



Haiti Policy Report

One year later: Haiti needs a shelter strategy

One year ago, Haiti experienced a magnitude-7.0 earthquake that destroyed nearly 190,000 homes and left more than 1.5 million survivors homeless or displaced. It is estimated that 1.3 million Haitians remain either in spontaneous settlements or temporary housing situations and more than 200,000 now live with family or friends. Displaced Haitians live in more than 1,300 settlements scattered across the affected areas of Haiti, with 70 percent in Port-au-Prince alone. One of the greatest direct impacts of this devastating earthquake was the loss of housing, but one year later, no comprehensive shelter and resettlement strategy exists to support the Haitian people and facilitate access to permanent shelter solutions.

The emergency response immediately after the earthquake, including the distribution of 800,000 tarps and 100,000 tents, was both a herculean humanitarian effort and a noteworthy success. Habitat for Humanity and its partners distributed more than 21,000 emergency shelter kits and are on schedule to complete 2,000 transitional or upgradeable shelters by the end of January 2011. But the vast majority of disaster-affected families remain without options for improving precarious shelter situations. The 1.5 million internally displaced people in Haiti face extreme uncertainty, as their futures are threatened by forced evictions, improvised shelters and emergency shelter materials that have begun to deteriorate. Hurricane Tomas and a widespread outbreak of cholera have further complicated recovery efforts by diverting resources away from long-term reconstruction.



LEOGANE, HAITI (6/22/10)-Rose Flore Charles, 35, holds her 2-year-old daughter, Guallina Delva. Prior to moving into a Habitat for Humanity transitional shelter, Rose and her family spent six months living in a makeshift shack that Rose cobbled together out of scraps.

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Shelter is a basic human need, critical to good health, stable employment and effective education. A failure to prioritize decent shelter in Haiti's recovery efforts will not only affect the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of Haitians, but also diminish the returns of other long-term development investments, delaying the "refounding" of Haiti.

Shelter reconstruction can stimulate local economies through job creation, investment, commerce and skills training. Decisions about how, where and when the homes of Haitians are rebuilt will have a critical impact on Haiti's future economic potential and on the long-term success of its people.

The context for thinking about shelter

Shelter and resettlement should fit into a comprehensive urban strategy and development plan supported by the government and people of Haiti. That plan must take into account the availability of land and improved security of tenure; land use and environmental issues; the improved delivery of basic services, including water, sanitation, health services and transportation; national economic development and job-creation opportunities; measures to reduce disaster risks; input from those who have lost their homes

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI
(01/23/2010)-Earthquake survivors left homeless by the earthquake live in this large encampment of makeshift shelters near the Port-au-Prince airport.

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and communities; and the needs of renters, who make up the majority of the population in spontaneous settlements. The plan must include incentives, implementation plans and realistic timetables to transition families from the camps where the majority of the 1.3 million people are living.

To support shelter and resettlement, policymakers should focus on a community- and neighborhood-based approach that enables families to fix homes that can be repaired and that, where practicable, plans for the reintegration of Haitians into their original neighborhoods and livelihoods. Policymakers should also address shelter needs of former renters when return to rental units is impossible. Policies of urban inclusion and support are essential to establishing fairness and equity on the ground.

Special considerations and priorities

The following principles, considerations and priorities must be included in the design and implementation of a shelter and resettlement strategy:

1. Shelter plans must be coordinated with programs that aim to alleviate poverty and promote job creation alongside economic growth. Although agriculture and rural development are essential, 70 percent of Haiti's gross domestic product is generated in the Port-au-Prince area. Housing, therefore, must be built where Haitians will want to live and work, and where they will have access to resources that will allow for growth and expansion. Local concerns, preferences and community infrastructure must fully be taken into account to ensure that Haitians take complete ownership of the country as it rebuilds.
2. Equally important are the complex land tenure issues that face Haitians today. Even before the earthquake, land titles were nebulous or unknown, with a high percentage of property in Haiti lacking clear, documented ownership. The disaster has only made the situation worse. For example, some deaths that occurred during the earthquake have not been formally documented, making claims on land by heirs complicated, if not impossible. Building shelter is risky when one is unable to ascertain who owns the land or who will have rights to the shelter when it is finished. Putting Haitians back into homes without security of tenure will put them under the same risk for evictions and above-market rents that existed before the earthquake. Tenure security gives Haitians a reason to invest in their homes. These investments create gross domestic product and contribute to the economy as a whole. A successful resettlement depends upon the work of the Haitian government and the international community to empower local communities and citizens to work together to solve land disputes and ensure security of tenure.
3. This disaster has also underscored the importance of construction standards. One needs only to compare the devastation seen in Haiti to the relatively low levels of damage seen in the subsequent Chilean earthquake (which was of a greater magnitude) to see the number of lives that are saved by enforcing building codes designed to address the risks inherent in a particular location. Developing and following standards that can help new construction in Haiti withstand the next hurricane or earthquake is critical to creating a better Haiti.
4. Any shelter and resettlement program must take gender issues into consideration. Women, men, girls and boys are affected differently in disaster situations and have different needs. Policies and programs must take into account these differences and address the safety and security of women and children not only in the camps, but also in the design and construction of homes. They also must address equal access to jobs and other livelihoods, tenure security relating to joint ownership of land, and inheritance rights for women.
5. Priority should be given to building the capacity of the Haitian government. Haiti is now frequently labeled as the "NGO capital of the world." This is both a commendation of the incredible outpouring of support from the United States and the international community, and a warning of the amount of work to be done in developing local Haitian capacity in all sectors. International nongovernmental organizations will not be able to support the Haitian society indefinitely, nor should they. For Haiti to remain vibrant, stable and prosperous long after the recovery effort, all international NGOs must work to increase the capacity of the Haitian government, local NGOs, community-based organizations and the private sector to address the daily needs and aspirations of the Haitian people.
6. Decentralization and resettlement, both extremely important issues, need to be understood as separate goals. Increasing access to basic services and creating economic opportunities or "growth poles" in other parts of the country is essential. But decentralization will take years and should not be confused with a resettlement strategy. A comprehensive resettlement plan is needed in addition to a decentralization strategy to avoid making the spontaneous settlements a permanent "temporary" solution. Without a resettlement plan, camps will be occupied for years to come, creating further reliance on the NGO and donor community.

Over the past year, a dynamic effort by the international community, NGOs and especially Haitians has taken root in Haiti. Lives have been saved, and rebuilding efforts are ongoing. All stakeholders, however, must increase their efforts to support the Haitian people, and especially work to find appropriate and viable solutions for the Haitians who were displaced or left homeless by the earthquake.

To this end, Habitat for Humanity makes the following recommendations:

The international community must:

- Support the development of a Haitian-led comprehensive shelter and resettlement plan to address the housing needs of 1.5 million internally displaced people still living in spontaneous settlements. This strategy should take a community-and neighborhood-based approach and support the reconstruction of destroyed and damaged property with clear building standards. It also should address land ownership, access, tenure and registration, and the massive need to remove rubble.
- Create distinct but coordinated strategies for decentralization and resettlement.
- Increase the capacity of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission to maximize coordination and effectiveness in supporting a shelter and resettlement strategy and provide a foundation for a Haitian-led reconstruction effort after the IHRC's charter has expired. This plan should address the need to close the camps and give camp residents an incentive to resettle in communities and neighborhoods with basic services to meet their needs.

The U.S. government and USAID must take the following actions:

- Refocus their efforts on developing and supporting a community-based, Haitian-led comprehensive shelter and resettlement strategy for the 1.3 million Haitians living in spontaneous settlements.
- Develop their own joint shelter and resettlement strategy that both integrates with and leverages an overall comprehensive strategy.
- Designate a senior official with relevant expertise to lead the U.S. government's efforts on shelter and resettlement issues. This official should work to advise and inform stakeholders on key developments and encourage input from experts and stakeholders on the U.S. government's shelter and resettlement strategy in a clear and transparent manner.
- Increase resources for shelter and resettlement reconstruction activities. As the government of Haiti stated in March, 40 percent of the earthquake's impact was on the housing sector. Less than 6 percent of funding pledged at the donor conference in New York is for housing, and less than 17 percent of the current U.S. State Department spending plan is dedicated to shelter, urban upgrading and rubble removal.
- Increase resources for rubble removal, which is a necessary precondition to housing reconstruction. The State Department spending plan includes \$25 million—less than 3 percent—for rubble removal. Rubble is known to be a key impediment to long-term reconstruction.
- Increase resources to solve community-based land tenure issues, with a special focus on renters, since they represent a majority of Haitians who remain in need of safer, more secure, permanent housing.