

# HABITAT FOR HUMANITY'S COMMITMENT TO REBUILDING HAITI



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The magnitude-7.0 earthquake and strong aftershocks that struck near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in January 2010 caused massive loss of lives and destruction of housing and infrastructure. The number affected is in the millions, and Haiti's ambassador to the United States called the quake a "catastrophe of major proportions."

Damage from the earthquake has added yet another dimension to the humanitarian crisis and poverty conditions faced by Haiti, where more than 80 percent of the people live on less than US\$2 per day and 55 percent live on less than US\$1 a day.

In the past two years, political instability, food shortages, tropical storms and hurricanes have made it next to impossible

for Haitians to break the cycle of poverty. More than 50,000 homes were damaged or destroyed in 2008 storms alone, and the next Atlantic hurricane season is fast approaching.

Most Haitian homes are of low-quality construction and not built to withstand disasters. Walls are made of concrete bricks, mud or stones that lack steel reinforcement and are not anchored to a foundation. Roofs are often made of scrap wood and metal sheets; floors are dirt.

Although the full toll of homes damaged or destroyed is not yet known, Habitat for Humanity International has begun to respond and will remain there long after relief efforts have faded and long-term recovery work begins.



MIKEL FLAMM

After the floods and cyclone that hit Bangladesh in 2007, Habitat built solid houses covered with woven bamboo walls, an example of successful transitional shelter.

### A threefold response

Based on current information and past experience with international disasters, Habitat for Humanity is planning a multiphase strategy that includes early recovery and mid- and long-term responses.

#### 1) First phase: Early recovery

**Recovery starter kits:** The kits are designed to help families make immediate repairs and construct emergency shelter. Materials in the kit include a bucket, a tarpaulin, wire, rope, a pry bar, a mason's chisel and trowel, gloves, nails, a hammer and a saw. The kits will be distributed to families by Habitat employees and partners. For the past three years, Habitat for Humanity has offered vocational education programs that have created a cadre of certified masons and carpenters to assist with the effort.

**Re-establish operations:** As part of our immediate response, it will be vital to assist Habitat Haiti in restoring its capacity to fully participate in the recovery efforts.

#### 2) Second phase: Rehabilitation and cleanup

To clear the way for home repair and construction, Habitat for Humanity plans to assist in the cleanup by mobilizing people to remove debris and salvage materials that can

be recycled in new shelter, and to assist in rehabilitation of homes with repairable damages. Combined with initial machine-assisted removal of heavy materials, these activities could include a "cash for work" component that would organize local people in affected neighborhoods and provide them with tools such as shovels, wheelbarrows and crowbars. This involvement in productive activity provides a small influx of cash to those affected by the disaster to help them meet other basic needs, and also contributes to their mental health by providing a positive, active opportunity to help with recovery.

#### 3) Third phase: Reconstruction and recovery

**Core homes/Transitional shelters:** In the next phase, Habitat plans to replace destroyed homes using a transitional shelter model, rebuilding in a way that reduces risk and contemplates long-term strategies for improving construction quality in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas. Transitional shelter is a base upon which improvements and additions can be made over time, providing an immediate solution along with the beginnings of a permanent home. The core transitional shelter unit will adhere to international Sphere standards, providing adequate living space for the average Haitian family of five.

**Habitat Resource Centers:** Habitat Resource Centers are designed to enhance local systems, or “value chains,” that support housing development and improvements. Through the centers, Habitat for Humanity identifies gaps in the local supply of housing materials, designs, finance and skills and addresses them in ways that support local livelihoods. The centers can be mobile units or community-based. (See additional information below.)

Through all aspects of the strategy, Habitat will cultivate partnerships with local residents and other humanitarian organizations that can multiply the effectiveness of the response.

### **Commitment to long-term recovery and disaster mitigation**

An important part of Habitat for Humanity’s disaster response strategy is disaster risk reduction, implementing shelter solutions that will help to mitigate future disasters.

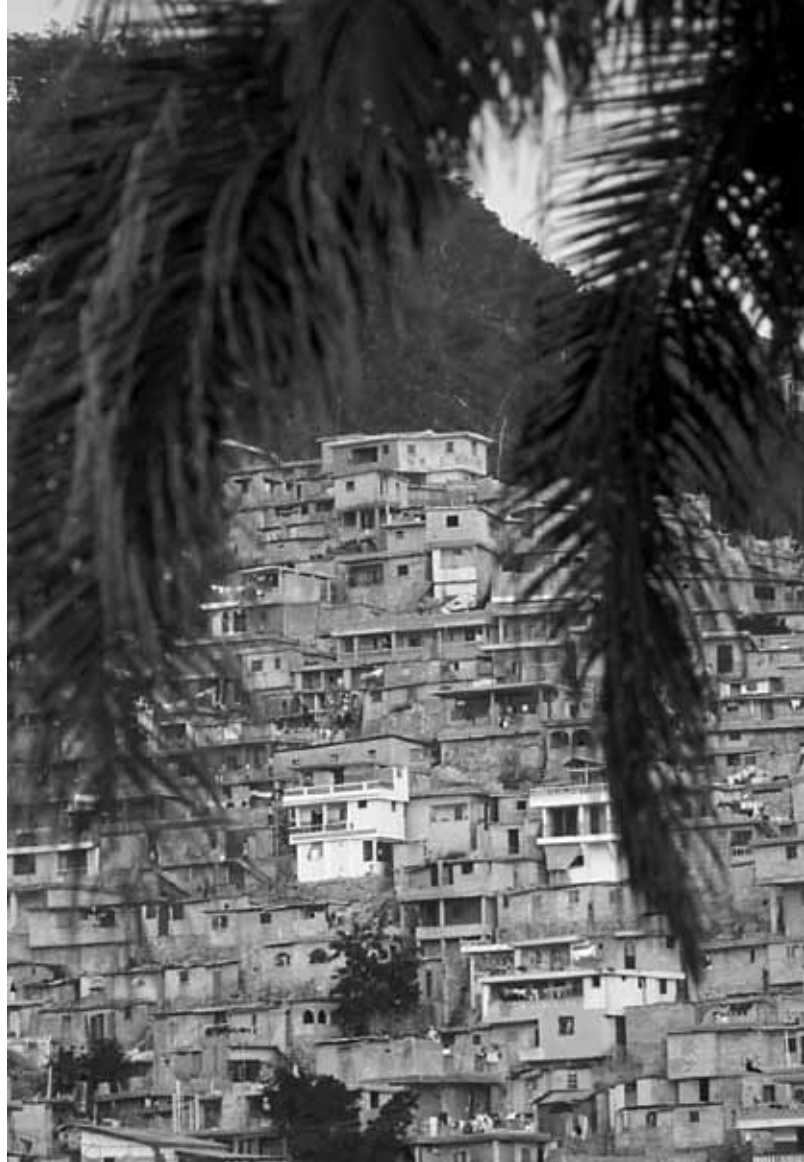
Before the January earthquake, many Haitian hurricane victims had still not found a solution to their housing issues and pervasive vulnerability to natural disasters. A total of 15 severe tropical storms or hurricanes have hit Haiti in the past 14 years. The mission of Habitat for Humanity International’s Disaster Response program is to develop innovative and long-term housing and shelter assistance models that generate sustainable interventions for people vulnerable to or affected by disasters.

### **Habitat Resource Centers: A model for delivery of housing services**

Economic recovery is a vital aspect of a disaster response strategy. Employment, economic opportunity and stability are closely intertwined in a fragile state. Habitat’s integrated disaster response strategy seeks to stimulate the economy in Haiti by targeting gaps in the low-income housing production sector. This strategy also creates employment opportunities while rebuilding shelter solutions for families who have lost everything.

Through Habitat Resource Centers, Habitat has been partnering with local businesses, community-based organizations and nongovernmental organizations to further economic recovery and help families rebuild through vocational education in construction trades, support to small enterprises,

**ABOVE: Petionville, 2003; BELOW: Post-earthquake city streets.**



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training to families in financial literacy and disaster mitigation, and disaster-resistant home designs and improvements.

As part of this initiative, Habitat supports small entrepreneurs in the construction sector with training in appropriate technologies and access to resources, including equipment necessary for their trade. The project targets vulnerable populations such as women and youths in particularly disadvantaged areas such as earthquake-struck Port-au-Prince and Gonaives, one of the areas hit hardest by last year's hurricanes.

Habitat for Humanity first adopted the Habitat Resource Center model in Asia, in response to natural disasters that challenged the traditional model of direct house construction. The needs of communities affected by these disasters were too immediate to address through a supply-driven approach. Habitat mobile centers in Pakistan have assisted households in post-earthquake environments to modify traditional heavy roof beams by providing sawmill services to cut them into smaller beams that are less likely to collapse on inhabitants during an earthquake.

Habitat helped build and repair 25,000 houses in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India using Habitat Resource Centers after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and is one of

the few organizations working to meet immediate shelter needs in a way that helps families transition into complete recovery over time. An integrated strategy of early recovery shelter, cleanup, and simple, disaster-resistant core homes will help families in Haiti work toward full recovery.

### **About Habitat for Humanity**

Habitat for Humanity International was founded in 1976 as a nonprofit, ecumenical Christian housing ministry. Strong name recognition and a demonstrated capacity to raise funds from the public led to tremendous growth. Today Habitat operates in more than 80 countries, has about 2,400 registered affiliates, and has built about 350,000 houses worldwide, helping 1.5 million people obtain simple, decent and affordable shelter. HFHI is one of the world's most recognized and well-respected nonprofits and will bring a solid history of 26 years of service in Haiti to its earthquake recovery work.

As a result of lessons learned in responding to major disasters going back to Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and including the Indian Ocean tsunami and hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Habitat for Humanity has developed effective disaster response systems that include rapid assessments, project design and implementation in addition to project monitoring and evaluation.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

For more information or to support Habitat for Humanity's work in rebuilding houses and hope in Haiti, please visit <http://www.habitat.org>.

Donations also may be made by:

- **Calling** (800) HABILITAT.
- **Sending** a check to Habitat for Humanity International, 121 Habitat St., Americus, GA 31709. Please indicate Haiti on the memo line.
- **Texting** "HABILITAT" to 25383 from your mobile phone to donate \$10 to support Habitat's efforts in Haiti. After texting "HABILITAT" to 25383, you will receive a message asking you to reply "YES" to confirm the \$10 donation. The donation amount will be added to your mobile phone bill. The charge will appear on your bill with a URL to a Web site where you can obtain a receipt if desired. You may donate to the Habitat campaign via text up to five times per month.

