

URBAN DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Gender-sensitive WASH programming in post-earthquake Haiti



Oxfam Health Promoter Berline Malette explains the importance of hand washing and clean water to displaced Haitians in Carrefour, February 2010. © Tess Williams/Oxfam

On 12 January 2010, the biggest earthquake in 200 years struck Port-au-Prince, the capital city of Haiti, and its surrounding metropolitan area. More than 220,000 people were killed, 300,000 were injured, and 1.5 million were made homeless. The earthquake was followed the same year by a cholera outbreak and then by Hurricane Tomás, making conditions even worse. Oxfam was able to build on its experience of more than 30 years in Haiti to move from immediate humanitarian response in the aftermath of the earthquake to working in partnership with communities, INGOs, NGOs, and local organizations, and also with the government on longer-term development.

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INTRODUCTION

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world, with nearly 80 per cent of the population living below the poverty line.¹ Haiti ranked 158 out of 187 countries on the 2011 UN Development Programme's Human Development Index,² and there is a wide gap between rich and poor citizens. Deficient governance is characterized by pervasive corruption, lack of access to public services for most Haitians, and a legal system that mostly preserves the privileges of the elite. There is also severe environmental degradation and high levels of unemployment and underemployment.³ Discrimination against women is widespread, gender-based violence is all too common, and women enjoy fewer economic and educational opportunities than men.⁴

For decades, many people in Haiti have not had access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities (WASH). The public agencies responsible for the WASH sector have not been able to ensure that it functions in a reasonable way. There are a number of reasons for this, including lack of funding, insufficient government leadership, and co-ordination difficulties. These factors have left far too many Haitians without access to safe drinking water, and usage of improved sanitation is extremely low. Furthermore, there is a yawning gap between urban and rural Haitians in this regard. In 2011, just 64 per cent of the population enjoyed access to an improved water source (up slightly from 61 per cent in 1990), a figure that fell to 48 per cent in rural areas, where a majority of the population lives.⁵ Statistics on sanitation are even more alarming, with a mere 26 per cent of Haitians using improved facilities in 2011, which is up from 21 per cent in 1990; among rural Haitians, only 17 per cent used improved facilities.⁶ Those who do not have access to improved facilities frequently resort to open defecation, which adds to the problems. The few sewer systems that exist do not work well, and there is almost no wastewater treatment.⁷

As in many developing countries, women and girls in rural Haiti bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility for providing safe water and sanitation for their households.⁸ This imposes a significant time burden on them, reducing the time they have for income-generating activities, going to school, and studying.

Oxfam in Haiti

Oxfam has worked in Haiti for over three decades, focusing on rural livelihoods and food security as well as humanitarian assistance. Following the earthquake of 12 January 2010 and the subsequent cholera outbreak, Oxfam rapidly scaled up its humanitarian activities.

This paper highlights key lessons learned from emergency WASH programming in Haiti following the earthquake. It also emphasizes Oxfam's efforts to provide WASH assistance via a gender-sensitive approach. In addition, we hope that the paper will be a helpful tool for use in response to other large-scale, mainly urban disasters, particularly with regard to gender-sensitive approaches to emergency WASH assistance.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: first, it examines the links between the pre-earthquake WASH sector problems and humanitarian interventions following the earthquake. We then look at the long and short-term objectives of Oxfam's intervention as well as at its design and implementation, with an emphasis on gender-sensitive programming. We explore the partnerships through which Oxfam implemented the programme, and some of the challenges faced. We discuss the lessons learned from the response, and conclude by looking at the post-earthquake prospects for gender-sensitive, equitable WASH systems.

Links between pre-earthquake problems and post-earthquake interventions

Prior to the earthquake, only about 30 per cent of the residents of the metropolitan area of Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, had access to clean drinking water. Nevertheless, some progress had been made on this front. In the mid-1990s, the municipal water agency established a system of neighbourhood water points, managed by community-based committees. Some of these bodies also took on responsibility for sanitation. This community management model spread to smaller towns and some rural areas, and by 2003, there were 230 Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Committees (CAEPAs) around the country. Some were quite effective in managing and maintaining systems although others were dysfunctional. In 2009, the Haitian Parliament passed a water and sanitation reform law, which granted formal legal status to the CAEPAs. The law requires that system users elect the committee, and that its members include at least two women.⁹ Port-au-Prince residents also proved adaptable in the face of the city's abysmal sanitation situation. Given the absence of sewage systems, many low-income residents took up the practice of disposing of their faeces in plastic bags.¹⁰

Because Oxfam has worked in Haiti since 1978, it was able to draw on its involvement in the country when designing a humanitarian programme following the earthquake. The emergency was one of the most large-scale and complex that the global humanitarian community had ever faced, occurring in a densely populated, impoverished urban area that has frequently experienced mass protests, which were sometimes violent. Oxfam focused its emergency WASH activities on communities within the earthquake zone where it had experience of working and established relationships with Haitian partners. In addition, the humanitarian response drew on existing practices and operating procedures with which programme beneficiaries were already familiar. Oxfam helped organize WASH committees in the camps that resembled CAEPAs in their responsibilities and gender-balanced leadership. The agency also distributed sealable plastic bags to both camp residents and people who remained in their communities in the earthquake zone. In some camps, Oxfam established collection drums for the used bags; these were emptied daily, with the contents used to make compost.¹¹

OXFAM'S RESPONSE TO THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE THREAT OF CHOLERA

The severity of the disaster and its aftermath seriously threatened to overwhelm the country's weak and poorly functioning WASH sector. The majority of those left homeless by the earthquake quickly became residents of 1,555 temporary tent settlements throughout Port-au-Prince and in the Palmes region around Léogâne, the epicentre of the quake. In addition to creating an immediate and greatly increased need for WASH systems, the proliferation of camps led to an increased risk of gender-based violence for female residents. Many internally displaced persons (IDP) settlements had poorly lit latrines and showers that lacked door locks. Immediately after the earthquake, camp residents and others installed makeshift WASH facilities although some camps had none at all. Lighting was a problem in the camps as in much of Haiti because of erratic or non-existent electrical service. All this made camp latrines and showers unsafe places that often served as a venue for sexual assaults.¹²

In addition to providing training and WASH services in the camps, Oxfam worked with communities outside the camps. In the early days after the earthquake, Oxfam undertook efforts to improve WASH facilities for residents of affected communities who chose to remain in their homes.

Oxfam carried out a number of activities related to the cholera outbreak. These included facilitating coordination between the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) and

DINEPA (the National Directorate for Potable Water and Sanitation, part of the Ministry of Public Works), on the one hand, and local and international partners on the other. In addition, Oxfam was engaged in epidemiological monitoring, distribution of water treatment products, construction and rehabilitation of water and sanitation infrastructure, and public awareness raising.

As part of its cholera-prevention work, Oxfam installed chlorine dispensers in some villages, which helped communities disinfect their own water. This effort helped reduce the likelihood of family members getting sick from water-borne diseases. And this, in turn, reduced the time burden on women, who were responsible for taking sick family members to health centres or hospitals, which are often very far away.

Gender discrimination and cultural practices play key roles in how women have come to have primary responsibility for families' WASH needs. Oxfam used gender analysis to ensure that its WASH programmes were non-discriminatory, and took women's perspectives into consideration. Oxfam's training of camp WASH committees emphasized the differing needs of men and women with respect to WASH, so as to avoid a sense among men that programmes were only for women. Although all residents were able to volunteer to serve on committees, Oxfam made it a point to ensure that all committees had women members.¹³

Women on these Oxfam-trained WASH committees sometimes became pivotal community organizers. For example, Esline Belcombe, a 25-year old widow (her husband died in the earthquake), became president of one of the water committees in the sprawling Corail Camp outside Port-au-Prince, home to 20,000 IDPs, in May 2011. Mme Belcombe received training from Oxfam on managing WASH facilities, and took on the responsibility of explaining to her fellow camp residents why they had to pay a fee of five Haitian gourdes for a gallon bucket of water. For the first 12 - 18 months after the earthquake, camps had received their water for free, with Oxfam and other humanitarian agencies covering the cost. She informed residents that their fees paid for such things as trucking in water and maintaining the water storage bladder. The fee was in line with the level recommended by DINEPA. Mme Belcombe also took the lead in organizing a local refuse removal company, made up of camp residents, which would employ camp youth. She told Oxfam, *'This is our community now, and we should be responsible. I feel happy and proud to be involved in this work, despite our difficulties here.'*¹⁴

It is important to note that gender analysis and a gender-sensitive approach do not equate with targeting resources to women. In fact, many humanitarian actors in Haiti targeted their cholera treatment and prevention activities to women, assuming that since women usually procure household water supplies, they are more likely to come into contact with contaminated water. But it is absolutely essential to challenge such assumptions based on actual field data. In Haiti's Artibonite Department (province), where the epidemic started, there is evidence that it has disproportionately affected men, although the reasons for this are not clear.¹⁵ Oxfam therefore targeted both men and women in its cholera programming.

Short-term objectives

In 2010, Oxfam provided assistance to over 500,000 people through its earthquake response programmes and 700,000 people through its cholera-prevention activities. WASH services were central to both. During the first six months after the earthquake, Oxfam and other humanitarian agencies undertook the following WASH assistance activities:

- Provided safe drinking water, 11,000 latrines, bathing facilities, drainage, and solid waste removal to 1.72 million people;
- Financed trucking of over 6,000 cubic meters of water to the camps each day, providing IDPs with 5 litres of water each;
- Trained 2,200 hygiene promoters and community mobilizers to provide information on good hygiene practices and distribute hygiene kits, consisting of

- soap, menstrual management articles, toilet paper, toothpaste, washing basins, water collection, and storage containers;
- Facilitated the development of local government capacity.¹⁶

Following the initial outbreak of cholera in October 2010, there was considerable concern about the disease spreading to the IDP camps. However, one measure of the effectiveness of WASH assistance is that few cases were recorded within the camp population, as Oxfam and other agencies had proactively provided chlorination as part of the WASH response.

Long-term objectives

In 2011, as short-term emergency relief efforts turned to long-term reconstruction and development, Oxfam reached an additional 532,000 people in the IDP camps as they were returning to life in their communities.¹⁷ Oxfam's transition efforts sought to ensure that the WASH systems developed after the earthquake would be sustainable post-emergency. Over the course of the year, Oxfam phased out payment for daily trucking of water to the camps, which it could not sustain on a long-term basis, given the high cost. In preparation for this, Oxfam trained camp residents as well as residents of surrounding communities on how to maintain and manage latrines and showers, as well as on how to secure continued delivery of water. Camp WASH committees were put in charge of selling water by the bucket at a reasonable rate, using the funds to pay for maintenance of the facilities. To help ensure sustainability, Oxfam assisted committee members with training on general management issues, including good bookkeeping and cash-flow management practices.

In preparation for its exit from day-to-day management of WASH services provision, Oxfam sought early on to set realistic expectations. When Oxfam started its work in the IDP camps, it explained to camp committee members and residents that the agency's assistance was temporary. This message was reinforced on a regular basis. Thus, when Oxfam stopped paying for trucking, this did not come as a complete shock to camp residents. Before handing responsibility over to the committees, Oxfam worked closely with DINEPA and municipal government officials¹⁸ to ensure a smooth transition, engaging all the stakeholders, including the camp committees, in discussions about the new management arrangements. DINEPA and municipal officials were able to co-ordinate service delivery efforts with camp leaders, as they had previously with Oxfam. For instance, DINEPA worked with the committees to ensure that existing water kiosks were in a good state of repair.

According to responsible Oxfam staff whom we interviewed, the process of handing over responsibility for WASH services to the camp residents themselves went smoothly in the vast majority of the 113 camps in which Oxfam worked. However, implementation of the handover frequently took longer than Oxfam staff would have preferred. In most instances, however, residents viewed the training that they received from Oxfam as excellent, and the participation of residents in the design and implementation and their sense of ownership over their WASH facilities was very good.

The handover of service provision proved quite complex in two very large camps, Golf and Corail. In the Golf Camp (located at the Golf Club in the affluent suburb of Pétionville), Oxfam had some concerns: the camp management and WASH committees did not seem to have adequate capacity to manage the funds and keep the systems functioning; there was potential for corruption; it was not clear that some of the most vulnerable residents would be able to access water on a paying basis; and there were worries about abuse of female heads of households. Many camp residents did not trust the committees to provide water in exchange for a payment. For their part, the committees said that they did not receive the right amount of water from suppliers, but did not follow Oxfam advice to carefully measure the water that they received. The committees also lacked the proper equipment to test water quality. Because the committees did not develop a strong relationship with DINEPA, and the NGO in charge of overall camp management had no water specialists, there was no mechanism to independently

monitor the committees' water management or offer residents an effective mechanism to handle their grievances. As a result, Oxfam continued to advise the camp managers on WASH issues even after its formal exit. In contrast, at the adjacent Cité Maxo camp the committees played an effective leadership role and gained the trust of residents, so Oxfam's exit was not problematic.

In 2012, there were problems of miscommunication at the Corail camp on an Oxfam livelihoods project unrelated to the WASH services that made it difficult for Oxfam to continue working in the camp. It took six months to rebuild relationships with the residents. Oxfam also worked in Corail on WASH projects, including the planned construction of water kiosks and latrines, the completion of which was delayed until March 2013 when the water arrived at the kiosks. The delay stemmed from technical miscalculations and procurement problems with government water agencies, including DINEPA, which felt that the committees needed additional training. At the time of writing, Oxfam continues to work in Corail.

As time went on, Oxfam worked with and provided WASH services to communities outside the tents to help IDPs to maintain access to facilities after reintegrating into their communities. This was part of Oxfam's effort to minimize the 'pull' factor caused by the availability of services in the camps. In 2011, Oxfam worked with committees of residents in Cité l'Eternel, a large, impoverished slum adjacent to the Port-au-Prince docks, to build permanent toilets. These are designed to process human waste into fertilizer that residents can use in their vegetable gardens, and methane gas that they can use for fuel or sell. Slum dwellers donated labour to build the systems that had been designed by Oxfam engineers, and received training from Oxfam on management and maintenance.

Lajoie Lesline, a woman residing in the community, told Oxfam, *'These latrines will mean that people will stop having to use the beach, so everything will be cleaner, and they will reduce the risk of people getting sick'*.¹⁹

She added that since the community had put a lot of its own effort into building the facilities,

'We will take care of them like our houses, like our kids'.²⁰

Working to help people leave the camps was important for the well-being and safety of women, as it became clear that they were at greater risk of gender-based violence in the camps. Interviews conducted by Oxfam staff and studies by women's organizations confirmed these risks.²¹

Design and implementation of a gender-sensitive intervention

In all of its WASH assistance, Oxfam employed a gender-sensitive approach in order to promote both gender equity and equality. This approach recognizes the privacy and hygiene needs of women and men. It also means ensuring that Oxfam uses gender analysis to understand and identify what kinds of inequities may exist between men and women in a given society, so that it can work with local partners to develop appropriate humanitarian interventions.²² As a result of this analysis, and in light of the high levels of gender-based violence in Haiti prior to the earthquake, Oxfam made sure that WASH facilities in the camps where it worked were as secure as possible, including separate facilities for men and women, locks on toilet and shower doors, and adequate lighting.²³ Oxfam engaged in advocacy efforts through the Protection Cluster – the UN-led body co-ordinating protection activities – to improve lighting at and around WASH facilities. These efforts helped to influence the NGO Electricité Sans Frontières and the UN Population Fund to install solar-powered streetlights, thereby addressing difficulties in ensuring continuous electrical service.²⁴

There is no single gender-sensitive approach nor a single definition of a gender-sensitive approach to emergency WASH assistance. However, there are some key elements that most experts more or less agree constitute good practice:

- Providing services in ways that recognize that women and men are affected differently in most crises because of their gender and the different roles they play in society;
- Women's effective participation and leadership roles in the operation and management of WASH systems; and
- Service delivery that takes into account the different and specific needs of women and men related to privacy and hygiene needs.²⁵

Oxfam integrates the issues of gender equity and fairness into its long-term objectives and this is reflected in a commitment to conduct a power analysis before starting a new project. Following the earthquake in Haiti, Oxfam worked with local partners to gain an understanding of the context of gender inequity and gender-based violence. As a result, Oxfam targeted WASH services to women, given their responsibility for securing water supplies for their families, and also in light of their need for protection from sexual assaults in the camp settings.²⁶ Oxfam consulted with camp residents about the terms and conditions of delivery of WASH services until consensus was reached. Only then did it build latrines.

Oxfam also sought to ensure that its approach was inclusive, with women given an opportunity to participate in decision making. In Oxfam-supported camps, these efforts included leadership training for women so that they could serve on camp management bodies and play an effective role. Initially, few women served in leadership positions on camp WASH committees. Oxfam facilitated discussions and raised awareness about the role that women could and should play, and as a result, over time, more women became members of the committees. One of the things that Oxfam proposed to camp residents and leaders was that a man and a woman should co-chair meetings. Oxfam's view was that by being in such positions, women would be more likely to have the 'power to'²⁷ improve conditions in the camps.

Partnerships

Oxfam carries out its humanitarian and development activities in partnership with local organizations. These include community-based organizations, NGOs, local governments, and ministries of the national government. In Haiti, Oxfam had a number of partnerships that focused on gender equality and WASH, including working with Solidarité Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA, or Solidarity with Haitian Women) on income-generating activities for women and advocacy on women's rights.

In the WASH sector, Oxfam worked with the municipal government of St. Michel de l'Atalaye on the Central Plateau to develop a drinking water system for the town and its environs. In various parts of Haiti, Oxfam and its partners built latrines that were clearly delineated by gender. Oxfam worked with partners to push the Haitian government to put in place equitable sectoral policies. This lobbying effort focused on DINEPA, the agency responsible for implementing national water and sanitation policies. The policy advocacy contributed to the passage of a new law in 2009 that calls for equal representation of women and men on community water committees.

After the earthquake, Oxfam maintained its relationship with existing partners and also developed new partnerships on WASH, protection, and women's rights. The partnerships were very important for ensuring that Oxfam met the needs of vulnerable people, as many partners had long experience of working at the community level.

Over the course of 2010 and the first half of 2011, Oxfam trained 100 partner organizations to better manage and dispose of solid waste, including recycling and composting. Many of these partners were women's organizations, such as Oganizayson Fanm Mon Laza (OFAMOLA), based in the Port-au-Prince suburb of Delmas, which was heavily affected by the earthquake and hosted many IDP camps. Oxfam equipped its partners to engage in further training of local

people, and also carried out a humanitarian mapping exercise, to identify additional capacity development needs among local government and civil society partners.²⁸

Post-earthquake advocacy activities centred on issues such as: the need to protect women in the IDP camps, and to combat violence against women. For example, Oxfam provided information and training to members of Action Communautaire de Solidarité et d'Intervention Sociale (ACSIS), a youth organization dedicated to inform and educate the public about violence against women. Members of the organization testified that they learned a lot from Oxfam's trainings and became more aware of various forms of gender-based violence and the impact of such violence on not only the individual but also her family and the community as a whole.²⁹

Oxfam has continued these partnerships beyond the emergency. The earthquake and cholera response strengthened Oxfam's collaboration with DINEPA on WASH service provision, which is on-going. Similarly, Oxfam's longstanding partnership with SOFA, which predated the earthquake, has endured and deepened since then, and remains focused on women's livelihood activities as well as advocacy on women's rights.

Working with the government, international agencies and the media

In addition to working with its long-term partners, Oxfam collaborated closely with Haitian national government agencies, international organizations, and the media on its emergency response. Government partners included not only DINEPA, but also MSPP. DINEPA in particular proved to be a capable public agency. Prior to the earthquake, it had responsibility for overseeing the CAEPAs, ensuring that local water committees followed democratic procedures and had gender-balanced leadership.³⁰ Working closely with DINEPA was essential for WASH interventions to be successful, as the agency took a leadership role, along with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), in the WASH Cluster, the body charged with overall co-ordination of humanitarian WASH programmes after the earthquake. Evaluations indicate that this was one of the most effective of the clusters following the earthquake, and one of the few that seriously sought to engage Haitian humanitarian response capacity by putting a government agency in a leadership role.³¹ Oxfam was an active member of the WASH Cluster, participated in several of its technical working groups, and partnered with UNICEF on camp livelihood activities. Oxfam supported DINEPA in creating an emergency response department, which had not existed prior to the earthquake. Oxfam sought input from MSPP on its interventions strategy. Particularly on the cholera response, close contact with the ministry was necessary, as MSPP took the overall lead in ensuring a co-ordinated and coherent programme.³² Oxfam also partnered with UNICEF, DINEPA, the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, and others in the Alliance for WASH in the Schools, to integrate hygiene promotion into the curriculum.

Oxfam worked with international organizations on protection issues, such as forced evictions from the camps and gender-based violence. The partners included the UN Population Fund and the International Organization for Migration.

Oxfam's media strategy focused on working with Haitian and international media to raise awareness on a range of issues, including women's rights and safety in the camps. Media work also helped raise awareness of Oxfam's transition out of direct WASH service provision. Oxfam took local journalists to the camps to see Oxfam's WASH programmes and to interview staff members and camp residents on the transition process.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Establishing local partnerships

Oxfam worked with local organizations to help it assess local needs and identify those in greatest need.

Ensuring security in campsites

Oxfam was one of the few organizations that made sure camps that it was managing had sufficient security, including around WASH facilities.

Empowerment of women

In line with the organization's gender-sensitive approach, Oxfam provided technical and management training to local organizations, and prioritized the needs of women, girls, and the most vulnerable populations by involving them in discussions about all of Oxfam's WASH projects from design to utilization to evaluation. Oxfam also provided women with the skills to serve in leadership roles on water committees. Participation in the committees and leadership roles, although time consuming, did not put an undue burden on women. Because women played a key role in ensuring the availability of clean water in the camps, this meant that women, as the primary providers of water for their families, did not have to trek around the vicinity (or even farther away) in search of water.

Increased community buy-in into the projects and programmes

Community buy-in and relations of trust between WASH committees and other residents were essential to sustainable service provision after Oxfam's exit. Related to this, a gender-sensitive approach proved to be very effective and efficient in reaching the crisis-affected population, particularly women and young girls. Communities with strong women's participation were more engaged in deciding where to place permanent boreholes and latrines and other sanitation facilities.

More informed staff

The gender-sensitive approach allowed staff to better understand gender-specific problems and develop appropriate projects to address them. Staff seemed committed to this approach, and we observed a strong support among senior managers to ensure that staff internalized this approach within their standard operating procedures.³³

Increased men's and women's understanding of 'gender'-sensitive approaches

Explaining to trainees that 'gender' is not synonymous with women was important to the successes of Oxfam's WASH programmes. Also, having women and men participating and working together on WASH committees reduced the likelihood of any resentment that men might have by mistakenly believing that gender-sensitive programmes were designed just for women. In other words, it reduced the likelihood that men would feel alienated from the programmes. Indeed, male camp residents whom we interviewed in 2011 said that they appreciated the collaborative, inclusive nature of the programmes.

Provision of information to and increased awareness of the crisis-affected population

By keeping residents informed and providing them with information and answering their questions, communities were ready to take responsibility for WASH facilities when Oxfam began to phase out its programmes.

Good gender analysis, coupled with good on-going programme monitoring and evaluation, is essential

This can avoid inappropriate gender targeting as the result of incorrect assumptions, as in the case of cholera treatment and prevention.

Gender-sensitive regulation was desired by public institutions

By consulting with appropriate public institutions, Oxfam learned that they, too, understood the important role that gender plays in Haitian society and the impact of deeply rooted gender-based discrimination. The institutions affirmed that it was important to work to promote gender-sensitive approaches to public policies and regulation.

Gender-sensitive approaches worked

Applying a gender-sensitive approach and working with local partners were critical to the short-term assistance provided immediately after the earthquake and longer-term WASH programmes.

Engaging local capacity enhances effectiveness

One reason that the WASH Cluster proved more effective than some other sectoral coordination bodies was that it made a serious effort early in the emergency response to bring its activities under the umbrella of DINEPA leadership. Many other clusters tended to bypass the government.

Willingness of public institutions to partner with the NGO community

Conventional wisdom argued against working with the Haitian state. The main argument was that the Haitian government was corrupt and institutions were weak. This argument seriously overlooked the good work that some public institutions have been trying to do over the years, such as DINEPA's efforts to ensure gender-balanced, democratic community-based water committees, as well as the strong representation of women in the agency's management ranks.³⁴

Importance of common strategy between the NGO community, public institutions, and international organizations

Working with public institutions helped Oxfam better understand their goals and objectives. Consulting with them also helped them see that Oxfam had the same objective as they had during the crisis, which was to improve the lives of all Haitians affected by the earthquake. They and Oxfam valued the importance of gender-sensitive approaches as a strategy not only to achieve better humanitarian service delivery but also for long-term reconstruction and development in Haiti. In the large camps, where WASH committees did not have extensive relationships with DINEPA, Oxfam's exit proved problematic. The WASH Cluster proved to be a very important mechanism for information sharing, ensuring a cohesive and coordinated response. Oxfam's emphasis on gender-sensitive approaches reflects the organization's commitment to women's equality as well as the United Nations' efforts to mainstream gender in public policies and in all humanitarian and development activities.³⁵

Building community self-reliance helped sustainability, improved community life and reduced women's time burden

By installing and rehabilitating water and sanitation facilities in communities and having high participation of community members (for example through donated labour) Oxfam helped increase community incentives to maintain them. Accessibility of the facilities made them available to all members of the community. As these facilities are in the communities, women now have to travel shorter distances to access them.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Oxfam's comprehensive intervention strategy allowed it to meet the needs of crisis-affected groups in specific ways. Oxfam trained and hired women residing in the camps to manage WASH facilities, serve as hygiene promoters, and take part in cash-for-work and business loan

programmes. This also enabled the organization to reach women, men, and young people in ways that were beneficial to them and their communities. Oxfam installed WASH facilities and provided services that were accessible to all affected by the earthquake without discrimination. These facilities were of high quality and gender-sensitive. Through efforts to turn systems over to camp and community WASH committees, Oxfam sought to ensure the systems' sustainability, at least for the duration of the camps' existence. The programmes were in keeping with its rights-based approach to development and humanitarian assistance, and designed using international humanitarian standards, such as the Sphere Standards, for guidance. Oxfam stressed these principles in the training of camp and community WASH committees.

Immediately after the earthquake, it was difficult to reach the most vulnerable groups as there was no official record as to who was where, and the government itself suffered major losses in staff and infrastructure. However, because of its long history of working in Haiti and the strong relationships it had built with local partners, Oxfam was in a strong position to reach these groups. In the first few weeks after the earthquake, Oxfam provided safe drinking water and sanitation facilities for nearly 400,000 displaced people in Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas.³⁶ Given Oxfam's understanding of the weakness of the state, one of its key longer-term objectives was to build WASH facilities that would last; to give the crisis-affected populations and the Haitian government time and space to engage in a dialogue about reconstruction and long-term plans. While Oxfam believes that its projects lived up to this objective, unfortunately, so far, the necessary dialogue has not yet taken place between the people and the government; this is a problem that has persisted throughout Haiti's history.³⁷

Oxfam will continue to work with its local partners and public institutions in Haiti to advocate for ways to reduce the WASH access gap between rural and urban communities. With a persistent divide between the urban and rural areas, emergency as well as long-term development programmes and projects must work in rural Haiti as well as in the cities and towns. The poor-to-non-existent state of WASH facilities in rural areas contributed significantly to the spread of cholera. To reduce this gap, part of Oxfam's long-term development effort will include supporting the development of rural WASH systems. In addition, Oxfam and its partners will work on supporting sustainable livelihoods for rural Haitians. Other programmes will focus on advocacy efforts, reducing poverty, ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in rural areas, and promoting dialogue between the Haitian state and its citizens.

NOTES

- ¹ <http://data.worldbank.org/country/haiti0>
- ² <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/HTI.html>
- ³ M. Cohen (2010) 'Planting Now: Agricultural Challenges and Opportunities for Haiti's Reconstruction', Oxfam Briefing Paper No. 140, Oxford: Oxfam International,
<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/planting-now-2nd-edition-revitalizing-agriculture-for-reconstruction-and-develo-248432>
- M. Cohen (2012) 'Haiti: The Slow Road to Reconstruction', Oxfam Briefing Note, Oxford: Oxfam International,
<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/haiti-the-slow-road-to-reconstruction-two-years-after-the-earthquake-200735>
- ⁴ Human Rights Watch (2011) "Nobody Remembers Us": Failure to Protect Women's and Girls' Rights to Health and Security in Post Earthquake Haiti', New York: Human Rights Watch; International Labour Organisation (2010), 'La promotion du travail décent dans la reconstruction et le développement d'Haïti après le tremblement de terre de 2010' *Mission du BIT février-mai 2010*, Geneva: ILO.
- ⁵ World Health Organization/UN Children's Fund Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) (2010) 'Progress on Sanitation and Drinking-Water: 2010 Update', Geneva: WHO and UNICEF.
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241563956_eng.pdf
- 'Access to an improved water source' refers to the percentage of the population with reasonable access to an adequate amount of water from an improved source, such as a household connection, public standpipe, borehole, protected well or spring, and rainwater collection. Unimproved sources include vendors, tanker trucks, and unprotected wells and springs. 'Reasonable access' is defined as the availability of at least 20 litres a person a day from a source within one kilometer of the dwelling'.
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