

When Academics Become Humanitarians: A Post-Disaster Programme by the State University of Haiti

Summary Report

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Urban Crises Learning Fund

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IIED's Human Settlements Group

The Human Settlements Group at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) works to reduce poverty and improve health and housing conditions in the urban centres of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It seeks to combine this with promoting good governance and more ecologically sustainable patterns of urban development and rural-urban linkages.

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The Urban Crises Learning Partnership (UCLP) is a two-year (2015–17) learning initiative aimed at improving humanitarian preparedness and response in urban areas. It is a partnership between Habitat for Humanity GB, Oxfam GB, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), and University College London (UCL). The project has carried out primary research in Haiti and Bangladesh through the National Offices of Habitat for Humanity in both countries, and Oxfam in Bangladesh.

The UCLP has two primary objectives: to improve the way stakeholders in urban crises engage with each other to form new partnerships and make better decisions; and to improve disaster preparedness and response in urban areas by developing, testing, and disseminating new approaches to the formation of these relationships and systems.

The project has addressed these objectives by exploring four related themes: the role of actors who are not part of the formal national or international humanitarian system; accountability to affected populations (AAP); urban systems; and coordinating urban disaster preparedness.

This paper by Rachel Sénat of Habitat for Humanity Haiti contributes to the first of these themes. By exploring the evolving role of the State University of Haiti (UEH) in responding to disasters since 2004, she draws much needed attention to a category of actor that the humanitarian system generally neglects. The paper raises interesting questions about the strengths and weaknesses of actors such as UEH who are outside the formal humanitarian system; in some cases their 'informal' status is their strength, as they are not viewed with suspicion by affected populations. There may be disadvantages, however, as they often lack the resources they need to be effective, and have weak monitoring and evaluation systems, if any.

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Habitat for Humanity GB
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CEPODE	Study Centre in Population and Development (<i>Centre d'Etude en Population et Développement</i>)
CRESFED	Center for Economic and Social Research and Training for Development
EFACAP	Specialised Elementary School and Support Centre (<i>Ecole Fondamentale d'Application Centre d'Appui</i>)
FASCH	Faculty of Human Sciences (<i>Faculté des Sciences Humaines</i>)
IHSI	Haitian Institute of Statistics and Informatics (<i>Institut Haitien de Statistique et d'Informatique</i>)
MAPODE	Master in Population and Development (formerly CEPODE – <i>Centre d'Etude en Population et Développement</i>)
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PNCS	National Programme for School Cafeterias
UEH	State University of Haiti (<i>Université d'Etat d'Haiti</i>)

Preface

The State University of Haiti (UEH – Université d’Etat d’Haiti) has been involved in post-disaster crisis management since 2004, when floods battered two small Haitian cities and left many rural communities in need of assistance. Later that year Hurricane Jeanne destroyed the city of Gonaïves, and UEH turned its attention to an urban area for the first time. More intervention in urban settings followed in 2008 when four cyclones hit the capital Port-au-Prince and other nearby cities. The major 2010 earthquake saw UEH once again responding to a crisis, but this time in both rural and urban areas.

This case study asks to what extent an academic institution can make a useful and valued contribution to post-disaster response. It describes the kind of work

that UEH has brought to post-disaster crisis response, particularly in urban areas, and seeks to highlight how that work has contributed to promoting participation and resilience among affected populations. One of the questions it raises is whether an academic institution can play a unique role in post-disaster response due to its ‘informal actor’ status and perceived freedom from the interests of donors.

The case study was informed primarily by interviews with key people leading the programme, including three UEH staff who teach and conduct research, and two students. In addition to these interviews, desk-based research looking at literature such as articles, reports, and manuals has helped to gain a broader view of UEH’s post-disaster work in Haiti.

Introduction

For many years, political, social, and economic factors have driven urbanisation in Haiti via unplanned urban growth. Among these factors is what is usually called ‘rural exodus’: a massive internal migration from rural to urban areas, typically because of poverty. In Haiti, the phenomenon of rural exodus has taken place in three main migratory waves. The first was in 1949, when president Léon Dumarsais Estimé marked the bicentenary of the city of Port-au-Prince. The second was from 1957 to 1970, when every year on 22 September, rural people travelled to the capital to celebrate the ascension to power of President François Duvalier and did not return home. The third migratory wave began in the 1970s with the launch of many industries in Port-au-Prince. Since then, internal migration to Port-au-Prince has continued, with an average of 20,000 people moving to the city each year.

Rural exodus does not only promote urbanization; it also contributes to increasing urban poverty and other social issues such as violence, environmental degradation, and the marginalisation and socioeconomic exclusion of city residents who lack an education or financial resources. A large number of rural migrants live in slums where social services are lacking; and to survive, people try to work for themselves in the informal sector, where they offer services often in inappropriate ways. Unfortunately, these issues are not addressed in a robust manner. Urban sustainability is not possible without public policies that provide all citizens with equal access to resources regardless of their family ties, or ethnic or religious affiliation – but we continue to see inequality and exclusion of the urban poor in Haiti.¹ There is a shortage, and often an absence, of basic services in their settlements, and these shortages become characteristic of informal housing and infrastructure. The harsh living conditions, coupled with unequal distribution of services and resources, heighten residents’ vulnerability.

Disasters increase this vulnerability even more: people’s needs become more pressing as homes and businesses are destroyed.

The first responders after a disaster are those living in the neighbourhood; international humanitarian responses come later. These are people who help their

neighbours in the spirit of solidarity, often with limited resources and little knowledge about how to resolve crises. In an interview given to the French newspaper *Le Monde* in 2013, Dany Laferrière, a famous Haitian novelist, told of how after the 2010 earthquake (Rousseau, 2013):

“That which saved the city was the energy of the poorest. To help, to get food, all these people have created great energy throughout the city. They gave the impression that the city was alive. Without them, Port-au-Prince would have remained a dead city, for the people who have enough to live, most of them have remained at home.”

Academics, on the other hand, are an unusual stakeholder in efforts to deal with post-disaster issues. In this case study, we describe the response that the Faculty of Human Sciences (FASCH) of UEH brought to Haiti. We ask a number of questions: To what extent can the involvement of an academic institution make a useful and valued contribution after a disaster? Did FASCH’s involvement strengthen resilience among crisis-affected people? Do academics fill a specific niche in disaster response? In seeking to answer these questions, the case study puts particular emphasis on crisis management in urban areas, and highlights how that response has contributed to promoting local participation and resilience among affected populations in Haiti.

The front gate of the FASCH campus

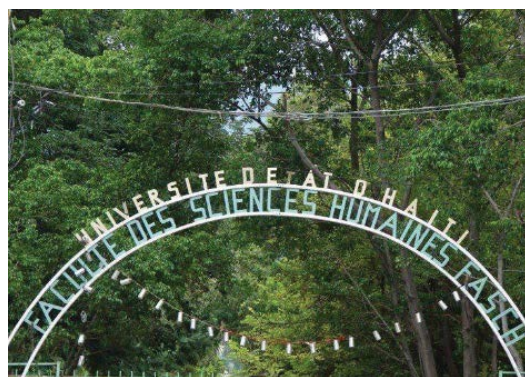


Photo credit: Jonas Laurince, social communicator

¹ Research into poverty and social exclusion in Haiti is being conducted by the National Observatory for Poverty and Social Exclusion, an autonomous organisation supported by the Haitian Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation. In 2009, it organised the country’s first conference on social exclusion.

Methodology

To investigate the role of FASCH in post-disaster response, we interviewed the key people leading the process. In all, we met three teacher-researchers and two students individually. The teaching staff coordinated the different aspects of the intervention, and the students took on the role of social and psychosocial professionals under their supervision. We also drew on secondary sources such as scientific reviews and papers related to the topic, including lectures, debriefings, and draft reports on the interventions.

It was not easy to find fully fledged reports of the 'tradition of intervention' in social crises. Quantitative data was also limited and would have been useful – statistics would undoubtedly have shown the extent of psychosocial support that has been provided by the academic sector, and would also have helped to assess the impact of the FASCH interventions. But this information is missing or incomplete due to failures in archiving.

Involvement in Crisis Management

FASCH's involvement in post-disaster crisis management began in 2004, shortly after floods devastated rural towns, including the central areas of Mapou and Fonds-Verrettes. A few months later, in September 2004, Hurricane Jeanne ravaged the city of Gonaïves. On those occasions, the Department of Social Work (an undergraduate programme within FASCH), on behalf of UEH's faculty, mobilised professors and students to offer psychological support to the affected population, and to distribute food and hygiene kits. When four hurricanes hit in 2008, FASCH was able to respond once again, but this time in both rural and urban areas. Each disaster allowed FASCH to assess and improve on its approaches, resulting in a better response to the devastating earthquake that hit the city of Port-au-Prince in 2010.

The history of FASCH's post-disaster responses can be described in three consecutive stages:

1. From September 2004 to February 2005, FASCH implemented and led a response project called 'Meeting the affected people'. A group of social workers teaching at FASCH produced two training manuals and two pamphlets to guide FASCH staff on how to roll out the intervention. This was largely about psychological support, but also about the distribution of food and hygiene kits. Committees were formed to each lead an area in the intervention: the communication committee, the psychosocial assistance committee, the training committee, and the first aid committee.
2. In 2008, when the four hurricanes hit several locations in Haiti, FASCH carried out a year-long programme of small-group therapy workshops in the city of Cabaret² at the request of the city and the *caisse populaire de Cabaret*.³ Among the beneficiaries were UEH staff, school students, and displaced persons living in camps. Some social work students from FASCH took the opportunity to submit their academic internship reports about these experiences. It has also been an experience showing how a 'solidarity economy', where a community and an academic institution work together to improve quality of life, has worked in crisis response.
3. After the earthquake of January 2010, FASCH led a response to the crisis in four phases. First, a basic document called *Rebuilding the House* was adapted to the specific conditions of the earthquake. Second, around 100 students were trained to assist the population. The third was an exploratory visit to the disaster-relief camps, followed by the fourth and final stage comprised of the main psychosocial assistance intervention. The support focused on UEH employees first, and then on the displaced or people otherwise affected by the earthquake. As a part of this main intervention, there was also a series of lectures and public debates organised by the Department of Continuing Education and delivered by UEH professors, mostly from FASCH.

² Cabaret is the city in a district of the same name located near Port-au-Prince. The district has an area of 226,850 square kilometres. In 2015, its population was estimated at 68,245 people, with approximately 60,000 living in the Cabaret urban area(s).

³ A kind of credit union located in the district of Cabaret.

'Rebuilding the House': People and Reconstruction

In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince, most of the discussions among politicians and civil society leaders in Haiti were about reconstruction. Various experts suggested that the best way to rebuild the city was to think about the reconstruction not just from an architectural perspective, but also considering the networks and links between citizens. They proposed that all aspects of social life must be taken into account within a holistic approach. For example, in addition to the material damage, loss of life, rubble on the streets, and lack of housing, new problems arose which had to be considered. Among these were the increase in the numbers of disabled people, people with psychopathologies, orphans, street children, pregnancies among teenage girls, and unemployed people.

In 2012, Haiti's Center for Economic and Social Research and Training for Development (CRESFED) held a panel discussion about the reconstruction. Reflecting on the discussion in an article entitled *The Challenge of Reconstruction*, lecturer and author Suzy Castor says that "any reconstruction is impossible without the participation of those affected" (Castor, 2012). Castor advocated for replacing social exclusion with equal citizenship and access to education, health, and work.

FASCH followed this approach in framing its intervention in terms of reconstruction involving citizens. This is why the response was branded 'Rebuilding the House': to conjure social ties, inviting a practice of reconstruction that includes building social relationships between citizens. Its work aimed to build resilience in affected people by including them in decision-making and project implementation. Its approach was to think of each individual as someone able to make their own decisions – despite being affected by crisis – and who may have abilities that are hidden or underutilised.

Stages of the Response

Tailoring the Basic Material

The basic material for intervention after a disaster had already been produced by the team of social workers and psychologists who teach at the UEH. This was a psychosocial assistance manual for staff carrying out interventions, which was adapted to the particular

needs arising from this disaster. The *Rebuilding the House* document was named after the intervention itself, and emphasised the process of problem-solving on the ground. It put forward a conceptual framework around concepts related to psychosocial support, post-traumatic stress, self-esteem, and self-confidence. It also laid out a step-by-step approach to the psychosocial intervention.

Training for Graduating Students

About 100 UEH students who were about to graduate from the Social Work and Psychology department were trained in delivering psychosocial assistance to affected people. The training was aimed at learning the contents of the psychosocial assistance manual on the one hand, and on the other it was aimed at learning to manage people's distress and how to run group workshops. Psychology students were also trained on how to administer psychological tests.

Exploratory Field Visits to Camps for Displaced People

The camps were spontaneous resettlements managed by a committee which worked with municipalities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). FASCH worked in six camps located in the metropolitan areas of Port-au-Prince. When arriving at the camps and meeting those affected by the earthquake, the first job for FASCH staff was to carry out a census of displaced people and what they had lost.

FASCH workers also sought approval to work in the camps from the people affected, showing UEH's commitment to accountability at the start of the project.

Main Intervention

The main intervention was implemented in three phases: verbalisation, demystification, and projection. In verbalisation, a counsellor leads people in crisis to express their suffering with words, instead of keeping it bottled up. In demystification, counsellors help people to understand that there is no mystery to earthquakes. They do this with information about tectonic plates and the natural environment, with support from experts or at times from humanitarian workers. After completing these two phases, people are ready for the projection phase, which is designed to help them plan their future in the knowledge that life always goes on after

a disaster. At this point they become more prepared to face the crisis and are well on their way to becoming more resilient. A more specialised intervention is needed in cases of severe pathologies: those who presented with behavioural troubles benefited from a few sessions of psychotherapy.

The intervention then expanded to other settings, especially schools. The schools that are part of Haiti's EFACAP⁴ programme asked for FASCH's package of services (training, counselling, lectures, and other materials) to support teachers helping pupils who suffered from trauma. This request was made through the National Programme for School Cafeterias (PNCS),⁵ and was aimed at schools in rural areas which were welcoming new pupils from devastated urban areas. In the aftermath of the earthquake, there was a considerable rise in the number of children attending rural schools. This highlighted the solidarity between people in Haiti as many of the residents of Port-au-Prince returned to family homes in the countryside.

FASCH activities also included radio programmes. These had two aims: first, to disseminate information about the causes of earthquakes; and two, to raise awareness about the the intervention itself, in order to avoid any misconceptions about the FASCH's activities into those schools.

The FASCH building before January 12, 2010



Photo credit: Jonas Laurince

Lectures as a Part of the Main Intervention

In parallel with the psychosocial assistance, lectures were given by the faculty to audiences consisting of teachers, students, and interested professionals. These lectures were mostly about the Haitian ecosystem or the impacts of humanitarian aid. This part of the response to the crisis was made possible thanks to FASCH's Continuing Education and University Extension department. The lectures were presented either by a single professor or a panel of several professors, on a particular topic or several related subjects.

Among the most notable lectures are the following:

- The political and economic strategies powerful countries use to suppress poor countries.
- The history of earthquakes in Haiti and the geological factors behind the January 12, 2010 earthquake.
- Humanitarian aid and the Haiti reconstruction project.
- The debt of Third World countries: the case of Haiti.
- Internal migration and urbanisation in Haiti: challenges and prospects.

Since the night of the earthquake, many local people without knowledge of disasters, mostly religious leaders, had been suggesting that it was caused by the sins of the Haitian people and that the disaster was the product of God's judgment and punishment. Many said that the end of the world would begin in Haiti. It is not unusual for some to explain unexpected events as a mystery, based on their religious beliefs. It was therefore important for the university to intervene and explain that the earthquake was a natural disaster with identified causes, and to analyse its impact. At one of the lectures, the speaker said: "If religion really has an integrating function as proposed by Alexis de Tocqueville, we need to ask this question: would there be a total disintegration in Haitian society without these discourses on religion?" That is an important question: we know that societies affected by natural disasters are usually disrupted as people see their lives turned upside down while feeling helpless.

⁴Ecole Fondamentale d'Application Centre d'Appui (EFACAP) is a school programme that was developed in four of Haiti's departments or administrative divisions (North, South, Centre and Garnd-Anse) to ensure that school teachers receive continuing education and follow-up support by advisors. It aims to improve teaching materials and also the quality of teaching itself, and has resulted in higher enrollment rates in the Haitian education system.

⁵The PNCS was created in 1997 by the Haitian state to provide free lunch for needy children in public schools.

Impact of the Response to the Crisis

The FASCH post-disaster interventions fit into the UEH educational mission in the following ways:

- **Training:** By offering continuing education for students, through learning related to both new techniques and new practices. Students were able to expand their knowledge of crisis theories.
- **Research:** Although the research component has not been explored systematically in our analysis, the professors who took part in FASCH activities have had the opportunity to put their research in context and write academic papers about their experiences. For example, Dieuseul Anglade wrote an article building on the lecture he gave about the geological causes of the earthquake (Anglade, 2011). Jean François Lenz took advantage of his active participation in psychosocial support to develop a paper about the resilience of people after a disaster (Lenz, 2011).
- **Service to the community:** It is part of FASCH's mission to intervene where populations face difficult circumstances, and the new emphasis of responding to crises has gradually increased. The Haitian people have invested in the education of young people through their taxes, so it's important that they see some of the fruits of this investment.

Overall, these three main missions were served to some degree through the interventions. Students also benefitted from FASCH: many took the opportunity to produce reports or undertake academic internships linked to the programme.⁶

The Port-au-Prince Urban System

Robert Park (1999) argued that the city is not an artificial structure, but a natural and human one. According to his theory of urban ecology, the urban environment takes a form that reflects the socioeconomic aspects of everyday life. In fact, from this perspective, urbanisation is a fundamental social

phenomenon of human existence and environmental issues are part of urban life – contrary to perspectives that see it as the result of long and complex processes of human domination over nature to establish settlements.

Research and first-hand experience suggest that rural people do not consider migration to Port-au-Prince a denial of their past. On the contrary, urban emigres remain connected with their families and relatives in rural areas. Solidarity between rural and urban people is evident every day, whether through money transfer activities⁷ or by welcoming a relative, a friend, or even a stranger into a home. This kind of social link resulted in farmers opening their houses to many people in the aftermath of the earthquake; it is an exceptional case of migration from cities to the countryside. As mentioned earlier, several schools in rural areas have welcomed pupils from schools in Port-au-Prince.

The environment is linked to urban socioeconomic and political spheres too. In cities of the Caribbean, for example, the environment has been going through a process of degradation for decades as a result of deforestation, poor waste management, and economic activities that have harmful effects on nature.

Environmental degradation in the city of Port-au-Prince has a long history. But it appears to be worsening with increasing sociopolitical instability, which is also closely linked with poverty and rural-urban migration (Léger, 1998). Life is precarious in rural areas, because cultivating land is no longer profitable, and the rural poor often migrate to cities – particularly the capital, where public services are concentrated – in search of a better quality of life. Another reason for internal migration is to pursue education, mostly at university level.

However, governments are unable to keep up with the rapid urban sprawl driven by these factors and by population growth, so not everyone in cities has basic services and infrastructure. As discussed earlier,

⁶The study cycle at FASCH ends with an internship period of a recommended minimum three months or 120 hours. To meet its requirements, graduating students must practise under the supervision of a professional, working as volunteers in a social institution, in a psychological clinic, or in the community. At the end of the internship, they must submit a report to be approved by their supervisor.

⁷Money transfer may not always be beneficial for a country's economy, as has been suggested by macro-economic studies. In a paper (Paul, 2009), Bénédicte Paul analyses the long-term consequences of money transfers for Haiti's economy.

poor people often have no choice but to settle in environmentally vulnerable areas such as the coast. And because they tend to use environmental resources badly, they contribute to degrading bay and coastal areas. Poor waste management makes vulnerability to natural disasters more evident. Indeed, informal housing districts lack a number of services including potable water supply systems, road maintenance, and garbage collection. The state must take some responsibility – environmental degradation is the result not only of people’s inconsiderate behaviour, but also mismanagement by local authorities. There are no effective urban environmental policies in Port-au-Prince.

The UEH as an Informal Stakeholder

‘Informal stakeholders’ must be understood in two ways. First, as in the case of actors such as universities or churches, they may have a history of being involved with humanitarian work even though that is not part of their main mission. Second, although community-based organisations may contribute to local development, some of them are not formally registered and are not competent in managing humanitarian problems.

Because of the proven leadership of UEH, especially FASCH, the affected population was less reluctant to participate in interventions and more respectful towards this academic entity than towards some

other informal stakeholders such as churches or community-based organisations. One of the reasons for that confidence might be that people knew that FASCH did not receive any donations from foreign donors. This emerged from interviews with teaching staff, who reported that many beneficiaries of the intervention shared this viewpoint. According to the former coordinator of FASCH, Professor Hancy Pierre,⁸ the implementation of this project would not have been possible without good transparency. The teachers funded the intervention project with 40 per cent of their salaries during the emergency in 2010. The Haitian Public Treasury also helped, mainly funding the supply of fuel and other logistics.

Because neither the university nor FASCH are specialised in emergencies, there was no mechanism in place for systematic monitoring and evaluation of the assistance programme. Instead, prior experiences and lessons learned in post-disaster crisis responses were used as examples to tailor interventions to specific needs. It was also not easy to address feedback or complaints systematically due to the typically urgent nature of humanitarian action. But ordinary people have shown gratitude towards the teaching staff and students for the psychosocial assistance provided, saying it enabled them to overcome their hardships and to survive difficult moments. As Professor Jean Francois Lenz⁹ has stated (Lenz, 2012), the role of UEH in the response to this crisis must be understood in terms of its aims to contribute to the building of resilience and the autonomy of affected people.

⁸ M. Hancy Pierre is a social worker, teacher-researcher, former Director of the Department of Social Work and former Coordinator of FASCH. He now oversees postgraduate research projects under FASCH’s Master’s programme in the Population and Development.

⁹ Jean Francois Lenz is a psychologist, teacher-researcher, and was director of the department of Psychology at FASCH for five years. He also led psychosocial activities with young people after the earthquake.

Legacy and Future Prospects

As a result of the intervention, FASCH's postgraduate programme in population and development has modified an existing research programme to add emphasis on urban crises and resilience. Its review of the interventions was also published in a special issue of MAPODE, a scientific magazine published by the department (CEPODE 2011), to summarise many of the themes presented in the lectures. There is also a plan for the continuing education department to publish the lectures, which are currently archived for on-site consultation.

Despite its involvement in post-disaster crisis management, FASCH was unable to intervene after Hurricane Matthew devastated the south of the country in October 2016. This is because it lacked the necessary resources. Traveling to the south would have required transportation, accommodation and staff allowances; but the budget at the time was tight. State authorities did not provide any kind of financial

support. FASCH is now considering setting up a team for post-disaster intervention. Twenty students are being recruited for training in psychosocial assistance and group intervention; the target is to recruit a total of 100 students. This should create a more systematic structure to face future crises.

For the time being, FASCH is promoting education on social-behavioural changes – to equip people to better deal with the aftermath of a natural disaster, and also to prevent major risks and damage. For example, people are being informed that an earthquake may occur at any moment in Port-au-Prince, so they need to have the knowledge they need to save lives. They are also being educated about how to maintain solidarity and keep up hygiene practices while awaiting humanitarian aid when the next disaster strikes.

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