

HEALING HAITI

Ravaged by a major earthquake, floods, a cholera epidemic and an election plagued by violence and fraud, a resilient Haiti moves forward with hope

It's been a year since a deadly earthquake with a magnitude of 7.0 struck Haiti. Already ranked the poorest country in the Western hemisphere with a history of violence and dictatorship, this new catastrophe left utter devastation and chaos in its wake. With at least 230,000 people killed and over 1.5 million homeless, this natural disaster crippled an entire country and its population. Despite the efforts and good intentions of immediate rescue operations and international aid, the earthquake had damaged and essentially shut down Haiti's major airport, seaports and roads making relief efforts virtually impossible. In many ways, it seemed as if the people of Haiti, surrounded by endless piles of rubble, grief and makeshift tents, were left to literally save themselves.

Unfortunately, the earthquake was not the last major disaster that the Haitian people had to face in 2010. Once the tremors and aftershocks finally subsided, Haiti was flooded by torrential storms and hurricanes making living conditions even more dangerous and unsanitary. Ultimately, due to a lack of water sanitation, the country was soon facing a cholera outbreak that quickly became an epidemic. In the last three months alone, over 93,000 people have been infected with the water borne illness and over 2,100 have died. With one tragic disaster after another, both natural and political, Haiti's present day status and future seems fairly bleak. Yet time and time again, particularly in the past 12 months since the earthquake hit, the brave and resilient nature of the Haitian people shines through. Determined to rebuild their country and reshape their future, Haitians continue to move forward in the face of adversity. Aid and support has since poured in from various sources ranging from celebrity fundraising efforts to international relief organisations providing medical care. Julia Roberts, George ▶

A Haitian woman rests sitting on the rubble of a destroyed building at a market in Port-au-Prince just days after the earthquake that shattered the country

GETTY IMAGES/GALLO IMAGES



A girl walks through a flooded village where waterborne diseases such as cholera are now rife

IMAGE VIVA RIO

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Clooney, Leonardo DiCaprio and Reese Witherspoon, to name but a few, lent their time and support for an all-star, international *Hope for Haiti* telethon which raised US\$57 million, while several charity singles, including *Hope for Haiti* featuring Jay-Z, Rihanna and U2's Bono, were also released to raise more money.

Alongside celebrity support, numerous outstanding NGOs and charitable organisations around the world are playing a vital role in trying to raise Haiti from the rubble. Here we meet two innovative international organisations, and one Dubai-based local heroine, whose passion for helping Haiti proves that with hope, integrity and positive action, recovery and progress is possible.

TEARFUND

TearFund is a UK-based Christian charity working predominantly through local churches and non-profit partners with the goal of creating sustainable poverty-free

communities. It has been working in Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, for the past 30 years with humanitarian projects in the area covering basic education and literacy, health and nutrition, as well as HIV and AIDS prevention.

Once the earthquake struck, TearFund's disaster management team conducted a 'needs assessment' of the region and identified that while the various aid organisations were reaching out to the population of Port-au-Prince, virtually no aid was reaching the neighbouring rural regions. When TearFund learned there was no support offered in Léogâne, a mountainous city just 30km outside of the capital, it became the sole agency working in the area. Lynsey Pollack, Senior Communications Director of TearFund, says: "In just the past 11 months, TearFund has built 500 transitional homes that are earthquake and hurricane resistant for the population of Léogâne which 3,000 people will benefit from.

"We've also built three permanent schools

and supported 28 others with construction, teacher training and providing staff, which in turn has addressed the educational needs of about 5,000 children. And most recently, due to the cholera epidemic, we have conducted children's clubs to teach them how to prevent and detect communicable diseases. We also promote teaching about hygiene in the local schools and provide communities with bucket filtration systems so that they can sanitise water from the local spring." Additionally, TearFund also offers social services to Haitians displaced by the earthquake. Evelyn's most resounding memory, however, isn't the devastation caused by the earthquake, it's the spirit of the people who she is helping. "Haitians are incredibly resilient. They just dust themselves off, no matter what hand is dealt them, and move forward."

To find out more about TearFund's incredible work or to donate to their emergency fund, visit their website at: www.tearfund.org/haiti

VIVA RIO

Committed to promoting a culture of peace and social development through innovative arts, sports, water sanitation and peace building projects, Viva Rio is a Rio De Janeiro-based NGO that has been successfully working in Haiti since 2005. For the past five years, especially this past year, Viva Rio has addressed the social and sanitation needs of the underprivileged community of Bel Air in Port-au-Prince. Ruben Cesars Fernandes, Director and Founder of Viva Rio, says that what allows the organisation to provide relief in Haiti is that, "many of the issues facing urban Haitian communities in Port-au-Prince – from gang culture to poor sanitation operations – are very similar to issues facing favela communities in Brazil." Thanks to government and private funding in Brazil, Viva Rio has applied the methods it uses to assist communities in its home country to its work in Haiti. ►



IMAGES GETTY AND REUTERS



Top: People line up to vote in the first Presidential election following the earthquake
Bottom: Residents wait to fill buckets of water in camp Cannan in Port-au-Prince



A girl with cholera is carried into a Medecins sans Frontieres hospital in Port-au-Prince

IMAGE REUTERS

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HELP HAITI

MORE WAYS TO LEND A HELPING HAND

PARTNERS IN HEALTH:

Renowned throughout the world as the leading non-profit medical organisation on the ground in Haiti since 1987, Partners in Health (PIH) operates on the principal that all world citizens deserve equal access to good healthcare. Since the earthquake, PIH is behind the *Stand With Haiti* campaign which has significantly increased

the amount of patients that are treated in the country, fights the cholera epidemic and contributes to building a complete academic medical school in Port-au-Prince to encourage local future doctors and nurses to enroll, ensuring medical aid in the area continues. You can donate through a variety of ways, such as wedding gift registry, memorial donations and employer matching gift programmes, or support PIH's unwavering commitment at their website www.standwithhaiti.org/haiti

SAVE THE CHILDREN:

As an independent and highly respected international aid organisation, Save the Children has created lasting change in the lives of children around the world and in Haiti. For over 32 years, Save the Children has worked in Haiti with 250 staff members on the ground to provide food, water, shelter, and child-friendly spaces. Being one of the few offices that did not suffer structural damages from the earthquake, Save the

Children has provided office space for other aid workers and campaigns to work from following the earthquake. Donations to Save the Children will help this terrific organisation protect children's rights and assist children in receiving primary school education, quality medical counselling and services in remote communities, and the basic needs of food, shelter, and preventing/treating cholera cases. www.savethechildren.org



Earthquake fissures show the dangers the natural disasters left behind

IMAGE GETTY

Thus, to provide clean water supplies for several communities in the slum neighbourhood of Bel Air in Port-au-Prince, Viva Rio brought in numerous respected engineers from Brazil to work with Haitian engineers and masons to collect and treat water from the Haiti's frequent rain storms. Also to battle the cholera outbreak, Viva Rio distributed 1,000 water filters through out the capital with each filter providing 1,000 litres of clean water per day. Viva Rio also works with community organisations from schools and clinics to distribute filters at these locations so the maximum number of people can benefit from clean drinking water.

Another way in which Viva Rio has improved the welfare of Haitian communities and reduced violence has been their music, dance and soccer programme for local youths. By using the cultural connection of Brazilian dance and sports to provide an emotional and stress relieving outlet for the local population, Viva Rio conducts various dance programmes and capoeira classes through out Port-au-Prince to huge success.

After the earthquake, Viva Rio continued the classes for hundreds of people. Ruben says that Viva Rio's success in improving the emotional and basic needs of the Bel Air community can be attributed to three simple factors. "We have a cultural affinity with Haitians with similarities between our cultures, we believe that we are equals and operate as such, and we always partner with the locals."

To donate to Viva Rio's team and its unique programmes to support Haiti's victims of the earthquake victims, visit their website at www.vivario.org.br.



IMAGE CORBIS/GRAPHEAST

The future of Haiti; these children's smiles show the resilience of the Haitian spirit

HAITI'S LOCAL HEROINE

Just over a year ago, Melissa Gilchrist Higgins, 34, was working as a Dubai-based PR executive, but having seen the devastation the earthquake caused, her life changed forever. "I donated funds, but I just couldn't shake the feeling that I had to do more and that I *could* do more," says Melissa.

She quit her job in PR and signed up with the Global Volunteer Network, a volunteer services organisation with placements in Port-au-Prince. In her 30 days of service, Melissa taught adult English classes, visited and treated children in orphanages, helped dismantle and clear schools damaged in the earthquake, sanitised school bathrooms, helped run a Women's Day once a week and spent countless hours playing with children and providing them with swimming lessons. "By travelling to Haiti, I gained the

understanding I needed to educate myself in ways I could help, but most importantly, how I can continue to help," she says. "By living alongside the community, by playing with children who had lost their entire families in the earthquake, by spending time with individuals who just needed someone to talk to in their darkest hour, I learned more than I ever imagined."

Now back in Dubai, Melissa knows that her commitment to Haiti's progress, "is, and will always be, a life-long project of passion. For me, this is a long-term partnership and not something I imagine I will ever want, or be able to, walk away from." Currently raising funds to start her own charitable organisation to assist the earthquake victims, you can learn more about Melissa's experience with her online diary blog of her time in Haiti at <http://alligatorsontheroof.blogspot.com>. To volunteer in Haiti with the Global Volunteer Network, or to donate, visit www.globalvolunteernetwork.org ■



Viva Rio's dance programme provides an emotional outlet for the Haitian community

IMAGE VIVA RIO

HAITI AT A GLANCE

CURRENT POPULATION: 9,034,497

POVERTY RATES: 80 per cent of population lives under the poverty line and 54 per cent of population lives in abject poverty

AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY FOR MEN: 29

AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY FOR WOMEN: 30

TOTAL DEATHS FROM EARTHQUAKE: 230,000

TOTAL DEATHS FROM CHOLERA EPIDEMIC: 2,100

TOTAL POPULATION LEFT HOMELESS FROM EARTHQUAKE: 1,500,000 (Roughly 1 of 6 Haitians are now homeless)