

2-3. Field Survey on Haiti Earthquake

Atsushi Koresawa, Executive Director of Asian Disaster Reduction Center(ADRC), visited Haiti from 4 to 12 March 2010 to assess the damage caused by the earthquake on 12 January 2010 as well as to explore the pressing needs for recovery. The following provides an overview of the findings and observations from this mission.

(1)The impact of the Haiti earthquake on the capital

The Port-au-Prince metropolitan area is home to approx. 2.5 million people, one quarter of the national population. In the center of the capital, almost all government buildings, including the Presidential Palace, Parliament and Ministries were completely destroyed, resulting in the deaths of many government officials.

As a result, government functions were paralyzed, hampering immediate response and early recovery work. Economic and social activities were also greatly affected. Since the country's economic and administrative center was severely damaged, the earthquake affected almost every part of Haiti. This is what makes the Haiti earthquake distinct from many other disasters.



Fig 2-3-1 Presidential Palace
(the second story collapsed)

(2)Underlying factors

Natural disasters are natural, but they are also social insofar as they often are a result of the combined effects of such factors as unplanned human settlements, poor construction, lack of basic services and adequate infrastructure, and lack of coping capacity. Haiti is a case in point. It is often cited as “the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere” with about 80 percent of Haitians living in poverty.

Widespread informal settlements have been established in the suburban areas of the capital. Furthermore, the Haitians had made virtually no preparations for a large-scale earthquake because Haiti, unlike its more earthquake-prone neighbor, the Dominican Republic, had not experienced such an event in the last two centuries or so.

Therefore, it is no surprise to hear that in the wake of the earthquake, the World Bank began working with the Haitian government to start training thousands of engineers in the assessment of

seismic resistance.

(3) Challenges ahead

The challenges that lie ahead are enormous, and include the following:

- Even two months after the earthquake occurred, most buildings destroyed in Port-au-Prince and other devastated areas remain almost as they were, with very limited progress made in debris removal. Given the huge scale of the work to be done, it is likely to take many months for the destroyed buildings to be cleared away, let alone rebuilt.
- Some 1.3 million people are reported to be displaced and living in mostly spontaneous settlements without basic services or protection. As the rainy season (and then hurricane season) approaches, many displaced people are at high risk of being affected by flooding, landslides, and disease. The provision of safe transitional shelters is a matter of great urgency, but progress has been very slow due to the lack of a systematic implementation program.
- It has been reported that some 60,000 people left after the earthquake to seek shelter, food, and other basic necessities in the countryside. The Haitian government wishes to pursue a better distribution of the population and economic activities throughout the country by creating new regional development centers, thereby avoiding a recreation of the situation that prevailed before the earthquake.

Haiti will require continued assistance for many years to come, and faces challenges that must be met not by Haiti alone but by the international community as a whole. The government expects reconstruction and recovery to be achieved in 10 years. ADRC would like to continue to explore ways to provide support to Haiti through the framework of the International Recovery Platform (IRP) as well as to share Haiti's experiences with the countries of Asia.



Fig 2-3-2 Collapsed houses in suburban Port-au-Prince