

The United Church of Christ supports the ACT Alliance.

ACT Alliance in Haiti: Six months after the earthquake

On 12 January, 2010 a powerful earthquake of 7.0 magnitude on the Richter Scale affected Haiti at 16.53 hrs local time. The earthquake hit Haiti 17km south-west of the capital Port-au-Prince devastating the center of the capital and the towns of Leogâne and Jacmel.

Human losses estimates indicate 220,000 deaths and more than 1,5 million people having been left homeless. Infrastructure was greatly affected, including destruction of government buildings, schools and hospitals.

Since the earthquake, ACT Alliance has raised over US\$120 million from all sources for their humanitarian response in Haiti and committed more than US\$70 million to emergency and reconstruction efforts to date. Working directly or through more than 20 local and national partners, ACT members have assisted more than 341 000 crisis-affected people in Haiti. ACT Alliance members' priorities in the direct aftermath of the earthquake were to ensure that those affected by the earthquake had adequate shelter, sanitation and humanitarian assistance.

Six months later, ACT Alliance has undertaken several activities in different sectors.

Camps, incl. facilitation and management / NFIs

In the very first emergency phase, ACT members provided to the people living in the spontaneous settlements with emergency shelters, such as tents and tarpaulins, non-food items, such as blankets, mattresses and mosquito nets, assistance to drinking water and water purification tablets, sanitation, regular food parcels and daily meals. Thousands of hygiene kits, baby kits and school kits have been distributed.

Members have distributed "cash transfers" where monthly cash sums are given to meet basic needs for selected people. First cash transfers were often used to buy food, water, NFIs, shelter materials, medicines and hospital costs, but also to pay school fees or to repay loans. The most vulnerable groups in the camps – women, children, the disabled, and elderly - have been given special attention especially in distributions.

ACT members continue to provide support to the camp committees – committee members having been selected by people living in the camps among themselves - and prepares to support people having access to their property in temporary shelter when this will be possible. ACT members are also providing basic services and assess what needs to continue within the nearest future while the process to move/relocate people is still pending.

Within the camp context, the main challenge has been gathering accurate data as the numbers of beneficiaries are not static. Strong camp committees and clear chains of communication are needed.

Regarding the resettlement of people living in the camps, lack of available land, unclear land ownership questions and the fact that land is still blocked by debris are the biggest obstacles at the moment.

Shelter

Right after the earthquake, ACT members provided emergency shelters, such as tents and tarpaulins to people in different earthquake affected areas. Now the need for safer shelter is acute with the hurricane season that started on June 1st prompting fears that thousands of people living in tents or makeshift camps are at risk of flooding and mudslides.

ACT members have conducted in co-operation with the local authorities and the Community Based Organizations detailed house to house surveys determining the needs of the rehabilitation and reconstruction of houses. In many earthquake affected areas, houses have already been rehabilitated and reconstructed. Temporary shelters are being provided to families that have been relocated from high-risk emergency shelter locations to transitional settlement sites, permanent shelter assistance have been provided to selected families who own a housing plot on which they can rebuild. Development of sustainable and innovative housing designs are underway.

The main challenges concerning shelters are that rubble clearing has been slow and in many cases land is still blocked by debris, inexistent land registry system which complicates the government's allocation of land for resettlement, destroyed legal documents relating to land title, unclear land tenure system, scarcity of suitable land for resettlement, especially in Port-au-Prince, and the fact that housing development must be coordinated with other complementary investments that provide incentives, such as economic opportunities and social services, for IDPs to move out of camps.

Psycho-social support

ACT members have been providing psychosocial support to the people affected by the earthquake as well as to the staff of ACT members and partners.

Support on psycho-social support has been provided through a staff care programme and through work with youth groups, teachers and students in the communities. People with disabilities have been provided emotional recovery events and they will receive further counselling and psycho-social support.

Youth and children are involved in activities such as arts, dancing and painting to cope with the changes in their lives since January 12th.

ACT members have given training to local ACT employees. Community leaders have been trained in psycho-social activities and they will continue to support local communities to play a constructive part in the rehabilitation process.

Education

The education sector has been very weak already prior to the earthquake, with less than 50 % of children attending school. In the earthquake, estimated 5000 schools were destroyed or badly damaged leaving the sector very vulnerable. The worst hit areas were Leogâne with 94 % of the school infrastructure damaged or destroyed, and Gressier, Grand Goave and Petit Goave with 40-60 % of school infrastructure destroyed.

ACT members have provided school tents and more durable transitional classrooms in the most affected areas. School activities started in early April with a revised curricula. ACT is working to provide emergency facilities with water, sanitation and school materials and emergency education inputs in IDP camps.

The plan is to get schools in the affected areas back into operation, with a long-term plan to build permanent, safe schools. At the moment, over 50 temporary schools supported by the ACT Alliance are up and running. School materials have been distributed in co-operation with UNICEF and a school feeding programme is being planned with WFP.

ACT has also started building an environmentally-friendly pilot school that uses recycled rubble and promotes community participation for approval by the Ministry of Education in Haiti.

The biggest challenges for the education sector are still insufficient school facilities and materials. Almost all schools have operated through a school-fee structure to pay teacher salaries, but now most of the teachers have not been paid since the earthquake and are still working as volunteers.

WASH

ACT members are involved in water and sanitation and hygiene promotion. Since the earthquake, ACT members have provided with water, basic water systems, water purification and sanitation equipment and hygiene kits to the affected population. Members have also provided latrines.

In the camps, ACT members have installed water tanks and tap racks. They have also provided with trucked water and quality control.

ACT has provided with cleaning materials for sanitation and rubbish disposal and trained public health promoters and camp committees.

ACT has mobilized the UN community in Haiti to develop a national programme to build biogas digesters for communities. The plan is to build 25 biogas digesters. The benefits of biogas digesters are long-term and will benefit economy, environment and health.

Livelihood

ACT members are supporting the affected communities to create sustainable livelihood and income opportunities. Provision of seeds and tools have been carried out to farming communities in many different earthquake affected areas.

Cash for Work activities have been used to repair damages and to mitigate future risks and to improve livelihoods of people. Another form has been "one-off cash grants" which have been accompanied by training in small business management or economic livelihood activities. Cash distributions have been implemented in both urban and rural areas and targeting IDPs and host families. Cash grants have also been provided for reconstruction and community rehabilitation.

Host families in the rural areas where, according to estimates, approximately 500 000 people fled after the earthquake, have been supported with food, seed, tool and cash distributions and cash for work activities.

Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster Risk Reduction measures aim at increasing resilience of communities to likely natural hazards. ACT has provided communities with disaster risk reduction training and has introduced measures to mitigate risks in rural communities and camps.

ACT members have done contingency planning together with the communities and have been in contact with key government people and the UN system in order to integrate their contingency planning with those of the government. ACT members have also shared their plans in order to prepare for a new eventual emergency response.

Coordination and Co-operation

ACT members have worked in Haiti for more than three decades. They coordinate and share information regularly with each other, and due to the good co-operation during the past years they were able to start working together quickly after the earthquake.

ACT members also work closely together with and through their Haitian partners; grassroots organizations best placed to understand their local context and the needs of their communities. ACT members have consulted them and their beneficiaries and have supported local partners in involving them better to the national level discussions and decision-making processes.

Co-operation with the Government of Haiti and the local authorities with respect to Haitian laws is an important element of ACT members work in Haiti.

Since the earthquake, ACT members have participated actively in the UN/OCHA Cluster System, the Humanitarian Country Team and other coordination bodies. Leading NGO umbrellas, InterAction together with ICVA, were able to establish the first-ever NGO Coordination Office in Port-au-Prince within 10 days of the earthquake. The task of the NGO coordination office is to actively work with international NGOs to coordinate their work in Haiti. Without NGO coordination, the success of the emergency response after the earthquake wouldn't have been possible.

ACT members are participating actively in all emerging coordination bodies, such as the work on the Interim Commission for the reconstruction of Haiti.

Advocacy

ACT Haiti Forum has adapted an ACT Haiti Forum Advocacy Plan with three main messages – Haitians must have a full ownership on the reconstruction of Haiti, the GoH resettlement strategy need to be clearly implemented and sustainable use of natural resources will be promoted.

The task of the ACT Haiti Forum is to raise awareness of the problems and challenges in Haiti that need to be addressed by advocacy measures, feed information to the ACT Secretariat in Geneva and to the member organizations' HQs, influence issues through those structures where they are represented on the ground in Haiti (HCT, clusters and local networks such as CLIO), support and facilitate the advocacy work of the partners in Haiti and to build partners' capacity in advocacy work.

ACT Alliance is an alliance of 100 churches and church-related organizations that work together in humanitarian assistance and development. The 11 ACT members working in Haiti have been supporting local organizations and/or implementing humanitarian and development programmes in Haiti for over three decades.