HAITI: MOUNTAINS OF CHALLENGES AND THE RESILIENCE OF A PEOPLE

2021-2026 review

Development and Peace
CARITAS CANADA

Haiti is the poorest country in the Caribbean and one of the poorest in the world. It is estimated that over 6 million Haitians live below the poverty line[1], on less than US$2.41 a day, and that more than 2.5 million have fallen below the extreme poverty line, living on less than US$1.23 a day.

Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse in 2021, the Haitian people have been facing the most severe crisis in their history since the fall of the Duvalier regime in 1986.

Président Jovenel Moïse

Armed groups, once created and supported by certain political and economic actors to defend their interests, are now beyond control. They now occupy much of Port-au-Prince, as well as certain regions of Artibonite and the Central Plateau, near the border with the Dominican Republic.

Armed with weapons smuggled in from the United States and the Dominican Republic, they have created a climate of fear and violence[2] that is disrupting people's daily lives. They are accused of murder, rape, looting and kidnapping. They have also blocked roads and seized control of the country's port, through which essential goods such as fuel and medicine are imported. The gangs' extreme violence has driven more than a million people to flee the capital, mainly to the southern peninsula.

1 https://www.undp.org/fr/haiti/reduction-de-la-pauvrete
2 https://binuh.unmissions.org/en/press-releases/haiti-more-than-1600-people-killed-in-the-first-quarter-of-2026-a-human

OUR PRESENCE IN THE COUNTRY

Development and Peace — Caritas Canada (DPCC) has been active in Haiti since the 1970s. The early years of our work in the country were dedicated to promoting fundamental human dignity, literacy and the right of small-scale farmers to organize and demand access to land.

Currently, our programming in Haiti aims to:

- Strengthen Haitian grassroots organizations' capacity to continue working with impoverished communities and to reduce their dependence on international aid
- Support communities in disaster preparedness and the development of collective initiatives
- Promote citizen participation in local governance by creating spaces for dialogue between the public and local authorities on agricultural and environmental issues
- Bolster women's organizations through training, support for survivors of gender-based violence, and the promotion of gender equality and positive masculinity
- Promote sustainable practices like agroecology and agroforestry to address rural environmental degradation
- Respond to natural disasters and humanitarian crises by supporting community-led interventions based on needs identified by the communities themselves

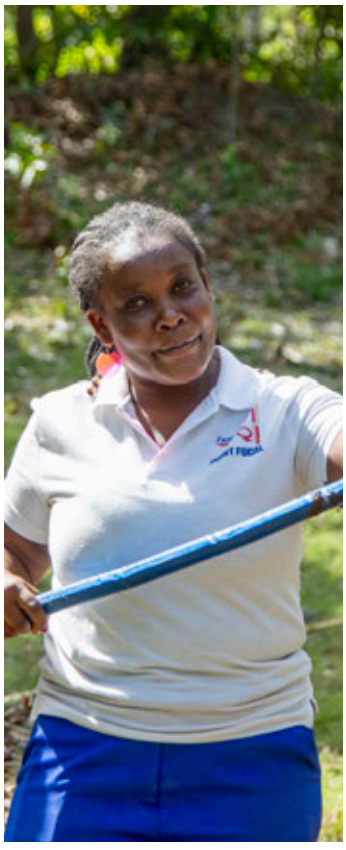
Deye mon gen mon

This Haitian proverb, which says that behind the mountain lies another mountain, powerfully illustrates the reality of the Haitian people. Every obstacle they overcome gives way to a new challenge. It also reflects our commitment. Together with our partners, we continue to move forward despite the crises, relentlessly pursuing the struggle for justice, dignity and human rights.

MAJOR CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

The current situation is marked by several major challenges, including:

- A state in crisis, weakened public institutions and dependence on foreign aid
- Environmental degradation and vulnerability to the effects of climate change
- Persistent gender inequalities and violence against women
- A severe humanitarian crisis caused by violence and mass population displacement
- Environmental risks associated with a mining project in the Dominican Republic near the Haitian border



In this constantly evolving context, our work and our support must adapt. Our programming is designed to address the most urgent needs while strengthening communities' capacity to build a more just and sustainable future.

A STATE IN CRISIS, WEAKENED PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND DEPENDENCE ON FOREIGN AID

Before its independence, Haiti—then known as Saint-Domingue—was one of the wealthiest colonies in the Americas, thanks to its sugar and coffee production. However, this wealth was built on the exploitation of thousands of enslaved people.

In 1804, Haiti became the world's first independent Black republic, but this historic victory came at an immense cost. In 1825, France imposed a heavy indemnity[3] on the young country in exchange for recognizing its independence. To pay this "debt," Haiti had to borrow from French banks, which stunted its development for many decades, with payments continuing for 200 years.

This dual debt—the unfair reparations paid to slaveowners, and the loans taken to make those payments—severely hampered the development of institutions and the state and pushed Haiti into aid dependency from the very beginning. Today, Haiti is undergoing a profound governance crisis. With no national elections held for several years, public institutions have been weakened and are struggling to perform their essential functions.

3 https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr36/9258/2025/en/

INTERNATIONAL AID THAT CAN SOMETIMES BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

Over the years, certain international interventions have weakened the local economy and the government's ability to meet the needs of its people.

Here are a few notable examples:

1978

THE ERADICATION OF CREOLE PIGS

Creole pigs, which were essential to the rural economy, were slaughtered at the request of U.S. authorities to prevent the spread of African swine fever. The animals imported to replace them were less suited to local conditions, resulting in significant losses for farming families.

1990

THE WEAKENING OF RICE PRODUCTION

The reduction in customs tariffs from 35 per cent to 3 per cent, demanded by the U.S. government, led to a massive influx of subsidized rice from the United States. This unequal competition severely weakened Haiti's rice industry and increased the country's dependency on food imports.

2010

THE EARTHQUAKE

It claimed more than 250,000 lives and destroyed much of the country's infrastructure. Despite the scale of the international aid mobilized, Haitian organizations and institutions were often excluded from decision-making, thereby limiting opportunities to build local capacity in a sustainable manner.

OUR APPROACH: BUILDING ON HAITIAN CAPABILITIES

Considering these realities, DPCC prioritizes an approach that strengthens the autonomy of Haitian communities and organizations and seeks to place the people at the center of their own development.

We work directly with local organizations that understand the needs of their communities and are best positioned to address them. We support them through training in leadership, management and administration so that they can continue their mission over the long term.

This approach has led to the implementation of several concrete initiatives:

REBUILDING WITH COMMUNITIES

After Hurricane Matthew, a small program to repair and rebuild homes was designed and managed by local organizations. The criteria for selecting beneficiary families were established in consultation with the communities, which then formed solidarity teams to participate in the work.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

We support the creation of committees that bring together community organizations and local authorities to strengthen dialogue, citizen participation and the accountability of public institutions.

GIVING A VOICE TO THE COMMUNITIES

We also support community radio stations and other forums for dialogue that enable people to discuss issues that affect them and to participate in public life.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND VULNERABILITY TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Haiti is one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as hurricanes, floods and droughts. This despite contributing very little to the global greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate change. Haiti's per capita greenhouse gas emissions in 2024 were just 1.16 tons (for comparison, Canadians emitted over 17 times more at 19.76 tons per head). This means that Haiti is disproportionately affected by a climate crisis it has done almost nothing to cause. The country is a victim of climate injustice.

This vulnerability is exacerbated by environmental degradation. The country has lost 98% of its forests[4] in a century due to human activity. Soil erosion and increasingly frequent droughts make farming difficult and drive many young people to leave rural areas for urban centres. In some regions, access to drinking water is becoming increasingly difficult, forcing people to travel long distances to obtain it.

4 https://www.fao.org/4/i3157e/i3157e12.pdf

OUR APPROACH: STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES' ADAPTATION CAPACITY

To address these challenges, we support initiatives that enable communities to better adapt to climate change and protect their environment.

We are working with local partners like the Institut de technologie et d'animation (ITECA, Institute of Technology and Animation) on a climate adaptation project in the municipalities of Les Anglais and Tiburon on the southern coast. Funded by the Government of Quebec as part of its International Climate Cooperation Program, the project aims to:

BUILD COMMUNITY CAPACITIES

in agriculture, fishing and beekeeping to facilitate better adaptation to climate change

PROTECT FRAGILE ECOSYSTEMS

such as the La Cahouane protected area in collaboration with local communities and authorities

PROMOTE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

by directly involving local organizations in project management and development committees

RAISE AWARENESS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

about the importance of protecting the environment through school workshops and activities

PERSISTENT GENDER INEQUALITIES AND VIOLENCE AND AGAINST WOMEN

Women, who make up just over half of Haiti's population, continue to face many forms of discrimination. Their participation in public life remains limited, and they often bear sole responsibility for their children and households. Gender-based violence is also widespread. Despite some legislative progress achieved through the work of women's organizations, women's rights are still too often violated, and existing laws are rarely enforced.

The current crisis has exacerbated this situation. In areas controlled by armed groups, gender-based violence is frequently used to terrorize and control communities. More than 5,500 cases were recorded in the first half of 2026[5]—nearly 70 percent of the total in the entire year of 2025. Women and girls are paying a heavy price.

5 https://www.unocha.org/news/todays-top-news-democratic-republic-congo-occupied-palestinian-territory-haiti-0

OUR APPROACH: SUPPORT, RAISE AWARENESS, MOBILIZE

We work with organizations that play a vital role in advocating for the rights of survivors of gender-based violence and supporting them.

Our approach comprises:

Supporting survivors of sexual violence

through medical, psychosocial and legal assistance. Over the past year, one of our projects provided such support to 565 women, 44 of whom availed temporary shelter in a crisis center.

Raising awareness among communities

about women's rights and gender equality by encouraging women—especially those from rural areas who often have little education—to speak out and participate in public life.

Promoting positive masculinity

by targeting groups of exemplary men to showcase them as positive role models for fathers and partners to foster gender-equal relationships.

Creating opportunities for women

by promoting income-generating activities to enhance women's economic independence, self-esteem and standing in their communities and society

Women at the heart of climate adaptation

Climate change disproportionately affects women, particularly in rural areas. With financial support provided by Quebec's Ministry of International Relations and the Francophonie through its *Québec sans frontières*, we are implementing a project with the Institut de recherche et d'appui technique en aménagement du milieu (IRATAM, Institute for Research and Technical Support in Environmental Planning) to strengthen local agricultural practices tailored to women farmers' needs.

The project has enabled women's cooperatives to import 400 pedal-powered irrigation pumps. Requiring no fuel or electricity to run, these pumps help reduce the communities' vulnerability to droughts, enhance agricultural productivity and boost family incomes. The initiative also includes the provision of agricultural equipment, technical training, and awareness-raising activities to highlight the role of women. It will directly benefit 888 people—including 588 women—and indirectly reach another 3,750 individuals.

A SEVERE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS CAUSED BY VIOLENCE AND MASS POPULATION DISPLACEMENT

Violence by armed groups has plunged Haiti into a major humanitarian crisis. UN agencies estimate that over 16,000 people have been killed[6] since the gang violence began in 2022. Today, over 1.4 million people[7], nearly half of whom are children have been forced to flee their homes.

Gangs now control up to 90 per cent of Port-au-Prince[8] and some of the surrounding areas. Many families are living in makeshift camps, while others are seeking refuge with relatives in rural areas.

This crisis is also exacerbating food insecurity. More than half of Haiti's people struggle to feed themselves adequately, even as hundreds of thousands of displaced people try to rebuild their lives elsewhere.

6 https://news.un.org/fr/story/2025/10/1157737
7 https://dtm.iom.int/fr/reports/haiti-fiche-dinformations-cles-sur-la-situation-de-deplacement-round-13-mai-2026?close=true
8 https://news.un.org/fr/story/2026/03/1158570

OUR TRIPLE NEXUS APPROACH: ADDRESSING THE EMERGENCY WHILE PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

In Haiti, crises follow one after another, and humanitarian needs are immense. To ensure that emergency aid does not create dependency or weaken local capacities, we have adopted a triple nexus approach, which links humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding.

THE TRIPLE NEXUS APPROACH

- Entrust project implementation to Haitian organizations.
- Involve communities in decision-making and in selecting beneficiaries.
- Support the local economy by prioritizing local supplies, materials and seeds.
- Encourage the participation of beneficiary families to strengthen their autonomy and sense of ownership of the projects.
- Promote collaboration between communities and local authorities to strengthen governance and disaster preparedness.

In practice, this means that every emergency response also aims to strengthen local communities and organizations so that they are better prepared to cope with future crises.

Specifically, given the current situation and the massive population displacements, we aim to:

Support local organizations that provide shelter to displaced persons by offering medical assistance to survivors of gender-based violence, counselling services and emergency financial assistance

Link humanitarian aid with long-term development so that emergency responses also help build community resilience

ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH A MINING PROJECT IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC NEAR THE HAITIAN BORDER

A new gold mine owned by Canadian interests is set to begin operations soon in Restauración, in the Dominican Republic, near the border with Haiti.

This project raises significant concerns for communities on both sides of the border[9]. Its promoters estimate requiring up to 70,000 cubic meters of water—the equivalent of about 28 Olympic-sized swimming pools—just to begin mining operations.

Our partners and local organizations fear that this activity will place additional pressure on the region's water resources. The affected aquifers play a vital role in agriculture and the livelihoods of many Haitian families living near the border.

Haitian authorities have not adequately addressed concerns regarding the project's potential impacts on the environment and local communities.

OUR APPROACH: PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

Given these concerns, we are working with our local partners to:

- **Support advocacy and mobilization efforts** to ptotect the environment, smallholder agriculture and food security
- **Raise awareness among communities** about issues related to water management and protection
- **Strengthen the capacity of local organizations** to advocate for their communities' interests and carry their voices to the authorities

9 https://devp.org/fr/denonciation-impact-mine-canadienne-sur-haiti/

THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITIES

Despite the scale of the crises the Haitian people face, community organizations, women's movements, farmers' associations and many individuals continue to work every day to improve their living conditions.

By supporting local initiatives and strengthening community capacity, we are contributing to sustainable solutions that meet today's needs while preparing for the future.

The courage and determination of Haitians remain as monumental as the challenges they face. The solidarity and generosity they inspire among our members enable Development and Peace — Caritas Canada to remain committed to standing with the collective strength of the Haitian people.

We warmly thank all our donors, as well as the Government of Quebec, for their invaluable support to Haitian communities and our partners. Their solidarity makes it possible, year after year, to sustain initiatives that strengthen resilience, self-reliance and hope.

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