

# HAITI ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP (HAWG)

*HAWG is a working group of international development, faith-based, human rights and social justice organizations advocating on issues related to U.S.-Haiti policy.*

## **A Focus On Post Earthquake Shelter Issues**

### **The Importance of Shelter**

One of the greatest direct impacts of the earthquake for most Haitians has been the loss of their homes and shelter has become a clear, urgent priority in relief and reconstruction efforts. In total, nearly 1.5 million people have been displaced or are homeless due to the earthquake. Shelter is one of the most basic and essential human needs; it is critical to health, stable employment and education. Other humanitarian assistance investments will suffer diminishing returns and the “re-founding” of Haiti will be delayed if the provision of adequate shelter is not made a priority. Any reconstruction plan must make shelter in cities a central component as a part of a broader effort to foster Haitian self-sufficiency. Shelter reconstruction will stimulate the local economy through job creation, investment, 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 opportunity and on the living standards and conditions of its people.

### **The Context for Thinking about Shelter**

Haiti and its international partners must be committed to “building back better.” Housing reconstruction should occur within the framework of an urban strategy and development plan supported by the Government of Haiti and its citizenry. That plan must take into account such factors as the availability of land and improved security of tenure; land use and environmental issues; the improved delivery of basic services including and water, sanitation and transport; national economic development and job creation opportunities; disaster risk reduction measures; the expressed preferences of those who have lost their homes and community needs; the special problems and needs of renters; etc.

Specific to the current situation, policy-makers should enable families to return to homes that are structurally sound, develop programs to help families fix homes that can be repaired, and plan for the reintegration of the many families whose homes have been destroyed and who inevitably will want to return to be near family, community, and livelihoods. Policies of urban inclusion and support are essential. It is well documented that in similar disasters, urban populations have increased over time and accepting and planning for that increase must begin now; ensuring that costs and benefits of urban investments enables fairness and equity on the ground.

### **Special Considerations and Priorities**

A number of principles, considerations and priorities must be assessed and considered in designing and implementing a program for shelter reconstruction:

- Link reconstruction plans to poverty alleviation and durable job generation and economic growth opportunities
- Include programs to clarify land ownership and occupancy rights, and to improve security of tenure
- Coordinate housing reconstruction with infrastructure development, particularly water and sanitation

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

IAN SCHWAB, American Jewish World Service at [ischwab@ajws.org](mailto:ischwab@ajws.org) · VICKI GASS, Washington Office on Latin America at [vgass@wola.org](mailto:vgass@wola.org)

**Multiple organizations contribute on a case by case basis to issue or sector specific recommendations and positions expressed in HAWG materials. These materials are not designed to be consensus positions and have not been explicitly endorsed by each organization active in the HAWG.**

- Ensure that shelter reconstruction strategies and building standards take into consideration the likelihood of future earthquakes and other natural disasters
- Incorporate gender concerns into shelter planning at all stages of development
- Reflect local preferences, practices and conditions and community infrastructure
- Build up capacities of Haitian organizations (government, CBOs, NGOs, private sector)

#### **The shelter situation in Haiti today, 6 months after the earthquake:**

People displaced in settlement sites after the earthquake still continue to struggle to meet their basic needs. Original estimates showed 1.2 million displaced persons, but that has increased in the past six months to 1.5 Million. Of the estimated 570,000 people who left Port au Prince after the earthquake, well over half have returned. Displaced persons live in over 1,300 settlements, of which less than 25% have a designated camp management agency to coordinate the provision of food, water, protection, and other humanitarian aid. Displaced people face extreme uncertainty as their futures are threatened by forced evictions. Moreover, the impending danger posed by expected hurricanes and the existing stress caused by heavy rains are compounding an already difficult situation. Only 5,657 of a planned 125,000 transitional shelters have been built.

#### **The Importance of Security of Tenure in Shelter Reconstruction**

Tenure security is a vital part of a multi-pronged approach to improve housing conditions for the poor. It more effectively fights poverty when implemented gradually in tandem with basic services such as water and sanitation. Efforts to improve tenure security should prioritize the most vulnerable populations—the urban poor, women and children, and those affected by disasters. Education, advocacy, and awareness of individual rights are key to improving tenure security for the poor, especially for these populations most at risk. National and local laws that create a framework for granting tenure security, including an accessible, transparent and accountable land administration system to combat corruption and inefficiency in government, are vital to increasing tenure security.

#### **Haiti Shelter Related Recommendations for the U.S. Government**

- Increase resources for shelter reconstruction activities. As the Government of Haiti stated in March, 40% of the earthquake's impact was related to the housing sector. However, less than 6% of funding pledged at the donor conference is earmarked for housing and less than 14% of the current US Haiti supplemental is designated for shelter. Special focus should be given to housing repair programs. Currently only 3 million USD has been dedicated to housing repairs.
- Ensure programs resulting from the Haiti supplemental with funding targeted for shelter reconstruction take the above context, considerations and priorities into account.
- Expedite and expand resources for rubble removal activities, which is a necessary pre-condition to housing reconstruction.
- Increase resources for solutions to land tenure issues. Special focus must be given to the vast majority of IDP's living in camps who were previously in rental situations.
- Increase time, resources, and focus on the capacity of organizations that work on urban planning, housing policy, and land tenure issues.
- Understand that decentralization and resettlement are distinct and separate issues, and that housing reconstruction should only take place in areas where jobs exist.
- Understand the multiplier and boosting effect that shelter and housing reconstruction activities have on the local economy and family livelihoods, as well as its contribution to enhanced protection of affected populations.

#### **For more information, please contact:**

Chris Vincent, Director, Congressional Relations/International Affairs/Habitat for Humanity

#### **Organizations working on Shelter Issues in Haiti:**

See Haiti Shelter Cluster website: [www.shelterhaiti.org](http://www.shelterhaiti.org)