

BUILDING — *hope* —

World Development Appeal 2014



Haiti

Introduction

On 12 January 2015, Haitians will be marking a sombre day of remembrance, the fifth anniversary of a devastating earthquake which rocked their world, killed an estimated 220,000 people, and left much of the country's infrastructure in ruins. In the meantime, Haiti has continued to bear the brunt of the severe weather which has always been a feature of life in the Caribbean but whose destructive effects are now being enhanced by patterns of climate change.

Already ranked in 2010 as the poorest country in the western hemisphere, Haiti has struggled to recover from these multiple devastations. Clearing the rubble has been an enormous and difficult task, as roads are poor and many neighbourhoods were severely overcrowded. Many of those who were made homeless by the earthquake had no title to the land on which they lived, and many fled the capital, Port-au-Prince, in the wake of the earthquake, fearing further tremors.

Access to clean water has been an ongoing challenge. And deforestation of Haiti's Central Plateau in recent years has meant that there is often severe soil erosion in the wake of tropical storm activity. Today, out of Haiti's six million people, it is estimated that 1.5 million are living with serious food insecurity, and that 60% of rural families cannot produce or buy enough food to meet the needs of their household members.

Project details

MISSEH (Social Mission of the Haitian Churches) is a network of evangelical missions across Haiti, formed in 2009 to support the social and economic development of the Haitian people. MISSEH has 13 member churches, and plays an important role in linking Christian faith-based organisations with the wider Haitian civil society.

To make the love of God visible in society is MISSEH's stated purpose, and the network seeks to promote a culture of dignity and mutual respect in all aspects of its work. Its current priority areas are the regeneration of the environment, social unity/working together, gender equality and child protection. In the areas in which it works, MISSEH intentionally seeks out the most vulnerable as its primary partners.

Since the earthquake, **GARR (Support for Refugees and the Repatriated)** has been significantly involved in addressing the needs of the internally displaced, particularly in the Central Plateau. People who fled the capital in the wake of the devastation either became homeless, living in makeshift shelters or taking refuge in churches and schools, or moved in with relatives, who themselves were probably already struggling, and thus became indirect victims of the earthquake. GARR's commitment, therefore, is not only to help provide needed housing, but to work alongside residents to build functioning, sustainable communities for the sake of both the host families and the displaced people who have arrived among them more recently.

Building Hope

Gerrard Deserne works with GARR, and speaks with passion about his work. He tells us that in the months following the earthquake, the focus of GARR's work in the Central Plateau was twofold: strengthening the food security of the host families by providing agricultural training and necessary tools, and decreasingly the extreme vulnerability of the displaced by helping them to start small businesses. At each stage, the most vulnerable, according to an agreed set of criteria, were helped first.

The greatest challenge, however, is now housing, and Gerrard wants us to know exactly what he means when he talks about housing. Housing for us, he emphasises, means good housing. And good housing is not just well-built and earthquake resistant housing. It is housing which is built in a community which is continuing to develop long after the houses have been completed. And in building good housing in this sense, you also build hope.

Christian Aid country manager, Prosperity Raymond, agrees. Our partners can't rebuild Haiti on their own, he says. But we can help them to provide good models of how it should be done. Key to this approach is the involvement of those who will live in the houses right from the beginning. Consultation is everything, Prosperity adds. We ask people what will give them dignity, what will make them proud.

In the village of Balan, also in the Central Plateau, an area of significant food insecurity, MISSEH is engaged in agricultural training, which runs alongside training in gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. Jean-Marc Solomon, one of the trainers, emphasises the importance of the training, both for the prevention of violence in the community and for the growth in self-confidence which the training enables. Your support gives us such strength, he says.

As Haiti continues to emerge from its most recent trauma, MISSEH and GARR are working alongside some of Haiti's most vulnerable people, rebuilding not only houses but also communities, in which hope for the future can take root and flourish. It is our privilege in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to stand in solidarity with them through the 2014 World Development Appeal.