

# Improving Housing in Haiti



The January 2010 earthquake dealt an immense blow to Haiti's infrastructure, and an estimated 2.3 million people – approximately one quarter of the national population – were displaced, the majority forced to seek shelter in makeshift camps.

The earthquake's impact on Haiti's social, political, economic and infrastructure base has complicated the rebuilding process. Approximately 10 million cubic feet of rubble and a variety of pre-earthquake housing challenges such as unclear land tenure and a lack of planning and enforceable building codes have necessitated a comprehensive strategy in this sector.

The most severely impacted area was the densely populated capital city of Port-au-Prince, where there was already a scarcity of safe housing options. Vulnerable neighborhoods were constructed on steep slopes and in ravines, making the recovery process even more challenging.

## From Relief to Recovery

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the global Red Cross network devoted considerable attention to emergency sheltering of displaced Haitians by providing **tarps and tents for nearly 860,000 people**. During the initial response, the American Red Cross funded more than **4,000 house repairs** and the construction of nearly **6,000 transitional shelters**, including 800 specifically designed for people living with disabilities. These initiatives also included improving access to water and sanitation facilities by constructing latrines and incorporating rainwater collection systems into construction designs.

Given the scarcity of available land for new housing and the importance of offering safe housing options to help Haitians move

out of camps, the American Red Cross expanded its strategy to best meet evolving needs. A wide range of more durable solutions is being implemented to help make housing safer within camps, impacted neighborhoods, and emerging new settlements.

In all of these areas, three criteria guide the development of the projects in the shelter sector:

- **Housing must be connected to the community.** Offering people a desirable place to live is about more than just providing a structure; people have a right to choose where they live, to be connected to other areas of the city, and to have access to basic services and livelihoods opportunities.
- **Residents must have access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities.** Approximately 75% of the population lacks access to improved sanitation facilities and 35% lacks access to clean drinking water. Projects must integrate water and sanitation elements into their designs to ensure safer, healthier, more livable housing options.
- **Designs must be customized to meet the needs of residents.** The American Red Cross engages local residents and authorities in assessment and planning of shelter projects to create the most effective solutions based on their prioritized needs.

Following these principles, the American Red Cross has developed housing solutions in Haiti focusing on the Port-au-Prince area, including rental assistance, retrofitting shelters, promoting self-management in camps, supporting integrated neighborhood recovery, and contributing to formalization of emerging settlements.

## Rental Assistance

In order to transition internally displaced people out of camps, the American Red Cross has funded the distribution of cash grants to families to help cover the cost of resettlement. These projects, led by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), assessed the needs of thousands of families living in camps and offered personal assistance in choosing solutions best suited to the families' needs. Three different rental assistance projects have helped more than 26,000 people relocate to more secure shelters.

## Shelter Retrofitting

Thousands of housing units damaged in the earthquake continue to be used by families who previously had no other options. These structures pose serious dangers to residents should another disaster strike. The American Red Cross is retrofitting many of these damaged structures, to include improved access to sanitation facilities and livelihoods opportunities.

## Promoting Self-Management in Camps

Immediately following the earthquake, approximately 1.5 million people moved into more than 1,500 camps in and around the capital. The camp population has steadily declined in the years since, but approximately 85,000 people still remain in 123 locations. The American Red Cross promotes self-management of remaining camps and supports transformation of these camps into formal settlements where it's feasible for them to receive associated improvements and to be absorbed formally into the surrounding neighborhoods. By giving residents the skills and resources necessary to carry out essential services, these camps reduce their dependency on humanitarian assistance and sustainably integrate with surrounding neighborhoods. Camp self-management projects aim to serve more than 20,000 people.

## Integrated Neighborhood Recovery

In addition to supporting people who have been displaced, the American Red Cross is contributing to the recovery and rehabilitation of Carrefour-Feuilles, a neighborhood of Port-au-Prince that was one of the hardest hit. This program renovates or reconstructs important infrastructure such as water and sanitation systems, schools, streets, retention walls, ravines, stairways and other public spaces and community assets. A focus of neighborhood recovery has been on rebuilding homes and making them stronger and more resistant to future disasters. The American Red Cross also incorporates livelihoods activities into these projects, including training community members on proper construction and maintenance techniques in order to ensure that these projects are sustainable for years to come. Residents are involved in public health and disaster risk reduction initiatives so neighborhoods stay safe. These efforts are closely coordinated with the local authorities to ensure neighborhood development projects fit within broader urban planning efforts. This integrated neighborhood recovery program serves more than 48,000 people in the target area.

## Formalizing Emerging Settlements

The internal displacement of millions of Haitians led to many people seeking out and establishing new settlements, close to Port-au-Prince. To further contribute to diverse durable housing solutions, the American Red Cross is supporting formalization of these emerging settlements. In coordination with other organizations and integrated with the government's housing policies and urban planning, recovery plans for new urban areas seek to leverage what people are investing themselves in homes and new neighborhoods. By assisting these areas with formal urban planning efforts, providing infrastructure and improvements, offering information on safe construction techniques, and developing livelihoods opportunities, the American Red Cross is working to help these settlements become safer permanent communities.



Construction trainer Widleine Georges (center) shows trainees Aldomoro Victor (left) and Gabriel Beaussicot (right) how to lay light metal roofing sheets in the Carrefour-Feuilles neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Foremen and masons are receiving training on safe construction techniques that will make houses resistant to earthquakes, hurricanes, or other natural disasters.

Photo by Rodrigo Ordóñez / American Red Cross