

Partners In Health

Emergency Relief and Rebuilding in Haiti

Spring 2009 Report

Overview: PIH's Hurricane Response

In August and September 2008, four hurricanes and tropical storms surged onto Haiti's shores, bringing floods and widespread destruction to the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. As many as 1,000 people died and an estimated one million Haitians, almost 12% of the population, were displaced, as storm waters washed away houses, deteriorated roads already in poor condition, and destroyed six key bridges. Whole cities were flooded, including Gonaives in the Artibonite Valley and Hinche in the Central Plateau.

Although Partners In Health (PIH) is not a disaster relief organization, we have been working in Haiti for over two decades, and our sister organization, Zanmi Lasante (Creole for Partners In Health) has become an integral and trusted resource in the many poor communities in Central Haiti and the Artibonite Valley, where we serve a catchment area of more than 1 million people. Our presence in some of the hardest hit areas allowed our staff to not only provide medical care for displaced, injured, and sick people, but also to distribute food, drinking water, clothing and other basic needs to thousands who sought refuge in shelters.

PIH's approach has always been to meet the immediate needs of our patients but also to address systemic issues, such as poverty and inequality, that put people at risk for disease and ill health in the first place. Thus our work in Haiti regularly includes not only medical care but also educational initiatives that enable children to go to school and better their life prospects, clean water projects that bring potable water and sanitation to entire communities, food support and agriculture programs to improve food security among the rural poor, and housing construction to enable patients to better withstand the elements.

Therefore, in the context of the devastation wrought by the storms, PIH sought to respond with both short-term relief measures and long-term efforts to "build back better" in Haiti so that the public health system and local communities are better able to respond to future disasters. To garner the necessary financial resources, immediately following the storms PIH published our first "Call to Action" to raise funds for hurricane recovery in Haiti. We were truly overwhelmed by the response: our call to action was answered by an astounding 800 donations in just the first three days after sending the call, and we raised \$2.2 million in two months. Overall we raised \$3 million in grants and donations to support our short and long-term initiatives. The following report describes relief and recovery activities that PIH and Zanmi Lasante (ZL) have undertaken in the last six months, as well as our ongoing efforts to continue to rebuild the communities we serve.



Above: Flooding caused by the hurricanes inundated whole cities and villages, including Hinche.

Below: Residents in Hinche trying to escape the rising floodwaters.



Phase I: Emergency Relief

When the storms initially struck Haiti, providing emergency relief was an immediate priority. Residents in Saint-Marc and Petite-Rivière in the Artibonite Valley, and in Hinche and Mirebalais in the Central Plateau, were in dire need of food, water, shelter and essential medicines. In Saint-Marc, three major low-lying areas of the city were flooded, and ZL's clinical site there continues to face increased patient volume from refugees coming south from the city of Gonaives. Petite-Rivière also experienced heavy flooding from the nearby Ester and Artibonite Rivers. In addition to our sites in the Artibonite, Hinche and Mirebalais were also greatly impacted by flash-flooding that displaced thousands. In the days and weeks following the storms and because of the quick and generous response of our donors, PIH and ZL were able to provide \$400,000 worth of food, water, shelter and medicine to thousands of Haitians.

- **Food:** ZL provided food for thousands of people by purchasing, preparing, and distributing sandwiches for displaced people in the hours and days following the flooding, as well as providing hot meals for people in shelters. ZL also coordinated the donation and distribution of 6.8 metric tons of high energy biscuits and dry food rations for families to take home.
- **Water:** As community water sources were contaminated by flooding, ZL provided thousands of water bottles, 1,100 five-gallon water jugs, and 20 hanging camp filters to emergency shelters. We also distributed 500,000 packets of donated PUR water treatments (one packet purifies enough water for a family of five for one day) and 5,000 chlorine water treatments to families. We also installed a filter pump to treat and filter river water for the entire community of Hinche.
- **Shelter:** In the immediate aftermath of the storms, ZL provided temporary shelter for 800 people. We also provided clothing for over 1,000 people by coordinating and distributing donations from communities in Haiti and in the US. When families prepared to leave the shelters after the water receded, ZL provided "return to home" kits (including mattresses, clothes, food, kitchen utensils, pots and pans, a stove, buckets and water purification solution, and soap) to over 100 families whose homes were not completely destroyed. ZL also resettled 65 PIH/ZL staff members directly affected by the storms, helping with household essentials, clothing, housing (home repair or rental), and funeral expenses.
- **Medicine:** ZL provided medical care for thousands of people through shelters and mobile clinics, including vaccines which are extremely important to prevent disease outbreaks among the displaced. ZL staff coordinated and distributed 7,400 pounds of peanut-butter based ready-to-eat therapeutic food (RUTF) to malnourished children identified in shelters and mobile clinics. And lastly, PIH relied on our networks of community health workers to track down our HIV and TB patients to ensure that those who need daily medications did not miss a dose.



ZL staff waded through floodwaters to find missing patients.



Above: ZL provided hot meals for people seeking refuge in shelters.

Below: The "return to home" kits helped families who had lost everything in the floods.



Phase II: Recovery through Social Assistance and Solidarity

In the weeks following the storms, residents in the hardest hit areas faced the daunting task of rebuilding their lives. With fields destroyed by flooding, houses washed away, and belongings lost, many families returned to their communities with only the clothes on their backs and the tenacity to start rebuilding their homes and their futures. PIH and ZL began immediately to provide the social assistance needed by thousands of families, primarily by building or repairing houses, assisting families with school fees for their children, providing food support, and bolstering agricultural capacity for local farmers through tools, seeds, and training. Through these efforts, which will continue for the next several months, PIH and ZL is devoting \$1.3 million to rebuild lives and livelihoods in our communities.

- **Housing:** The number of people who lost their homes in the storms is staggering; ZL staff identified hundreds of families in need in our communities alone. To date, we have built twenty-five houses, and there is a waiting list of houses still to build. Assistance is given to many families to fix their homes. Each of the houses includes a latrine to be used by everyone in the surrounding area. The homes are being built with a thick foundation, so as to prevent serious water damage in the future. PIH and ZL are putting together a long-term rebuilding plan that will include repairing or rebuilding as many homes as possible. We are looking into lower cost-options for housing construction in Haiti (in the past, we have built homes at an average cost of \$5,000 each), as well as the possibility of donated materials and expertise.



Above: House destroyed by floodwaters.
Below: In the past few months, ZL has helped build over a dozen sturdy new houses for families whose homes were lost in the storms.

- **School Fees:** While PIH and ZL were able to assist thousands of families with food, water, medical care, the damage of the storms forced many who were already desperately poor to deplete their meager resources on food, shelter, and water – leaving little to cover the expenses of sending their children to school for the delayed start of the school year in October. Not only did many families lack funds for school fees, but uniforms and books already purchased were lost in the storms. Tragically, student identification cards, which serve as receipts of fee payment, were also destroyed, meaning that parents had no proof that they paid for school. To overcome these challenges, ZL has provided school assistance for nearly 6,000 children this year, and in the 2009/2010 school year ZL aims to support over 6,000 students with school fee support.



- **Nutritional Support and Building Agricultural Capacity:** The global food crisis, which brought international attention to Haiti's starving poor in the months leading up to the hurricanes, caused the costs of basic staples like wheat and rice to rise nearly 100% in 2008. Widespread food insecurity in Haiti was further compounded by the storms, which destroyed crops and ruined fields. PIH and ZL have responded to this crisis with short and long-term solutions, knowing that rural Haitians need not only immediate relief from starvation but also agricultural initiatives that will improve farming productivity and food security in the years to come.

Zanmi Agrikol, which translates to “Partners In Agriculture” in Haitian Creole, is a fast-growing program that uses agricultural initiatives to both treat and prevent malnutrition in children and increase food security for the families of these children and the broader community. Zanmi Agrikol uses three main strategies: We treat severely malnourished children in our nine sites across the Central Plateau and lower Artibonite Valley of Haiti by using a locally manufactured therapeutic food called Nourimanba. We work to prevent pediatric malnutrition by providing a locally produced mixture of milled grain and legumes called Nourimil to children at risk for malnutrition. We build agricultural capacity by providing local farmers with inputs (seeds, tools, goats, and fruit trees), training them in environmentally sustainable agricultural techniques, and providing markets for their crops. Through Zanmi Agrikol, PIH and ZL are providing malnutrition treatment and prevention to 6,000 children this year and agricultural assistance to 240 families.



The storms destroyed many crops in one of Haiti's most important agricultural regions.

Phase III: “Building Back Better” through Strengthening the Public Health System

It will take months, if not years, for devastated communities in Haiti to recover from the hurricanes. Beyond providing emergency relief and social assistance, in solidarity with the Haitian Ministry of Health PIH is working to strengthen public health infrastructure in areas hardest hit by the storms. These efforts include rehabilitating the district hospital in Saint-Marc, expediting the opening of a procedure room at a hospital in Lascahobas to perform emergency c-sections and other obstetrical care, rehabilitating Mirebalais Hospital, and continuing to bolster our medical programs across all sites to meet greatly increased patient volume. Over the next year, PIH and ZL anticipate spending at least \$1 million in these efforts.

- **St.Marc/Petite Rivière:** In 2008, PIH and ZL expanded beyond the Central Plateau to two sites in the lower Artibonite Valley, Saint-Marc and Petite-Rivière, effectively doubling our total catchment area in Haiti to 1.2 million people. In Saint-Marc, we began by strengthening the district hospital, called Hospital Saint-Nicholas (HSN), by training and supporting Ministry of Health staff, establishing reliable communications and internet connectivity, stocking the pharmacy with essential medicines, and providing much-needed medical and laboratory equipment. The hurricanes occurred in the midst of this work and caused extensive flooding and damage in Saint-Marc. The city also received, and today is still struggling to cope with, tens of thousands of refugees from Gonaives, a city of 300,000 to the north that was completely flooded, with 80% of its residents displaced.



Flooding drove many people in Gonaives to seek refuge in Saint-Marc.

With nearby hospitals in the Artibonite Valley crippled, PIH has accelerated the rehabilitation of HSN to handle the surge in patient volume that the facility is experiencing and to improve access to basic primary care, which helps in the long run to reduce the burden of disease. Specifically, PIH and ZL are using hurricane funds to rebuild an x-ray suite, pediatric ward and kitchen and to construct a new outpatient clinic.

- **Mirebalais:** Mirebalais is a crucial junction between Port-au-Prince and the Central Plateau. It is also the central warehouse for the ZL/World Food Program food distribution program that provides food support for our HIV and TB patients. Mirebalais experienced severe flooding when the nearby river overran its banks. The flash flooding and degree of damage that occurred over a four-hour period of rain during Hurricane Ike was unprecedented in this area and was all the more devastating because of the unexpected, rapid onset of the floods. Moreover, a major bridge collapsed in Mirebalais, isolating the town from its hospital and disrupting the major vehicular route to the Artibonite Valley.



A major bridge collapsed in Mirebalais.

Over the long term, PIH is partnering with the Ministry of Health to rebuild Mirebalais Hospital. We had already developed plans to undertake this work in the future, but given the severity of the damage in Mirebalais from the storms, we are prioritizing hospital construction work in the coming fiscal year. In the meantime, ZL has re-established minimal functions at the Mirebalais Hospital by providing staffing support, supplies, and essential medicines. We have purchased an ambulance to take patients to neighboring clinics for emergency care, and we are training a cadre of community health workers (accompagnateurs), the cornerstone of our model of community-based care, who provide follow up and daily home visits to patients with HIV and TB. Over the next few months as construction commences, PIH and ZL will be training clinicians and program staff to implement our full model of primary care and treatment in the completed hospital. Expanding the PIH model to Mirebalais will have a tremendous impact on the 140,000 residents there while reducing very high patient loads at some of our nearby facilities.

- **Essential Medicines:** After the hurricanes, PIH and ZL began strengthening clinical capacity at all ZL sites to accommodate increased patient volume. PIH stocks 185 essential medicines, including antibiotics, anti-parasitics, malaria treatment, vitamins, ophthalmological products and intravenous fluids, across our nine clinical sites in Haiti. Among the items most needed in the aftermath of the hurricanes were medicines like de-worming medications, malaria treatment, antifungal medicines, oral rehydration salts, and a broad spectrum of antibiotics. Much of our reserve medicines were given out during the emergency relief phase, and ZL is working to restock our pharmacies.

Thank You for Your Support

The overwhelming support that PIH received from donors in the wake of the hurricanes and tropical storms in Haiti not only enabled PIH to provide emergency relief to those directly affected, but also spurred longer-term efforts to “build back better” the communities and health system in areas where PIH and ZL work. PIH is grateful for your support of our patients, staff, colleagues and friends in Haiti, and we are deeply moved by your generosity and dedication to our work.