

## Haiti: 4 Years After the Earthquake

Written by Rev. John L. McCullough for CWS  
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It is easy to forget that this Sunday – January 12 – marks four years since Haiti’s devastating 2010 earthquake. With crises in Syria, Africa and Asia, and this year’s record-breaking winter temperatures affecting Europe and North America, the world’s focus has – understandably – long since moved on from Haiti.

But four years later, hundreds of thousands of Haitians still are directly facing the consequences of a dire disaster.

History has demonstrated that it takes a long time to recover from disaster of any magnitude. By all accounts, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti viciously shook up conventional ideas of what it means to be human community. Never has there been such an outpouring of compassionate response.

Yet the recovery in Haiti still is incomplete.

Let’s take stock. After the quake, world attention was focused almost entirely on Haiti. Shocked televised spectacle of one of the world’s poorest countries grappling to respond to a catastrophic natural disaster, the public took action with a combination of compassion, anger and solidarity.

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Hundreds of humanitarian agencies flew in, thousands of personal pledges were made, governments promised international aid and millions of dollars were donated to charities around the world. At least half of America's households made donations to organizations responding to the crisis in what remains the most significant public response to a humanitarian disaster in American history.

For our part, we at CWS are proud of what we accomplished. We delivered more than \$2 million in material aid and initiated solid, sustaining programs that, among other things, built and repaired houses, many for people with disabilities. We also expanded support for 13 food cooperatives in Haiti's Northwest and Artibonite regions.

More broadly, President Obama called for a global humanitarian response and stressed that the United States would accompany Haiti "in its time of need." The U.S. government provided more than \$3 billion in combined aid. "Build Back Better" became the anthem of this global cry for action to build a new Haiti.

But in January 2014, hundreds of thousands of Haitians still await the building of their better world, with no idea when it will occur. Certainly, some progress has been made, but who has benefitted? More than 800,000 Haitians today still depend on humanitarian aid, according to the United Nations. At least 145,000 still live in the "temporary camps" built to accommodate families internally displaced after the earthquake. And still there exists no comprehensive national housing plan.

Hunger and malnutrition, especially in Haiti's far west, remain acute. One-third of Haitians are food "insecure" – meaning they have difficulty accessing food – yet funders repeatedly fail to support Haitian plans for agricultural development and food security.

More than 60 percent of Haiti's population depends on agriculture, yet international donors instead have poured millions of dollars into the establishment of free trade zones on Haiti's best arable land.

Those watching Syria and other disasters should take note of what has happened in Haiti over these past four years. The manner in which the international community responded to Haiti will remain the litmus test for how natural and manmade disasters are addressed elsewhere.

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The systematic policy failures, lack of leadership and unclear political action - in Haiti and in international centers where policy towards Haiti is decided - explains why so many Haitians today are still waiting for their country and their lives to be “built back better.”

[Rev. John L. McCullough](#) is President and CEO of CWS.