ON JANUARY 12, 2010, shortly after a catastrophic earthquake struck one of the world’s most vulnerable nations, Development and Peace began working with local partners to help Haitians build a better future. Despite significant, ongoing challenges, the results are showing.

I n the year since the most dev- astating earthquake in two centuries hit 1.5 million people living in temporary shelters in Haiti, Development and Peace is a Canadian international development organization working to address the root causes of poverty and injust- ice in the Global South. Founded in 1967 by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the organi- zations aim to reach out to the most poor and vul- nerable regardless of race, gender or religion.

Beyond raising awareness of social justice issues among Canadians, Development and Peace works in over 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, partnering with local organi- zations to bring change in their respective countries. It is the Canadian member of the Caritas Internationalis confederation of the Catholic Church and receives program funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Through local citizens and partner efforts, Development and Peace is making a difference.

ON THE GROUND

$313,000
houses destroyed or damaged in the earthquake

$123,000
a recent Development and Peace contribution to a campaign to help prevent and treat cholera in Port-Au-Prince camps

Haitian communities

In the aftermath of a disaster, we do extensive consultation and planning with local people and involve them in reconstitution.

In the hard-hit town of Gressier for example, the community has been very involved in designing four prototype homes that meet the needs of local residents. “They are the people living with the conse- quences of this work, long after most aid workers will have gone,” says Mr. Casey. “They should lead and participate as part of the recovery effort,” says Mr. Casey.

With support from Develop- ment and Peace and another funding partner, work in Gressier is being carried out by ITECA, a local organization that supports the peasant economy in Haiti through training and rights advocacy. The project, which involved ITECA-led consulta- tions to ensure that the commu- nity participated in home design and construction, is expected to yield 100 new dwellings. ITECA executive director Cherlet Jean-Baptiste says, “As much as 75 to 80 per cent of the houses here were destroyed (permanent structures). Because the training centre is here in Gressier, we looked at the disaster and the destruction with the community.”

Immediately after the quake, he says, “we encouraged people to stay in their land and go to the tent cities. We promised to not do extensive consultation and partner with local communities. Evidence including new home construction (picture above) signal hope.

Célina Tessier, 73, stands proudly on a small plot of red earth. She is one of 100 people from Ti Boucan participating in a permanent hous- ing initiative program supported by Development and Peace and led by ITECA, that will eventu- ally benefit 1,700 families.

Célina would likely have been one of the forgotten ones not to benefit from this program. She does not live in a camp, her home, is a vision of hope. This bare patch of earth, soon to be turned into a mound of stones for construc- tion, is central and valued. “We are using the earthquake as an opportunity to transform our community,” says Mr. Jean- Baptiste.

Despite the trauma now being brought by the cholera outbreak in Haiti, it is critical to remember that there is hope through this work, says Mr. Casey. “The human spirit is very strong. There’s been terrible loss of life and human tragedy associ- ated with this disaster, but we see such resilience as people come to terms with terrible loss- es and join in rebuilding lives and communities.”

Even when the news seems never-ending, “we have a responsibility not to despair,” says Mr. Golid. “The situation in Haiti is quite terrible, but it is up to us to con- tinue to provide hope for the people who live in Haiti every day.”

Through local citizens and partner efforts, Development and Peace is making a differ- ence in the lives of families, and use of local materials, is central and valued.

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In Gressier, for example, the com- munity is being carried out by Development and Peace and another long-term partner of Devel- opment and Peace, ITECA helps develop projects such as the creation of a mango co-operative in the Gros Morne region. “This region can grow the most mangoes, but the pro- ducers were receiving very little profit from their harvests,” says ITECA executive director Cherlet Jean-Baptiste. “We formed a mango co-operative with 1,300 members and helped them organize.”

The co-operative also planted 20 fruit trees to improve fruit production and introduce a new source of income. The mango trees will bear fruit in the next 6 to 8 months, providing an additional source of income for the members.

Célina Tessier will soon have a new permanent house to live in to replace the tent that held her belongings. “I am thankful for this house,” she says, “I am very thankful that God has given me this new house.” She already began assembling a grow- ing mound of stones for construc- tion.

“My house used to be over there,” she says, pointing to a pile of rocks, “this is where I used to live.”

The base patch of earth, soon to be turned into a mound of stones for construc- tion.

While reconstruction is not ITECA’s usual work, Mr. Jean- Baptiste says, “We bring all our experience in mobilizing the community, our institutional resources and our understanding of how to adapt to the realities of rural populations to the present. We want to create homes that corre- spond to their needs and gen- erally improve their quality of life. The participation of families in the process, and use of local materials, is central and valued.

“We are using the earthquake as an opportunity to transform our community,” says Mr. Jean- Baptiste.

By working with Haitian government organizations, includ- ing women’s and youth groups, peasant organizations and community radio associations, Development and Peace aims to improve the lives of Haiti’s most poor and vulnerable citizens.

Among its first actions, the organization provided resources to help local organizations meet the urgent needs for clean water and food. “I was moved by the response of our Haitian partners in this disaster,” says Danielle Goblet, assistant director of International Programs, Emer- gencies. “After being torn from their homes by this devastating earthquake, they worked day and night, delivering aid to people where they were needed.”

In that initial period, Devel- opment and Peace responded rapidly through participation in the Canadian International relief network, the L’Eglise et Developpement Foundation and the garment workers’ movement, providing $1 million in Haiti within the first six months of the crisis.

But each emergency effort is only the beginning of a much more complex response to the crisis in Haiti. “While Development and Peace executive director Michael Casey says, “The story is not something that is over done in six weeks or one year. It is an ongoing relief and reconstruc- tion program, we generally plan for five-year periods.”

Looking back on the first year of reconstruction, he says, it can be surprising to see how much work has been done, despite the enormous challenges. He also notes the results of foundational work critical to the long-term recovery of affect- ed communities taking shape.

“There is a strong hunger for justice and equality in Haiti, and a desire for development and peace,” says Michael Casey. “Our fundamental response, says Mr. Casey, “is to see a more measured response, that lessens the need for emergency assistance, and helps to prevent future disasters.”

“This is the crux of our approach to development and Peace. We are aiming to bring people home, to build homes that are sturdy and fit for the long term,” he says. “In Haiti, we want to create homes that corre- spond to their needs, and generally improve their quality of life. The participation of families in the process, and use of local materials, is central and valued.

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