

**Haiti Shelter Sector Assessment – One Year After the Earthquake  
International Housing Coalition  
Executive Summary  
April 2011**

The International Housing Coalition’s (IHC) Haiti Shelter Sector Assessment (HSSA) reviews the progress and obstacles facing the recovery of the shelter sector after Haiti’s devastating earthquake on January 12, 2010. The HSSA is based on the prevailing shelter conditions one year after the earthquake. The principal objective of the HSSA is to provide USAID with a broad perspective on support to the shelter recovery process. Recovery from such a devastating earthquake will take many years. Therefore, the Assessment takes a medium to long-term perspective on the process. The assessment identifies critical Haitian shelter sector issues, analyzes their current context and recommends appropriate actions to be taken or facilitated by USAID through its assistance program. The following Executive Summary of the HSSA provides a brief background on Haiti, USAID’s shelter program in Haiti, as well as the five priority recommendations the IHC believes are critical to moving shelter and livelihood reconstruction forward. The Executive Summary then presents the full set of recommendations of the IHC.

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The IHC is a non-profit education and advocacy organization in Washington D.C. that supports “Housing for All” and seeks to raise the priority of housing on the international development agenda. To learn more about the IHC visit its web site at [www.intlhc.org](http://www.intlhc.org).

## **BACKGROUND AND PRESENT CONDITIONS IN THE SHELTER SECTOR<sup>1</sup>**

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010 a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, 15 miles west of Port-au-Prince. The quake killed more than 220,000 people and injured over 300,000. It left more than one million people homeless. The majority of the earthquake affected families relocated to 1,300 temporary camps in and around Port-au-Prince.<sup>2</sup> The international community flooded Haiti with humanitarian aid in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. However, by the end of 2010, the long-term recovery and reconstruction of housing in Haiti was still threatened by the complexity of shelter reconstruction in

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<sup>1</sup> Summary based on U. S. Department of State. Office of the Haiti Special Coordinator, “HAITI ONE YEAR LATER”, January 10, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Oxfam, “Haiti Progress Report 2010”, January 6, 2011

Haiti, weak leadership from the Government of Haiti (GOH), a lack of coordination between donors and the absence of an officially approved strategy.

The scale of destruction reflects the conditions that existed in Haiti prior to the earthquake. The country's high population density, endemic poverty and lack of institutional capacity to enforce building standards or urban planning led to the high death toll and extensive building collapse. Approximately 105,000 houses were completely destroyed, over 208,000 were damaged and approximately 25 million tons of rubble covered the earthquake zone.<sup>3</sup> The cost to repair damaged houses, including rubble removal and the provision of temporary shelter, was initially estimated to be over \$3 billion, and some analysts estimated that an additional \$2.3 billion would be required for 340,000 new houses to settle people permanently displaced from their former houses.<sup>4</sup>

The Haiti Reconstruction Fund (HRF) was established to mobilize and utilize contributions from donors. The Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) was also created as a temporary institution to approve and coordinate development programs.

In the earthquake affected areas, technical teams have assessed houses for habitability as part of the reconstruction process. As of January 12, 2011, teams had assessed more than 380,000 structures, tagging 54 percent green, or safe to inhabit, 26 percent yellow due to the need for minor repairs, and 20 percent red, indicating a need for major repairs or demolition.<sup>5</sup> Many of the "green" houses have not yet been reoccupied; sometimes because former residents can no longer pay their rent and other times because households do not want to lose access to the aid provided in camps.

#### **UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE HSSA**

##### Do no harm.

The shelter sector recovery process should make the lives, health, safety, and economic condition of the poor no worse than they were before the disaster. To the extent practical the recovery process should result in "building back better."

##### Facilitate "safe return" for as many households as possible.

The shelter sector recovery process should enable households to safely return to their former neighborhoods and houses to the maximum extent possible.

##### Recognize the need for a variety of shelter solutions.

Renters and house-owners need different types of shelter solutions during the recovery process. The poor and the non-poor also have different needs.

##### Haitian leadership for the recovery process is essential.

USAID can support shelter recovery, but Haitians must lead it. Leadership must start with the GOH, and a single focal point for housing community development policy and programs.

<sup>3</sup> Oxfam, "Haiti Progress Report 2010", January 6, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Associates, Inc. (2010). *Housing for Haiti's Middle Class: Post-earthquake diagnosis and strategy.*

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

As of December 2010, long-term reconstruction had hardly begun, and the slow removal of rubble on private property has hampered rebuilding. Shelter conditions for most households displaced by the earthquake had not improved substantially beyond emergency shelter in formal or informal camps. According to Habitat for Humanity International: “The 1.5 million internally displaced people in Haiti face extreme uncertainty, as their futures are threatened by forced evictions, improvised shelters and emergency shelter materials that have begun to deteriorate.”<sup>6</sup>

Recent USAID/OFDA data indicate that the January 2011 population of camps is approximately 810,000 people, a decline of approximately 690,000 people since July 2010.<sup>7</sup> Although it is not yet clear where people have gone, or if their shelter situation has improved, anecdotal evidence suggests that returns to green-tagged structures are increasing in areas where rubble has been removed, services are beginning to be restored, and other shelter activity is occurring.

The condition of land markets is chaotic and essentially lawless. Land ownership records are nonexistent or ambiguous. Lack of clear title to a plot of land or written approval from a verified owner makes it difficult to supply a potential beneficiary with a new house or to support re-occupancy of prior homes.

Un-removed rubble is also having a profound impact on shelter sector recovery. Rubble removal is an inherently time-, resource-, and labor-intensive process. Millions of tons of rubble remain. There is a need to identify sites for rubble disposal. Only one rubble disposal area has been approved to date and this is limiting the pace of removal.

The most fundamental problem facing the shelter sector is that responsibility for shelter issues remains divided among multiple Government of Haiti agencies, and capacity in these agencies is very weak. For example, lack of government capacity is delaying the registration of NGOs, the importation of shelter material, and identifying land for new settlement sites. In the absence of a single ministry with a political mandate and responsibility for planning, coordinating and ensuring implementation of critical shelter functions, delays and inefficiencies in the shelter recovery process continue to arise.

## **USAID STRATEGY IN SUPPORT OF SHELTER SECTOR RECOVERY<sup>8</sup>**

According to documentation provided, the U.S. Government’s overall goal is to *promote a stable and economically-viable Haiti*. It plans to achieve this goal by supporting economic opportunities outside Port au Prince with investments in housing, energy, agriculture, health, rule of law and national & local governance. USAID is responsible for managing U.S. foreign assistance efforts but it intends to work with key

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<sup>6</sup> Habitat for Humanity International, “Haiti Policy Report”, December 17, 2010

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Summary based on the Post-Earthquake USG Haiti Strategy: “Toward Renewal and Economic Opportunity”, January 3, 2011

stakeholders, including the GOH, other donors, NGOs, the private sector and local communities with special attention to building Haitian capacity.

In the infrastructure area (broadly defined), USAID is tasked with achieving *improved infrastructure that supports community and commercial development*. It plans to invest in areas where their assistance can add value, catalyze economic growth and help build Haiti's institutions and their capacity to perform their roles. The program consists of four components.

**1. Support for upgrading up to five Port-au-Prince neighborhoods, including provision of resources to accelerate rubble removal using heavy equipment.**

The objective is to facilitate the return of displaced households to their original neighborhoods. Activities funded directly or indirectly by USAID will address rubble removal, land tenure security and the lack of community infrastructure, all of which currently combine to prevent the safe return of displaced households. Assistance may also include funding for repair of "yellow" houses and the incremental improvement of transitional shelter units in the neighborhoods.

**2. Integrated investments to facilitate the establishment of up to three new communities that offer housing, jobs, and sustainable economic opportunities.** USAID plans to develop up to three new communities that offer housing, access to electricity and sustainable economic

**IMMEDIATE PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Of the many recommendations of the Assessment, five need immediate attention because they lie on the critical path to improving the pace of shelter sector recovery:

In partnership with other donors, USAID capacity-building assistance to the GOH should focus on creating a high-level housing policy staff, and USAID should immediately engage with major donors to negotiate the establishment of a Ministry of Housing and Community Development with the Haitian President-elect. Training programs in housing policy analysis and formulation are needed as soon a high-level Haitian policy staff can be assembled.

The GOH needs to develop flexible, fair and not overly complex standardized shelter assistance packages. USAID should call on the GOH to make this issue an immediate priority and should offer any technical assistance possible. Standardized shelter assistance packages will facilitate donor-NGO coordination, encourage the efficient use of resources and clarify assistance options.

To the maximum extent possible, USAID should fund GOH development of the essential guidelines and plans identified in the IHRC "Neighborhood Return and Housing Reconstruction Framework" that have not yet been initiated. There are at least 12 essential guidelines and plans that need to be prepared as soon as possible.

USAID, with other donors, should provide additional staff to the IHRC Housing and Neighborhoods Team. A fully-functioning IHRC is critical to the success of the shelter sector recovery process.

For the new settlements program component, USAID should create a team within the Mission with the skills necessary to manage the contractors providing professional/technical, construction and beneficiary relocation services. New settlements require careful supervision by USAID to achieve their intended results and to manage costs.

opportunities close to Port-au-Prince and in the vicinity of St. Marc and Cap Haitian. USAID intends to facilitate construction of new houses and also support the upgrading of transitional shelters in the same three areas to create more permanent homes on the model used in Port-au-Prince neighborhoods

**3. Provide capacity building and policy reform support to the GOH.** USAID plans to provide technical assistance in urban planning, management, construction, and housing administration. Policy assistance will be focused on land tenure and titling, the creation of an enabling environment for housing finance and mortgage markets, and regulation and supervision of building codes.

**4. Increase access to housing finance.** USAID plans to encourage the recovery of the housing sector with housing finance mechanisms tailored to different segments of the population. A number of options will be assessed for implementation, including home improvement loans, construction finance, mortgage lending for the middle class and working poor, and subsidies and vouchers for the poorest.

## **IHC STRATEGY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

IHC recommendations fall into three categories: 1) USAID specific issues; 2) Broader strategic issues; and 3) Issues related to critical aspects of the shelter recovery process.

### **1. USAID SPECIFIC ISSUES**

#### **A. Focus of USAID Bi-lateral Shelter Investments**

- 1) USAID should identify the factors that motivate displaced families to return to their neighborhoods or relocate to new settlements. A study involving limited household surveys or focus groups should be funded by USAID. There are substantial risks to not making demand the key factor in the location of new houses.
- 2) USAID should attempt to relocate displaced families to places where their livelihood prospects and access to essential services are at least equivalent to their original informal community in Port au Prince. At a basic level, economic opportunity should be the essential site selection criteria for USAID new settlements projects, and should be made a binding constraint in the site selection process.
- 3) USAID should avoid making the success of new settlements primarily dependent on the prospect of foreign direct investment. When selecting sites, the USAID new settlement program component needs to take a much broader view of the demand for housing than to focus on a very limited number of foreign direct investment deals.

- 4) Selection of beneficiaries for relocation to USAID new settlements should favor households who have no possibility of returning to their former housing site.
- 5) In conjunction with local governments and community groups, potential USAID beneficiaries should be identified through the simultaneous application of Neighborhood Enumeration, Neighborhood Risk Mapping and Participatory Community Planning techniques. Use of all three techniques will show which registered households from a given neighborhood may be permanently displaced due to unmitigated risks or re-planning of their building site for a community facility or infrastructure right of way.

## **B. Implementation of USAID Shelter Projects**

- 1) USAID should attempt to identify in-fill areas where smaller new settlements can be constructed as near as possible to informal neighborhoods undergoing upgrading. New settlements near existing informal neighborhoods will minimize the adverse impact of household relocation and make it easier to assemble land parcels with clear ownership.
- 2) Wherever possible, USAID should utilize Haitian construction contractors under appropriate supervision. Smaller new settlement projects can more easily encourage Haitian housing construction and development company growth.
- 3) USAID should make certain that ownership of the land for any new settlement is undisputed. Haitian landowners for each USAID new settlement project need to be able to demonstrate that they have well established control over the land that is to be developed.
- 4) For the new settlements program component, USAID should create a team within the Mission with the skills necessary to manage the contractors providing professional/technical, construction and beneficiary relocation services. New settlements require careful supervision by USAID to achieve their intended results and keep costs under control.

## **C. USAID Assistance for Safe Return to Communities in Port au Prince**

- 1) To the maximum extent possible, USAID should fund the GOH development of the essential guidelines and plans identified in the IHRC “Neighborhood Return and Housing Reconstruction Framework” that have not yet been initiated. The Framework identified at least 12 essential guidelines and plans that needed to be prepared as soon as possible.
- 2) USAID, in collaboration with other donors, should provide additional staff to the IHRC Housing and Neighborhoods Team as soon as possible to enable them to coordinate the full range of safe return programs being implemented by all types of donors and NGOs. A fully functioning IHRC is critical to the success of

the shelter sector recovery process. USAID should work with the IHRC to define its immediate staffing needs, and provide as much funding as possible toward meeting those needs.

- 3) USAID should use policy dialog to promote agreement among all parties on appropriate risk mitigation, participatory community planning, affordable standards, and household contribution to rebuilding. Working with other donors and the NGO community, USAID should endeavor to influence the GOH approach to shelter recovery to incorporate citizen participation and efficient use of financial resources.
- 4) USAID should strongly advocate with the GOH for a central registry of Neighborhood Enumeration data to be established as soon as possible.

## **2. BROADER STRATEGIC ISSUES**

### **A. Dealing with Households that Lived in Hazardous Locations**

- 1) USAID should expand its assistance for neighborhood enumeration to include concurrent risk mapping in the same communities. Adding risk mapping and mitigation specialists to the community enumeration teams will speed up the identification of registered families that will be permanently displaced from their former neighborhoods. The involvement of local governments and community groups in decisions about risk related displacement of households will be important.
- 2) USAID should engage the managers of the Housing Reconstruction Fund (HRF) on ways to accelerate the use of some of the USAID contribution toward risk mapping and mitigation activities. The sooner that risk mapping and mitigation cover more communities, the sooner an orderly process of safe return can be implemented.
- 3) To the extent possible, USAID should offer households registered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the option to relocate to a USAID new settlement when they are displaced from their original neighborhoods due to unmitigated risks at their building site. These families should be selected as beneficiaries for the USAID new settlements and offered a plot and assistance for building a house in the settlement of their preference.

### **B. Institutional Arrangements for Implementing Shelter Sector Recovery**

- 1) In partnership with other donors, USAID capacity building assistance to the GOH should be focused on creating a high-level housing policy staff, and USAID should immediately engage with major donors to negotiate the establishment of a Ministry of Housing and Community Development with the Haitian President-elect. National level Haitian political leadership is essential,

but currently there is no cabinet level political leader with clear responsibility for the success of the shelter recovery process.

- 2) USAID should negotiate for the IHRC Housing and Neighborhood Team to be shifted to a Disaster Recovery Division within a future GOH Ministry when the IHRC is disbanded. The staff of the Team should be expanded as soon as possible so that it can manage the functions that are essential to the shelter recovery process.
- 3) USAID should focus capacity building assistance to municipal governments on the subjects of participatory community planning and facilitation of safe return to earthquake affected neighborhoods. Local governments should be important participants in the shelter recovery process.

### **C. GOH Communication with the Public about Shelter Reconstruction**

- 1) USAID should assist the GOH to professionally and programmatically communicate its longer-term vision for rebuilding and the immediate process for achieving it. Households need information to make good decisions about their housing options. USAID can support more useful communications about the shelter recovery process by helping the GOH to establish a focal point for housing policy development.
- 2) USAID might help fund media outlets – radio, print, newspapers – as a relatively low-cost way to ensure that residents stay informed about the packages of assistance being developed and the options available to them.

### **D. Participatory Planning & Implementation of Shelter Reconstruction**

- 1) USAID projects should balance swift reconstruction against the need for households to influence their own re-housing process. By including residents as much as possible in the process of locating and designing the homes they are expected to occupy, they are more likely to be satisfied with the outcome.
- 2) USAID should encourage neighborhood upgrading projects to engage community leaders and residents in the enumeration, risk assessment, and community planning process. Residents have a more detailed understanding of each household's tenure and risk situation in the pre-disaster neighborhood than any outside organization can. Residents and community leaders who are actively engaged in redevelopment of their neighborhood are better able than outside experts to prioritize and locate sites for community facilities.
- 3) USAID new settlement projects should provide the flexibility to allow displaced households to design their own houses within the limits of a per unit budget and safe construction standards. Households are better equipped to make

tradeoffs of space, amenities and layout than people who will never live in the units themselves.

### **3. ISSUES RELATED TO CRITICAL ASPECTS OF THE SHELTER RECOVERY Process**

#### **A. Rubble Removal**

- 1) USAID should assist the Ministry of Public Works with funding for the completion of an “Integrated Rubble Management Plan”. Currently, there is no officially approved plan for dealing with the remaining rubble that is found primarily on private property.
- 2) USAID should advocate with the managers of the HRF to devote a major portion of the resources contributed by the USG to continued rubble removal. Rubble remains one of the most serious roadblocks to shelter sector recovery. HRF resources could be used strategically to support the rapid implementation of an Integrated Rubble Management Plan once it has been developed. Other donors should also be encouraged to contribute to this effort.

#### **B. Secure Tenure**

- 1) USAID should ensure that residents and groups that represent them are involved in the mapping of property boundaries and claims. Close-knit neighborhoods in Haiti tend to know and acknowledge who lives where and who has rights to what. The GOH should be encouraged to accept and codify these claims and resolve any outstanding disputes. This is the one of the main ways to help people begin the process of rebuilding.
- 2) USAID should advocate for GOH use of alternative forms of tenure security depending upon the situation of residents. International experience demonstrates that secure tenure can be achieved through a variety of means. At a minimum, residents should be free from the fear of sudden eviction. They will then have the assurance and stability to begin to invest incrementally in building and improving housing on their own.
- 3) USAID should pilot the use of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) in their new settlement areas. CLTs have the potential to provide both tenure security and long-term affordability in a new settlement.

#### **C. Provision of Basic Infrastructure**

- 1) USAID should promote the design of water and sanitation services to function on a neighborhood network basis. In Haiti, neighborhood based systems have traditionally provided the most reliable and cost-effective service. Neighborhood water reservoirs or wells and condominium sewers connected to

communal septic tanks can be developed to provide essential and cost effective services.

- 2) USAID should assure that there are good road connections between the USAID new settlements and major highways or city streets. Transportation connections will be critical to households' ability to earn income after relocating to new settlements.
- 3) In assembling land on which to provide services and resettle displaced residents, USAID should encourage the GOH to consider using a variety of approaches. These include sites-and-services schemes for government owned land and land pooling and land sharing in the case of privately-owned land where the GOH might have to exercise the right of eminent domain and/or negotiate with land owners.
- 4) USAID should support efforts by local governments and future residents to participate in and plan the design of housing, infrastructure and other elements of communities built on newly assembled land. With the help of Haitian NGOs the international community should be able to organize residents and negotiate appropriate agreements.

#### **D. Provision of Housing Finance & Housing Microfinance**

- 1) USAID should focus technical assistance for housing finance on the development of non-mortgage lending products. The absence of clear titles to property makes it virtually impossible to use property as collateral for mortgage loans. Haitian banks are highly risk averse and this is reflected in their avoidance of mortgage lending. Making micro-finance available for housing reconstruction will be a more productive use of scarce technical assistance resources.
- 2) USAID should support development of a housing microfinance assessment. Despite a fairly robust micro-finance sector, Haitian MFIs have not developed sustainable housing micro-finance products. Realistically, most households (because they depend on irregular income in the informal sector) will have to be served by housing microfinance products that permit affordable incremental building and improvements to housing that people make for themselves.
- 3) USAID should discourage the GOH from establishing a government-run housing bank. The record of such institutions is quite poor and usually results in large government subsidies.

#### **E. Transitional Shelters and Shelter Reconstruction**

- 1) USAID should try to minimize funding for NGO and other donor construction of any kind of housing units in favor of assisting families to repair or rebuild their

own housing. With appropriate technical and limited financial assistance, households will produce better housing than can be provided by any donor organization. Haitians have historically demonstrated the ability to provide their own housing through incremental construction.

- 2) At most, USAID should support construction of upgradable shelter units in new settlement areas. Upgradable shelter units with a concrete foundation, permanent roofing, and walls of more temporary materials represent a more durable and cost effective shelter solution than T-shelters. Experience shows that households will improve and expand such units if they have secure tenure and adequate income.

## **F. Technical and Financial Assistance for Displaced Households**

- 1) Standardized shelter assistance packages that are flexible, fair and not overly complex need to be developed by the GOH. USAID should call on the GOH to make this issue an immediate priority, and should offer any technical assistance possible.
- 2) Once developed, the GOH and the donor community should urge all private actors, including NGOs, to operate within the guidelines to ensure some equitable basis for assistance. Otherwise, actual assistance provided to households will be based on a random (lottery-like) system in which assistance is determined on the basis on what neighborhood one happened to live in and what NGO happens to be working there now.
- 3) GOH (and all donor) communication about assistance packages needs to be continuous, informative, and two-way. Assistance packages and any options associated with the packages (such as for resettlement, for example), need to be clearly communicated to residents, landlords, and business owners so that they make informed personal, household-level, and community-wide decisions.
- 4) USAID should encourage the development of multi-organization Neighborhood Resource Centers for the provision of technical assistance to displaced households. Households returning to existing informal settlements as well as those relocating to new settlements will require technical assistance in repairing, rebuilding, or upgrading their shelter.
- 5) USAID should support development of guidelines by the GOH for the provision of conditional financial assistance to households. Financial assistance needs to be provided in a manner that permits quality control over the shelter that is built. Linking fund disbursements to technical assistance should be a standard provision in assistance packages.

## G. Rental Housing

- 1) USAID should recognize that development of a rental assistance program needs a thoughtful approach and design. Most households affected by the earthquake were renters. USAID should support both studies and neighborhood pilot programs in an effort to find combinations of assistance and incentives that work both for landlords and for displaced tenants.
- 2) In cases where renters need to be relocated because they cannot safely return to their neighborhood of origin, USAID should advocate that they be offered secure tenure options. Such options could include help with rent. Consideration also should be given to offering former renters, who can afford it, the option of obtaining homeownership status.
- 3) USAID should advocate that the GOH facilitate the restoration of the private rental housing stock rather than embarking on direct involvement in large-scale direct provision of housing for renters. Such mass public housing projects have failed almost everywhere in the past, with a particularly bad record of maintenance in developed and developing countries alike.
- 4) USAID should assess the feasibility of providing financial assistance through a standardized housing voucher mechanism. Vouchers that enable displaced households to pay for a year's rent in advance (as was fairly standard in Haiti before the earthquake) would ease financial stress on unemployed households, create an incentive for landlords to repair/reconstruct units, and could be used to encourage households to leave the camps and return to private housing.

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