Post-Earthquake Reconstruction in Haiti Since 2010

Student name: Jennifer Ann Lamy
Project advisor: Naomi Darling

Although natural disasters cannot be prevented, with proper building techniques and correct design choices, the level of infrastructural damage done can be minimized. On January 12, 2010, Haiti was affected by one of the most devastating earthquakes the country had ever experienced. With a magnitude of 7.0 over 200,000 people lost their lives and millions were displaced. The majority of the buildings that were destroyed were built in concrete but were not made to withstand an earthquake that powerful. Nonetheless, even after that event, concrete remained the most popular building material in Haiti. Since then, many changes have been made in terms of construction methods and regulations. However, unequal access to this information prevents the majority of the population from improving their building techniques.

One of the key changes that was made was the creation of the country’s first national building codes, *Codes National du Bâtiment d’Haiti* (2012), which address questions regarding concrete construction and specify the proper procedures when it comes to building and rebuilding. Although having them is a step towards better construction, they are inaccessible to most of Haiti’s population. 59% live below the poverty line and continue to build informally with concrete. In addition, the codes are written in French which only 10% of the population speaks, reads and understands. That further pushes away the 59%. Simply because they cannot afford to hire the best engineers and architects to work on their homes does not mean that they should not have access to the information provided in the codes.

In order to address this issue of inaccessibly to information, for my project, I will be developing a series of pamphlets which will include some key information—such as where to avoid building—that should be taken into consideration when building a home with concrete. In order to do so, I have been able to communicate with an earthquake engineer in Haiti in order to gather more information about construction and to discuss the codes. Moreover, these pamphlets will be written in Haitian Creole, the language widely spoken there, in order to reach as many as possible. This project is not meant to be a solution to informal building crisis in Haiti nor does it guarantee one a fully earthquake resistant home. However, since so many continue to build informally with concrete in order to have a roof over their heads, it is worth thinking about what can be done now even as we work on developing a long term solution.