

## **CARE and FAO joint press release**

### **Food crisis looms in rural Haiti**

#### **FAO and CARE collaborate on cash-for-work programme in Léogâne**

**17 February 2010, Léogâne** - More than a month after the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, FAO and the international humanitarian organisation CARE have issued a joint alert over a national food crisis.

“This is a hidden but pervasive crisis that has already touched all corners of the country”, said Dick Trenchard, Assessments Coordinator for FAO in Haiti. “Rural areas experiencing the highest levels of displacement from Port-au-Prince and surrounding areas are the most affected, particularly the Artibonite in the west and Grand’Anse in the south”.

Rapid assessments undertaken by FAO and its partners in the Agriculture Cluster have shown that “host families” caring for displaced people are spending their meagre savings to feed new arrivals and consuming food stocks. In many cases these poor people are resorting to eating the seeds they have stored for the next season and eating or selling their livestock, in particular goats.

“We are seeing clear signs that people are already resorting to worrying and unsustainable coping strategies to try and help the estimated 500 000 people who migrated to rural areas and other smaller urban centres after the earthquake,” said Trenchard.

#### **Two weeks to planting**

“The main planting season, which accounts for over 60 percent of annual production, will start in less than a fortnight”, said Jean-Dominique Bodard, CARE’s Emergency Food Security Specialist.

“If the host families have no means to buy seeds or other ways to obtain quality seeds, this will be a disaster for them”,

“And there is another aspect to this vicious circle. Due to lack of cash, many host farmers will not be able to hire day labourers for the planting. As an effect, the labourers will not earn money to feed their families and the planting will not be carried out to the extent it could be if the workforce were available.”

In the rural sector, farmers lack cash to buy seeds for the upcoming planting season and food prices have already risen 10 percent compared to before the quake – an indicator for worse things to come.

One immediate solution might be cash for work programmes in the agricultural sector. “We need to inject money fast before the planting season starts”, explains Jean-Dominique Bodard of CARE. “Food distributions can help alleviate the immediate suffering after the disaster, but in the long run what is needed most is cash for the farmers to be able to invest and regain their autonomy.”

## **Cash-for-work**

FAO has kick-started a small cash-for-work programme cleaning out irrigation canals in Léogâne and CARE will work to scale it up in the coming days from 600 to 4,000 people. “This will be a much-needed financial boost at a crucial time when people are desperate to take their lives back into their own hands and will provide a much-needed injection into rural markets that have slumped since the earthquake”, said Trenchard.

As part of the recovery phase, CARE plans to support community-based organizations in activities such as water management, product marketing and capacity building.

These activities will contribute directly to the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development’s “Special Emergency and Support to Food Production Programme in Haiti in Response to the 12 January 2010 Earthquake, the Integration of Displaced Populations and prevention of the hurricane season.” The programme is supported by FAO and the Inter-American Institution for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

## **Cluster leader**

As the leader of the UN’s agricultural cluster in Haiti, FAO coordinates international and national organisations in the sector. Part of its work is to ensure donors and agencies on the ground work within government guidelines.

CARE is already present in Léogâne, a farming town to the west of Port-au Prince that was eighty percent destroyed by the earthquake providing shelter, emergency supplies, water and sanitation facilities and health support for mothers and pregnant women. FAO is supporting the small scale farmers and essential agriculture inputs such as quality seeds and tools are being distributed.

***About CARE:** Founded in 1945, CARE is one of the world’s largest humanitarian aid agencies. In nearly 70 countries, CARE works with the poorest communities to improve basic health and education, enhance rural livelihoods and food security, increase access to clean water and sanitation, expand economic opportunity, and provide lifesaving assistance after disasters. CARE has been working in Haiti since 1954, providing projects in HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, maternal and child health, education, food security, and water and sanitation.*

***About FAO:** Founded in 1945, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information. FAO helps developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all. FAO focuses special attention on developing rural areas, home to 70 percent of the world’s poor and hungry people.*

## **For more information or to arrange interviews with staff in Haiti:**

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