

Haiti 2021 Earthquake and Tropical Storm Grace

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a. Introduction

On August 14, 2021 at 8:30 AM ET, an M7.2 earthquake struck the southwest of Haiti in between the mountains of the Nippes Department and the Sud Department (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). The earthquake occurred at a depth of 6.2 miles, which is considered a shallow earthquake, which causes more damage (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Two days later on August 16, 2021, Haiti experienced a direct hit from Tropical Storm Grace which resulted in more death and destruction.

i. Statistics

The earthquake left 650,000 people in humanitarian assistance and more than 137,000 homes and 60 healthcare facilities were damaged or destroyed (Relief Web, 2021). As of September 10, 2021 there were at least 2,248 deaths and 12,763 injuries (Relief Web, 2021). The hardest hit areas were Grand'Anse, Nippes, and Sud, locations that were all on the Tiburon peninsula near the epicenter of the earthquake. Within these three areas, 60 health facilities were destroyed, along with 137,585 homes (Relief Web, 2021). Haiti also experienced a direct hit from the storm Tropical Grace overnight on August 16th, 2 days after the earthquake. As a result, international humanitarian and response teams had to reduce many of their operations, including distributing supplies (Relief Web, 2021). Landslides triggered by the earthquake and Tropical Grace also hampered rescue and aid efforts (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021).

b. Historical Context

Haiti has grappled with pre-existing vulnerabilities that exacerbated the effects of the earthquake and tropical storm. As of 2021, Haiti remains one of the poorest countries in the world with 59% of the population living under the poverty line (World Bank and Relief Web, 2019). Political turmoil, food shortages, unemployment, natural disasters, and a lack of basic

public infrastructure has kept many Haitians left in a cycle of poverty for generations. Haiti has one of the highest levels of chronic food insecurity in the world with more than half of its total population food insecure and 22 percent of children chronically malnourished (WFP Haiti, 2021). Haiti also lacks adequate, affordable housing especially after the 2010 earthquake, with more than 2 million people being displaced from their homes after the earthquake without any promise of shelter (Amnesty International, 2015).

i. Structural Inequalities

Haiti holds one of the highest wealth gaps in Latin American and the Caribbean: the richest 20% hold more than 64% of its total wealth, while the poorest 20% hold hardly 1% (World Bank, 2014). The biggest inequality, however, is the difference between the cities and the countryside. Over half of the population live in the countryside, and almost 70% of rural households are considered chronically poor, while only a little over 20% are considered poor in the cities (World Bank, 2014). The countryside faces structural inequalities compared to the city such as less access to energy, poor sanitation, and less access to clean water (World Bank, 2014).

ii. Haiti's Government

Ever since Haiti's independence from France in 1804, Haiti's development to forming an independent country has constantly been stagnated due to foreign interventions, natural disasters, and epidemics (Labrador et. al, 2021). Corruption within the political system is widespread in Haiti which in turn led to the increase of state violence. With the increase of state violence and the rise of gangs came the steady decline of living conditions in the countryside (Fatton, 2002). The desolation of the countryside eventually drove many Haitians out of their homes and into the overcrowded urban economy (Hsu et. al, 2021). Foreign intervention exacerbated the political and social unrest within Haiti. For example, the U.S. supported the Duvalier regime and

knowingly funded the paramilitary Tonton Macoute, a special military led by dictator Francois “Papa Doc” that terrorized the Haitian people due to their extrajudicial killings (Hsu et. al, 2021). This event, along with many other foreign interventions, pushed for policies that focused on less social protection and more access to markets and widened the gap between the poor and the rich. The trend of foreign intervention also continued with the NGO influx following the 2010 Haiti Earthquake (Hsu et. al, 2021). One of the biggest events that exacerbated the vulnerabilities after the 2021 Haiti earthquake was the assassination of President Jovenel Moise on July 7 (Reuters, 2021). As a result, Haiti has been facing an escalating amount of gang violence that has displaced 19,000 people and affected 1.5 million people (Reuters, 2021). The political crises, socio-economic challenges, food insecurity, and gang violence greatly exacerbated the effects of the 2021 Haiti earthquake.

iii. Sectors Most Affected

The Haiti Civil Protection Directorate reported that more than 130,000 houses had been destroyed and there was enormous damage to multiple roads and ports (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). The earthquake left 650,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance, and left 754,200 people acutely food-insecure (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Approximately 30,000 people were left homeless, and there continues to be an urgent need to build safe and sanitary shelters and about 120,000 are in need of safe water (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Of the 140 hospitals that were in the area of impact, 4 were destroyed, 32 experienced structural damage, and 12 were extremely damaged. Healthcare became an extreme challenge as 90 health care centers (including outside of the area of impact) were damaged (ReliefWeb, 2021). UNICEF reported that in the Sud Department 94 of the 255 schools have either sustained damages or been completely destroyed. In Grand’Anse, 63 schools were

destroyed and 39 more sustained damage (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). The rollout of the new school year was severely hindered due to the earthquake with around 70 percent of all schools in southwestern Haiti being damaged or destroyed (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Tropical Grace hit 2 days after the earthquake, further hindering the operations and humanitarian resources that were coming in, and triggered more landslides (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Overall, the Haiti earthquake left about 7.8-8.5 billion dollars in damages.

c. Media and Government Portrayal

The 2010 earthquake showed a clear example of Haiti falling victim to “disaster porn”, and the capitalist efforts of foreign aid attempting to profit off of disasters. Media has and continues to dehumanize the Haitian people after disasters by creating a disaster narrative. The media has often used images that dehumanize or fail to respect the Haitian people’s dignity such as portraying images of people who are naked or dirty (Anthropolics, 2021). Haiti also fell victim to disaster capitalism, a phenomenon in which corporations and organizations use moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering (Klein, 2021). Foreign humanitarian aid organizations such as the Red Cross came in and left little sustainable improvement and exacerbated existing inequalities (Anthropolics, 2021). Mark Schuller led an independent study to observe how much damage these foreign aid organizations did– labeling it a “humanitarian aftershock”, he describes that foreign humanitarian aid organizations actually ruptured Haitian social and cultural institutions and increased violence (Schuller, 2016). These aid organizations would support the eviction of displaced people from camps, forcing them into dangerous shantytowns (Schuller, 2016). Haitian people weren’t included in the decision-making process and instead the humanitarian aid was led by young and inexperienced workers who often ignored the Haitian culture and often tended to “just do

something” always with an eye for a photo opportunity (Schuller, 2016). The Red Cross was an example of a failed humanitarian aid organization that took advantage of the money they received as donations. When the earthquake struck in 2010, the Red Cross raised more money than any other charities. The Red Cross ended up building 6 permanent houses out of the proposed 130,000 houses due to the Red Cross not being “able” to acquire the rights to the land (Elliott et. al, 2015). The Red Cross also promised that for every dollar donated, 91 cents went to Haiti. This was not the case, as in addition to Red Cross’s 9% that went overhead, other groups that the Red Cross funded also got grants for their overhead (Elliott et. al, 2015). This shows that oftentimes, Haiti has fallen victim to international foreign aid organizations, which has rightfully resulted in Haitians being skeptical of foreign aid (Elliott et. al, 2015).

e. Current Disaster Response

The current disaster response as will be covered for each sector below involves reliance on foreign humanitarian aid. Although helpful, humanitarian aid often only offers supplies without focusing on listening to the Haitian people and working with the Haitian people, resulting in unjust recovery plans. Next in this report, a more just and improve disaster recovery will be proposed.

f. Proposed Disaster Response

i. Proposed Principles

These are the proposed principles to a just disaster recovery, modeled after Jerolleman’s Principles.

1. Respect the Haitian People

It is essential to use respectful language to not use language as perceived as offensive by Haitians and respect the Haitian culture and listen to their voices.

2. Being transparent with plans for aid

It is essential to make work plans public, such as work plans from the Red Cross. It is important to ensure that corporations specify where the money is going to.

3. Stopping Disaster Porn

As previously stated, it is essential to not use images to dehumanize the Haitian people and not create disaster narratives from the media. The MacBride Report, originally published in 1980, was an attempt in making the flow of news and mass communications more equitable as a contribution to human rights (Benthall, 2008, pps. 4-5). This report proposed a “horizontal” approach to media, that would be less dominated by Western agencies and media organizations, and more sensitive to the needs of poor countries. In order to create a just disaster recovery, the United States should consider implementing the MacBride Report, and create more regulations on how journalists focus on disaster aid instead of disaster porn.

4. Addressing Root Causes of Vulnerability

In creating a long term just disaster recovery, it is important to address the sectors that were the most impacted: education, gang violence, poverty, and food and housing insecurity.

5. Support Local Groups

Instead of relying on foreign aid that has shown to be unsuccessful and ignorant of Haiti’s needs, supporting local groups such as the Lambi Fund of Haiti, FOKAL (Fondasyon pou Konesans ak Libète), ORE (l’Organisation pour la Réhabilitation de l’Environnement), Fondation Paradis des Indiens, St. Boniface Haiti Foundation / Health Equity International, Regroupement pour la Mobilisation et le Développement

Local (REMODEL), Fondation Communautaire Haïtienne-ESPWA (The Haitian Community), is essential to bring Haiti what they need with the proper local knowledge (Anthropolics, 2021).

6. Listening to the Community

It is essential that we are making sure to provide what the Haitian people need the most, and we can only do this by listening to the community and making sure the Haitians' voices are heard (Jerolleman, 2019).

ii. Recovery of Key Sectors

Creating a just disaster recovery would require identifying the sectors that were the most affected during the 2021 Haiti earthquake. The four sectors that were arguably the most affected as listed in the report above, were education, the rise of gang violence, housing/infrastructure, and the food shortage.

iii. Proposed Recovery Actions

Education: An essential part of rebuilding the community back after the Haiti earthquake is focusing on education. Around 70% of the schools in Southwest Haiti were damaged during the 2021 earthquake (World Bank, 2014). Focusing on building back education would also result in boosting the economy by creating a labor force for young adults, and create a more stable government by properly training the nation's next leaders. The majority of Haiti's schools lack infrastructure and the curriculum is often outdated, with the schooling system remaining largely disconnected from Haitian society (Cela 2021). Haiti's academic diaspora is essential in strengthening the ability of local institutions to contribute to reconstruction efforts by connecting these institutions with local communities in dire need of healthcare services (Cela 2021). The post-earthquake context brought to the fore Haiti's need for leadership and a skilled

labor force and in so doing that the long neglected higher education sector came into focus. The majority of Haiti's schools lack infrastructure and offer few support services to students (Cela 2021). International aid such as UNICEF pledge to help the education system by enrolling children in primary school and distributing supplies. However, this is not enough. The proposed just disaster recovery requires working with local groups such as the Groupe de Travail sur l'Éducation et la Formation (GTEF) and Foundation Paradis des Indiens (Anthropolics, 2021). These groups are both founded locally within Haiti, and seek to rebuild schools after they have fallen from disaster. In order to strengthen the education system, it's essential to have foreign aid sponsor these local groups so they have enough resources to rebuild these schools. These groups would work with larger organizations such as UNICEF and they would work together to create building codes in order to have sturdier architecture that would withstand disasters. Larger aid organizations would also listen to the local organizations to see what they need, and deliver more up-to-date books and supplies to create a stronger curriculum.

Focusing on gang violence: Ever since the assassination of the President on July 7th, gang violence has escalated in Haiti, resulting in the displacement of around 19,000 Haitians who are now living in makeshift shelters in unsanitary conditions (Associated Press, 2021). The current disaster involves Haiti's National Police who have been working to follow recommendations from U.N. policing experts, but the force is over-stretched and under-resourced (Associated Press, 2021). MINUSTAH had success in defeating gang violence in 2004-2007 before the 2010 earthquake that collapsed prison walls, releasing over 5,000 gang members (Cockayne, 2014, pp. 737). A just disaster recovery then involves working with the local Haitian force, while also employing MINUSTAH's tactics to help defeat gang violence. One of the most successful operations MINUSTAH operated was employing force elements

worldwide, and utilizing the United Nations Police (Cockayne, 2014, pp. 737). These forces from worldwide would help to bring numbers in controlling gangs, while local Haitian police would be there to provide insight on where each gang lay (Cockayne, 2014, pp. 737). With the help of foreign assistance, Haitian law enforcement should strengthen security and law enforcement institutions. Groups such as the U.N. policing exports would create stable and sanitary shelters to those hiding from the gangs. These shelters would be sanitary, have clean water, and access to food.

Focusing on the housing crisis: The housing crisis was further exacerbated by the 2021 earthquake, with around 30,000 people being left homeless (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Current housing projects from foreign aid organizations often waste their funding on overhead, where unrealistic masterplans are never scaled and the remaining funds are often insufficient to repair all homes. Foreign aid organizations should instead local groups such as FOKAL, a group based in Haiti that seeks to accept donations that help provide immediate support to grassroots organizations that would then build houses and shelters (FOKAL Home Page). When funding local groups such as FOKAL, it is important to focus on the planning portion of housing so there is direction on where to fund, what housing is feasible within their budget, and so that they have building codes that would help to create strong infrastructure, such as implementing stronger material for houses. Additionally, since a lot of the time local companies are often considered too small for international investors, and too big for donors, local Haitian programs should instead incentivize and offer assistance to banks and small local developers to enter the market (Nielsen, 2020). This would help boost the economy, and also would have local developers, banks, and credit unions working together to build safe and affordable housing. The Haiti Home Ownership and Mortgage Expansion Program is an

organization that seeks to implement this, so it is important to fund this program to keep the program running (Nielsen, 2020).

Food Shortages: After the 2021 earthquake, 754,200 people were acutely food-insecure throughout Haiti (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2021). Many foreign aid delivered supplies of food to Haiti. In addition just deliveries of food, this report proposes that a just disaster recovery should also involve providing support to Haiti by creating a more stable community agriculture infrastructure. Agriculture is an essential part of Haiti's livelihood— with around 60% of rural Haitians relying on agriculture for their livelihood (United Nations, 2021). There should be aid given to agricultural workers in order to encourage small-scale farming and backyard farming (United Nations, 2021). Organizations such as the World Food Program would bring agricultural seeds and support to families to help each family provide food for themselves (WFP Home Page). WFP would also talk to the local community in order to provide poultry and goats to those who need it. WFP should also work with the local Haitian government to provide plots of land to families who don't have healthy soil to grow plants on. Focusing on bringing agriculture back will be essential to rehabilitate the community agriculture infrastructure, and in return, help solve the food shortage crisis.

g. Risk Reduction and Mitigation

Including this just disaster recovery plan, steps should be taken to lower risk reduction and have hazard mitigation. A stronger warning system should be implemented for hurricanes and tropical storms that Haiti is prone to (Sjaavik, 2017). As mentioned above, there should also be construction of more solid houses to withstand the disasters, increased information to improve housing structures, and increased information to the public about disasters. There should be material and economic assistance to improving housing structures. Vulnerability reduction

programs should also consider the illiterate or poor, when thinking of how to best spread information about the disaster to the public (Sjaavik, 2017). There should also be increased preparedness before the disaster: where there is already pre-packaged non-perishable foods, water, oil and charcoal to help those survive without a home (Sjaavik, 2017). Main access roads should be mapped out for emergency supply transportation, and these maps should also include alternate access routes in case there are blockages that prevent transportation from getting through the main access roads (Sjaavik, 2017). Shelters that are sanitary and have access to clean drinking water should be built prior to a disaster so that Haitians have places to go as soon (or even before) a disaster is known to hit. Maps should also be written out to point out vulnerable communities during a natural disaster such as floodplains.

h. Timeline of Implementation

Overall, the just disaster recovery would ideally be implemented within a decade to create a stable recovery. The risk reduction and mitigation would ideally be implemented within a year— since these implementations are short-term recovery plans, it is essential to have these implemented by the Haitian government with the help of foreign aid to help Haiti become prepared for the next disaster.

f. Conclusion

Haiti is vulnerable to natural disasters due to the predisposed vulnerabilities that Haiti faces. Although foreign aid constantly comes in to offer assistance, oftentimes they are ignorant of Haiti's needs and implement actions that benefit them instead of Haiti, leading to an unjust disaster recovery justice. This report offers a more long-term disaster recovery plan that focuses on listening to the community's needs so that Haiti can be better prepared for the disasters that will continue to hit the country.

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