



## HAITI EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE: USAID MUST FUND LOCAL GROUPS, ADDRESS NATIONAL POLITICAL CRISIS

**September 2, 2021** -- Last Thursday's [pledge](#) of \$32 million in humanitarian assistance for Haiti is a welcome sign of the United States' commitment to supporting Haitians in recovering from the devastating 7.2 magnitude earthquake of August 14, which killed more than 2,200 people, injured many thousands more and uprooted the lives of more than 800,000 people. Two key principles need to guide the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and all agencies involved in the U.S. humanitarian response, as they deliver much-needed aid:

- (1) Rooting USAID's response in Haitian people's needs and agency; and**
- (2) Supporting Haitian efforts to end the national political crisis by supporting good, transparent and effective governance as a fundamental tenet of effective long-term recovery.**

### **Rooting USAID's Response in Haitian People's Needs and Agency:**

Given the history of weak and corrupt central governance in Haiti, local Haitian community groups and churches have long been a crucial cornerstone in filling services and needs of the community throughout the country. These groups know and have the trust of the people most affected by the earthquake – and have developed the expertise in humanitarian service delivery in the wake of earthquakes, cholera epidemics and hurricanes, especially over the last decade. Yet, when the 2010 earthquake hit Haiti, [less than one percent](#) of the \$6 billion dollars in international aid went to local Haitian groups. The vast majority went to international, particularly U.S., groups, with a [resulting series](#) of scandals, waste and mismanagement of resources, and a lack of coordination and corruption. International groups also largely failed to consult with local grassroots groups, nor draw on local Haitian expertise.

As additional aid from the U.S. and international community arrives in the wake of the most recent earthquake, USAID needs to be a leader in avoiding past mistakes in the provision of assistance by being responsive to local needs and ensuring both transparency and accountability. In the eight years following the 2010 earthquake USAID disbursed \$2.1 billion, [yet only two percent of that aid](#) went directly to Haitian organizations. This time, USAID needs to regularly engage with, and send assistance directly to, local organizations, faith-based groups and other civic groups rooted in the affected community. One way to do this would be for USAID to hold a forum for local organizations to discuss opportunities to receive USAID funding and hear directly from Haitians on the best path forward. USAID should also provide regular public updates on who is receiving funding, what the goals and benchmarks are, and if they are being met.

From our work in Haiti and discussions with local Haitian groups, we know that there are deep needs for assistance not only for immediate essentials such as food, water and shelter – but longer-term needs including:

- Psychosocial support for those who suffered loss and are experiencing trauma;
- Increased support and services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence;
- Public health measures to prevent additional crises, such as the cholera outbreak that killed more than 10,000 people in Haiti in 2010;
- Increased support to women owned businesses to assist in the recovery;



- Investment in food sovereignty, particularly for small holder farmers, to ensure long term sustainability of food supplies for their communities, and expand local procurement of food assistance ensuring that, where possible, goods be purchased in Haiti instead of imported;
- Prioritization of particularly marginalized communities and groups, including LGBTQI populations, women and girls and people living in isolated communities;
- COVID prevention information needs to be prioritized and disseminated.

**Supporting good, transparent and effective governance for long-term recovery:**

During the aid announcement on August 26, USAID Administrator Samantha Power emphasized her alignment with the Haitian government in an effort to redress the lack of coordination that hampered the international response to the 2010 earthquake. The desire to avoid past mistakes is laudable, however, supporting the government of Ariel Henry is not the way to achieve that goal.

The U.S. response to the earthquake cannot be disconnected from the larger political crises that has engulfed Haiti for years: ranging from the [contested elections](#) that brought former President Jovenel Moïse to power, to [the overstay of his legal mandate](#) as president in February 2021, to [his assassination](#) in July 2021, the systematic [dismantling of democratic](#) and health infrastructure that marked Moïse's rule over the last four years, along with his Haitian Tet Kale Party's (PHTK) provision of [protection, guns and money to the gangs](#) that now terrorize Haiti and control the main roads between Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince and the areas most affected by the earthquake. Henry's government includes, and is allied with, people implicated in [past corruption scandals](#) and links to violent gangs. Henry's response to the earthquake to date has been roundly [criticized](#) by local communities for being slow and ineffective. And, given past experience, trust is low and fears exist that money spent in cooperation with Henry's government will end up disappearing or being redirected away from the people who need it most.

Longer-term, aid should be able to go through the Haitian government in order to build capacity and strengthen institutions. That is not possible today because of the Henry government's lack of legitimacy and credibility. However, the long-term need for a credible and functional government in Haiti – not only to manage aid, but to effectively govern the country – underscores the importance of the U.S. supporting Haitians as they determine the best path forward for their democracy.

Many Haitians blame the Administration of U.S. President Barack Obama for tipping the political scales in a hastily organized election after the last earthquake, when then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [pressured Haitian officials](#) to revise the election results for the run-off – resulting in the election of former president Michel Martelly and the destructive, violent rise and rule of the PHTK, who are responsible for the current political crisis. Thus, many Haitians see it as the responsibility of the current Administration to clean up the mess – or at least refrain from repeating the same mistakes - of their predecessors.

As a good first step, USAID needs to coordinate with the State Department – specifically the Special Envoy for Haiti, Ambassador Daniel Foote – in supporting Haitian efforts to end the current political crisis. In particular, USAID needs to meet with the [Commission for a Haitian Solution](#) to the Crisis – a civil society initiative backed by more than 380 Haitian groups and major churches – which is seeking to create a government by consensus to create the conditions for a more democratic Haiti to emerge. The Commission released a political accord earlier this week, representing a consensus view of more than 200 civil society groups and political parties for a democratic path forward for the country. This process provides the best chance of securing a transitional government committed to transparency and reform – a fundamental pre-requisite for the effective partnership with Haiti that USAID needs for its assistance to be successful over the long term.