

# Haiti, 1 year after the earthquake



“Sponsoring a child and making a difference in a community”

## I. Background

2010 was an extremely challenging year for Haiti. After the devastating earthquake on 12 January, Haiti has been in turmoil, with hundreds of thousands of displaced people and the country's infrastructure in ruin, followed by destructive weather weather and a cholera epidemic that spread throughout the nation. Finally, the results of the presidential and senatorial elections of November were widely disputed which led to violent protests across the country.

This has equally affected Plan operations in the communities we work in, including individual communication with sponsors. Following the earthquake, the priority for Plan Haiti was to help save the lives of children and their families, without distinguishing whether they are part of the Plan sponsorship program or not.

## II. Sponsorship in Program Units after the earthquake

The South East and West were the two geographical departments most severely affected by the earthquake.

### 1) Evaluation of sponsored families in the West and South East

The South-East is a mountainous department and many communities are inaccessible by car or even by motorcycle. Some are only accessible on a donkey, and it took Plan teams hours of work, interrupted by the rainy season and floods, to visit each family. Quite often, they had to visit a family several times before obtaining information, since many families were displaced after the earthquake.

In the West department, most of the communities in which Plan operates are semi-urban and semi-rural. The displacement of families was a challenge and there were many families who temporarily emigrated to other departments of the country.

Two days after the earthquake, Plan Haiti launched a census in the communities in the West and South-East departments, to inquire about the status of sponsored children and their families.

Queries from the sponsors of the sponsored children were becoming increasingly numerous and urgent. Plan took the decision to introduce community volunteers in the process. It was a real community operation, in which 30 leaders took part in supporting Plan's 13 field agents. Despite many challenges, Plan feels lucky to have been able to mobilize people in the community and its staff who were also directly affected by the earthquake.

Once the census was completed, in order to ensure that the information shared with the sponsors was reliable, Plan conducted a systematic check of the information obtained for all the sponsored families. This verification was conducted exclusively by Plan staff to reduce any possible margin of error. This evaluation was completed for 22,000 families scattered in 61 communities in the South-East and West departments. This strategy allowed us to correct discrepancies and ensure that the information was reliable.

Today we are pleased to inform you that the census is completed. Facilitators consistently revisited the home of 100% of the sponsored families. According to information obtained for these two departments, we regret to announce the death of 14 children during the earthquake, which includes 6 in the West and 8 in the South-East. Approximately 1,500 families in the two departments have yet to be located. We are continuing our efforts to obtain relevant information about them and hope that these families will return to their original communities. We are observing that families are beginning to return to their communities 11 months after the earthquake and we hope to resume individual communication in July 2011, when we expect that most, if not all displaced families will have returned to their communities. However, with effects of the recent cholera outbreak, the return process could be further delayed.

Children identified during the census were directed to Child Friendly Spaces, where they have access to psychosocial support in the protection program implemented by Plan in the communities. We invite you to visit our international website for more information: <http://plan-international.org/what-we-do/emergencies/haiti-recovery/priorities/child-protection>

## **2) Communication**

### **a) Letters**

Maintaining individual communication between sponsored children and their sponsors was a huge challenge for Plan during the period that followed the earthquake. The constant movement of families complicated the process. Given the magnitude of the emergency, it is also to be noted that Plan has taken the decision to mobilize all resources to respond to urgent needs of families in the communities. All the staff of Plan Haiti has been deployed in the humanitarian response program, allowing us to reach the maximum number of people and to contribute to making available basic social services in these communities.

### **b) Gifts**

Moreover, given that the whole community was affected by the earthquake and that the needs were enormous everywhere, Plan has estimated that the distribution of gifts or special attention to the sponsored

families would provoke jealousy put them at risk. Thus, the decision was also taken to suspend the distribution of gifts.

Aside from that, it should be noted that Plan Haiti was not able to store the gifts, because the central office in Port-au-Prince and program units in West and South-East were severely affected and were declared unusable. After having worked for several months under tents in the parking lot of our offices, we were able to install our new office space in the month of September.

### c) Children's Voice

Understanding the importance of maintaining the link between sponsors and children, Plan has encouraged and supported children and youth communities to produce the newsletter 'The Children's Voice'. Through this communication, children and young people shared, with their own words, their experiences in their communities after the earthquake.

This communication is made possible through the invaluable support of young community volunteers, who before the earthquake were actively involved in the leadership program implemented by Plan in communities, possible because of your contribution.

### **3) Sponsorship in North-East**

Although not been directly affected by the earthquake, the department of North-East did receive a large population of displaced persons seeking refuge with relatives or allies. Overnight, some families increased from 7 to 13 people in the same house. Given this situation, in addition to implementing its regular program, Plan had to extend its emergency program to support families who had emigrated as well as host families.

It is also worth noting that after the earthquake and during the four months that followed, communication in the sponsorship program was discontinued in the department of North-East. Plan agents in the North-East had also lost family and friends in Port-au-Prince, and some had been relocated in the West and the South-East to support the humanitarian response.

The space constraints in our new premises in the central office prompted us to accelerate the process of decentralizing the Sponsorship department that started before the earthquake. We relocated the systems managers in the field starting the month of May, which facilitated the continuation of some of the sponsorship activities in the North-East.

Today, activities have been interrupted in the North-East because of the raging cholera epidemic there. According to information published by the Ministry, it is the department with the highest ratio of loss of life due to the inaccessibility of some communities. Our staff had once again been requested and redeployed in the response. Priority is being given to community mobilization, to awareness campaigns, to hygiene meetings and in schools, and to the installation of oral rehydration points to save as many lives as possible.

### III. Use of funds from sponsorship

Over the last 11 months, the sponsor contributions were invested as follow:

Community Health	Education	Household Economic Security	Children, Youth and Community Leadership
1,214,886 USD	403,762 USD	258,184 USD	423,915 USD

During the period that followed the earthquake, Plan launched an appeal to respond to the post-earthquake emergency. The funding received to date is 30 million, which represents 49% of what we plan to invest in the emergency and recovery program. This does not include the reconstruction which will be very expensive, given that most social infrastructures (schools, health centres etc.) were either severely damaged or destroyed during the earthquake. The recovery phase will probably last at least two years and rebuilding, at least ten years. We know that our work will be interspersed by other natural disasters and the country's political situation will also most likely slow down the process.

In this context, we planned to use the annual contribution of sponsors for:

- 1) Complete the funds raised to date for the emergency.

Some donors request matching funds from organizations, which represents a percentage of their contribution, as a condition to funding their programs.

- 2) Funding certain programs.

Continue to fund some programs that were underway before the earthquake and continuing particularly the leadership program in our communities that has been successful. These funds, which are more flexible, will enable us to respond to opportunities and to fund projects that are not by institutional donors.

### 3) Financing reconstruction efforts

The Reconstruction phase is expected to officially begin next January. According to the national reconstruction plan, the necessary budget amount is 11.5 billion. Unfortunately, to date donors have contributed very timidly, despite the great promises made in March at the Donors Conference in New York.

## **IV. Lessons learned under the sponsorship**

The earthquake of 12 January has taught us many lessons, the main ones being:

1) The importance for Plan to include in its contingency plan a section addressing the communication with the sponsors in case of a humanitarian emergency of great magnitude. Alternatives to individual communication must be identified in order to maintain a minimum of contact between sponsors and communities.

2) Sponsorship has a long-term perspective and has a real impact in the lives of communities. We helped build social capital in communities through programs implemented by Plan before the earthquake, thanks to sponsorship. The young people we have trained, mobilized and encouraged were the first to bring help to their peers and to date they manage most of the psychosocial activities. This is very encouraging to see that our work has been successful and that these skills are actually available in the communities. The mobilization was much easier in communities where Plan had a presence before the earthquake than in new communities we supported after the earthquake.

3) Sponsors' contributions and communication between them and the children were mainly individual. Plan has always worked with communities and the benefits of sponsorship have been proven to be targeting the community. It is difficult to imagine the welfare of the child in his family without seeing the entire community. The contribution of a Sponsor to their Sponsored Child helps to improve the quality of life in the community and allows Plan to work at regional and national levels to influence public policy in favor of the rights of the child.

## **V. The contribution of the program funded by sponsorship before the earthquake, in an emergency**

Before the earthquake, Plan implemented a leadership program for children, youth and communities,

whose main objective is to strengthen the capacity of children and youth to promote their own rights and to influence the public agenda.

Immediately after the earthquake, these children and youth clubs continued to exercise their leadership roles and put into practice the skills that we helped develop in them. Nearly one thousand participated in the post-disaster needs assessment and identified their priorities and shared their vision for the new Haiti. A young girl said: *"We want a beautiful Haiti, where the state cares for the well-being of young people and everyone must know that in the new Haiti, there should be no exclusion ... We need the strength of the whole nation to make the new Haiti possible..."*

Last November, ahead of the presidential and senatorial elections, our young people were invited to participate in public debate relayed on radio and television to influence the agenda of the next government as part of Plan's campaign 'I'm not old enough to vote but I have a voice'. Daphnica, aged 15, said *"The new leaders must work to uphold the government's commitment to defend, protect and guarantee the rights of children, especially their participation."* Now they are all mobilized in the campaign to raise awareness in communities against the cholera epidemic. They have produced a very rhythmic song through which they disseminate prevention messages and encourage people to take urgent and essential actions that can save lives. Visit their Facebook page at the following address: <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/Timoun.Medya>

## VI. Sponsorship in the coming months

Plan staff are working hard to resume sponsorship activities, including individual communication. Plan expects to restart activities in the North-East between February and March 2011. In regard to the South-East and West, we hope to resume normal communication in the beginning of July, by which time we anticipate that all families will have returned to their communities of origin and reconstruction will be officially launched.

Meanwhile, we continue the enrollment of new families in the department of North-East where we currently are studying the possibility of entering new vulnerable communities.

## VII. Conclusion

During 2010, we had to face many challenges in Haiti. Our development work was interrupted to give us the opportunity to respond to the urgency of the moment. We greatly appreciate the fact that the sponsors have continued to support the program in Haiti. We want to give a special thanks to sponsors for their patience and especially their solidarity toward the Haitian people, particularly the children of Haiti.

People tend to disassociate the development work and the emergency work. We have noticed over the last 11 months that the two go together. At Plan, we are convinced that children and young people can indeed

help improve the quality of life of their peers. The contribution of young people following the earthquake is a living testimony and is in compliance with our community development approach focusing on the child.

In recent years, Plan has invested heavily in, through sponsorship funds, strengthening the capacity of communities we work in with special emphasis on children and young people to achieve sustainable development.

The challenges are great and it is certain that we will not succeed in overcoming them alone. Thus, we strongly encourage you to continue with us on the path toward the reconstruction of the Haiti that all children of this nation dream.