



Ashley Jonathan Clements / WVI

**A range of critical issues must be addressed immediately if Haiti is to recover from January's earthquake; the provision of shelter for the displaced, access to primary healthcare for the most vulnerable, access to education for every child, agricultural reform, and many others. But a common thread across all these sectors must also be addressed if we are to make any lasting progress in these other areas. This thread is resilience: the need to rebuild a resilient Haiti and to support Haitians to become even more resilient themselves.**

The evidence of January's devastating earthquake is still on display across Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. The camps that are home to hundreds of thousands of displaced people continue to spread to cover virtually every space that can accommodate them. Rubble from the

thousands of shattered buildings still litters the streets more than two months on. But even with the scars of the last disaster fresh, the onset of the rainy season is already turning attention to the 'next' emergency.

Between 1990 and 2004, more than twenty disasters affected Haiti. Haitians are exposed to growing and complex threats that result from natural disasters, compounded by high levels of poverty, severe environmental degradation, and high levels of social vulnerability.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, the question being asked at the moment is not whether there will be a next disaster in Haiti. The question is rather when the next disaster will strike. As recovery and reconstruction efforts pick up momentum, and an overall strategic framework is taking shape, consideration must be given to how to rebuild a resilient Haiti, and not just how to put the pieces back as they were.

1. Republic of Haiti, *Grown and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*, November 2007

## World Vision's Disaster Risk Reduction Activities

With over 30 years of work in Haiti, World Vision has a strong track record of long-term development as well as relief. Mitigating risks and reducing the impact of disasters on the communities in which we work has been an important focus, particularly in recent years.

In many areas World Vision has supported the creation of community committees to take the lead on risk-mapping, community contingency planning, awareness raising, and mitigation activities. These committees work closely with local authorities to develop community preparedness plans, significantly enhancing community resilience.

There is much space for highly innovative work in the area of DRR across Haiti. In some areas watershed preservation and reforestation initiatives have been linked with economic recovery and livelihoods opportunities through the planting of fruit trees on deforested slopes. But World Vision's support for DRR work has found particular success by involving children in the process. By equipping children to protect themselves, community resilience is greatly enhanced over the long-term, and vulnerability to environmental threats is significantly reduced. Schools provide the perfect venue for engaging children in DRR.

World Vision will continue to focus on DRR, integrating it into the sectors across our response to ensure that communities are rebuilt with attention to resilience. Focus groups and interviews conducted with children affected by the earthquake are directly informing World Vision's programme strategy, advocacy, and DRR activities.



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## Reducing Risk

Haiti's impending disasters cannot be prevented – at least not in the short-term. But we can focus on preventing or minimising the effects of these disasters on the people who live here.

Multiple studies have demonstrated the returns which investments in pre-disaster preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) can yield. The economic cost of reducing risk is far less than the cost of dealing with the aftermath of disasters; according to the Swiss Agency for Development, every dollar spent on risk reduction avoids at least four dollars in non-occurring disaster losses.<sup>2</sup> With Haiti at such high risk of being impacted by disasters, and with so many Haitians being acutely vulnerable to their effects, DRR must be treated as a critical component of any reconstruction and recovery framework for the country.

## Community-Based Solutions

Too often disaster preparedness and mitigation activities are limited to infrastructural development, building codes, and policy reform. A much-overlooked but critical component of DRR is investment in community-based resilience.

Communities should be empowered as the principal drivers of disaster preparedness. Local disaster response ownership is a core principle of international development and is expressed in numerous humanitarian standards, including the Red Cross Code of Conduct and Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship. Communities and families will significantly decrease their vulnerability if they are kept informed of potential hazards, threats, and shocks and if they

have taken steps to plan ahead and adequately prepare. Empowering communities in Haiti to become more resilient must involve championing local-level leadership. DRR will be best served by bringing Government and civil-society together.

## Children As Agents of Change

Children account for nearly half the Haitian population. They are traditionally the most vulnerable during periods of disaster, where they can become separated from families and cut off from support structures. The active participation of children in preparedness programmes is therefore not optional. Rather, it is critical in order to preserve a future in which children are safe and can participate in the development of their country.

Schools are the best venues for sowing seeds of conventional knowledge and collective values. Through its schools, Haiti has the opportunity to set the highest standard both for disaster risk reduction and disaster risk education. By integrating DRR fully into school curricula, particularly in high-risk areas, Haiti's education system would be aligning with the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) global campaign: 'DRR Begins in Schools.'

World Vision's research has shown that children can and should be trained as leaders in their community on disaster preparedness. Disaster risk reduction and preparedness training should be integrated into school curricula so that children can be empowered to protect themselves and their community members.<sup>3</sup> In this way, children are recognised and treated as legitimate change agents in whom the future of Haiti rests, and in whom we must help build resilience.

2. Swiss Agency for Development, *SDC Guidelines on Disaster Risk Reduction*, March 2008

3. World Vision International, *Planet Prepare: Preparing Coastal Communities in Asia for Future Catastrophes*, 2008



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## Recommendations

Much hard work has been done in Haiti over recent years by the Government (particularly the Ministries of Interior and Civil Protection) and its partners in the field. But January's earthquake has raised the stakes. More attention, more investment, and more community-oriented approaches to DRR are now required.

World Vision calls for the Government of Haiti and the international community to:

- Ensure that DRR is prioritised in the reconstruction and recovery strategy, with a minimum of 10 per cent of total humanitarian funding made available for DRR interventions;
- Ensure that affected communities and civil society actors are engaged in helping formulate the strategic directions of the recovery and reconstruction process, and that their priorities and needs are reflected in the recovery and reconstruction plan;
- Through these civil society mechanisms, ensure a high degree of accountability and quality for any DRR interventions undertaken during the recovery and reconstruction process (focusing on preparedness for hurricane season and building code standards as initial priorities);
- Ensure the protection of children through hazard resilient construction of schools and hospitals, integration of DRR into all school curriculum, and advocacy to ensure children's resilience in situations of vulnerability before, during and after emergencies;
- Allocate significant resources to build capacities of both communities and local authorities to manage and reduce disaster risk by having access to the necessary information, resources, and the authority to implement actions for DRR, in accordance with the Hyogo Framework for Action and Haiti National Platform for DRR;
- Prioritise the role of children as agents of change, placing them at the forefront of the DRR arena, allocating resources for ongoing focus group discussions, research and other mechanisms to identify and incorporate children's voices into the recovery and reconstruction strategy.