

## Season 2 Episode 8 : Disaster Response to Haiti Earthquake 2021 / Guests Paul Shetler Fast and Muriel Champron

### Key:

S : Scott Campbell

P : Paul Shetler Fast

M : Muriel (translation and audio by Alexis Kreiner)

S: Hi, Scott here from Relief, Development and Podcast. We had originally planned to take a break this month but with the earthquake in Haiti in August we felt there were important stories to share

P: the first thing that struck me was just how vast the damage is. The area covered by this earthquake, impacted by it is just huge

S: That was Paul Shetler Fast, Global health coordinator for MCC, when we asked about his first impressions of the earthquake damage in southern Haiti in August of this year.

P: And it's not every house, but it is most houses that you can find damage. On some houses it's just small cracks in the walls. Other houses have large cracks. Some have walls that have fallen down. Some have shifted on their foundations and some are completely collapsed. So it is just everywhere you look, there is damage. There's damage to churches and schools, to roads, to bridges. And when you think through what, repairing that much infrastructure or how much resources it takes just to get back to where people were, that was just striking.

S: We spoke with Paul two weeks after the 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Haiti. He was part of MCC's first relief efforts in Saint Jean de Sud, a municipality in southern Haiti heavily impacted by the earthquake.

Paul and others from the MCC team in Haiti travelled to the region to do assessments and project planning and for an initial distribution of relief supplies.

We would also like to note that COVID-19 cases were low at the time of the visit, and the team took safety precautions during the distributions, meetings and interviews to keep the local community as safe as possible.

P: The other thing that was striking was that this area in Saint Jean de Sud, where we were visiting, is the same area that was heavily impacted by Hurricane Matthew in twenty sixteen.

And that's actually when we first started working with this partner AVORDEZ. And many of these families who have now lost their homes, who have lost belongings, whose gardens were lost in landslides caused by the earthquake and rains that followed.

Many of these families had not fully recovered from Hurricane Matthew. One of the women was just we talked to today was just so distraught because she had just gotten her home slowly rebuilt over the last five years back to where she was feeling very hopeful again and then to see it crumble within minutes.

So just the scale of the devastation, how deeply it reaches into every community and how it touches every corner of people's lives from their homes to their gardens to their places of worship and even the roads and bridges that they need to travel on.

S: MCC Was the first relief the people in this community had seen; Canned meat and relief kits were distributed to the most vulnerable families for immediate relief.

We asked Paul how he would describe the distribution.

P: The distribution went really well. So we flew down today on a flight with Mission Aviation Fellowship from Port au Prince.

We were picked up at the airport by our staff. We had to staff down here already and by the staff and volunteers of our desk, the partner that's associated with the Assembly De La Grace Church, which is the world Mennonite conference church down here.

And we drove out to the site where they had organized the distribution. Everyone was arriving. We got there a bit before them and were able to set everything up. It was really nicely organized. This was the first distribution of any kind that has happened anywhere around the St. Jean de sud common.

So what we heard from people was that in most of these communities, no one from the government or other or NGOs, no UN agencies had been there to do evaluations or to do distribution. So even though we were coming two weeks after the quake, we were the first aid to arrive.

And so just filled with gratitude. One woman said, thank you for not leaving us alone. We've we felt very alone these last days, waiting after the earthquake, hoping someone would come, hoping someone would not forget us, and feeling very grateful.

And they mentioned that it was the same thing after Hurricane Matthew, that in many of these same communities, we were the first ones there. And so feeling this sense of connection. Almost

half the participants in the distribution today happen to be from Mennonite churches because this area of St. John suit has many Mennonite churches, the assembly de la Grace.

And so the selection criteria was based on whose homes had been most severely damaged or destroyed. And among those people, the 50 from the most more vulnerable households. So there were a lot of pregnant women people with handicapped, elderly headed households, single female headed households.

But a lot of them were from the Mennonite churches. Even one of the Mennonite pastors was among those who was who was getting aid. And so there was also an. Deep appreciation for this connection to churches and to people, Mennonites in particular from North America, who had helped to support this, the solidarity with them.

S: What your hearing is the hymn sung right before the distribution of relief in Saint Jean de Sud-at Assembly de la Grace church, just 2 weeks after the earthquake destroyed so many peoples home's and livelyhoods. During his time there, Paul witnessed so much resilience in the community.

This isn't the first disaster like this that Haiti has seen, many remember the earthquake eleven years ago. We heard from MCC staff Muriel Chaperon who experienced the major earthquake in 2010.

M: My name is Muriel Chaperon

For myself, who experienced the earthquake on January 12th, I lost my home, which collapsed entirely and we lost everything. I think about how I survived that, as someone who was employed, I more or less had a way of contacting other people to find someone who could help me.

S: Muriel was part of the resent relief distribution and she tells us how the stories touched her deeply because of her own experience in 2010.

M: The story that most struck me was the story of a single mother, Marie Rose Dasse. We met her in Saint Jean de Sud and she explained all of the things that had happened in her area where she lives with her children. Her husband had been shot and killed. After her husband died, she lost two of her children. It had been her job to care for the children not only did she lose her home but she had to help her children who were traumatized by the earthquake

When you look at her, you see someone who, even if there had not been an earthquake, had endured a lot of trauma just because of her story. She could not hold back her tears as she told

me what had happened in her life. This story pained me to hear because you see all of the trauma this woman had already endured, in addition to now having this traumatic experience from the earthquake. That really struck me.

We saw a lot of people when we went to visit this area where SOFA works who need a lot of mental health care. It's true, they need help rebuilding homes, or finding ways of income. But these people are also traumatized and need a lot of help with that. We see, in our culture, we are not used to seeing a mental health professional. Then these things come out in negative ways through aggression or violence. These people, even more so than others, need help dealing with this trauma.

S: One of MCC's local partners in southern Haiti is an organization called SOFA the Creole acronym for Solidarity of Haitian Women. They are a women's rights organization that supports women who have faced gender violence. Often this kind of violence increases when there is a disaster like this one.

M: I think it is incredibly important for us to work alongside organizations who serve women and girls specifically. When you work alongside an organization like SOFA that has years of experience working with women and girls, it is easier for the aid to be received by women. Because SOFA works on the ground with women and girls in the communities where they live, they can bring the aid directly to them and help them. When you help women, you help the entire family.

S: For Paul too, seeing how the community was working hard to rebuild and care for each other was inspiring.

P: Everywhere you look, people are doing what they can to rebuild, patching houses that can be patched up. Even the women we talked to, even coming from very vulnerable situations, said they just felt so blessed with the food, with the aid they were given, which included can meet.

They also said that they've been welcoming people into each other's homes as they can, because many people still cannot safely go into their homes that were damaged. And so they either have to sleep outside. And there's been a lot of rains, including that tropical depression grace that passed over just after the earthquake. But a lot of other rains, too, including just a couple of days ago.

And so neighbors have been letting neighbors stay in their house, especially when it rains, welcoming folks in who don't have a safe place to be.

S: Paul witnessed resilience and the community coming together to support each other, but he also saw that the needs are vast and diverse.

P: The thing that you sort of see visually first is, of course, people's homes in need of repair.

But in many ways, that is just the tip of the iceberg. And what people are asking for, you know, Haiti has had a lot of disasters and they've seen how quickly. Just very short term aid can go. It's appreciated, but it can be used up very quickly and people can end up back in the same

situation they were in. And so there have been many calls for MCC, remembering what we did after Hurricane Matthew, remembering to balance this kind of short term material aid that we're giving right now with our longer-term support. So there was requests to help people rebuild their livelihoods.

You know, a lot of market women lost all their goods. Several of the markets collapsed. The goods that were stored there were crushed, destroyed in the rain then afterwards. Many a lot of goods that were to be taken to market were in people's homes and were destroyed.

A lot of farmland was destroyed, including a lot of people's plantation crops, which is what they would normally use to be paying school fees this time of year. And so people looking ahead not just to, you know, yes, there's the need for the next plate of food, but beyond that, how do they rebuild?

How do they send their kids to school this fall? How do they rebuild a livelihood that's sustainable?

So but there was a recognition from people that disasters like this, they happened in Haiti too frequently. And the the longer term solution is people having thriving livelihoods, having diverse livelihoods and being able to to have as much resilience within the community as possible.”

S: Looking ahead at how this devastation has impacted peoples lives , MCC anticipates that a long term response would include, long term livelihood recovery and helping people recover from the trauma. This work may be carried out alongside other organizations.

The response to this disaster will take time. The area effected is remote and there are often security issues when traveling to this area of the country. MCC will be working with the local partners to find the best way to carry out a further response.

MCC has been accepting donations that will support the people Haiti. If this episode has inspired you, you can go to our website and click on Haiti Earthquake on the home page. The link will also be included in the show notes.

This episode of Relief, Development and Podcast was produced by Christy Kauffman and the head producer is Emily Loewen.

Thanks to Muriel Chaperon for sharing her story and Paul Fast for speaking with us and for recording the interview with her. Thanks to Alexis Kreiner for translating Muriel's story as well as recording the English version.

We will be taking a break next month in October, but keep an eye out for our November episode about a food relief project in Syria, and how it brings together Christians and Muslims to build peace.

If you like this podcast, it would be great if you could subscribe and rate it and tell your friends to give us a listen!

A lot is happening in the world right now. This is a difficult time for many. May you experience God's provision and protection as we work together to share God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ.

Thanks, and take good care.

Support the people of Haiti:

Donate in the U.S. <https://donate.mcc.org/cause/haiti-earthquake>

Donate in Canada <https://donate.mcccanada.ca/cause/haiti-earthquake>