

Five years since the Haiti earthquake

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Five years have passed since the 2010 Haiti earthquake killed 230,000 people, injured nearly 300,000 more, and left at least 1.5 million—the equivalent of nearly half the nation’s capital—homeless.

According to an extensive report published last June by the Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d’Informatique (the Haitian Institute of Statistics and Information Technology) and the French research institute DIAL, the number of people living in makeshift camps after the quake reached 1.6 million in July 2010. There was at least one injured person in 23 percent of families in the camps; 7 percent of the wounded have long-term disabilities, either physical or mental.

Official figures state that approximately 80,000 people remain homeless in camps five years later. While this number is staggering, it does not include thousands of others living under tarpaulins in back alleyways, or in shacks they’ve had to build themselves because much of the aid promised by the US government has been diverted to contractors like Chemonics.

In a recent interview on Bloomberg TV’s “Money Makers,” former Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe claimed that 97 percent of the people left homeless have been relocated from the camps, an exaggerated figure. When in power, Lamothe’s concern was to relocate the homeless so that they wouldn’t be visible to wealthy tourists and resort companies.

In his recent resignation speech—which sounded more like preparation for a future presidential run—Lamothe boasted about World Bank figures showing that extreme poverty in the country dropped from 31 to 24 percent of the population between 2000 and 2012. But extreme poverty is defined as less than \$1.23 per day, and more than half the population still subsists on less than \$2.41 per day. Nationally, 6.3 million Haitians—more than 60 percent of the population—are food insecure. Haiti has one of the highest income

inequality rates in the world.

In preparing their report, the IHSI and DIAL painstakingly interviewed 4,980 households using well-established statistical methods. The interviewers were so thorough that they often spent a whole day with one household.

Their findings stand as an indictment of capitalism’s response to the disaster. Only 2 percent of families whose homes were badly damaged received aid for clearing the rubble; slightly more—7 percent—received aid for rebuilding. Remittances from friends and family abroad were a much larger source of funding, but only 13 percent of households received extra funds this way after the earthquake. According to World Bank figures, the number of Haitian households receiving remittances increased from 42 percent in 2001 to 69 percent in 2012.

The report also found that, if currency values are kept constant, the median income of surveyed households dropped by 57.3 percent between 2007 and 2012. Child labor increased, often under very hazardous conditions. While in 2007 only 1 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 worked, in 2012 the percentage increased to 20 percent.

Only people in the top income quintile are not living in overcrowded conditions. Poor families who have been forced to build new homes in Port-au-Prince from whatever materials are available face increasingly difficult circumstances. The amount of available land has not increased substantially, but people are understandably afraid of building anything higher than one story. The IHSI/DIAL report found that, although 50,000 new multi-story buildings were constructed between 2003 and 2007, 33,000 were lost in the earthquake.

Hurricanes, tropical storms, and flooding have, like the earthquake, serious impacts on Haiti. A September 2012 Interim Strategy Note of the World Bank stated

that 96 percent of the country's population is vulnerable to such events. Losses from Hurricane Jeanne in 2004 equaled 7 percent of GDP, while three storms in 2008—Fay, Gustav, and Hannah—resulted in damages equaling 15 percent of GDP.

Total destruction from the quake equaled 120 percent of GDP. The World Bank estimates post-earthquake reconstruction needs at US \$11.3 billion. Money from foreign governments increased from 6.7 percent of GDP before the quake to 16.6 percent after.

International donors pledged \$10.4 billion in reconstruction funds. The US government has allocated approximately \$3.6 million. Yet Raymond Joseph, who was Haiti's ambassador to the US at the time of the earthquake and who has written for the *Wall Street Journal*, told Bloomberg, "We don't know where the money has gone."

In the Bloomberg interview, Joseph posed as an opponent of current president Michel Martelly and a critic of the Clintons. At pains to stress that Haiti offers cheap labor opportunities to foreign businesses, his disagreement was with how the reconstruction has been administered.

In a January 9 *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece, he cites two examples: the Caracol industrial park on Haiti's northern coast and the Lumane Casimir "model village" just north of Port-au-Prince. The Clintons and Martelly promised 20,000 new jobs at Caracol in its first five years, but so far only one company has set up shop and employs approximately 4,000.

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Similarly, the government promised 3,000 new homes at Lumane Casimir, but as of last September only 1,280 were occupied.

Of the homes that have actually been constructed with USAID funds, many are of poor quality. According to an article in the *Boston Review*, 15,000 new homes were promised in Port-au-Prince and the North Department. As of January 2014, however, only 900 of those houses had been built, and the construction cost for each had increased from US \$8,000 to US \$33,000.

An August 2014 US government assessment of 750 of the houses "revealed numerous deficiencies" including "missing roof fasteners, sub-specification roof materials and concrete reinforcement, and other

structural and drainage issues." The Center for Economic and Policy Research reported that USAID paid an additional \$4.5 million to a private corporation to "provide a remediation plan." Beth Hogan, a USAID assistant administrator, blamed US and international building codes when questioned about the overruns by the US House of Representatives.

Last week the *Miami Herald* interviewed Islande Lima, who lives in one of the one-bedroom houses. "The doors, the windows—they aren't good. The slightest wind and the windows fly off," she told the *Herald*, while pointing out cracks that developed in the outside walls as soon as she moved in.

In April 2013 the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) published a report attempting to detail how USAID reconstruction money had been spent up to that point. Because of US government secrecy, CEPR found it "impossible to determine how much is being spent on individual projects and how awardees are administering U.S. taxpayer funds."

Documents which it did obtain through Freedom of Information Act requests were heavily redacted. Rather than the standard excuse of "national security" for such measures, USAID cited the "proprietary" nature of the information.

Nonetheless, CEPR was able to determine that Chemonics, the third largest recipient of USAID funds worldwide, had received nearly \$200 million in Haiti reconstruction contracts. The company had previously been cited by auditors for not hiring as many Haitian workers as were stipulated in its contract.



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