

2 October 2008

Babe's Update from Haiti

With certainty I can say people are picking up the pieces from the devastation the series of storms left behind. Since there was so much devastation, scattered broadly nationwide, there are many smaller communities that only now are being reached and finally receiving a trickle of assistance. Other areas, like Gonaives, have been the focus of much attention. And even though Gonaives is receiving attention, the amount is hardly anything compared to the scope of the problem.

Rodney travels regularly to Gonaives to check on the recovery efforts being done by IOM and has been networking with a dozen other entities involved in aspects of disaster response. Since this was the hardest hit and largest area, I'm copying a few of the pictures he took while there. Along with providing emergency non food items, one of IOM's first goals was to engage people in work projects aimed at infusing the local economy with money and creating a tiny bit of normalcy. They quickly mobilized teams of workers. The first two pictures show a team cleaning away dried mud from a previous IOM project: a public park. You can see part of a large group of children already playing on a swing set in the background. This section of town only had about four feet of water and a foot of mud left behind because it was a slightly elevated area. In most other areas water still flows so clean up has not yet commenced.



Following is a picture of a team clearing a road in front of a school. Once the team had cleared the section, residents began to voluntarily sweep the cobblestone in preparation for the anticipated opening of school.



There are many areas still deep in mud with shipping containers perched atop walls, huge trucks completely buried in debris, and roads with water still flowing. Thousands of homes have been destroyed. Many schools are severely damaged or totally destroyed, others that are in the process of 'evicting the displaced' as the buildings transition from emergency shelter back to schools. Recovery will be a long and complicated process.

Rodney came back from meetings in Gonaives about 9pm last night. Besides identifying, locating, and providing for the needs of the estimated 70,000 homeless, agencies are beginning to assess the scope of the clean up. Yesterday's number was 2.5 million cubic yards of mud and debris that need to be moved. An even more fantastic number when broken out as: 100 dump trucks per day/ six days per week/ average six trips daily/ for **one year**. There is not that kind of machinery or financial resources for the entire transportation department for the whole nation. And these figures are for Gonaives, only one of the areas affected by the storms.

Most frustrating was the complaint from most of the UN and other agencies, about paying 550 workers he mobilized immediately on the aftermath of the storm. Seems the majority of agencies think paying storm ravished victims, most of them with 3 feet of mud in their homes and absolutely nothing else, an inflated salary of \$5 *per day* instead of \$4 daily is unacceptable. Most of these same agencies are still sitting on millions in relief aid formulating a policy on how to help victims and what people constitute those needing help. The recovery process is complicated.

Classes at UNEPH are scheduled to begin next week. All schools have had a delayed start as per government decree, trying to give families more time to get things in order. Enrollment is expected to be low this year and student ability to pay, even lower. The dean of education had planned on offering physical education this semester but there was no funding to purchase a needed soccer ball. The library has also put on hold the cataloging of books because there are no more cards and no money to purchase more. (Please do not send either as transportation costs are terrible.) Finances are acutely tight everywhere nationwide.

I took some pictures of the agricultural work we are involved in. We made a trip this past Saturday as access to the area was finally possible. What we saw was very encouraging. There were groups of people working on hillsides and leadership busily inspecting and teaching. This was a surprise inspection as no one knew we were coming! It shows buy-in and dedication of the local community.



Above, Rodney is doing some informal training with leadership, one-on-one. Sharyn is pointing out a tree seedling transplanted amongst special grasses used to minimize rain runoff. Because the slopes are excessively steep, a ditch or canal is built periodically to catch some of the rain water to allow it to later soak into the ground. Last is a picture of one of the 4 groups we found working upon our arrival. This group is planting vetiver grass, one of several types we use to slow erosion. Although this soil is dusty dry now, a couple weeks ago the storms totally trashed this area blowing down nearly every banana plant and dozens of the few remaining mango trees. A ravine just below these workers was gored nearly 15 feet deeper in one day.

I hope this gives an idea of how things are progressing here in Haiti in these past post-storm weeks. We remain very busy but sense a little reprieve soon. Thank you again for your prayers and support.

Sharyn & Rodney

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