

# CRS's Response to the 2021 Haiti Earthquake

On August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck the southern peninsula of Haiti. The earthquake destroyed homes, infrastructure, and businesses, and displaced tens of thousands of people throughout southern Haiti. According to Haiti's Civil Protection Agency (DGPC) assessments, at least 2,248 people were killed and 12,763 were injured. 130,000 houses were damaged or completely destroyed. The DGPC also flagged severe damage to water infrastructure, leaving more than 200,000 people without access to clean drinking water. The city of Les Cayes, Haiti's third largest city, suffered extensive damage, including nearly every church in the Les Cayes diocese. CRS' own office in Les Cayes was severely damaged, rendering it unfit for daily use.

CRS, which has worked in Haiti since 1954, mobilized a response within 24 hours of the earthquake. By September, CRS emergency response teams had distributed nearly 1,500 shelter and hygiene kits. The response was multi-faceted, and included direct cash assistance, distribution of emergency shelter and hygiene solutions, mental health and psychosocial support, economic support, and longer-term projects like school and home reconstruction.

## Multipurpose Cash Assistance



In the aftermath of the earthquake, one of the most tangible and urgent ways CRS supported families was to offer multipurpose cash assistance to help them meet their basic needs with dignity, whether that was to buy food, treat injuries, seek alternate shelter, or respond to other needs. With the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)'s Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), the United Nations Development Program, Islamic Relief USA, Latter-day Saints Charities, World Vision, Caritas Australia, and the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 16,205

households received 20,000 HTG (about 200 USD) each over the course of several months. This cash assistance targeted vulnerable families directly affected by the earthquake, with an emphasis on those whose homes had been significantly damaged or destroyed. 47% of recipients (7,639 families) were also supported with emergency food support, funded by BHA. Recipients were chosen with the help of the DGPC and other humanitarian actors to maximize coverage and avoid duplication. In the months following receiving this support, families reported a significant increase in being able to meet most or all their basic needs.

## Shelter and Settlements

It has been estimated that more than 30% of homes in the three departments (the Sud department, Grand Anse department, and Nippes department), an area with a population of just under one million, were damaged or destroyed. The need for shelter was urgent, as this earthquake occurred during hurricane season. In fact, Tropical Storm Grace passed through the same area just days later bringing substantial rainfall. Within weeks of the earthquake and the storm, the CRS team was on the ground distributing emergency shelter kits to families whose homes were affected. With the support of BHA, 13,865 shelter kits have been distributed, benefiting as many as 69,325 individuals. Shelter kits included tarps, wire, nails, rope, and tools like hammers. CRS also distributed informational materials in Haitian Creole with instructions on how to use the contents of the

emergency shelter kits. At several key sites within targeted communities, CRS organized demonstrations of how to make temporary shelters using the kits. CRS also hired and trained 306 local masons to help recipients install the kits and create a safe temporary shelter. In addition, CRS provided 35,000HTG in support to 1,250 households displaced by the earthquake who had settled in a makeshift camp in Les Cayes. The allowance was specifically to be used for repairs to their homes or for renting a new safe living place.

CRS is currently working to provide permanent housing to families whose homes were destroyed by the earthquake by training nearly 120 local masons on disaster-resistant building techniques. By training masons local to the earthquake-affected areas, the CRS shelter team aims to equip communities with a sustainable way of building more durable homes and buildings. Masons are learning the Build Back Better method of construction, a method that teaches how to build durable homes that will be resistant to hurricane and earthquake damage, a critical skill in a country that is not only prone to earthquakes but is also vulnerable to hurricanes. As their training is being completed, the masons have begun repairing 2,000 homes that were damaged by the earthquake, using building materials provided by CRS and the communities.

As homes and basic infrastructure have been repaired, CRS, in partnership with Caritas Jeremie, has begun working with five earthquake-affected communities to support them as they carry out further infrastructure projects selected by community members. For example, the community of Arnaud in the Nippes department chose to clean and restore their drainage ditches, which protect the community from flooding during storms.

### **Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)**



The DGPC and local partners reported significant damage to water and sanitation facilities in regions affected by the earthquake. [An assessment](#) from the Haitian Directorate of Potable Water and Sanitation (DINEPA) reported that 60% of the population in the affected areas did not have access to clean water after the disaster. In order to prevent crises related to a lack of clean water and unsafe hygiene practices, CRS distributed a two-month supply of water purification tablets (Aquatabs) to all families who received cash assistance. CRS also distributed 9,753 hygiene kits, which

included Aquatabs, toothpaste, body soap, laundry detergent, diapers, toothbrushes, baby wipes, combs, brushes, bath towels, menstrual pads, and a five-gallon bucket. CRS continues to distribute Aquatabs in communities where drinking water systems have not yet been repaired. Together with Water Mission International (WMI), CRS installed six temporary drinking water supply systems, five of which are in the process of being made permanent. In coordination with DINEPA and supported by CRS private funds and BHA, CRS is repairing an additional seven water supply systems. Lastly, CRS has shared and continues to share information about hygiene with communities affected by the earthquake, including information about water borne illnesses and COVID-19 prevention; how to identify clean water and store it safely; the importance of handwashing with soap; and safe excreta disposal.

### **Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)**

Disasters like the August 14<sup>th</sup> earthquake can lead to significant psychological harm to those affected. When not acknowledged, such trauma can have a long-term impact on survivors' mental health. In coordination with the National Ministry of Health (MSPP), CRS provided emergency psychosocial services (PSS); conducted mass informational campaigns on when to seek care and the benefits of PSS; and established a system of referrals for long-term support. CRS contracted three psychologists to work in local clinics in the most severely affected areas to facilitate direct service delivery. In the past year, 28,391 people have received information about PSS from the campaigns and 1,027 individuals have had appointments with the psychologists. CRS is committed to continuing this support to those affected by the earthquake into 2023.

Integrated into the PSS programming were trainings based around child protection. Since August 2021, over 3000 children have participated in awareness-raising sessions on their rights as children. Additionally, CRS conducted trainings for community leaders on child protection, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and counter-trafficking efforts. There were over 150 participants.

### **Economic Recovery and Market Systems**

The earthquake caused severe damage to many local marketplaces, businesses, and farms and put a pause to local business-owners' and farmers' income-generating activities. Not only did this affect their ability to make a living, but it affected all residents of earthquake-affected areas, as they were unable to purchase the goods and services needed to meet their basic needs. In order to support the restoration of local markets and of local farms, CRS provided cash grants to local vendors and farmers who provide essential goods and services, such as food, water, construction materials and services, hygiene materials, sanitation services, etc. With the support of BHA, CRS has provided 615 vendors and 409 farmers with a grant of 30,000 HTG (300 USD) each, enabling them to replace lost stock, rebuild their farms or places of business, and resume their normal business operations.

### **School Reconstruction**

Recently, CRS has begun preparations for the rehabilitation or reconstruction of nine schools in the Sud department that were damaged or destroyed by the earthquake. The construction work is currently underway. Each of the nine schools will have seven classrooms, an administrative office, and a sanitary block with one bathroom for boys and one for girls. In addition, with the support of USAID and in collaboration with CRS partner University of Notre Dame, seven schools in Grand Anse and the Sud will benefit from six semi-temporary classrooms.

### **CRS Disaster Preparation**

CRS hosts an annual simulation exercise (SIMEX) in collaboration with our partner Caritas Haiti. During the SIMEX, the whole CRS Haiti team, led by the emergency coordinator, simulates a disaster and the CRS response. This practice strengthens CRS's ability to deploy our resources rapidly and effectively if or when a disaster occurs. The many years of preparation explain CRS's ability to respond so efficiently to the 2021 earthquake.

CRS also contributes technical expertise in emergency management to the Haitian Government (via the DGPC) and fellow Caritas organizations in the Caribbean by leading similar exercises, thereby building their capacity to respond to disasters. This collaboration also reinforces our partnership with these organizations through shared technical support.