

PERMANENT, SOCIAL HOUSING IN HAITI: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE US GOVERNMENT

September 2012



"People simply want a space where they can live like human beings." ¹ --Sanon Reyneld

SUMMARY

More than two and a half years after the earthquake, hundreds of thousands of Haitians are waiting for viable housing solutions. Even before the earthquake, Haiti was experiencing a major housing crisis, with an estimated shortage of 300,000 homes in 2009. After the earthquake, more than 1.5 million people were left homeless,² and today, the number of people still living in tent camps is estimated to be over 369,000,³ with even more Haitians living in substandard housing, deemed unsafe by public authorities.

Historically, vast public works programs have been implemented around the world to build and manage rental housing, and finance programs to facilitate private home ownership. Haiti should be no exception. The government of Haiti is bound by a constitutional directive to support the needs of people living without adequate housing. Despite the existing crisis, the government of Haiti has not yet produced a comprehensive housing plan to address the shortage of housing affecting homeless Haitians.

Of the \$988 million in United States Government post-earthquake recovery and reconstruction efforts, only 10% has been spent to provide shelter to those left homeless.⁴ Indeed, international assistance for housing has not even scratched the surface of the need, with less than 4,843 homes constructed since the earthquake.⁵ Relief and reconstruction efforts have neglected to prioritize the most basic need for earthquake survivors, forcing hundreds of thousands of women, men and children to remain under tents for thirty-two months and counting.

THE NUMBERS

- The 2010 earthquake destroyed 20% and damaged 27% of the houses in Port-au-Prince.⁶
- The total damage to the housing sector was estimated at \$2.3 billion.⁷
- Only 13,198 houses have been repaired and 4,843 permanent homes built for more than one and a half a million people originally displaced.⁸
- At present, 369,000 people are still living in displacement camps; and it is estimated that 311,000 will be living in camps by the end of this year.
- 80 percent of those displaced thus far have nowhere to return to because they were renters before the earthquake.⁹
- There is not enough housing available to absorb the need. According to data from the International Organization for Migration, current shortages will leave more than 300,000 without housing.¹⁰
- When evicted from camps, these families have no option but to inhabit substandard housing units. As soon as one year after the earthquake, despite the dangers, families had returned to 64% of houses marked for demolition and 85% of houses needing significant repair.¹¹

BACKGROUND

\$3.06 billion in private donations have been spent since the earthquake,¹² but questions remain about the impact of these funds when the most fundamental need of survivors – housing – is not being met.

In addition to the 369,000 people in displacement camps, many others live in housing that does not meet minimum safety standards. In both camps and impoverished urban areas, inadequate sanitation, close living quarters, and limited access to potable water has contributed to the spread of disease, the most fatal of which is cholera, responsible for 7,558 deaths as of September 6, 2012.¹³ There is also a significant correlation between lack of safe, permanent housing and problems of insecurity. Women and girls in particular have been victim to high rates of gender-based violence in these camps.

The Haitian Right to Housing Collective, an advocacy platform of human rights organizations that includes a coalition of 26 grassroots groups and displacement camp committees, is calling on the Haitian government, with the support of its allies and donors, like the US government, to prioritize public or affordable housing for Haiti's urban poor and homeless. In order to do this, the Haitian government must first:

- (1) Designate land for housing construction;
- (2) Create one centralized government housing institution to coordinate and implement a social housing plan;
- (3) Solicit and allocate funding to realize this plan.

Having already invested nearly \$98 million in temporary shelter assistance post-earthquake, the US government is implicated in the failure to provide adequate housing solutions. Permanent housing should be a priority for the remaining \$1.12 billion in “committed” funds in the recovery and reconstruction budget.¹⁴ With this funding, the US government can dramatically improve the lives of thousands of families by reallocating funding for permanent, lasting housing solutions.¹⁵

At \$644.4 million,¹⁶ the annual budget of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, MINUSTAH for 2012-2013 would allow for the construction of more than 58,000 houses at \$11,000 USD per home.¹⁷

INADEQUATE EFFORTS

To date, the steps taken towards housing solutions in Haiti have been plagued by lack of political will, resulting in little to no funding allocated for permanent housing. In the past, the governmental Public Agency for the Promotion of Social Housing (EPPLS by its French acronym) was responsible for social housing projects, however it has been underfunded for decades and has no current authorization to move forward. Even before the earthquake, housing was not a priority for the government.

Privately-financed efforts have not produced housing that is accessible to the majority of the population, in part because the price of building materials is not regulated, rent control legislation is not enforced, and speculation on land and housing is widespread. Poor urban planning, lax building code enforcement, and an archaic system of land registry have all contributed as much or more to the current housing crisis as the catastrophic 2010 earthquake.

Efforts by the international community have been severely disorganized, with little governmental cooperation or oversight. Unable to navigate the difficult process of land tenure and titling for permanent housing projects, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have built temporary one-room shelters made of plywood. Few permanent alternatives to these temporary, three-year solutions have been proposed. Only 20% of the funds spent in the housing sector have been invested in the repair and the construction of permanent buildings.¹⁸ The only permanent housing structures funded by USAID have been erected in industrial areas, and only one of these is planned for an earthquake-affected area.¹⁹

The power to create affordable, permanent solutions to the housing crisis rests in the hands of the Haitian Government. A significant portion of the land in Haiti is owned by the government, and they have the means to make land available for housing through the power of eminent domain. Despite having the capacity and the legal authority to solve this problem, the government and its supporters in the international community have undertaken a number of unsuccessful and piecemeal projects that fail to address the structural underpinnings of the housing crisis. Some of these inadequate housing and relocations programs include:

GOVERNMENT RELOCATION PLAN “16-6”

As President Martelly took office in the summer of 2011, he pledged to close all displacement camps within six months of his presidency. Two and a half years later, an estimated 575 camps remain.²⁰

The 16-6 plan, financed by the Haiti Reconstruction Fund, and implemented by the Government of Haiti, International Office of Migration (IOM), UN Development Program, UNOPS, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) called for the clearing of six public areas where displacement camps were located, and the rehabilitation of sixteen neighborhoods of origin for families living in those camps. The project cost a total of \$78.9 million and 30 million of this came from the Haiti Reconstruction Fund (with the US having supported over 30% of that fund’s resources).²¹ Families were offered \$500 to repair a damaged home, or the same amount as a rental subsidy. However, the majority of displaced families in the 16-6 camps report being renters before the earthquake and have no homes to return to. With \$500 they can barely rent a two-bedroom apartment in one of the capital’s urban slums for one year; leaving these families with even less alternatives a year after the camp eviction. Despite this, only 1,000 new houses have been built as part of the rehabilitation phase.

In addition, internally displaced families were forced to leave camps prior to the rehabilitation of their neighborhoods, meaning that few alternatives for safe and affordable housing existed. In total, the 16-6 plan only assisted 5% of families who were displaced after the earthquake. Although this model is being replicated by aid groups, and is moving into a second phase that targets 45 more camps, it is a piecemeal program that is failing to meet its own goals while a comprehensive housing plan is still glaringly absent.

ILLEGAL FORCED EVICTIONS

The government’s emphasis on camp closures has resulted in unlawful, violent evictions of tens of thousands of people. Forced evictions continue to occur on a regular basis, with support from the police and local officials. In many cases, no legal authorization was given and little effort was made to provide appropriate housing alternatives for displaced people, violating Article 22 of the Haitian Constitution.²² Further, these evictions are a breach of Article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, signed by Haiti in January 2012. In a study conducted by IOM in 2011, 34% of displaced persons stated that they had been victims of a forced eviction.²³ With little safe housing available, many return to damaged housing. Others have been pushed to live on dangerous hillsides, in slum neighborhoods, and the growing settlement, Canaan, north of Port-au-Prince. Canaan represents an estimated 50,000 people and has yet to be officially recognized by the government, with no urban planning, building oversight or basic services currently provided.²⁴

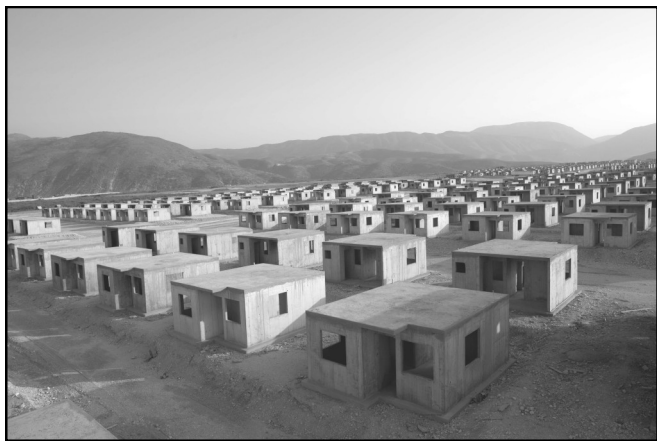
“Evictions of persons without suitable alternative housing constitute a violation of their human rights and guiding principles for internally displaced persons.”²⁵

— Nigel Fisher, Humanitarian Coordinator of the United Nations in Haiti



Displaced women participate in a peaceful protest for housing in front of Ministry of Social Affairs. October 3, 2011. Port-au-Prince. Photo Credit: Alexis Erkert

INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR HOUSING PROJECTS



Haitian government housing project in Morne Kabrit Photo Credit: Ben Depp

The US government has been closely involved in the Caracol Industrial Park, financing housing construction for potential factory workers in the new Free Trade Zone, as well as a power plant and a port.²⁶ The Haitian government used eminent domain to make the land available for the factories, transforming a fertile farming area into a 617-acre industrial park with \$224 million in funding from the Government of Haiti, the Inter-American Development Bank and the United States Government. The housing in Caracol has received extensive criticism from the Architectural Peer Review of Caracol EKAM Housing. According to these engineers, the housing has no provision for water connection, uses improper roofing material, provides little space between houses, and states that it has the potential to become a, “blighted slum or public health disaster resulting in added despair for the Haitian people”.²⁷

Two of the major housing projects managed by the Haitian government have provided little reprieve to the housing shortage. A project in Morne Kabrit, located just nine miles from Port au Prince, was financed by the Venezuelan Petro-Caribe Fund at a cost of \$44 million to build 3,000 houses. The second project to build 400 homes was developed in Zoranje, and paid for by a grant from the Inter-American Development Bank worth \$30 million.²⁸ Despite the completion of these Zoranje homes in February 2012, only a handful has been offered to some government employees. Unfortunately, the remaining houses stand empty, waiting for the government and donors to resolve beneficiary selection. Additionally, the few Haitians that currently live in Zoranje complain about the lack of access to water, transport, jobs, and other services unplanned prior to its opening.

NATIONAL HOUSING POLICY

A newly formed governmental institution, *Unité de Construction de Logements et de Batiments Publics* (UCLBP), has been given the directive to draft a National Housing policy. A \$300,000 World Bank trust-fund grant supported the creation of this policy. However, UCLBP sought no input from displaced people and promotes market-based solutions to the housing crisis, with no mention of affordability or access for Haiti’s urban poor. Civil society has also pointed to the fact that this entity was created without following the appropriate legal process, and as such has no real authority.

According to the UCLBP policy, the housing deficit can only be met by “Haitian families and the private sector.”²⁹ Further, the document states that the role of the government is solely to facilitate the work of families and the private sector, notably in planning land use, providing construction codes, risk reduction, environmental management, security concerns, and plan the appropriate urban/rural mix to meet the country’s needs. No funding mechanism is outlined in the UCLBP project. And, although it is being branded as a housing plan, it is clear that the UCLBP policy emphasizes private financing, putting the responsibility back on the people.

LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

- Under Article 22 of the Haitian Constitution, the government is obligated to recognize the right to decent housing for those who cannot find a home for themselves.
- The Haitian government is legally bound by its international treaty obligations in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), signed and ratified by the Haitian Parliament on 31 January 2012. Article 11.1 of the ICESCR mandates the government of Haiti to guarantee an adequate standard of living, and to protect all internally displaced people from forced evictions from the land they occupy.³⁰
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to adequate housing and protection from forced evictions as inviolable rights belonging to each person.³¹

US POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Americans were extremely generous in the aftermath of Haiti's 2010 earthquake, and the US Government has been one of the largest donors to the relief and reconstruction efforts. However, the failure to prioritize housing as the most fundamental emergency response has had long-reaching impacts on the lives of earthquake victims, especially women and children. Without four walls and a roof over their heads, families have spent thirty-two months exposed to severe heat, tropical storms and hurricanes, a deadly cholera epidemic, and horrific rates of gender-based violence.

In response to a growing movement in Haiti that calls for a comprehensive social housing plan, we are seeking support for legislation to mandate the US government to:

- 1) Discontinue the construction of temporary shelters and distribution of tarps and focus on permanent housing options that meet minimum safety standards, respect local architectural styles, using local materials and labor to the extent possible.
- 2) Urge the Haitian government to create a Ministry of Housing and halt all forced evictions until a social housing plan is in place.
- 3) Allocate a portion of the funding in the USAID recovery and reconstruction funding for:
 - Consultation meetings with EPPLS, UCLBP and Haitian civil society engaged in housing efforts to discuss how to create affordable, quality, and rights-based public housing.
 - The planning and implementation of large-scale public housing efforts, led by the Haitian government in consultation with Haitian civil society, which address the needs of the most vulnerable, including women-headed households, and fits within a coherent land use plan.
 - Training the chain of construction professionals on proper, Haiti-specific construction techniques.
- 4) Ensure that all cash payments for resettlement from camps are tied to a comprehensive assistance program to guarantee that displaced families have access to durable housing solutions.
- 5) Encourage the Haitian government to appropriate the necessary financing to provide infrastructure and services to Canaan, including urban planning and building oversight.
- 6) Assist the government of Haiti in creating programs that offer reduced interest loans for housing repairs or construction for those without stable sources of income.
- 7) Ensure greater transparency by working with the Haitian government to measure, monitor and make public the outcomes of housing projects funded by the US government, with public participation in oversight of these budgets attached to housing plans.

Under Tents is an international campaign to win housing rights for Haiti's displaced, working in coordination with the Haitian Right to Housing Collective. Co-sponsors include:

*Action Aid * Alternative Chance/Chans Altènativ * American Jewish World Service (AJWS) * Beyond Borders, Canada Haiti Action Network (CHAN) * Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) * Coalition of Classist Tendencies (Venezuela) * Convergence of Movements of Peoples of the Americas (COMPA) * Council of Popular and Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (COPINH) * Fraternal Organization of Black Hondurans (OFRANEH) * Gender Action * Grassroots International * Haiti Justice Alliance * Haiti Support Group * Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH) * Just Foreign Policy * Latin America Working Group (LAWG) * Let Haiti Live * Li, Li, Li! Read * MADRE * Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Haiti * National Council of Campesinos (Colombia) * Noise Runs * Other Worlds * Otros Mundos (Mexico) * Quixote Center * School of the Americas Watch * StopWar (Vancouver) * Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL) * TransAfrica * Trocaire * United Methodist General Board of Church and Society * WhyHunger * Women's Economic Agenda Project (WEAP) * Zero Evictions Campaign / International Alliance of Inhabitants*

www.undertentshaiti.com

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁵ In the analysis of the USAID and State Department reports, it was found that \$1.12 billion in Relief and Recovery funds have already been committed for specific programming. However, there is insufficient public information to be sure of the remaining amount, or which type of funding this money may already be earmarked for.
- ¹⁶ MINUSTAH powerpoint presentation, prepared by Vincenzo Pugliesi, Deputy Spokesperson/Media Relations, MINUSTAH
- ¹⁷ The \$11,000 construction estimate is based on homes being built by the Haitian organization, Institute of Technology and Animation (ITECA). These homes are earthquake and hurricane-resistant and use local building materials, like stones, to the degree possible, and are built with local labor and the participation of homeowners. The cost of each home includes a solar panel, outdoor latrine and water catchments system
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An electronic version can be found at: www.undertentshaiti.com/housingbrief