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HAITI

SNAPSHOT

Reducing the Impact of Hurricanes

USAID and the Haitian Government work together to control flooding.



A work team builds a flood protection wall in the hills above Port-au-Prince.

USAID/Haiti

December 2010 – The annual hurricane season is looked upon with dread in Haiti. Even with a small amount of rain, rampant deforestation subjects areas near rivers to flash floods. Heavy rains can wipe away roads and bridges and send torrents of water through communities.

To mitigate the possibility of flooding in earthquake-affected areas of Port-au-Prince and Petit Goave, USAID partnered with Haiti's Ministry of the Environment to construct rock walls and clear silt from under two key bridges that cross the La Digue and Piti rivers.

These bridges form strategic sections of highways that connect Les Cayes to Port-au-Prince and the departments of Western, Southern, Nippes, and Grand Anse. The loss of these bridges would imperil Haitians struggling to rebuild as they battle an outbreak of cholera, prevent the movement of people and humanitarian assistance, and disrupt public services and commerce—further devastating the local economy.

Through late summer and early fall, teams of Haitians built rock walls and reinforced the embankments of the two rivers with approximately 5,000 bamboo and reed plants and 10,000 vetiver grass seedlings, a large, deep-rooting variety.

In November, Hurricane Tomas unleashed several days of heavy rain. Following the downpour, Haitian officials visited the areas and found that, despite isolated damages, most people reported a drastically reduced amount of runoff than is normally experienced in camps and damaged homes during such storms.

The Ministry of Environment informed USAID that the projects substantially mitigated the effects of the storm and the Ministry's departmental director said, "Thanks to...the work done with your projects in Petit Goave, in spite of the downpour, the city was not inundated and bridges were not damaged."

The projects created short-term employment opportunities and reduced the vulnerability of many earthquake survivors and residents. Additionally, the bamboo and other grasses planted in strategic watersheds will continue to grow and hold the soil in place, increasing the protection provided for many years to come.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Contact: Anita Sachariah, Program Manager
e-mail: asachariah@usaid.gov; telephone: (202) 712-5181