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Rebuilding in Haiti: View from the ground

A UN donor conference on Wednesday received pledges of \$9.9bn (£6.5bn) in immediate and long-term aid for Haiti. The money is badly needed to help the country after the devastation of January's earthquake. But what is happening on the ground now as Haitians and aid groups try to rebuild lives and buildings?

REBUILDING HOUSES

Immaculee Dorcy and her family were living in a mud hut when the earthquake hit.

The building was virtually destroyed and they moved temporarily into a tent while three skilled workers and seven neighbours, employed by The Haitian Project, a US-based charity, built them a simple but comfortable home out of cinderblocks within six weeks.

The Haitian Project runs a school, Louverture Cleary, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince which educates around 350 boys, all picked from the poorest parts of the city.

The school escaped largely unscathed in the quake but The Haitian Project's supporters raised thousands of dollars after hearing of the earthquake. The project's president, Patrick Moynihan, said they decided the most pressing need was clearly permanent housing.

Mr Moynihan said: "The Dorcy house was completed on time and on budget (\$7,000). The house is a simple one, safe and secure, but without electricity or water, which are not available at this location."

The school also sent a team of volunteers to the city's main cathedral to help clear some of the debris and restore some of the building's dignity.



A worker puts the finishing touches to the Dorcy family's rebuilt home

PUMPING CLEAN WATER

In the aftermath of the earthquake one of the biggest problems was a shortage of clean, drinkable water.

Fortunately an American company, WorldWater & Solar Technologies, was on hand with a number of solar-powered water pumps and purifiers.

"It was pure serendipity that one of these machines happened to be in Haiti when the earthquake hit," said Micky Ingles, the firm's vice president of operations.

As Haiti also faced a shortage of diesel fuel to power generators and pumps, solar-powered equipment came into its own.

Mr Ingles said: "They are capable of producing 30,000 gallons of drinking water a day, which is the equivalent of three truckloads."

There are now four of the units operating in Haiti and Mr Ingles pointed out another benefit of the pumps: "Unlike the bottled water provided by the big aid operations, they do not generate any trash."



People collect water from a solar-powered pump in Bon Repos

REHABILITATING SPINAL INJURIES

Haiti Hospital Appeal has funded Haiti's first spinal rehabilitation unit, at Milot, which is dealing with 20 paraplegic patients, all victims of the earthquake.

Carwyn Hill, from the appeal, said: "The large numbers of people who have been left disabled through this earthquake is harrowing. There is a vast numbers of amputees, and also large numbers of victims with severe spinal injuries.

"Our unit is now just one of two operating in the country, providing long term care and rehab to these victims."

He said: "We've watched patients who were unable to talk due to their trauma and depression, who were ready to give up on life because of their spinal injuries and poor outlook. Such patients have now been transformed, with gleaming smiles at times, and a renewed sense of hope and dignity."

Stephanie was an paraplegic victim of the earthquake, who received surgery at the hospital before being transferred home by helicopter.



Stephanie (left) was treated at the hospital in Milot

CASH DISTRIBUTION

Christian Aid and its local affiliated charities have been handing out cash to deserving cases in parts of Haiti, including Port-au-Prince, Petit Goave and Les Cayes.

Christian Aid worker Nigel Timmins explains: "Historically there is a lot of emphasis on food and aid distribution but not everybody needs the same thing. Handing out cash means some people might buy food, others might need clothes or blankets they need, while others can start rebuilding their businesses."

He said a lot of people from the devastated cities of Port-au-Prince and Jacmel had gone back to their home villages: "There is an awful lot of 'hosting' going on now with people staying with their extended families. In one house a household of five had increased to 13, which means a lot more mouths to feed."

Mr Timmins said: "There has been tremendous solidarity and support shown across the country."

One woman, Doublin Bilam, had gone with her husband and children to live with her family in the village of Torbeck.

"Her husband has been unable to find a job but she is a tailor by profession. We gave her some gourdes (local currency) and it enabled her to buy materials and she made a 50% profit on the clothes she made. It has given her back her dignity and made her an agent of her own recovery," he said.

Other handouts have enabled food sellers in the Carrefour Feuilles area of Port-au-Prince to buy ingredients for hot meals.



Cash distribution helped this woman buy ingredients to make hot meals for local people

STARTING A BUSINESS IN A REFUGEE CAMP

Before the earthquake Françoise Luc, 38, was a teacher of maths and social sciences. In the afternoon she would teach students to crochet hats, belts and skirts.

Her home in Port-au-Prince was badly damaged on 12 January and she has taken refuge with her sons, Laurence and Rogers, in a camp for internally displaced people on a football pitch in Parc Sainte Claire.

"Of course I want to go home, but I can't...it is unstable," she said.

Mrs Luc said: "I am trying to busy myself to take my mind off things. So I spend my time crocheting and selling the skirts, hats and belts I create. I also sell soap and washing powder to other people in the camp, so that they can clean themselves and their clothes."

Many people ask Françoise to teach them to crochet, but she has not been able to get hold of any crochet hooks since the quake.

"I would like to be able to open a centre to teach our children to crochet. That way they would also be able to sell them to make money," she says.

Françoise, lives in one of two camps set up by Islamic Relief to cater for the needs of 1,000 families, has a message to the international community: "Please do not forget us. Take care of us and never forget about us."



Françoise Luc has set up a business selling crocheted items

FIELD TRAUMA HOSPITAL

Within hours of the earthquake Project Medishare, a Florida-based charity, had set up a field trauma hospital in Haiti.

Initially working out of the United Nations compound, it later moved to a tented village at the Port-au-Prince airport.

But the charity's communications director, Jennifer Browning, said: "We are looking to move to a permanent fixed facility so that we will be out of the tents by the end of May at the latest. The rainy season is very close and the hurricane season starts in June so we need to be out of those tents."

The hospital has treated thousands of Haitians, mainly those with crush injuries suffered in the earthquake.

Ms Browning said they were working closely with the Haitian Ministry of Health.

"American doctors are working side by side with Haitian doctors and in the process both are learning new techniques," she said.

Project Medishare has benefited from celebrity endorsements and donations from among others pop star Lady Gaga and they also had a special volunteer in the form of WBC world welterweight champion Andre Berto.

Berto, who lost eight relatives in the earthquake, withdrew from a lucrative fight with Shane Mosley in January because he was unable to concentrate on it in the wake of the devastation of his parents' homeland.

He came to Haiti with his brother Cleveland to work as a volunteer stretcher-bearer and porter for Project Medishare and will be donating part of his earnings from his next fight, on 10 April, to the Berto Dynasty Foundation which benefits Project Medishare.



Boxer Andre Berto, whose family come from Haiti, volunteered to help