

THE OPINION PAGES | EDITORIAL

# Haiti, Unfinished and Forsaken

By THE EDITORIAL BOARD JAN. 10, 2014

Four years after the earthquake, Haiti is a fragile, largely forgotten country. It's possible that some natural or man-made crisis this year could push it back into the headlines. But sustained attention, with the kind of support from outside that Haiti still needs to rebuild and become more self-sufficient, is mostly gone.

The United Nations says as much in a recently published Humanitarian Action Plan for Haiti that strives for an ambitious and hopeful tone but mostly sounds forlorn. It notes some positive changes. More than three-fourths of young children are now in primary school, up from about half. Cholera deaths are down, as is the number of homeless quake survivors. The population in the camps reportedly fell to 172,000 last year, from a peak of 1.5 million who were without shelter just after the quake in 2010.

But such hopeful signs are easily displaced by other dreary facts. Humanitarian aid is petering out as agencies leave and money dries up. The decline means Haiti's partners should be stepping up development efforts, to put the country on a sustainable recovery path, but that isn't happening. Meanwhile, Haiti still has half the world's cholera cases, as the United Nations — whose troops caused the epidemic — is battling it with an underfinanced eradication plan.

For all the talk — and the \$14 billion pledged by governments the world over since Jan. 12, 2010 — what is there to show? The grand total of new homes built in four years since the quake is dismally low: 7,515. The

signature American-led redevelopment project — an industrial park in Caracol, on Haiti’s north coast, which was supposed to create as many as 60,000 jobs — had created 2,590 at the end of 2013. Workers’ rights advocates reported last fall that garment factories at Caracol and elsewhere routinely violate Haitian minimum-wage laws and pay most workers too little to live on.

The new United Nations action plan lacks the loftiness of previous development proposals, but it focuses on four critical, and surely achievable, goals: housing the homeless, reducing cholera, feeding 600,000 “food insecure” Haitians and strengthening national institutions. Financing it for one year will take \$169 million.

The United States should stick to its commitments to Haiti, with a particular focus on building and repairing housing (permanent homes, not temporary shelters), supporting agriculture and building the capacity of the Haitian government and local businesses and organizations. Data from the United States Agency for International Development show that barely 5 percent of its financing for projects in Haiti in 2012 went to Haitian-led institutions; that is not good enough.

It would help, meanwhile, to have a better idea of what’s going on. A bill, the Assessing Progress in Haiti Act, would require more detail and transparency from the State Department in reporting to Congress how humanitarian and development money is spent. The bill, sponsored by Representative Barbara Lee, a California Democrat, passed the House with bipartisan support; the Senate should follow suit.

The United Nations plan notes that “the slightest shock” to Haiti could send it into another round of misery and death. It is a country still in the grips of an emergency, even though beyond its shores, nobody seems to remember.

Meet The New York Times’s Editorial Board »

A version of this editorial appears in print on January 11, 2014, on page A18 of the New York edition with the headline: Haiti, Unfinished and Forsaken.