

Crises and vulnerabilities

Economic and social recovery in rural areas following the earthquake in Haiti: linking relief, rehabilitation and development

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One year after the earthquake, Haiti is still faced with many problems. One of the International Community's missed opportunities during the first months of the response was not to have boosted agriculture and invested in rural areas to help them take in displaced people and create an economic counterweight to Port-au-Prince. Certain projects, such as the one run by SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE on the hillsides of Petit-Goâve, which combines a response to emergency needs while trying to deal with the structural causes of food insecurity, show what is possible. 9 months on, an in-depth assessment of production systems and good knowledge of the area and the hillsides farming system have allowed the teams to establish strong links with the communities and to adapt the project over time in response to changes in the context, changing needs and changing resilience strategies.

I- The earthquake, its direct consequences and the humanitarian response

On Tuesday 12 January 2010, an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 on the Richter scale, whose focus was less than 10 km deep, was recorded in Haiti's Western department. More than a hundred aftershocks were recorded in the hours and days following the earthquake. A strong aftershock of magnitude 6 was recorded as late as January 20 to the North-West of Jacmel (South-Eastern department).

The *commune* of Petit-Goâve was one of the most severely affected in the Western department. One of the earthquake's two epicentres was situated 5 km from Petit-Goâve.

The direct consequences of the earthquake in Petit-Goâve were:

- 2000 of the population of 157000 were killed.
- 32000 houses were destroyed or badly damaged forcing people to find shelter with neighbours or families or in makeshift shelters. This was followed by mass displacement from urban to rural areas and the setting up of numerous camps for displaced persons.
- Damage to roads such as the *Route nationale 2*, which was blocked by fallen rocks, or minor access roads to the hillsides and the mule tracks/paths which cover them, linking villages and allowing the distribution and sale of agricultural produce.

The humanitarian response

Following the earthquake, a large number of actors rapidly began to provide emergency aid: access to water and sanitation, food aid and the distribution of emergency shelters and basic necessities. But during the initial months, the majority of this aid was concentrated in urban areas and displaced persons camps in the plains. Very few organizations were conducting operations in the hills. Yet, following the earthquake, thousands of people had come from the cities to find refuge with their families who lived in the hills. This massive and sudden arrival had a major impact on household economies as food reserves which were supposed to last several months were used up in a few weeks. Furthermore, the lack of humanitarian response in these areas pushed certain people to go down into the plains to set up "ghost" camps in order to obtain aid. The emergency response during the initial months only reached a very small section of the population of Petit-Goâve, 80% of whom live in rural and peri-urban areas.

II- A context with structural and economic problems

2.1. Hillside peasant farming: a system in crisis

A wide variety of cash crops are grown on the hillsides (beans, yams, plantain, peanuts, etc.) as are subsistence crops (corn, sorgho, sweet potato, etc.). These are often grown together on the same plot. The rearing of caprids, pigs, cattle and horses also represents a major source of income (around 30%). These are a form of living investment which help to deal with cash flow problems. However, livestock farming is subject to major health constraints, particularly for poultry and pigs, and is affected by the reduction in pastureland, notably for cattle.

There are three main types of production system within the project area:

- **Type 1: Farmers with insecure land tenure who have to sell their labour regularly.** These are generally young couples or single women who survive by growing their own food via subsistence crops (mostly maize and sweet potato) and very productive garden plots. Their low income from rearing animals and selling fruit and beans means that they are at risk of sudden and irreversible decapitalisation. Their objective is to save enough via livestock farming to be able to buy more land. However, illness and cash flow requirements

force them to sell their animals prematurely, which is a major constraint. Without non-agricultural jobs such as small commercial activities, farm labouring and selling charcoal, they would be below the survival threshold and would be forced to migrate to urban areas. They cultivate less than 0.5 *Carreau*¹ and represent around 30% of the population of the hillsides.

- Type 2: Smallholders who grow a variety of crops and principally use family labour. These farmers combine cash crops like beans, bananas and peanuts with subsistence crops. Non-agricultural activities are only a secondary means of income. When harvests are good, the farmers can invest in livestock and store seeds to sell them for a higher price the following season. They are reasonably clear of the survival threshold but are particularly sensitive to bad harvests due to the risks which affect the cultivation of beans. Due to the lack of credit at reasonable rates, the smallest of them can fall into a cycle of decapitalisation quite easily, and they sometimes have to sell their trees or mortgage their plots. This category cultivates between 0.5 and 2 *Carreaux* and represents more than half of the population of the hillsides.

- Type 3: Big landowners who grow cash crops using external labour. These farmers try to optimize labour and therefore prefer to establish orchards which require less labour but provide a comfortable and regular income. They also set-aside land or rent land for tenant farming. Livestock numbers range from 5 to 20 animals with a large number of cattle and horses. Farming income, rent from tenant farmers, profits from livestock farming and income from non-agricultural activities allows them to buy more land and invest in livestock or their children's education. These farmers are not in great danger of decapitalisation as they have enough capital to deal with unexpected expenses. Nevertheless, they can have cash flow problems to pay those who work for them in the fields, which can lead to them getting into debt. This category cultivates more than 2 *Carreaux* and represents only 16 % of the population of the hillsides.

Land tenure insecurity, over-exploitation of the earth and deforestation

The land tenure insecurity of a large number of farmers is the principal cause of the structural poverty which affects them. From an agro-historical point of view, the increase in population density on the hillsides has brought a reduction in the area cultivated per family and the intensification of cultivation systems. The latter has led to a reduction in agroforestry practices and the regular setting-aside of land. In order to continue farming areas large enough to provide for their needs, the farmers have cleared wooded land. The abandonment of coffee cultivation which followed the economic liberalization of the 1990s, combined with the repealing of laws limiting the cutting of trees subsequently led

to massive deforestation. The over-exploitation of land and deforestation contributed to a rapid and major loss of soil fertility and a drastic drop in yields (and therefore income). There is also a difference in the way land is managed depending on land ownership security. Thus, there is a clear difference between land which is owned by the farmer where they invest in the long term (planting of trees) and land which is rented for tenant farming or where the legal owner is not well defined.

The lean season and food

The staple foodstuff of rural households is rice which is complemented with home-grown fruit (bananas, bread-fruit, mangoes, and avocados), grain legumes (beans, pigeon peas, etc.) and tubers (sweet potatoes and yams). The farmers' restricted storage capacity means that the quantity and quality of meals depends on what can be harvested at a given time, with a lean period between March and June (end of the dry season/beginning of the rainy season). Food is available on markets all year round, but accessibility is limited by the farmers' financial means. The poorest people, who depend most on the food they grow themselves, are particularly vulnerable to the lean season.

High exposure to natural disasters and epidemics

In the last 3 years, the structural problems of the area have been made worse by a series of major disasters:

- In 2008, 3 major cyclones (Faye, Gustave and Hanna) hit the island causing significant damage to crops and killing many animals (goats, pigs and cattle).
- In 2009, 3 tropical storms caused a great deal of damage. The storm of 23 December 2009 destroyed the pigeon pea and sorghum harvests (the bean harvest had already been particularly bad in July). It also killed animals and destroyed part of the seed stocks.
- Between 2009 and 2010, almost all the pigs in the area were wiped out by an epidemic. Pigs are particularly important for poor households because they require very little labour and produce an easily available source of food.

2.2. The earthquake – yet another shock

Even though it is true that the humanitarian situation on the hillsides was not comparable to the one in the city (fewer houses destroyed or damaged, few deaths, little impact on agricultural production...), the sudden and massive arrival of displaced persons from Port-au-Prince, Léogâne, Grand-Goâve and Petit-Goâve forced families to decapitalise (selling of grain/seed and animals) more quickly and to consume all, or almost all, of their grain stock including their seeds. According to estimations, as the population in the area increased by 30 to 50% during the first month after the earthquake, families' ability to look after the displaced persons was completely overstretched.

Households were therefore obliged to adopt strategies which threatened the sustainability of their livelihoods (cutting trees and producing charcoal, selling animals). Thus, household resilience strategies, which had already been seriously weakened in 2008 and 2009, suffered significant further damage.

Many households had to reduce their number of meals per day from 3 to 2 (or even 1) and the number of days per month without food rose from 2 to more than 7 or 8. The quantity of food rations also dropped significantly (from 1/3 to 1/2). In addition, in parallel to the drop in quantity, there was also a drop in quality due to less diversity in food rations. For example, meat consumption was 3 or 4 times less common than before the earthquake.

III- The response: an approach linking relief, rehabilitation and development

Based on the results of the initial assessment, SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE's strategy in Petit-Goâves was both to focus on the needs of people in rural areas who had been overlooked by the emergency humanitarian response so that they were not tempted to move into camps and also to address structural problems.

SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE's project (funded by DG ECHO and Fondation Bel) aimed to respond to the emergency needs of families (food, drink and shelter) and to provide food security during the lean season which ends in June with the first bean harvest. This consisted of allowing families whose houses had been damaged or destroyed to spend the cyclone season in a waterproof shelter, stopping or slowing down the decapitalisation which threatened the sustainability of agricultural economies and allowing farmers, and notably the most vulnerable amongst them, to have a successful agricultural season beginning in June/July.

In addition, the project involved developing agricultural recovery and livelihoods programmes in order to reduce vulnerability to food insecurity. As seen above, the problems faced by the communities in this area are, above all, structural: the small size of plots, the massive erosion, the difficulty of transporting products to the market in the plains, the weak storage capacity, the unsuitable agricultural techniques and the weak processing/promotion of agricultural products. Thus, over and above the emergency relief response, the objective of SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE's project was to allow communities to improve household production, reinforce their resilience to different shocks and prevent them from becoming dependent on humanitarian aid.

IV- The development of the project

4.1. The initial phases

The first activity was to provide families whose houses had been destroyed or damaged with basic necessities. 3840 families were given goods like tarpaulins, soap, jerrycans, buckets, blankets and kitchen kits.

Labour-intensive Public Works were then carried out which allowed 8.5 km of an access lane to the 8th communal section to be rehabilitated. The last activity of the emergency phase was the distribution of bean seeds for the June/July planting season.

The second phase of the agricultural recovery project began in July 2010. It is due to last almost a year and covers a number of different areas:

- Improving seed drying and storage techniques and capacity;
- Improving market garden production techniques through the creation of 9 demonstration gardens where training can take place;
- Distributing 720 caprids to farmer groups and setting up a veterinary service and a veterinary product supply service;
- Setting up forest and fruit tree nurseries.



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Sowing beans

4.2. The conditions for a successful project

Good understanding of the operational zone

Time was taken during this project to carry out a proper assessment and further studies which made it possible to understand the operational area and environment.

These were:

- A 4-month agrarian assessment to further develop the understanding of the zone which had been acquired during the initial assessment and thus re-orientate the project and prepare the second phase.
- Monitoring of peasant farmers' economic situation, which has been in place since November. Using key indicators (which came out of the agrarian assessment), this has made it possible to identify any deterioration in the peasants' situation and re-adapt the response.
- Occasional studies to evaluate the impact of the project activities.

An associative and community-based response

In order to make the activities in the Economic and Social Recovery project sustainable, communities participate in them via farmers' associations. The implementation of all the activities is done in direct collaboration with local associations who are responsible for ensuring that the activities go smoothly with the support of the SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE team. 9 associations in total were selected via a call for proposals and Memoranda of Understanding were signed with them in order to fix the rules of the collaboration and the rights and responsibilities of each party. The project also includes a significant training and capacity building component for these associations in a variety of fields such as governance, financial management and managing the goods supplied by the project.

Community participation (which is not reimbursed) is also integrated into each activity to establish a "quid pro quo" system and avoid hand outs and aid dependence and maintain a sense of responsibility within communities. For example, for the construction of storage silos, SOLIDARITÉS INTERNATIONALE supplied all the materials which are not available in the project area (imported wood, corrugated iron, cement, etc.) and paid the builders but, in exchange, asked associations to pay, for example, a part of the transportation costs or to supply the sand needed for concrete.

Transparency in the selection of beneficiaries and taking vulnerable people into account

Before implementing each activity, beneficiaries are selected using clearly defined vulnerability criteria. The selection initially involves the drawing up of lists by local committees (for the distribution of basic necessities) or partner associations (for the 2nd phase activities). The project team then carefully checks that the people on the lists do meet the vulnerability criteria. The lists are then either accepted or refused and readjusted.

As 2010 is an electoral year, particular care was taken in the selection of beneficiaries to avoid any political manipulation of activities and local political representatives were not involved in the selection process. However, they were regularly informed about how the project was progressing and were involved in key events, such as distributions, during which they were responsible for security.

V- Different approaches to the post-earthquake response

The earthquake of 12 January led to the presence of a large number of humanitarian actors in Haiti. Unfortunately, their actions did not always correspond to the real needs of the population. In fact, the strategies of certain organizations could have negative conse-

quences. Almost a year after the earthquake, certain actors are still distributing food without targeting households where there is malnutrition or are implementing "Food for Work" projects even though what exists is not a problem of availability of food but essentially of access to it. This type of programme can be in direct competition with local markets which have a good supply of varied produce. Fortunately, many actors have made the strategic choice of becoming more involved in programmes which target the transfer of financial resources (Cash for Work, for example) rather than the distribution of food.

Furthermore, certain Labour-intensive Public Works projects, whether Food for Work or Cash for Work, are implemented during peaks in agricultural work thus running the risk of diverting part of the population from work in the fields. This type of project can also have a negative impact on the availability of agricultural workers as farmers are more attracted by the often higher salaries paid by NGOs than those paid by landowners or land managers.

VI- The future of agricultural recovery projects while the emergency relief phase continues

Haiti is currently still in the middle of an emergency relief phase due to the slow pace of reconstruction and the cholera epidemic which has been raging since October 2010. There is therefore some doubt about whether donors will continue to finance this kind of project which confronts fundamental problems within Haitian farming systems but which needs to be sustained over the mid and even long term. This appears crucial, given the potential of Haitian agriculture, which has the capacity to produce food for a large part of the population. Haiti remains too dependent on foreign aid and can only benefit from this kind of project. ■

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¹ 1 Carreau: unit of measurement used in Haiti equal to 1.29 ha