



ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE CHANGE FACT SHEET

January 2016

BACKGROUND

Environmental degradation is a critical concern in Haiti and poses a serious threat to the lives and livelihoods of Haitian citizens. Widespread deforestation, particularly in the hillsides, has led to flooding, dramatic rates of soil erosion, and subsequent declines in agricultural productivity. Haiti's valuable coastal and marine resources have been degraded by sediment deposition and overfishing, resulting in considerable loss in biodiversity. In Haiti's urban areas, waste management is a major challenge, especially in Port-au-Prince, which is the largest city in the world without a sewer system. Solid waste clogs urban waterways and leads to the spread of water-borne diseases. Landfills are few and do not meet the needs of most municipalities. Medical waste is frequently left untreated, and waste is often dumped into open pits with incinerators in disrepair.

Haiti is also at risk of natural disasters due to its numerous fault lines and its depleted tree cover, which exacerbates the consequences of frequent storms and hurricanes. Moreover, like other island nations, Haiti is vulnerable to rising sea levels and other threats resulting from climate change. With rising temperatures and increasingly erratic rainfall patterns in Haiti, farmers and communities are facing a third year of extreme drought in some regions while others struggle with flash flooding caused by heavy downpours. The dearth of predictable rainwater in Haiti is not only detrimental to farmers whose crops wilt and die without irrigation systems in place, but also for ordinary Haitians who depend on water catchment systems for their daily water needs.

KEY CHALLENGES

Dependency on charcoal and firewood is a critical threat to air quality and a driver of deforestation and production of greenhouse gasses. Roughly 90 percent of Haitians rely on charcoal – produced from burning wood – as their primary source of energy.

Climate change: A scarcity of science-based climate and weather data for Haiti hinders farmers' ability to adapt to changing weather patterns; they cannot make informed choices about when to plant or harvest, or recognize when it is time to switch crops.

Lack of Government Capacity: The Ministry of Environment in Haiti is a relatively new institution,

and local, regional and national governments have limited capacity to enforce environmental laws and regulations. Poorly defined land-use strategies, an absent land-tenure policy, and poor water management leave residents living in the flood plains vulnerable as ongoing resource depletion persists.

USAID STRATEGY & ACTIVITIES

The strategy of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to help Haiti protect its fragile environment and preserve its precious resources is incorporated throughout its development portfolio. In order to create sustainable change, the Agency promotes activities that create environmentally friendly business and income-generating opportunities for Haitians across sectors and skills levels. Building up industries that profit from protecting the environment and augmenting the skills of the public sector to do the same are critical steps forward for a more sustainable Haiti.

In the agriculture sector, for example, USAID promotes technologies that increase Haiti's capacity to adapt to climate change, such as the use of greenhouses equipped with drip irrigation and solar panels. This technology incentivizes farmers to focus on high-value horticultural crops while freeing up space for agro-forestry and reforestation initiatives on environmentally vulnerable hillsides. In the economic sector, the Agency also promotes market-place solutions to environmental challenges by supporting small businesses that produce clean cooking technologies, lead recycling efforts and clear city streets of waste. Finally, USAID directly supports reforestation, conservation and environmental rehabilitation activities while also building the capacity of the Government of Haiti and Haitian civil society to carry out these same efforts.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Improved Cooking Technology Project (2011–2015) helped **100,000 households convert from use of charcoal to more efficient cookstoves**, reducing charcoal use by more than 120,000 metric tons (MT), saving more than 500,000 MT of wood and reducing CO₂ greenhouse gas emissions by more than 800,000 MT.

The Health Infrastructure Program addresses the problem of **medical waste management and waste water treatment** for all new and rehabilitated structures.

As part of a larger **effort to stabilize watersheds, increase tree cover, and promote sustainable agricultural** practices in disaster prone regions of the country, USAID has supported the planting of **over 5 million seedlings** with a survival rate of about 70 percent throughout the country.

Feed the Future Haiti has launched **four Rural Research Centers for Sustainable Development**, which collect agriculture and weather data. Feed the Future also **trained over 7,000 farmers** in sustainable farming techniques and **established nearly 400 greenhouses** that reduce pressure on degraded hillsides and **benefit more than 15,000 farmers**. In addition, USAID **constructed the Rivière Grise barrage** to provide permanent irrigation water to nearly 10,000 farmers while also preventing flooding in the most populated flood plain of the country.