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Haitians in UN's cash-for-work scheme earn income as they help their country



Dominique Charles works for UNDP's Work-for-Cash in the Carrefour neighborhood of Port-au-Prince

26 January 2010 – Thousands of Haitians are gaining a semblance of normalcy following the recent devastating earthquake in their homeland by gaining employment and rebuilding their neighborhoods through a cash-for-work scheme run by the United Nations.

The programme, coordinated by the UN Development Programme as part of its Emergency Relief and Recovery Framework, employs 11,500 people at the legal minimum wage of 150 gourdes, or \$4, for half a day's labour. The plan is to put 100,000 people to work as quickly as possible, with up to 220,000 as conditions allow.

"There are a million Haitians on the streets who lost their homes," Kim Bolduc, UN Humanitarian Coordinator and the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative, said in a statement released today. "We need to start programmes like that that immediately meet their most critical needs while involving them in the process of reconstruction."

The project gives priority to female-headed households, particularly those with destroyed housing and those with deceased family members.

Dominique Charles is a 21-year-old mother who lost her home in the Carrefour Feuilles district of Port-au-Prince. She is one of 1,500 workers currently employed in her neighbourhood.

"I work for my three children," Ms. Charles told **UNDP**. "To put food on the table and ensure their well-being. This programme allows me to do that. I am able to work and earn a small wage."

The project has a dual benefit. While earning a small wage, workers also provide vital services that the Haitian Government cannot coordinate right now, such as clearing the debris and rubble from the roads and removing waste that is piling up on streets.

"I also am able to do something important for my community," said Ms. Charles holding a shovel. "By clearing these roads the buses, the police, the fire trucks and the ambulances can get to us. After the earthquake we were completely cut off."

The sanitation benefits of the work are clear to Lenny Gibson, who is also employed in the Carrefour programme.

"I like this project for two reasons. Not just because we can make a little money. But we have to clean things up. I already lost my child. I don't want to lose anyone else due to poor sanitation," Mr. Gibson told UN Television.

UNDP Country Director Eric Overvest said that while the first phase of the programme emphasizes clearing rubble from roads and removing waste that could pose a health risk, workers are also "cleaning and restoring public markets, tented settlements and communal washing areas so that the local economy can once again start to function as efficiently as possible."

Job creation aimed at rebuilding infrastructure remains critical to UNDP's efforts to scale up programmes like the "cash-for-work" scheme, which is intended to inject money into the affected Haitian economy.

Funding and resources remain a challenge for the programme, despite the local community's backing and the call from Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for international support.

UNDP recently issued a flash appeal calling for \$35.6 million for immediate recovery priorities, including debris clearance, rehabilitation of basic infrastructure, and cash-for-work reconstruction activities. The appeal is part of a wider UN flash appeal for \$575 million which as of is only about half-way funded.

In addition, UNDP has said that the programme's expansion is constrained by the need to coordinate with local authorities and ensure the systems are in place for payments and for the transparent and accountable management of the finances. Another obstacle is obtaining the boots, gloves, shovels, pickaxes and trucks needed to remove the waste.

Given the challenges already faced in Haiti, these obstacles seem small in comparison

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with the hope they bring.

"As long as I can see the light, there is hope. The cash for work programme gives us a chance to see something besides the destruction. It gives us light," Jacqueline Jean Baptiste, whose home in Carrefour was levelled during the quake, told UNDP. "The work allows me to feed my kids. I do not know what I would do without it."

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