

Coping with disasters in Haiti

Ages: 11-14

This resource helps to begin to talk about some of the adaptation measures being taken in Haiti. Haiti is a poor country that ranks 146th out of 177 in the United Nations Human Development Index (2006) with approximately 80% of the population living in poverty. Two thirds of the population rely on agriculture with the majority of them being subsistence farmers. The country has been badly affected by natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes and landslides, which are increasing in frequency due to climate change. It has also suffered from food and fuel crises in recent years. The country's weak economy makes it particularly vulnerable to natural disasters.

Map of Haiti



Disaster strikes



Water flows through the streets of Gonaives, the fourth largest city in Haiti following tropical storm Hanna. Local people struggle to escape the flooding carrying their belongings on their heads.



Kita Zedor stands on the waterfront in Baintet before Hurricane Dean struck in 2007 this area was home to over twenty families.



Haitians crossing the border into the Dominican Republic after floods and storms devastate the area.

Preparing for disasters

In Borgne, North Haiti they have formed a Civil Protection Committee that runs training exercises to help people learn how to react to flooding. This training helps reduce risks in response to natural disasters. They also work on one-off projects such as flood protection walls and such work helps saves lives. See below for photos of the Committee in action.





This is Luc Justin, 58, who is team leader of the Civil Protection Committee of Borgne: “People who live in this area sleep with one eye open because when it rains they fear that they might be flooded. People hope that they can stay safe when it floods and the civilian protection programme helps them to feel secure. Committee members give advice on how to stay safe and make announcements using megaphones. When there are signs of flooding we tell people to forget their possessions and leave to a safe place, including school buildings, churches and the police station. We are confident that the training we are receiving is saving lives.

During Hurricane Dean 162 homes were destroyed in rural areas close to here as well as many hectares of coffee, crops and plantations. At least 240 gardens were destroyed. We managed to help people evacuate. We are proud of the work that we do and know our community is also proud of us.”

Early warning systems



A local radio station has been set up that is able to give early warnings, tell people when to evacuate and give advice on how to keep them and their families safe.