

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

WASH

They Were There.

A MONTH OF EMERGENCY IN THE SOUTH

Can Remzi Ergen

They were. And they were the first ones to respond.

Maybe you have not met them personally yet but they were the smile on the faces of People of Haiti. While we mark the 1st month after the 14 August Haiti Earthquake which devastated the country, we talked to UNICEF staff who provided crucial support to the most in need.

This is their story. This is your story.

They did not sleep. Once they had a chance to, it was in the corners of the office which now became a neck of the woods. They shared the water they have. They were there in the field to assess the situation and to respond. UNICEF staff has been on the ground in Haiti for decades with offices nationwide in close partnership with the Government and a range of partners that support in delivering life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable, especially children. But their way of being in the ground had to take another dimension with the 7.2 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on 14 August 2021.

This response has been made possible through the efforts of UNICEF staff on the ground. National or international, regardless, all UNICEF staff worked relentlessly day and night. Yet still for the nationals of Haiti the situation takes another angle, this is their home.

When I felt the earthquake I knew there was a catastrophe on the way. Another catastrophe in my hometown... I immediately remembered the 2010 earthquake. The first two weeks after the earthquake of 14 August 2021 we were still shocked, we slept 2 hours a day, every single staff member including the Representative. Witnessing the consequences was harsh. Seeing the saturation of the hospitals, the number of children, injured pregnant women with urgent needs was unbearable. We were there to make the distributions, but it was heartbreaking to see people in very disadvantaged situations wait for hours and hours under the sun to reach their basic needs. Every single one of us played a role in the response and seeing UNICEF colleagues' efforts gave me courage, seeing other colleagues working non-stop was a turning point. Not only among us but also through our coordination with the Government and partners. I have to also mention that the leadership of the management made things more efficient for everyone which I am grateful.

Jean Stenio Pierre, UNICEF Haiti Chief of Field Office

The management of the office played a crucial role in the response, but the management of the tasks and logistics were not always the easiest.

"We were in the field, everyone was somewhere, all the time. Our staff were dispersed all over the places affected by the earthquake. Therefore we had to adjust the vehicle allocations for the missions and distributions every single minute which became very complicated sometimes", said Marie Vierge Azor, Supply & Logistics Associate.

Marie Vierge is always prepared; it is herself who has brought her bed linen and quilt cover set with her to the office during those first weeks. 'I did not use it but gave it to the colleagues who needed it. This is community work not only while we are doing it for other people but also among our team here. We understood each other more while working very closely. We had so many aftershocks but we were together. This whole thing made me realize how short life is. We are here in this world to support each other, to love and to live. And we have to live whatever the situation is. Beyond this, people are looking at UNICEF to support them, we have a double responsibility in life. And this makes me feel proud, we are UNICEF and we are here to help.

I have two children, they are 2 and 3 years old. They of course did not understand what was happening exactly with the earthquake but they felt like there were things not going well. In times like these, you have to give more time and attention to your children. Because they would feel secure thanks to that attention. Spending time with them is a way of protection. This is what we did, even though things were very busy at work I always made sure that I took care of my children together with my wife. In life, this aspect of 'companionship' is very important. You can't do everything by yourself. And sometimes you can't be enough to achieve even with your companion but it is all right. You cannot achieve completely all the time but partial achievements and partial solutions are very important too. And it is only possible with other people. We can only go far by being together. As they say 'L'union fait la force

Pierre Rochelin Fleurant, Agent Administratif et de Maintenance

Even though this is a moment of crisis especially for the ones directly affected by the earthquake, it is not always about helping those people, there are the needs of the UNICEF Staff who serve those children and families in need. Obviously, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a critical role in making sure a smooth connection in every action we take during the operation.

"It is not always easy to ensure a connection between places, for instance, some materials we would distribute after the earthquake got delayed due to the security issues on the main road between Les Cayes, where we are now, and Port - au Prince. On the other hand, as a concept, connection and communication make things easier. When you communicate you find a solution to your problems. You have to communicate also for your well-being. Mental health is crucial and during this time our close communication among staff made things more bearable. That little communication, that very spark between us helped things move on. Sometimes we worked so much that we did not have time to think about what happened which was also a coping mechanism.", said Junior Riliere Alexandre, UNICEF Haiti ICT Officer.

These days, after the earthquake there are so many issues to cope with and earthquakes in Haiti have left children and their families paying a heavy price. But UNICEF staff are on the ground to

support and cushion the blow of the devastation. They were there, today they are, and tomorrow they will still be.

Another staff member, Dickson choose to help the people, not seeing his family for weeks.

UNICEF thanks all donors who contributed to the response effort to the earthquake of August 14, 2021, in Haiti: AECID, Canada, Citi Foundation, ECHO, ECW FER, France, Germany, GPE, HP Foundation, Impetus Foundation, Japon, LDSC, Lego Foundation, Liechtenstein, Madrid City Council, Meta, SIDA- Suède, Target Corporation, UNCERF, USAID, Wallonie-Bruxelles International, The Walt Disney Company, Xunta De Galicia - UNICEF National committees: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States - UNICEF CO: Argentina, Peru.



UNICEF Haiti/2021/

CrikxxUNICEF staff helping during a distribution.



UNICEF Haiti/2021/Crikxx

Pierre Rochelin Fleurant, Agent Administratif et de Maintenance

Child Protection

Ndiaga Seck

Stay with host family disrupted by the earthquake

It's tough being pregnant at 15, living with a foster family and dealing with the horrors of a magnitude 7.2 earthquake that left 2,200 dead, 12,700 injured, and affected 800,000 people

It's tough being pregnant at 15, living with a foster family, and dealing with the horrors of a magnitude 7.2 earthquake that left 2,200 dead, 12,700 injured and affected 800,000 people. This is what Love Anchise, a Haitian adolescent, rejected by her parents, experienced. With the help of UNICEF and partners, she was reunited with her family three months later.

Tozia, December 11, 2021 - This Monday in November is a day to remember for Love Anchise, who returns home to find her father. "I am very happy to return home. My parents encouraged me. My brother, my aunt, and my mother-in-law too," she said in the vehicle that brought her from Les Cayes in the South Department to Tozia in Grand'Anse, Haiti.

Getting pregnant took a toll on the 15-year-old. It turned into a nightmare when an earthquake struck and destroyed the foster family's home where she lived because she was rejected by her parents. "I gave birth on November 14 at 2:30 a.m. Everything went well. I'm well. My little girl too," she said, smiling.

With the help of a midwife, Love gave birth three months to the day after the earthquake, in the house next door where her foster family have been relocated. Long before that, the adolescent girl experienced health issues and was hospitalized and followed by a gynecologist for eight days. The earthquake

postponed her family reunification that had been scheduled for the end of August, as her father's house in Tozia was also damaged.

Love stayed for a long time without going to her home in Tozia, apart from a brief stint in July. She had gone to live with her mother in Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince, where she became pregnant. Her mother then asked him to return to her father's home, but the latter refused to take her in. "My dad didn't want to receive me, neither did my mother-in-law. Everyone cursed at me. I had to go and live in Les Cayes," said the child. One night, she was found in a moto-taxi station in Les Cayes and referred to the agency in charge of child protection, IBESR.

This is how Love was placed with a foster family, while IBESR and her partner NGO God's Vision For Haiti carried out family tracing and mediation, to get her father's agreement to take her in. With support from UNICEF, psychosocial follow-up is offered to the adolescent by IBESR and the NGO Center for Training and Research in Psychosocial Support (CFRAPS), as well as a food kit, a mattress, sheets, clothes, etc. and a 100 USD check for her return to his father's house.

"I feel very good today. I show respect to the people who have helped my daughter," said Mirevien Toussaint, Love's father, when she arrived home with her two-week-old baby. "For several months, they have taken care of my daughter. The baby was born at their place, not at my house. These are the same people who picked up my daughter from the street," he added.

Mirevien was bitter when he learned that his daughter was pregnant, while he made every effort to pay for her education. Thanks to the work of IBESR and the partners, the 46-year-old has changed his mind. Today, he is ready to make a clean sweep of the past. "What happened to my daughter can happen to anyone. After having a child, an adolescent girl can go back to school. That's the most important thing," Mirevien clarified.

And this is the wish of Love who would love to go back to school to have a job that allows her to raise her little girl well. "I want to take good care of my child and I need my father's support to do this," she said.

The 14 August earthquake weakened families and communities in southwestern Haiti and made thousands of children more vulnerable. Since the onset of the natural disaster, UNICEF, IBESR, and partners have reunited 27 children with their families and assisted 600 children in 150 host families in the Grand Sud.

UNICEF, 75 years serving the children of the world, 44 years serving the children of Haiti.

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UNICEF Haiti/2021/Plymouth



UNICEF Haiti/2021/Plymouth

A social worker with Love' father

Emergencies

Faces of the Returnees

Ndiaga Seck

Haitian families expelled from Cuba and the U.S. have faces. Here they are!

On 9 October, in just one day, seven flights from Cuba and one from the United States carried Haitian families, including 73 girls and 96 boys, back to Haiti. According to UNICEF estimates, 80 per cent of these children are under five years of age. Many had left Haiti on makeshift boats, and at least two people were reported dead when their boat capsized off the Cuban coasts. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 1069 people were expelled from Cuba and the U.S. on 9 October, 34 per cent among them are women and children.

Sterline Blaise, 22 years old, mother of two

I left to find a better life.

“My name is Sterline Blaise I am 22 years old. My first child is 4 years old, and the second is one year old. I heard there was a ‘kanntè’, a boat that was going to leave. So, I left to find a better life.

I spent four days on the boat. I had no idea it would be such a difficult, difficult situation. Otherwise, I would never have risked my life, and that of my two children in the middle of the sea where you couldn't even see the land. I couldn't see the trees.

I left empty-handed, it was the other passengers who gave me a little water and it was the sailors when they cooked, even if the food was not well cooked gave me a little and I shared it with the children. Because I had nothing, and I didn't know how the situation was.”

In addition to these newly arrived flights, a Cuban boat also disembarked some 348 migrants including 12 girls and 26 boys near La Saline, in the outskirts of the Haitian capital. Most Haitian children and their parents who were expelled on 9 October from Cuba and the U.S. are from the southern peninsula of Haiti which was hit by a massive earthquake last August. Yceus Saint-Louis left Haiti in a “kanntè” and was brought back in the Cuban boat.

Yceus Saint-Louis, 45 years old, fisherman

I left Haiti to help those I had left behind

“My name is Yceus Saint-Louis and I am 45 years old.

When the earthquake hit, I could no longer sleep in my house as it is partially destroyed. We took shelter in a kitchen, a small room used as a kitchen outside the main house. We couldn't even find enough money to fix the house or eat. We noticed that there is nothing to do to survive. We started a membership fee to collect money to buy fuel, an engine, and a boat. There were many of us and we got together to create the ‘kanntè’.

We helped put the boat in the water and set off together. But we couldn't get to our destination because of the weather. The sea was rough, and we stopped on the Cuban coasts. The whole night, the sea violently wrecked the boat and in the morning the rope of the boat broke. and the boat started drifting to the land.

Several passengers threw themselves into the sea and started swimming to the beach, but we lost two people. We got off the boat and the Cubans found us and today, we got back here.

I left Haiti to help those I had left behind. Before leaving, I lived in Nan Sous, Commune of Cayemites. I come back with the same state of mind as before, in the same situation. I will continue to do what I was doing before I left. Fishing. I fished, I dived. I will continue to do it."

According to OIM, 7,621 men, women, and children were expelled from the United States on charter flights between 19 September and 9 October, more than half are women and children. Children represent 18.7 percent of migrants who returned from the US by plane. Many among the people who were returned from Cuba said they had departed from the southern commune of Pestel hardest hit by the earthquake. UNICEF also identified at least four unaccompanied children among the children expelled from Cuba. Children among these migrants are often undocumented and at high risks of child trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse. Maliya Saint Louis was with her father Yceus on a perilous journey.

Maliya Saint-Louis, 12 years old, student

I was afraid the boat would sink, and the baby would die.

"My name is Saint-Louis Maliya, I am 12 years old and I was in 5th year at the national school and admitted to 6th year. I really enjoyed playing with my friends. We played games like "taking sick children to the hospital". But on the boat, I was not feeling well, I was throwing up. Sometimes people would cook the food but they would not give me. I was hungry. It was very windy, and a lot of water was falling on the boat. It's like the boat is sinking, people are scared and screaming for help. They were asking God to save them until the boat got to the coast. And I always felt like when I was on the boat, I couldn't stand and felt like I was losing my footing. My biggest fear was that the boat would sink with all the people. There were a lot of people vomiting, both adults and children. There was a baby on board and I was afraid the boat would sink, and the baby would die."

Most Haitian children and their parents who were expelled yesterday are from the southern peninsula of Haiti which was hit by a massive earthquake last August. They left the country in early September as they had lost everything. These children are likely to leave again for the US unless conditions are created for them to live decent lives in their communities.

Lerna Thelusca, 30 years old

We are back with the same feeling that we will continue to fight to survive.

"My name is Lerna Thelusca. I took the 'kanntè' à La Gonâve to go to Miami. Due to the wind, lack of fuel, and lack of food, we disembarked in Cuba to ask for water and fuel. They didn't give us what we wanted, kept us for a number of days, and this Saturday, we are back in Haiti.

It [the journey] was a hassle. The children were crying, we were out of fuel, out of water, in the rain, the winds. In the end, we did not reach our destination. Where we arrived, they kept us and sent us back to Haiti at the point of departure. As we went in search of a better life.

We are back with the same feeling that we will continue to fight to survive.

We don't have a plan. We've come back today. We've got no plan."

UNICEF continues to support communities affected by the earthquake by building or repairing basic social infrastructures, which can act as a deterrent and even a long-lasting solution to perilous migrations that put the lives of children and their parents and caregivers at risk.

“The Haitian migrants expelled from Cuba and the U.S. will most probably go back to the south where most basic services for children such as education and health services are still largely disrupted almost two months after the earthquake. More solidarity is needed to support the migrant families who lost all their belongings and need to rebuild their lives in Haiti,” said Bruno Maes, UNICEF Representative in Haiti.

UNICEF is calling for accelerated support to the expelled Haitian populations to rebuild their lives and help children regain access to health services and go back to school.



UNICEF Haiti/2021/Rouzier

Sterline Blaise, 22, mother of two



UNICEF Haiti/2021/Rouzier

Lerna Thelusca, 30 years old

Health

Routine immunization: Motivation is key to change

Berangere Antoine

Government of Japan supports routine vaccination in Haiti

Thanks to the support of the Japanese government, the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) continues its routine activities in the most remote areas of the country, with the support of UNICEF.

Port-au-Prince, July 13, 2021- This morning (May 2021), the waiting room of the Abricots dispensary, in the communal section of Pestel, was crowded. Dozens of mothers and fathers accompanied by their young children were patiently waiting for their turn to receive vaccination services.

Roger, 4 months old, was among the children vaccinated that day. He received 5 antigens: BCG, polio, rota, penta, RR. Nothing special since it was his first contact with vaccines. But what makes his story unusual is that his parents came from far away to receive this service.

Roger's parents live in Laplenn, a locality of Baradère, itself a commune in the department of Nippes but bordering Pestel. Vaccination services are non-existent in Laplenn and its surroundings. Roger has two older brothers who have never been vaccinated and are often sick. Wanting Roger to enjoy better health than his brothers, his parents set out to have him vaccinated at all costs.

Thus, they went four times to health institutions near their home area to be told "We don't administer vaccines here". The health center in Baradères is more than six hours away, so they were reluctant to go there, especially since they did not know the operating hours. They were not discouraged, however, and were just waiting for a favorable opportunity to accomplish this important gesture in their eyes.

When they heard from a street vendor that there would be a vaccination campaign in Apricot, they did not hesitate for a second to leave their activities at the time of bean picking, even though it was harvest time, and set out for the vaccination post. They walked for 3 hours and 20 minutes to reach it, carrying their child. After receiving the service, they were happy to have succeeded in getting Roger vaccinated, although they were tired from carrying an 8.6 kg child at arm's length for all that time. They also received health advice, especially on the respect of the vaccination calendar and happily took the way back home while confirming that they will be present at the center on June 4th for the continuation of Roger's vaccination.

The team of the clinic was delighted with the behavior of this family and believes that such examples are apt to motivate them to surpass themselves in serving the most vulnerable segments of the population and thus save lives.

This catch-up activity is carried out by the MSPP in 6 communes of the Grand'Anse department that have low immunization coverage. This is being done with the support of UNICEF and with funding from the Japanese government as part of the Child Survival Project.

"We thank the Japanese government for this donation, which allows us to extend vaccination to the most remote areas of the country and thus save the lives of the most vulnerable children," said Bruno Maes, UNICEF Representative in Haiti.



UNICEF Haiti/Fanfan

July, 13, 2021

EDUCATION

Crossing the sea to continue your studies

Jean Panel Fanfan

After the earthquake, many children have found themselves without any opportunity to go to school in the immediate future

The earthquake of 14 August 2021 in the Great South of Haiti had a considerable impact on school infrastructure. 906 schools were destroyed or partially damaged. Many children have found themselves without any opportunity to go to school in the immediate future. Efforts to rehabilitate and build schools began in a short period of time after the disaster but some parents decided to take their children to areas where the earthquake had not caused significant damage to allow them to begin or continue their education.

Île-à-Vache, 31 January 2022- The strident voices of schoolboys and schoolgirls fill the atmosphere. It's recess time and some children sing while two young schoolgirls are encouraged by the songs in a skipping rope game. One of them, 8-year-old Beyoncé, has an unusual story.

Before, she lived in the city of Les Cayes, the departmental capital of the South in Haiti, where her school and her house were destroyed by the earthquake on 14 August 2021. She came to live in Île-à-Vache, a small island on the southern peninsula. Here, the earthquake made little damage. Schools have sustained minor impacts and children continue to go to class. "Before, I was at Claire-Heureuse school. My school was destroyed, and my parents took me here and enrolled me here," she explains.

Beyoncé is a very dynamic, very bright little girl. She likes going to the blackboard to solve math exercises. Indeed, she says it loud and clear: her favorite subject is arithmetic. She likes doing calculations. She is happy with this opportunity that has been offered to her to continue her studies.

Thousands of children may interrupt their education

At first, the little girl found it difficult to adapt to her new environment. “I made new friends here. However, I miss my friends from Les Cayes a lot, and they miss me too,” she says. But that doesn't stop him from working very hard in class. And after class, she learns her lessons and does her homework before going to play with her new friends.

More than 1,000 families have settled in Île-à-Vache to allow their children to start or continue their schooling. Several schools on the island have benefited from UNICEF support in teaching and didactic tools for teachers and office equipment, while children have received school kits and learning supplies. UNICEF has already distributed 20 000 school kits, started placing 900 temporary learning spaces in 150 schools.

The new school year officially began on 4 October in the Great South. For the moment, only 231 out of 1,250 schools have received school kits, leaving an estimated 250,000 children at risk of losing their education. UNICEF, in partnership with the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP), has identified the schools to be rehabilitated or rebuilt and the first phase of this work has begun, taking into account the standards of accessibility for people with disabilities.

More children going to school since January

UNICEF continues to distribute learner’ kits consisting of backpacks and learning materials such as notebooks, pens, erasers, rulers, etc. to over 11,200 children, and pedagogical kits to 206 teachers in 66 schools in the three departments affected by the earthquake. 80,000 additional kits were received in January and are being distributed.

“Although the earthquake of 14 August has had a negative impact on the education of children, many more children have returned to school during this month of January. To enable them to stay there and complete their learning cycles, the actions already undertaken should be scaled up,” said Bruno Maes, UNICEF Representative in Haiti.

Among the actions undertaken, there is the establishment of educational support programs, cash transfers to the most vulnerable families, access to new information and communication technologies, secured access to schools, to name but a few. “All of these actions will contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal number 4, aiming for inclusive quality education for all, by 2030,” he concludes.

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UNICEF Haiti/2021/Ergen

UNICEF staff unloading school kits from a boat.



UNICEF Haiti/2021/Ergen

Beyonce making her homework exercises