. Factors including an urban environment, high population density, and chronic underlying poverty—Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere—conspired to ensure the earthquake caused maximum devastation.

In the immediate aftermath, the world watched as people struggled to survive in sprawling camps. Huge logistical constraints and damage to roads and the sea port hampered the international aid effort. Over half a million people fled the capital Port-au-Prince for rural areas in the north, east and west of the country.

Six months on, Haiti is starting to recover.

ActionAid has been working in Haiti since 1997, focusing on education, food rights and poverty-reduction projects. Working through partner organisations who have long-standing relationships with the affected communities, ActionAid's emergency relief programme initially concentrated on providing food packages and essential items such as cooking utensils, soap and sanitary towels. By April 2010, three months after the disaster, we had reached over 20,000 people with vital assistance.

ActionAid's experience in emergencies shows that distributing goods, whilst important, cannot and should not be the only response. Recognising the existing capacities of local communities to cope with and recover from the disaster, and building and supporting these, is central to our approach. Equally vital is the need to engage with the wider reconstruction process and support Haitians to actively participate in this.

Our 3 year response and rehabilitation plan aims to reach the most vulnerable—including women, children, the elderly, people living with HIV and AIDS— through programmes on shelter, education, livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, psychosocial support, policy and governance.

ActionAid's response: progress to date

ActionAid's response to the earthquake is focusing on a number of urban areas within the capital Port-au-Prince, as well as areas further afield which were affected indirectly by the disaster. These include Jacmel and Thiotte in the south of the country, plus Roseaux in the west and Lascahobas in the east.

Food and non-food items

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, ActionAid provided food packages containing rice, fish, maize, flour, sugar, cooking oil, sugar, corn flakes, beans, salt, spices and energy biscuits to those left homeless and hungry. A few weeks into the response, these packages were supplemented with hygiene kits and kitchen sets, containing vital items to help people cook and keep clean in the camps. Nearly 20,000 people benefitted from these essential supplies.

At the six month stage, ActionAid is moving away from distributing food supplies to providing people with the means to purchase their own food, through cash for work and other livelihoods programmes.

Livelihoods and cash for work programmes

Recognising that continued provision of food and other supplies can promote dependency and reduce people's sense of autonomy, ActionAid has recently initiated a number of cash for work programmes. In urban areas of Port-au-Prince, we are employing local people to clear rubble from flood-prone gullies, thus reducing the community's risk to flooding at the same time as providing families with an income. In Roseaux (Grand-Anse, South West department), local people are being paid to rehabilitate a 4km stretch of the road from Gomier to Jaquet. In rural areas we are providing seeds to farmers to help increase the yield from their land.

To date over 2,800 people have participated in livelihoods activities, earning valuable income to support their families (over 17,000 individuals).

Shelter

With over 1.5m people left homeless as a result of the earthquake, shelter is a priority. In the

"It's the first time that I am working since the earthquake"



Guirlene clears out the water path as part of the cash for work scheme. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid

24 year old Guirlene Nicolas lives in the Bethel camp, Philippeau. She is involved in a cash for work scheme supported by ActionAid's partner COZPAM.

"It's the first time that I am working since the earthquake. I work from Monday to Saturday for \$5.00 per day," explains Guirlene. **"The work that I am doing will benefit my community and me. I get paid for clearing out the water path that killed 3 people in 2004 during the floods. With the earthquake, rubble accumulated in the water path and keeps rainwater from going to the ravine. This year, despite the earthquake, with the work that we are doing, we hope not to face floods.**

"I will use the money to start a small business so I will be able to support my family. I want to be able to send my daughter and little sister to school," she adds.

Learning to laugh again

3 year old Cherlandine Alexandre was trapped in the rubble for three days, her mother and baby sister lying dead near her. Her father was unable to care for her so she was taken in by Mona Clervaue, a 53 year old widow living in Philippeau.

“When I found her, her wounds were still open, and she did not have an appetite,” explains Mona. “Taking her into my home made me feel very happy, she brought a lot of joy to my life. I comb her hair, I feed her, and I do everything to make her feel at ease and safe.

“We sing together, we talk about what happened to her mother and little sister. To help her deal with the trauma situation, I send her to the psychosocial centre. There, they have activities like drawing, singing, and dancing. Since she has been attending the centre, I see that she is more open and she is smiling more. These activities are a blessing.”



Cherlandine sits outside her new home, with her caretaker Mona in the background. Activities such as playing, singing and dancing are vital to helping bring back a sense of normality to children's lives.
Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid

months following the disaster, we provided tarpaulins to over 11,000 families living in camps, and tents for 30 extremely vulnerable families. With the start of the hurricane season at the beginning of June, the need for more robust shelter is all the more critical. By the end of 2010, ActionAid plans to build 200 transitional shelters. These structures last for 3-5 years and provide better cover against wind and rain than tarpaulins or tents.

ActionAid is also linking with local and national authorities to advocate for the dignity and rights of all Haitians to be respected in discussions over land use and rebuilding.

Psychosocial support

ActionAid recognises that emotional as well as physical support is crucial in emergency situations. Helping people express their feelings about the disaster can aid the recovery process and help people to resume their normal lives.

ActionAid is running a number of schemes which aim to help both children and adults do just this. In Philippeau, we are supporting a psychosocial centre where children receive basic education and are encouraged to sing, dance and draw, to express their feelings. To date, these schemes have helped over 27,000 people.

Disaster Risk Reduction

An essential component of any emergency response and rehabilitation programme, disaster risk reduction schemes aim to equip people with the knowledge, skills, training and practical support to reduce their vulnerability to future disasters. In a disaster-prone country like Haiti, these risks are ever-present.

ActionAid has trained a number of local volunteers in disaster risk reduction, and will be working with communities over the coming months to ensure people are prepared for and able to respond to disasters.

We're also pre-positioning stocks of food packages, first aid kits, drinking water and hygiene kits for 3,000 families, ready for immediate distribution should another disaster strike during the hurricane season.

Education

Almost 4,000 schools were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake, leaving many thousands of children without access to education. Over the coming months, ActionAid plans to provide 3,000 children with school kits, and build 12 temporary schools and one formal school, to enable children affected by the earthquake to continue their education.

Next steps: Programme and Policy

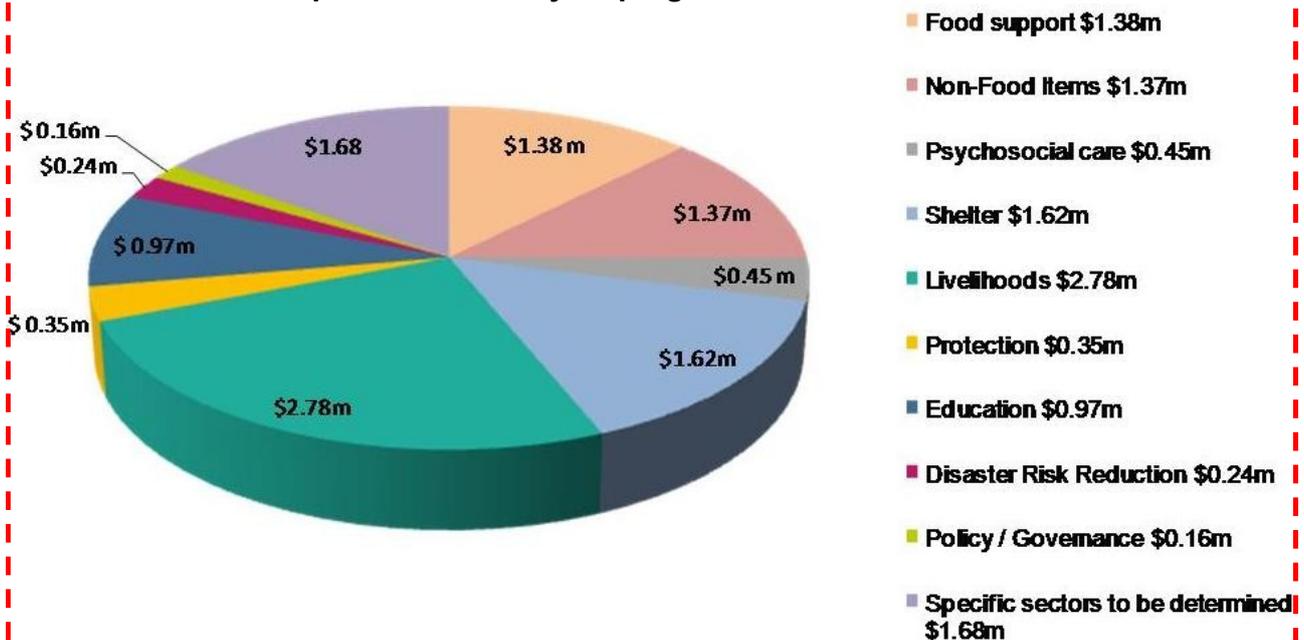
Over the next few months, ActionAid's response will focus on:

- ⇒ Constructing 200 transitional shelters for the most vulnerable families, and training people on how to advocate for the government and authorities to fulfil their commitments regarding land issues
- ⇒ Building 12 temporary schools and one formal school, and providing education kits to 3,000 children, to help them get back to education
- ⇒ Expanding livelihoods programmes to provide sustainable support to more families in need
- ⇒ Supporting communities to prepare for and reduce their vulnerability to future disasters through practical trainings
- ⇒ Working through our pre-existing campaign on the right to food - KABAgrangou ("HungerFREE") - to support peasant social movements in their efforts to promote Haitian agriculture
- ⇒ Strengthening the capacity of communities, partner organisations and local civil society to influence policies and decisions and to ensure that the voices of Haitians are taken into consideration in the wider reconstruction process
- ⇒ Strengthening the monitoring of aid mechanisms to improve accountability to affected populations and to ensure that aid does not exacerbate existing problems or create new ones
- ⇒ Advocating for the international donor community to fulfill its commitments to Haiti, including ensuring pledged funds materialise

Funding Update

To date, ActionAid has raised over **\$11m** for our earthquake response and rehabilitation programme. By end June 2010 we had spent over \$2.2m of this.

Chart 1: Planned expenditure over 3 year programme





Local residents in Philippeau participate in a cash for work programme clearing rubble from flood-prone areas. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid



Children at the Ecole Communautaire De Philippeau, a school supported by ActionAid partner COZPAM, play with toys as part of a psychosocial programme. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid



Children attend lessons in a makeshift classroom at a school in Philippeau. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid



Community members assist with the construction of a transitional shelter in the Bon Berger camp, Mariani. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid



Daniela Merceron, with daughters Danny Mason, 5, and Abigaëlle Laurent, 3, prepare to move into a transitional shelter. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid



9 year old Chery Laureore works on a drawing in an outdoor school. Photo: Charles Eckert/ActionAid

ActionAid is an international anti-poverty agency working in over 40 countries, taking sides with poor people to end poverty and injustice together. For more information on our emergency response work in Haiti, or indeed our wider humanitarian work, see www.actionaid.org or contact emergencies@actionaid.org