After being pounded by Hurricane Matthew on October 4, Handicap International sent its first mobile team to Haiti to work in hospitals and public shelters in the region of Sud. The organization assessed the situation facing the affected population, which remains highly problematic. Handicap International is providing people with injuries and disabilities with basic rehabilitation care, distributing mobility aids such as wheelchairs, crutches, and walkers, and identifying the most vulnerable people who need special support. A second mobile team has been formed to support the response. Handicap International is also planning to distribute 1000 emergency kits ("shelter" kits, hygiene kits, and essential household items).

**Background**

Three weeks after Hurricane Matthew hit the southwest and northwest of Haiti on October 4, 2016, affecting 2.1 million Haitians, 1.4 million people still need humanitarian aid¹. More than 146,000 homes have been destroyed, damaged, or flooded, and more than 175,500 people have been displaced to 224 temporary evacuation centers. From October 20-21, torrential rain swept through the region of Sud, already severely affected by Hurricane Matthew. The ground is flooded and many roads are completely blocked. The local community, which has already lost plantations and homes, now has to cope with a new disaster.

To help the most vulnerable individuals, Handicap International has formed a team of nine expatriate emergency specialists who are implementing emergency response actions in the areas affected by the hurricane.

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Activities

Deployment of mobile teams
Two teams each including a project manager specialized in special needs, particularly rehabilitation, a psychological support project manager, a physical therapist, and social worker were deployed to Les Cayes to provide needs assessment for the injured. After assessing the hospitals and rehabilitation services, each team will supply mobility aids—wheelchairs, crutches, and walkers—to individuals injured by Hurricane Matthew.

Distributions of emergency kits
Handicap International is distributing emergency kits each containing a toolbox, rope, fastenings, sheets, as well as other items that people can use to build shelters. The organization plans to distribute hygiene kits and essential household items—jerrycans and torches—to prevent the spread of disease like cholera, with the number of infections already high in specific areas including Chardonnières, located in the Sud region.

Logistics platform
“Our priority is to enable casualties, families who have lost everything, and the most isolated people to access humanitarian services,” adds Hélène Robin. Due to the difficulty accessing certain areas of Haiti affected by the storm and in order to access the most isolated communities, Handicap International beefed up its team of logistics specialists. HI will organize the transport of humanitarian aid by sea using the services of local carriers with boats or by road and distribute to the most vulnerable, even the most isolated people.

Quotes

Hurricane victim testimonies

“When the hurricane hit our neighborhood, Fondrède, I really thought it was all over,” explains Inès Virgile, 32, mother of five children. “The roof of our home fell on top of us and we escaped to our neighbour’s house. We didn’t stay long because we didn’t want to be a burden on them. Today, we’re back, but we don’t have a roof or any crops. We’ve lost everything.”

“I’m 90. I’m deaf. I don’t have any neighbours or family. I’m isolated. I was preventively displaced to Philippe Guerrier secondary school. The night of the hurricane, I didn’t hear anything. I didn’t even realise what was happening,” Méralia Simon.

Handicap International staff

“We don’t currently have the financial resources to provide an adequate response to a disaster of this magnitude,” explains Hélène Robin, head of Handicap International’s emergency response. “Needs are enormous and varied. Our teams are making every effort to meet people’s essential needs, but we don’t have the means to ensure people are able to get through this latest ordeal, or to help them recover again.”
“The closer we got to the northwest, the more hurricane damage we saw, particularly from Bombardopolis onwards,” explains Pauline Lavirotte, basic needs projects officer. “At Jean-Rabel, homes had been flattened by the violent winds. People from the commune have lost their crops and cattle, so they’re very worried about the loss of their livelihoods. They were already living in extreme poverty, and the hurricane has just made them even more vulnerable.”

“Haitians are very resilient, but a lot of people have been psychologically shaken by the hurricane. They need to express their feelings as part of their therapy. We’re setting up discussion groups as a first step to help people overcome their trauma,” Fanélie Rabanx, psychosocial project manager.

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