

## Acute Events Management Strategic Plan to tackle the Haiti Earthquake



A strong, shallow earthquake struck southwestern Haiti at 8:30 a.m. (GMT-4) on August 14, just 12 km northeast of Saint-Louis du Sud, about 125 km west of the capital Port-au-Prince. The 7.2-magnitude quake, which was 10 km deep, demolished buildings and damaged the infrastructure and roadways, restricting access to some roads in the southwest and forcing many residents to evacuate for fear of collapse.

The Haitian Civil Protection General Directorate (DGPC) reports over 700 collapsed buildings, including hospitals, schools, churches, and 2,410 destroyed homes in Nippes and 1,368 in

Grand'Anse, forcing at least 470 people into shelters and thousands more displaced. DGPC also reports 304 dead and 1,800 injured; figures were likely to rise in the coming hours and days as more go missing. Despite its strength and depth, the quake was less devastating than the 2010 disaster, killing over 300,000 people and injuring 1.5 million.

The earthquake occurred as Tropical Storm Grace approached Haiti on 16-17 August, subjecting an already vulnerable population to tropical-storm-force winds and torrential rain that might create life-threatening flash floods and landslides. In addition, a series of aftershocks, ranging in magnitude from 4.2 to 5.2 and occurring at 10km depths, were triggered by the earthquake, causing more damage to the infrastructure already affected by the main quake. In addition, the impacted areas have seen small floods and landslides.

The earthquake hit Haiti at a terrible time, only days after the country's president was assassinated and gang violence worsened, displacing thousands, and making an already dire humanitarian situation much worse. Before the earthquake, 4.4 million people needed humanitarian assistance.

While a recent increase in COVID-19 cases has subsided, the potential for thousands of people to be displaced has created ideal conditions for a COVID-19 outbreak, potentially overwhelming an already weakened and overburdened health system that will also have to treat those injured in the earthquake. Early reports indicate that local hospitals near the epicentre, particularly Les Cayes and Jeremie, are overburdened with injured people. The Red Cross and hospitals in unaffected areas provided surge assistance, and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) prepared to receive patients at Tabarre Hospital in Port-au-Prince.

Prime Minister Ariel Henry has proclaimed a one-month national emergency but has stated that international support will not be solicited until the magnitude of the devastation is known. Several governments in the region have already expressed interest in assisting with the national response. With the help of foreign partners, the Emergency Activities Centre (EOC) has been fully operational, and search-and-rescue operations are continuing. Preliminary evaluations are underway under the direction of national authorities, but it will take days, if not weeks, to determine the destruction's scope and humanitarian needs.

## Questions

1. As part of establishing a strategic plan and response to this disaster, and while creating a proper stakeholders' coordination is key to the success of the response plan, how can emergency management teams achieve appropriate coordination mechanisms at all levels (community, national, and global levels)?
2. Risk communication is another core element of emergency preparedness. If you were part of an acute events management team, how would you ensure the application of this element at all levels?
3. In tackling emergencies like this one at hand, what are the best ways to recruit surveillance, early warning, and information management systems to manage the disaster effectively?