

Trust must be earned: Perceptions of aid in Haiti

A reality check on post-quake accountability
to affected people

April 2022



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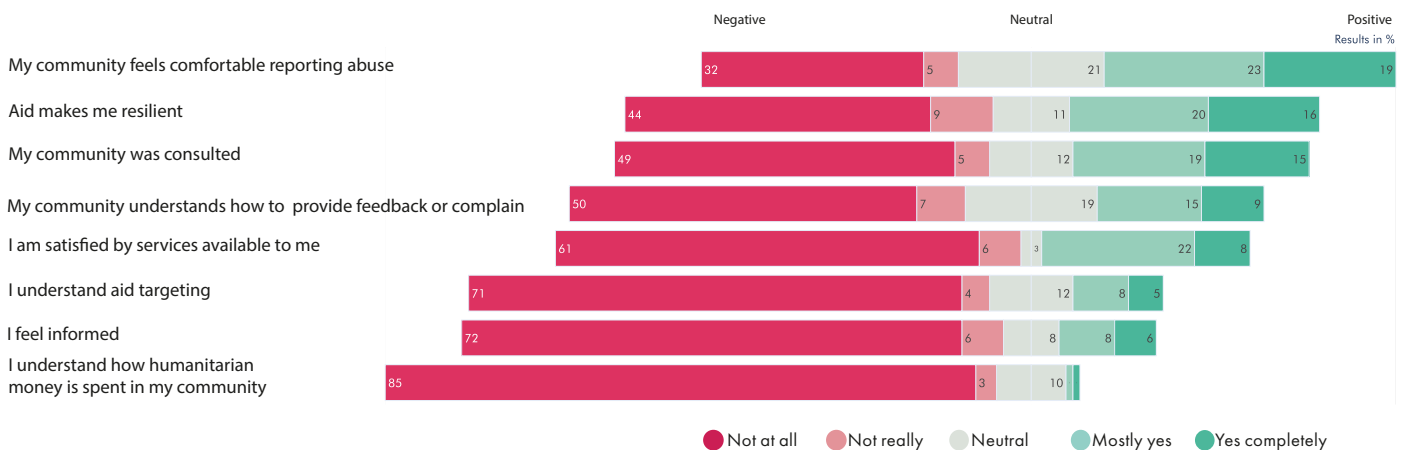
**The New
Humanitarian|**

Executive summary

Haitians are no strangers to foreign aid. Billions have been poured into the so-called Republic of NGOs, which at any given time hosts thousands of projects with aspirations ranging from improving sanitation to transforming livelihoods. The earthquake that ravaged Port-au-Prince in 2010 highlighted the chaos and sometimes the absurdity of the international aid machine. For years, the capital was overwhelmed with shipments of supplies, convoys of Landcruisers, media, celebrities, and planeloads of people wanting to help. There have been claims of corruption, poor coordination, and exploitation. Many years on, people are still asking where the money has gone. Haiti has inspired global debate on humanitarian reform, formalised in the Grand Bargain commitments¹, but clear improvements remain elusive.

When the August 2021 earthquake in the nation's south sparked a new surge of international aid, Ground Truth Solutions decided to ask whether Haiti's citizens feel humanitarian organisations are meeting community expectations, and where they are falling short.

We surveyed 1251 people affected by the earthquake to compare their expectations of humanitarian workers and programmes with their experiences of aid in reality. We then talked to 86 people in qualitative, long-form interviews and focus group discussions to discover where and why gaps between expectations and reality exist, and how they can be resolved.



This bar graph illustrates people's responses to questions on a Likert scale (1 to 5). Each bar shows the breakdown in responses in percentages, utilising a scale of colours from red to green. The red denotes negative responses (1/2), while the green vindicates positive responses (4/5).

This is what people told us:

- Aid falls short of expectations. People consider aid useful for short-term needs, but it does not address priorities. They see it as unfair and find little dignity in accessing it.
- Transparent information about aid is lacking. This marginalises crisis-affected populations in decision-making. People want to understand how aid works, but they do not – and they are excluded from decision-making processes – so they do not trust aid providers.

¹ [The Grand Bargain.](#)

- Aid is disempowering. Haitians expect to participate throughout aid planning and implementation. Instead, they feel ostracised by aid providers and relegated to passive roles as receivers. This leaves people feeling unable to influence anything.
- Aid does not help people achieve their long-term goals. People find humanitarian aid useful in the immediate aftermath of acute disaster, but it goes no further. They feel sustainability can be achieved by consulting affected populations on their longer-term needs and involving Haitian civil society in more decisions.
- Collaboration with actors who communities trust is key to making aid accountable. People find it important that aid is distributed by actors they trust to provide it fairly and transparently.

We discussed our findings with representatives from the government, humanitarian sectors, NGOs and organisations working with persons with disabilities, and accountability to affected people focal points., and encouraged them to develop recommendations and commitments to improve trust across the response. Priority recommendations include the following:

- Raise awareness about targeting and selection criteria, including in remote areas;
- Adapt needs assessments to local contexts, including gender- and age-sensitivity;
- Ensure secure aid distributions by: Carefully choosing the time of day, anticipating the number of people, providing training on crowd-control measures, and involving a range of local leaders who represent diverse groups in distributions.
- Harmonise existing independent, anonymous, and confidential complaint mechanisms;
- Increase awareness of existing complaints and feedback mechanisms, and inform communities about the processing of their complaint and any responsive action taken;
- Improve community organisation involvement, including organisations for persons with disabilities (OPDs) and women's organisations, to increase access to aid for marginalised groups.

Community trust has been eroded for many years. Implementing these recommendations can thus only go so far to build back trust. We hope they can be an important step in a broader process.

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For additional analyses and more information about our work in Haiti, reach out to Rieke Vingerling (rieke@groundtruthsolutions.org).

Background and approach

A 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti on 14 August 2021, causing large-scale damage across the country's southern peninsula and leaving approximately 650,000 people in need of emergency assistance. The quake exacerbated an already precarious situation, marked by political crises, socio-economic challenges, and escalating gang violence². Fuel shortages and insecurity hampered assistance to populations in affected areas³.

The Flash Appeal outlined the two main objectives of the response: to provide lifesaving assistance and to support livelihoods and basic service provision. The emergency response was led by the Haitian Directorate General of Civil Protection (DGPC) and supported by the international humanitarian community. The response strategy emphasised capitalising on national expertise, capacities, and knowledge, and the importance of community engagement and transparent communication using communities' preferred channels.

The region was still recovering from 2016's Hurricane Matthew and affected communities had long intersected with humanitarian and development actors. Observers often herald the response to Haiti's 2010 earthquake as a turning point in accountability to affected people, but there is little evidence that engagement with affected people is sufficient⁴.

The 2021–2022 Humanitarian Response Plan includes accountability as a strategic objective that aims to involve affected populations in decision-making. Humanitarian organisations have also committed to making aid more sustainable by strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, collectively working towards reducing need, risk, and vulnerability⁵. These commitments are reiterated in the Flash Appeal: "The response to this earthquake needs to demonstrate the capacity of all actors to work on the nexus and to put Haitians at the centre of these efforts, leading and implementing the response, supporting time-critical assistance to spontaneous recovery assistance by affected communities to rebuild lives, livelihoods and rehabilitate essential social infrastructure, through labour intensive activities." (p.14).

In light of commitments to the nexus and accountability to affected people, we wanted to ensure that community views informed the response, not just on needs and priorities but also on power, participation, and trust. We used a mixed-method approach to ask people about their expectations – what do they believe should happen? – versus experiences: how do they see things in reality? Between October and December 2021, we surveyed 1,251 people affected by the earthquake. This uncovered a gap between expectations and experiences across several dimensions of accountability: satisfaction; information and communication; participation; empowerment; and autonomy.

We situated the gap between expectations and experiences through qualitative interviews with 86 people in January 2022. The interviews deepened our understanding of the quantitative findings and allowed us to obtain recommendations from the community.

We validated the findings and co-created recommendations through a workshop with aid providers. We will communicate the results of this workshop to various community members so they know how aid providers intend to respond to their feedback.

Sample

Quantitative survey

1,251 phone interviews

Gender

746 men (60%)

505 women (40%)

Department

542 Sud (43%)

436 Grand'Anse (35%)

273 Nippes (22%)

Aid recipient

1,106 non-aid recipient (88%)

114 aid recipients (12%)

Qualitative interviews

16 face-to-face interviews with 86 people

Women

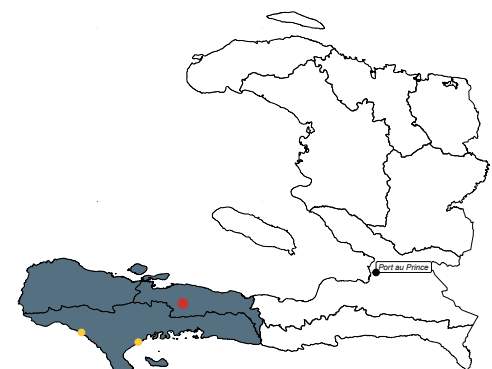
Men

Youth (18–24)

Persons with disabilities

Community leaders

Representatives of the LGBTQIA+ community (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other gender and sexual minorities)



- Earthquake epicentre
- Districts covered by our phone survey
- Communes covered by our qualitative interviews (Les Cayes and Port-à-Piment)

² OCHA. August 2021. "Flash Appeal".

³ The New Humanitarian. February 2022. "In Haiti, gang violence strains aid operations and demands new approaches".

⁴ CDAC Network and Michelle Betz. February 2022. "Haiti six months on: Good intentions, bad memories and local frustrations".

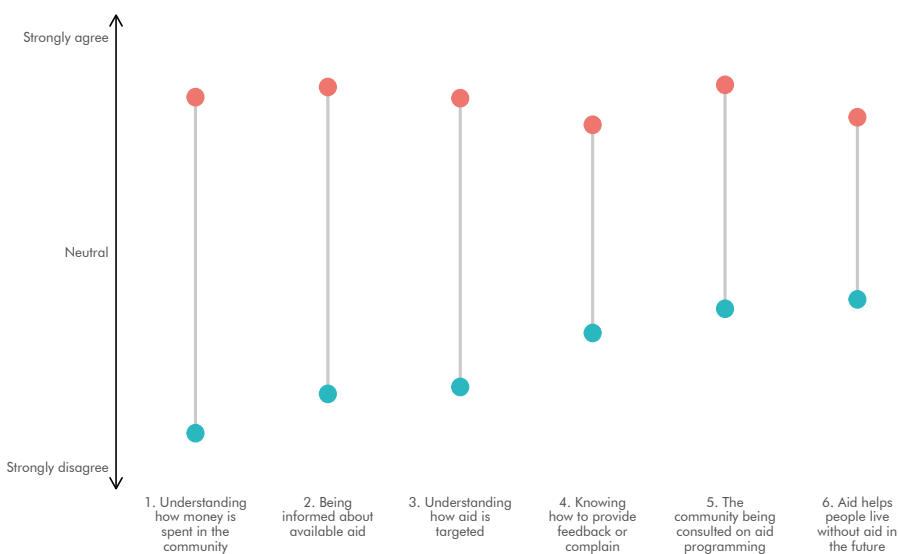
⁵ OCHA. March 2021. "Plan de Réponse Humanitaire".

Measuring the gap: Aid falls short of expectations

Haitians feel strongly about aid: it should be empowering, participatory, and transparent. But their reality falls short. Most people we spoke to highlighted wide gaps between what they consider important and the extent to which the system meets their expectations.

The gaps are especially big for transparency (see questions 1-3 in the gap plot): people expect to know how humanitarian money is spent, what assistance is available, and how targeting decisions are made. They see large amounts of international money flowing into Haiti, and feel it is important to know how it is used. Then they can hold organisations to account, particularly in light of well-documented mismanagement^{6,7}.

The gaps between expectations and experience are slightly narrower for the indicators of communities feeling consulted on aid programming; knowing how to provide feedback and complaints; and aid helping them to live without it in the future (see questions 4-6 in the gap plot). This smaller gap is partly due to more positive responses to these questions, potentially indicating successful investments by the humanitarian community. However, the smaller gaps are also caused by marginally lower expectations. These are potentially due to negative experiences in making complaints and submitting feedback, and low levels of trust in aid providers. People who do not think knowing how to complain is important may feel that complaining is not useful.



These results demonstrate that people value being involved, informed, and consulted. Humanitarians should focus on areas where the gaps between expectations and experiences are largest, and where they are far from meeting people's expectations. Transparency is key. Humanitarian communication is often one way, aimed at community behaviour change (like hygiene messaging) or how to access specific services, but people in Haiti want more. This is why the link between response leadership and community engagement is so important. Clearer, honest communication and consultation about how humanitarian money is spent in the community would build trust, but this requires high-level transparency.



What is humanitarian aid?

Focus group participants understand humanitarian aid as follows:

- Originating from abroad
- Short-term disaster relief
- Targeting all affected people, not individuals or segments
- Receiving individual items from distributions, such as food and tarps

In our survey, we asked people a set of questions for each aspect of aid, first asking how important they considered it, and then how they saw it working in reality. The red dots indicate people's ratings of the importance questions, while each blue dot indicates responses to the perception questions. The position of each dot was calculated according to the mean Likert score given for each question, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. The line in between represents the "gap" between expectations and perceptions of aid.

- Importance
- Perception

⁶ Reuters. August 2021. "[Haiti quake revives anger over aid response to past disasters](#)".

⁷ Ramachandran, Vijaya and Julie Walz. 2012. "[Haiti: Where Has All the Money Gone?](#)" CGD Policy Paper 004.

Aid does not go very far

"We don't want to be made victims for a sack of rice"

People see the effectiveness of aid as limited. Interviewees who received aid immediately after the earthquake were generally satisfied. Aid they received included tarps, food, water, and hygiene kits. But in the face of overwhelming need, many mentioned that the aid was too little to meet their real needs or only lasted a few days. Houses rebuilt after Hurricane Matthew were again damaged or destroyed. People said tarps were useful but that there was not enough distributed, especially considering household sizes. Overall, 67% of our survey respondents are not satisfied with the humanitarian services available to them. Satisfaction is highest among respondents in Corail (40% positive response), Anse-à-Veau (38%), and Coteaux (35%). These results align with a UNICEF survey* that named housing, money, and food as the priority unmet needs.

Are you satisfied with the humanitarian services that are available to your community?



Our qualitative interviews revealed that perceptions of the effectiveness of aid are complex. People's views depend on combined factors, including whether aid responds to needs and priorities, how much access people have to aid, and their experience of receiving it.

No trust in targeting: "People who lost everything are not the ones who have received aid"

People feel aid does not reach those who need it. This was especially true for interviewees in Port-à-Piment, which has a lower humanitarian presence than Les Cayes because it is more rural, even though rural areas were hit harder than the urban centres⁸. Gang-related violence around the capital, and poor infrastructure in remote areas has restricted humanitarian actors in reaching those in need.

Beyond a fairer geographic distribution of aid with a focus on rural communities, interviewees told us that everyone affected should receive aid, instead of specific targeting criteria limiting aid to certain groups. Of course, humanitarian funds are limited. This makes a transparent process crucial for people to see it as fair. People are acutely aware that their country receives plentiful foreign assistance and want to know why they are not included.

A majority of people who did not receive aid believe aid is inaccessible because it is given as a political favour, reserved for bigger towns and for people who know those in charge of distributions. Interviewees' experiences differ from the Flash Appeal strategies that prioritise households based on housing status and aid distribution to both rural and urban areas, among other factors⁹. Community leaders confirmed these findings.

These results align with [our 2019 report](#) on aid after Hurricane Matthew: people in rural areas felt left out. Some feel things are worse this time. They say less aid was available after the recent earthquake than after the hurricane and that aid was previously distributed more fairly.



Those of us who live outside the town couldn't find anything. Aid was only distributed within the town.

- Woman, Port-à-Piment



For aid to be distributed well, it must no longer be given with favouritism. The people who lost everything, they are not the ones who have received aid.

- Woman, Port-à-Piment



There are people who receive aid three or four times, even while there are people in need who haven't received anything.

- Community leader, Port-à-Piment

* UNICEF. December 2021. Enquête sur la redevabilité envers les populations affectées dans le Grand Sud. (Unpublished report)

⁸ OCHA. September 2021. "Situation Report No. 4".

⁹ OCHA. August 2021. "Flash Appeal".

Dangerous and undignified access: “We always feel shame during distributions”

Few interviewees have good experiences at aid distributions. They speak of insecure, crowded, and disorderly distribution sites. This often contributes to violence and injury¹⁰ or police responding with brutality or tear gas, especially in Les Cayes.

These experiences are clearly not a new development. Our interviewees described similar experiences after Hurricane Matthew, including one focus group participant who said a family member nearly lost an eye during a distribution.

Persons with disabilities noted that the conditions at distribution sites can make aid inaccessible for them, especially for those with reduced mobility or sensory impairments. As a result, the persons with disabilities we interviewed have accessed aid through family, neighbours, or OPDs, not via distributions. Such perceptions show that access to aid for persons with disabilities can be improved through a tailored approach involving partnerships with community organisations, and that efforts to reach people via OPDs seem to be successful.

Respect goes a long way: “Even if people need aid, it’s no reason to give them rubbish”

People feel disrespected when they receive poor quality aid from aid providers, such as spoiled goods or dirty clothing. Feelings of shame prevent people accessing distributions. They know there is a better way. They demand that aid is given with respect and dignity. People felt positively about aid when it was clearly accessible for all groups and given in an organised and respectful manner.

Community recommendations

- Distribute aid to more people, even if there is less for each individual.
- Avoid crowding and physical risk by organising distributions: In smaller groups; in larger, secured spaces; by zone, to reach all zones, or door-to-door, to reach all households; without discrimination but prioritising vulnerable people, such as persons with disabilities and older persons.
- Partner with OPDs and other community organisations to reach vulnerable people.



During the distributions, I frequently see people who don't stay in line getting hit. Sometimes the police launch tear gas.

- Man, Les Cayes



People with reduced mobility would access aid easily if it is sent to an organisation for persons with disabilities. But if it is distributed in public, we wouldn't be able to access it, because we can't fight everyone else.

- Woman, Les Cayes



By the time I arrive at the distribution site, the aid is gone. Because I have a disability, my means of transport makes me late.

- Man, Les Cayes



We always have a feeling of shame during the distributions. It's because of this that some people never go to one.

- Woman, Port-à-Piment



I ask aid providers that when they come to distribute aid, it is given with respect and discipline.

- Woman, Les Cayes



We don't want to be made victims for a sack of rice.

- Woman, Les Cayes

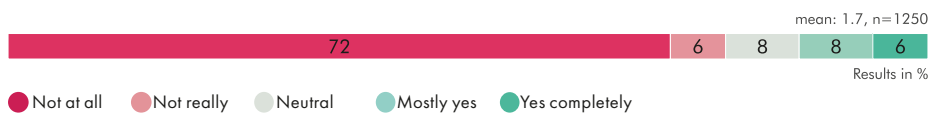
¹⁰ Associated Press. August 2021. “[Haiti Aid Distribution Clashes](#)”.

Transparent information is lacking

"We don't know anything"

Respondents do not understand how providers make decisions about aid and they complain about a lack of communication between aid providers and affected populations. Access to information is unequal. Only 14% of people we surveyed feel informed about what kind of aid is available to them, despite 98% of them deeming this information to be very important. Respondents in Anse-à-Veau and Corail feel slightly better informed than in other districts (28% and 25%, respectively). These results are echoed in the recent survey by UNICEF, in which 74% of respondents lacked information on aid distribution. Our 2019 report also identified the lack of communication and engagement with affected people, which is often attributed to security concerns.

Do you feel informed about what humanitarian assistance is available to your community?



People do not only want information about available aid. Focus group participants told us they want to know about various topics, including the sources of aid, who distributes it, and aid providers' motivations. They would also like to understand how much aid is available and how those quotas were decided.

There is an overwhelming consensus among respondents (94%) that it is important to know how humanitarian money is spent in communities, and how humanitarians decide who receives aid and who does not. Only 2% feel they know how humanitarian money is spent in their community, and just 13% understand how targeting criteria are decided. With such a huge gap between expectation and reality, anger among aid recipients is unsurprising. People expect transparency from aid providers about how decisions are made in their country and communities, just as they did after the 2010 earthquake¹¹.

Do you know how humanitarian money is spent in your community?



Do you know how humanitarians decide who receives aid and who does not?



Without information about targeting criteria and how money is spent, people speculate about corruption and unfairness, which leads to frustration and distrust.

Recommendations may feel either too obvious or too difficult, but it is important that humanitarians recognise that the long-term erosion of trust will not be solved by basic information-sharing. Trust must be earned through open communication, transparency, and respect.



I only find out about aid distributions after the fact.

- Man, Port-à-Piment



98% of people feel it is important to be informed about humanitarian assistance available to their community.

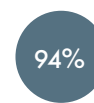


I'm not familiar with the organisations that usually provide aid in my community. They only come to distribute aid to the stadium without having any meetings.

- Man, Les Cayes



94% of people feel it is important to know how humanitarian money is spent in their community.



94% of people feel it is important to know how aid providers decide who receive aid and who does not.



It's always like this. I'm there at the distribution, but you tell me my name isn't on the list. I have to leave with nothing even if the [targeting] card is in your hands; why? I don't have any explanation.

- Man, Port-à-Piment

¹¹ Ramachandran, Vijaya and Julie Walz. 2012. "Haiti: Where Has All the Money Gone?" CGD Policy Paper 004.

Community recommendations

- Announce the time and place of distributions well in advance.
- Have meetings to inform people of aid, its processes, how much is available, and for whom.
- Open communication channels so affected populations understand the whole process, including the origin of aid and how providers make decisions over targeting and needs.
- Collaborate with community organisations and OPDs to share information.

People cannot participate

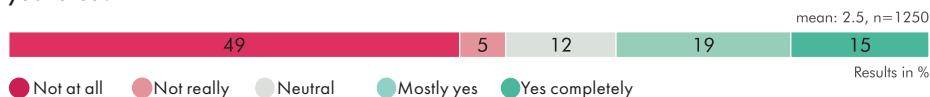
"All we can do is pray"

People consider participation crucial to improving aid. Nearly everyone we surveyed (98%) feels it is important to be consulted in humanitarian programming. Focus group discussions revealed that people feel they have the right to several things in aid, such as the right to ask questions, to be involved in decision-making, to know the source and legitimacy of aid providers, and to receive quality aid. Persons with disabilities describe feeling empowered when able to make decisions within OPDs. Community leaders say they should be involved in needs assessments to determine the types and quantity of aid needed for the community.

But most people's reality is far from their expectation. People understand their role in aid as passive recipients. Participants often repeated phrases like "we are in need," "we the poor," and "we are victims" during our focus groups, saying they are not equal with humanitarians. The relationship is one of givers and receivers. These feelings hinder citizens from taking more active roles¹².

This is a sombre reality check on the rhetoric around participation, power, and influence called for after the 2010 earthquake¹³ and again in the Grand Bargain¹⁴. Only 34% of people we surveyed reported being even consulted on aid programming, let alone having any power over it. People rather told us that aid made them feel disempowered. Youth, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community especially feel there are few opportunities to participate.

Do you think your community has been consulted on the programming of humanitarian aid in your area?



Interviewees said they do not have the power to make decisions about aid programming or to change its course or outcome. People feel there are limited options to complain, even about serious breaches like abuse and corruption.



We must have the right to ask questions to aid providers. Because we are all people, with the same rights, even if we are not on the same level in society.

- Woman, Les Cayes



The only right we have is to receive because we don't know anything about what the people in charge of aid are doing.

- Woman, Les Cayes



Sexual minorities should be involved, but now they are marginalised.

- LGBTQIA+ representative, Les Cayes



98% of people feel it is important that aid providers consult their community on the programming of humanitarian aid.



No, we don't have [the right to make decisions about aid] because community organisations tend to minimise the role of youth.

- Man, Les Cayes

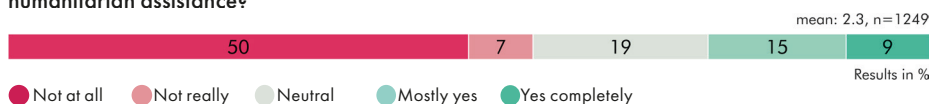
¹² Granzow, Tanja. 2018. "Between threat and infantilisation: How frames impeded the meaningful participation of the disaster affected in Haiti". *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 3(5-6): 726–744.

¹³ Alexander, David. September 2021. "Haiti: What aid workers can learn from the previous earthquake as they struggle to rebuild the country".

¹⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Accessed February 2022. "A participation revolution: Include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives".

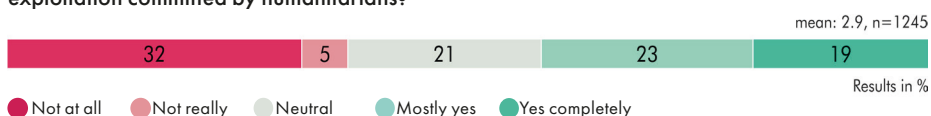
Only 24% of survey respondents feel their communities know how to complain or provide feedback, even though 86% find it important. Focus group participants described not knowing how to complain, but also not believing that complaining would bring about any real change.

Do you think people in your community know how to provide feedback or complain about humanitarian assistance?



When asked if people in their community are comfortable reporting cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by aid providers, the response is split, although people who answer negatively feel more strongly. Forty-two percent think people are either somewhat or very comfortable reporting SEA, while nearly one-third (32%) feel their communities are not at all comfortable. A high number of respondents gave neutral answers to this question. These scattered answers align with feedback from enumerators that respondents did not understand this question well or did not want to respond.

Do you think people in your community feel comfortable reporting cases of abuse and sexual exploitation committed by humanitarians?



Focus group participants say that although they can complain to the mayor or other local authorities, they do not always trust them, as they may be part of the problem. People told us about incidences of SEA committed by the local authorities involved in distributions. A UNICEF survey found that reasons for not reporting cases of SEA included a lack of information, fear of retaliation, and feeling that reporting would not result in any change.

The humanitarian community in Haiti has committed to measures to enhance protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). An inter-agency action plan and dedicated task force guide collective action on community engagement and the establishment of complaints mechanisms, as well as prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse training for all actors involved in the response. The plan also involves a coordinated response to reported cases and victim assistance¹⁵. Aid providers should improve communication and demonstrate the effectiveness of these policies to affected people, to ensure they feel reporting abuse is safe and worthwhile.

Community recommendations

- Involve OPDs and networks and other community organisations to ensure inclusive participation.
- Consult affected populations at all steps of the aid process, including during planning, implementation, and distribution.



For aid providers to know our needs, they must hear our grievances.

- Man, Les Cayes



of people feel it is important that their community knows how to complain or provide feedback about humanitarian assistance.



It's logical that we talk to the person bringing aid to the community, so that they can hear us and understand us, with the aim of distributing aid well.

- Man, Les Cayes

¹⁵ OCHA. March 2021. "Plan de Réponse Humanitaire", page 76.

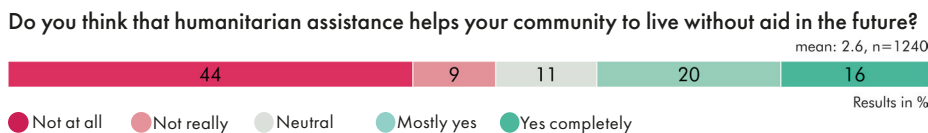
Aid strategies must be longer term

“To eat is not to nourish”

Haiti’s 2021–2022 Humanitarian Response Plan focuses on reducing humanitarian aid reliance by strengthening the humanitarian-development-peace nexus¹⁶. But people still perceive aid as a form of short-term relief. They consider it foreign, limited, and unsustainable in the long term. People told us they see autonomy firstly as the ability to live without aid, and secondly the ability to help oneself and others, neither of which they associate with humanitarian activities.

When asked about their long-term goals, people describe wanting a job or other means of subsistence, such as their own business. People also feel strongly about the need to rebuild homes. Youth describe wanting to get educated and help others in their community.

People say they found aid useful in the emergency phase when there was no access to water or food. Others note its utility in an even more limited sense. For example, one interviewee said they appreciated aid in the sense that they did not have to purchase those items in the market. But it was clear in focus group discussions that aid is not aligned with long-term – or even medium-term – priorities. Despite finding aid useful in the short term, people have divided views on whether aid helps their communities to eventually live without it. Thirty-six percent think aid helps them live without aid in the future. Respondents in Corail and Jérémie had more positive perceptions (54% and 45% agreeing or strongly agreeing, respectively).



People recognise they have lost much more than aid can restore. Many months on, people have still not been able to repair their houses. To achieve long-term goals, people emphatically describe the need for reconstruction, saying life-saving assistance, while necessary, must complement longer term support.

Research and evaluations about humanitarian responses in Haiti questioned aid and resilience after the 2010 earthquake¹⁷ and again after Hurricane Matthew¹⁸, when people raised concerns about food aid continuing to be distributed instead of more sustainable programmes. A 2011 evaluation by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee stated, “assistance that does not favour durable solutions no longer meets Haitian expectations”¹⁹.

People we interviewed had several suggestions for how humanitarian assistance could support their futures. They mentioned cash as a form of aid that can improve their self-sufficiency. Community leaders said shelter was a longer-term need.

People are motivated to help their communities and each other. Considering that people feel aid is short-term and comes from abroad, the idea of solidarity between Haitians provides an alternative vision of aid. People feel they can trust other Haitians, as they are all affected people who know each other’s needs. Of course, nuance is needed here, due to feedback about corruption in community leader decisions. Support to local organisations in terms of financial, material, and human resources was also an area for improvement identified in our [2019 report](#).



To be autonomous, we mustn’t have someone to aid us.

- Man, Port-à-Piment



Eating won’t help you to survive. Nourishing is not the same as eating. For example, I can buy a plate of food for you, but this won’t mean you won’t be hungry anymore.

- Man, Port-à-Piment



90% of people feel it is important that humanitarian assistance helps them live without aid in the future.



What is important to us is to reconstruct, to rebuild, so that we can figure out how to live again, because we can’t stay in a tarp our whole lives.

- Man, Port-à-Piment



During a natural disaster, we must have solidarity between us. We need to help and protect one another. We must learn how to reduce the need for assistance.

- Man, Les Cayes

¹⁶ OCHA. March 2021. “[Plan de Réponse Humanitaire](#)”

¹⁷ Patrick, Jonathan. June 2011. “[Haiti Earthquake Response: Emerging Evaluation Lessons](#)”.

¹⁸ Hsu, Kaiting Jessica and Mark Schuller. 2020. “[Humanitarian aid and local power structures: Lessons from Haiti’s ‘shadow disaster’](#).” *Disasters* 44(4), pages 641–665.

¹⁹ Inter-Agency Standing Committee. 2011. “[Inter-Agency Real-Time Evaluation of the Humanitarian Response to the Earthquake in Haiti: 20 Months After](#)”, page 8.

Persons with disabilities also feel that OPDs and networks must be involved throughout the entire process of aid, including its planning. People trust these organisations because they understand the needs of persons with disabilities and can make aid accessible. People think aid is distributed well when providers consult these organisations throughout the process.

Community recommendations

- Re-examine the forms of aid that are provided after the emergency phase of disaster.
- Incorporate Haitian civil society and community organisations, including OPDs, in information-provision, targeting, and distributions.
- Involve community leaders in needs assessments.

Conclusion: A hard road ahead to build back trust

Trust is central to this report. People have developed serious doubts about aid based on past experiences. Because they do not understand how aid works, and are not involved in its processes, they do not trust aid providers. A major complaint was that aid providers do not visit their communities to “see the reality.” Whatever goes on behind the scenes, people feel that aid is “all the same,” corrupt, and inaccessible. Maintaining relationships with communities is paramount to cultivating trust in this context²⁰.

Interviewees told us not receiving aid at all was preferable to receiving aid that does not meet basic standards, both in terms of unmet priorities and undignified access. “I should have the right to make aid providers leave the community”, a man in Les Cayes told us. They also want aid to be delivered by those they can trust and those who respect them.

The lack of local ownership has been criticised since the 2010 response^{21,22}. A more diverse and empowered group of national and community organisations may help to address the persistent allegations of corruption and favouritism by certain local authorities. More stringent accountability structures and inclusion of the most affected people is needed across the response.

As aid providers in Haiti increasingly seek “durable solutions”²³, affected people will not trust them if they maintain the status quo. Aid providers must earn trust by demonstrating that they are accountable and responsive to people’s needs, priorities, and complaints. This requires an overdue commitment to transparency and better collaboration with affected communities.



In two years, I would like the Haitian people to come together to produce change... When I speak of change, I mean the change that we ourselves need to bring, to form an organisation. If we know how to keep two gardens, we can also keep three, in order to take care of ourselves.

- Man, Port-à-Piment



We can question the aid provided, and we have the right to refuse it if isn't of good quality.

- Woman, Les Cayes



We trust the community organisation because if aid is provided, everyone would be able to receive it. There would be no partisanship.

- Woman, Les Cayes



I would like the CASEC to distribute aid. They should look for people who are most in need.

- Woman, Port-à-Piment



We must participate in the planning, implementation, and distribution of aid.

- Man, Les Cayes

²⁰ Carpi, Estella. 2017. “The ‘Learning from Crisis’ Humanitarian Formula: Bridging Disaster and Normality”. Urban Crises Learning Partnership Summary Report.

²¹ Binder, Andrea and François Grünewald. April 2020. “Haiti: IASC Cluster Approach Evaluation, 2nd Phase Country Study”.

²² USAID. March 2011. “Independent Review of the U.S. Government Response to the Haiti Earthquake”.

²³ OCHA. August 2021. “Flash Appeal”.

Recommendations

We held a workshop with members of the humanitarian community in March 2022 to formulate recommendations on how to act on our findings. Participants included representatives from the government, humanitarian sectors, NGOs and organisations working with persons with disabilities, and accountability to affected people focal points. To ensure recommendations lead to concrete action, active follow up from the relevant stakeholders in-country is key.

Targeting and communication around selection criteria

- Create a coordination body with community and civil society organisations to identify vulnerable groups and pre-identify vulnerabilities through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour's national vulnerability database (SIMAST);
- Apply standardised selection methods among aid providers;
- Conduct needs assessments specifically for persons with disabilities in conjunction with national and local organisations for persons with disabilities (OPDs);
- Base the response on multisectoral rapid needs assessments, including in remote areas; adapt it to different local contexts; and make sure it is gender- and age-sensitive by using the Gender- and Age Marker (GAM) tool.
- Raise awareness about targeting and selection criteria through markets, radios, schools, and religious organisations, making sure to include remote areas;
- Display a list of targeting criteria at distribution sites.

Safe and dignified access to aid

- Provide aid in secure locations and distribute aid early in the morning;
- Anticipate the number of people coming to the distribution and implement appropriate crowd control measures;
- Vary the location of distributions so they are not always in the same place;
- Involve local leaders in distributions, and train staff and distribution partners (Civil Protection) in safe distribution practices such as crowd control;
- Conduct a mapping of accessible areas as a preparedness measure;
- Hold separate or door-to-door distributions for vulnerable groups, such as pregnant or nursing women and people with reduced mobility.
- Reinforce quality assurance norms and standards for distributed goods, including at the organisational level, and prioritise locally sourced products and services.
- Train humanitarian field staff on humanitarian principles and conduct.

Community participation

- Consult community leaders and local authorities to identify distribution strategies appropriate for the community;
- Gather community input in the definition of vulnerability criteria;
- Commission an inclusive management guide with national and local OPDs to facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all phases of the project cycle and to contribute to the empowerment of persons with disabilities;
- Train organisations' staff on community consultation.

Complaints and feedback mechanisms

- Establish and harmonise independent, anonymous, and confidential complaints mechanisms, for example by establishing a centralised hotline and by designating focal points at distribution sites;
- Provide training for community organisations and associations (such as OPD and women's associations) on complaints and feedback mechanisms;
- Increase awareness of complaints and feedback mechanisms, for example by displaying complaints and feedback mechanisms at distribution sites and by informing communities on how complaints are processed and how to access and use feedback and complaint mechanisms;
- Implement systemic monitoring of complaints, for example by implementing policies on response time for certain types of complaints;
- Communicate results and any actions taken after complaints are made.
- Seek feedback on the quality and relevance of delivered aid through post-distribution monitoring.

Transparent information

- Integrate community organisations and religious actors in information sharing.
- Establish joint communication strategies among the various actors to ensure coherent messaging;
- Adapt communication strategies to different contexts and community preferences;
- Ensure information is accessible for persons with disabilities by dissemination through OPDs.

Methodology

We used a mixed-method explanatory design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

Quantitative survey

In collaboration with Institut de Formation et de Services (IFOS) and Viamo we conducted phone surveys with people living in the areas most affected by the earthquake: Nippes, Sud, and Grand'Anse.

Design and survey tool

The survey tool was co-designed by The New Humanitarian and Ground Truth Solutions and presented to in-country humanitarian partners for input and feedback. The survey was designed to measure satisfaction with aid using expectation-confirmation theory, one of the main approaches used in the private sector to explain customer satisfaction²⁴. The theory asserts that people's expectations strongly influence their satisfaction with services and products, and has been used widely in the public sector to measure satisfaction with government services^{25, 26, 27}.

Customer satisfaction research often refers to the gap between expectations and perceptions as the delivery gap. Providing information on its size should enable aid agencies to align their priorities more closely with people's expectations and to develop strategies to close these delivery gaps. Using customer satisfaction models from the private sector further strengthens the case that aid-receiving people should be seen as end-users with expectations towards service providers that influence their service satisfaction, just like private sector customers.

The survey tool was translated in French and Creole by two translators working for IFOS.

The enumerators from IFOS are experienced data collectors, both face-to-face and via phone. To familiarise them with the work of Ground Truth Solutions, the scope of the project, and collecting perception data, they received training organised by Ground Truth Solutions on:

- Collecting perception data;
- Mitigating enumerator bias;
- Enumerator code of conduct;
- Types of questions, including Likert-scale questions;
- The survey tool and the translation of the questions in Creole.

The training was conducted in French. After this training, the survey tool was pre-tested in 40 interviews. After integrating the feedback from this testing phase, the survey tool was finalised and followed up with a pilot phase of another 40 interviews.

²⁴ Oliver, Richard L. 1977. "[Effect of Expectation and Disconfirmation on Postexposure Product Evaluations: An Alternative Interpretation.](#)" *Journal of Applied Psychology* 62(4): 480–486.

²⁵ Morgeson, Forrest V. 2013. "[Expectations, Disconfirmation, and Citizen Satisfaction with the US Federal Government: Testing and Expanding the Model.](#)" *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 23(2): 289–305.

²⁶ Van de Walle, Steven. 2018. "[Explaining Citizen Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with Public Services.](#)" In *The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe*, edited by Edoardo Ongaro and Sandra Van Thiel, , 227–241.

²⁷ Van Ryzin, Gregg G. June 2013. "[An Experimental Test of the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory of Citizen Satisfaction: An Experimental Test of Expectancy-Disconfirmation.](#)" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 32(3): 597–614.

Sampling

Our sampling strategy focussed on where the response is concentrated. We contacted people living in the affected areas Nippes, Sud, and Grand'Anse by interactive voice response (IVR, or Robocall) using random digit dialling (RDD) in collaboration with Viamo. We aimed for an equal number of respondents in each administrative 2 level (arrondissements) by targeting phone numbers within ranges of cell phone towers in these regions.

Actual respondents reached can be seen in the table below.

Admin 1 level	Admin 2 level	Planned sample	Achieved sample	Difference
Nippes	L'Anse-à-Veau + Baradères	125 (10%)	142 (11%)	+1%
	Miragoâne	125 (10%)	112 (9%)	-1%
Sud	Aquin	125 (10%)	130 (10%)	=
	Les Cayes	125 (10%)	212 (17%)	+7%
	Les Chardonnières	125 (10%)	69 (6%)	-4%
	Les Coteaux	125 (10%)	86 (7%)	-3%
	Port Salut	125 (10%)	45 (4%)	-6%
Grand'Anse	Jeremie	125 (10%)	133 (11%)	+1%
	Corail	125 (10%)	205 (16%)	+6%
	Anse d'Hainault	125 (10%)	117 (9%)	-1%
Total		1250 (100%)	1251 (100%)	

To mitigate the inherent biases of higher income levels and higher literacy rates of people who own a cell phone compared to the general population²⁸, we targeted cell-phone users who had the lowest possible amount of cell phone credit²⁹, who did not send text messages, and who did not have a smartphone. We asked seven filter questions for the IVR to increase representativity:

1. Are you 18 years or older?
2. What is your gender?
3. Do you live in Nippes, Sud, or Grand'Anse?
4. If you live in the Nippes area, where do you live?
5. If you live in the Sud area, where do you live?
6. If you live in the Grand'Anse area, where do you live?
7. Do you consent to be called back for a survey on the current post-earthquake response?

28 GSMA. 2020. "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020".

29 WFP. 2015. "Food Security Brief UN Global Pulse".

Data collection

The people who consented were called back to participate in a live phone survey and compensated with phone credit upon completion of the survey. Data collection, including pre-testing and piloting, took place from 27 October 2021 to 9 December 2021. The surveys were conducted in Creole by enumerators from IFOS.

Weighting

Data was weighted based on administrative 2 levels (arrondissements). Population data for the admin 2 levels was obtained using a GIS approach with data from World Pop³⁰, a project that attempts to estimate population at high resolution using satellite images, geolocated covariates, and census data. This approach was used as census data was not available or reliable for recent years. Weights range from 0.34 to 2.03.

Qualitative interviews

Design

We conducted focus groups discussions using a semi-structured interview guide, aiming to further explore people's perceptions about the humanitarian response based on the preliminary results of the quantitative round. In partnership with a team of Haitian researchers, we developed an interview guide with the following areas of inquiry, which were further developed through a series of follow-up questions:

1. What is your experience with humanitarian aid?
2. What do you want aid to look like?
3. Who is best placed to provide humanitarian assistance in your community and why?
4. Does aid enable you and your community to meet your (long-term) needs?
5. How does humanitarian aid make you feel?

Sampling

Sampling for the qualitative component was purposive, aiming to reach conceptual saturation for a number of pre-defined categories. We sampled for eight focus group discussions, having a 50-50 split in gender (male/female) and age (adult/youth)³¹. We also aimed for a geographic distribution of four interviews in Les Cayes (high humanitarian presence) and Port-à-Piment (low humanitarian presence).

Of the three departments sampled in the quantitative component, Sud was chosen for qualitative interviews as a region highly affected by the earthquake. According to the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment by the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation, the department had the largest human death toll and otherwise affected people. The two communes representing a high humanitarian presence (Les Cayes) and low presence (Port-à-Piment) were chosen based on OCHA operational presence data and evidence of areas deemed inaccessible by aid providers.

³⁰ World Pop.

³¹ The age parameters for youth are 18–24 years.

Our final focus group sample included 70 participants:

Location	Gender	Age group	Number of participants
Les Cayes	Female	Adult	11
Les Cayes	Female	Youth	8
Les Cayes	Male	Adult	8
Les Cayes	Male	Youth	10
Port-à-Piment	Female	Adult	9
Port-à-Piment	Female	Youth	9
Port-à-Piment	Male	Adult	6
Port-à-Piment	Male	Youth	9
Total			70

We also sampled for additional interviews with community leaders, persons with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community, which were treated as key informant interviews. A total of eight interviews were conducted with 16 people:

Location	Gender	Category	Number of participants
Les Cayes	Female	Community leader	1
Les Cayes	Female	Persons with disabilities	2
Les Cayes	Mixed	LGBTQIA+	2
Les Cayes	Male	Persons with disabilities	2
Port-à-Piment	Female	Community leader	3
Port-à-Piment	Female	Persons with disabilities	2
Port-à-Piment	Male	Community leader	2
Port-à-Piment	Male	Persons with disabilities	2
Total			16

The sampling was conducted by establishing links with relevant organisations, such as women's associations, OPDs, youth associations, and other community associations. Representatives of these organisations were contacted for identification of focus group participants and key informants.

Data collection and analysis

We tested the questionnaire in a two-person group interview before proceeding with the data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 6 and 12 January 2022 by our data collection partners. We obtained written informed consent for all participants, which included an understanding of the purpose, procedure, voluntary nature, benefits and risks, confidentiality, and our contact information.

Focus group discussions and interviews were conducted in Creole; and were audio recorded, translated, and transcribed verbatim into French. Each focus group discussion and interview reached a duration of 1–1.5 hours.

Transcripts for the focus group discussions were coded systematically using an inductive method of line-by-line, open coding. A grounded-theory approach was utilised to allow the data to speak to themes such as empowerment and narratives about aid. We used a qualitative analysis software, MAXQDA, to code the transcripts. Inter-coder agreement was ensured through continuous discussion of codes and review of each other's work.

After all transcripts were coded the first time and logged in a codebook, the emergent themes were identified. Codes were categorised according to the themes, and the code structure was finalised. Due to the explanatory methodology, codes were first applied to the themes from the quantitative round, and then any additional themes were identified. A second round of coding then took place to ensure consistency across transcripts.

Group interview transcripts were coded deductively using a closed method through the themes identified in the focus group discussions.

Limitations

Limitations for the quantitative portion of our study include possible sampling and response biases, which could have resulted in errors in the measurement and the representativity of findings.

Response biases

- There could have been an error in the measurement of aid recipient status. Although we explained that the purpose of the study was not to provide aid and that Ground Truth Solutions is an independent organisation, respondents may have labelled themselves as non-recipients of aid due to the timing of the survey in the weeks and months following the earthquake. This could explain the relatively low proportion of aid recipients in our final quantitative sample.
- There are also indications that the wording of certain questions could have been confusing or not well understood by respondents. As a result, we decided to remove a question related to influencing aid, which was asked in the phone surveys, from our final results.

Qualitative research team

The qualitative research team was composed of two main researchers and three supporting staff:

- Jean Wesly, who has over 10 years of experience in qualitative data collection and working with communities in the South department as a CEA officer.
- Riche Jean Ruben Peterly, who has over 17 years of experience in qualitative data collection, programme management and capacity building.
- Claudel Thermond, who has over 3 years of experience in data collection and specifically in facilitating FGDs
- Jephthanie Francois and Thamar Italis as planners and note takers.

Sampling biases

- Phone surveys are prone to unknown biases, as the characteristics of the target population can differ from the general population. We completed interviews with 4% of the total amount of phone numbers we targeted using random digit dialling. Although a 4% completion rate is quite normal for a random digit dialling survey, it is unclear how the characteristics of the group who answered and the group who refused (or could not) to participate differ. Therefore, it could be that the people we spoke to are, because of unknown confounders, not a representative sample of the affected population in Nippes, Sud, and Grand'Anse.
- We aimed to have a 50/50 gender split. However, during the data collection it turned out to be more difficult to reach women than men. Possible explanations include that more men own cell phones, or that men more often have access to cell phones, when mobile phones are household owned, for example³².

We have much to improve upon in our approach to being inclusive of research with persons with disabilities. While most people we interviewed had mobility-related or sensorial impairments, we also need to recognise that other disabilities are often overlooked and under-sampled, such as people having psychosocial or neurodevelopmental impairments.

During our qualitative sampling, we found evidence of survey and interview fatigue. Certain community leaders refused to participate in our study because their experiences with data collection have made them weary of data collections without receiving any communication or benefit in return.

³² GSMA 2020. "[The Mobile Gender Gap Report](#)".



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