

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

**“2022 Washington Humanitarian Forum: Closing the Gap”**

**Panel 3: Forgotten Crisis: Tackling Humanitarian Challenges in Haiti**

DATE

**Wednesday, November 9, 2022, at 2:00 p.m. ET**

FEATURING

**Jean-Martin Bauer**

*Country Director, Haiti, United Nations World Food Program*

**Marie-Rose Romain Murphy**

*Co-Founder and President,*

*Fondation Communautaire Haitienne-Espwa/The Haiti Community Foundation*

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Marti Flacks: Earthquakes, gang violence, political assassinations. The people of Haiti have experienced a torrent of disasters in the last two years, both manmade and natural, building on a legacy of decades of governance, and political, and economic challenges. As a result, the number of Haitians in need of humanitarian assistance has shot up over the last year to nearly 5 million people.

Below normal rainfalls have resulted in giving Haiti one of the highest levels of food insecurity in the world, and a new outbreak of cholera has already infected thousands and killed nearly 150 people, while gangs that control nearly 60 percent of Port-au-Prince have impeded the delivery of everyday goods like fuel and water, causing nearly 100,000 new people to be displaced in recent weeks from their homes. The U.N. Commission on the Rights of the Child has talked about the triple threat facing children in Haiti right now, the threat of cholera, the threat of malnutrition, and the threat of violence.

Despite this serious, grave situation, however, the incredibly resilient people of Haiti continue to work to restore political stability, to bring economic opportunity to their country, and most importantly to provide assistance, and to meet the immediate needs of those around them in their communities.

Today's discussion, we're going to be talking to three experts who are living and working in this space to deliver that very humanitarian assistance and support to the people in need, and to support organizations on the ground that are doing just that.

We have representatives of both local and international organizations working in Haiti in the humanitarian space to talk about the current challenges facing Haiti, the solutions to some of those problems, and where we go from here to make sure we address both the root causes, as well as the immediate needs.

I'm Marti Flacks. I direct the Human Rights Initiative here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and I'm the interim director of our Humanitarian Agenda. And we're delighted to have you here as part of today's humanitarian forum to talk about the situation in Haiti with three expert guests. I'm going to introduce our first guest, who is here with me in the room, and we're going to do some introductory remarks from all three, starting with Marie-Rose Romain Murphy.

Marie-Rose is the cofounder and president of Fondation Communautaire Haitienne-Espwa, the Haiti Community Foundation. This is a foundation that's working to leverage and support Haitian leadership, to devise and implement effective solutions to the needs of the Haitian people. She's also a longtime nonprofit strategy leader, consultant with decades of experience in

developing programs, to serve low-income Haitian families in the Boston area, Boston's inner city main street program, and a number of other initiatives, both here and in Haiti. She's also an author and fluent in French, Haitian Creole, and English, and a real expert on what's happening on the ground. And we're so delighted, Marie-Rose, that you're able to be with us here in person to talk about the situation on the ground in Haiti.

So, I want to start with why you came to Washington. And having you here in person, I want to hear from you – given your experience, your work in Haiti, what messages are you bringing here to policymakers in Washington during your visit, and to those who are watching online from the international community, about the humanitarian situation in Haiti, and the needs on the ground?

Marie-Rose  
Romain Murphy:

The message that I bring is that Haiti has been in crisis for decades. I have heard someone say today that Haiti has been in crisis for 10 years – you know, forget about 10 years. It's been a lot longer. And the crisis – one crisis has fed into another. The humanitarian situation has gotten more complex. And part of the issue is because we haven't addressed the root causes. The sector hasn't addressed the root causes.

On the other hand, and I can say, given how long I've been working in the field, and sort of – I was born and raised in Haiti, and have worked in the country for over a decade now – is that it's never been that bad, whether we're talking – I think my colleagues here are going to be able to address – especially, sort of, like, Jean-Martin, in terms of the situation.

But the other part of the message is that I want to talk about the need for local leadership, for local solutions. I want to talk about the need and – for long-term investment, and the fact that Haiti is not hopeless, as many people have branded us for too long. If you go in the communities and you work with the communities, not just for the communities, you realize how much is being done. And this is cause for hope, and even the crisis has its positive sides.

This is the message that I bring. We need support, we need intervention, but the leadership is there, and it needs to be trusted.

Ms. Flacks:

Thank you, Marie. That's really important context for us, as we talk about both local and international assistance, humanitarian assistance needed in Haiti.

So, I want to turn to Carine. Carine Roenen has served as the executive director of Fonkoze Foundation since 2009. Fonkoze is a family of organizations that work together to bring award-winning financial and non-financial services to empower Haitians, especially women, to lift families out

of poverty, and it includes Haiti's largest microfinance program. You also provide health education, literacy, business skills.

And Carine, you are a medical doctor with a master's degree in public health. You've worked with Medecins Sans Frontières, with Concern Worldwide, and with others. Your work in Haiti and your organization's work is really mainly in the development space, or on the edge of sort of development and assistance. But given the recent crisis, I know you've been doing more work to respond to the urgent needs of Haitians. And I wonder if you could talk about that transition, and what you're seeing today as those most critical needs on the ground.

Carine Roenen: Thank you, Marti.

I think I want to echo what Marie-Rose just said. Fonkoze is a Haitian organization, and I think – I'm really happy to be able to represent Fonkoze, talking to you from Port-au-Prince, to bring voices of local organizations to this forum.

You say we've been transitioning to providing humanitarian aid, but actually, it's a lesson we learned a long time ago. As Marie-Rose was saying, there's been disasters and crises in Haiti for decades, from hurricanes in 2008, the earthquake in 2010, Hurricane Matthew, the other earthquake. Fonkoze, which is partly a microfinance institution and partly a development organization, we have learned that in Haiti, if you want to build something sustainable, you have to build in systems for resilience. And you have to be ready to walk alongside the people you serve to also bring emergency relief.

So, you can't do one without doing the other. More and more in the international development community, people are talking about the nexus between development and emergency aid. And I think if there's one country where that nexus is really, really important, it is in Haiti. And shortly, we'll have to make it a triple nexus, as climate change is not going to spare us. And so, we're going to have to take into account long-term systems and local infrastructure building, together with emergency intervention and resilience, together with ways to actually mitigate the impact of climate change.

So, that would be at the higher level. At the immediate level, in Port-au-Prince, everywhere in Haiti, what people need today is to be able to go about their business. Like, people are really, really resilient, and they can bounce back from unimaginable situations. But when there's no products to be had, when you can't travel around, when you can't trade, when you can't go from one market to another, that resilience becomes really, really difficult.

So, I think the first thing is getting back fuel and getting back security, so that people can go about their business. Also, the other immediate need is food.

But I will let Mr. Bauer talk about that, because that's really, really their speciality.

Ms. Flacks: Thank you so much, Carine, really important as well.

And let's turn to Jean-Martin Bauer. Jean-Martin is the country director for Haiti, for the United Nations World Food Programme. He has been on the ground working in this situation nearly two years. A native of Washington, D.C. of Haitian descent, Jean-Martin has worked with the WFP around the world, but particularly in West Africa – in Senegal, Mauritania, Niger, Congo-Brazzaville. I know you've done some work as well on how to deploy technology to manage some of our international efforts to provide food assistance, and I hope we can talk about that in the context of Haiti, as well.

But I want to turn to you to get an overview of the situation from your perspective. Obviously, we have talked about – we have started with the premise that so much can be done locally, and there's so much resilience, and there's so much energy there at the level of community organizations. But this is a situation that also requires international support and international engagement.

And so, as the representative of one of the largest organizations working on the ground, tell us from your perspective what's happening, what the international community is doing in response to this crisis. What are you able to do, given the extreme challenges on the ground, and where in your mind are the key gaps in access to the people that need help, and resources to be able to do your work?

Jean-Martin Bauer: Yes, Marti, as Carine mentioned, food is one of the major needs right now in Haiti. We're facing a complex emergency with cholera, where food happens to be one of the major priorities.

In October, the government came out with an assessment that indicated that half of the Haitian population, 4.7 million people, are facing acute food insecurity. Food insecurity worldwide is rated on a five-point scale, going from one being normal; two, stressed; three, crisis; four, emergency; five, catastrophe. For the first time, we have people in category five in Haiti. It's 19,000 people who live in Cité Soleil, a neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. This is the first time this has happened in Haiti, or in the Americas. This shows that the situation in this country has gotten to be extremely worrying/severe and people are bordering – bordering – on famine.

Now, this means we also have a big group of people who are now in emergency food insecurity conditions. It was 1.3 million people back in March; the October numbers showed that that group is growing to 1.8 million, so 500,000 increase in that – in that number. So, the needs are high,

driven by fighting between armed groups, there's been displacement of 100,000 people.

Food prices have also gone sky-high. That's been as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, as a result of international food prices going up. Haiti imports half of its food, and therefore, the impact is that food prices rise here, so the high prices of food, the high prices of fuel, this is what Haitians call "la vie chère," and it's been a big element in the instability right now, facing this country.

Now, the international community is ready to respond, but we've also faced extreme difficulties in this context. And we've actually been the object of attacks. International organizations in the country, and national organizations as well, they've had their offices looted, the premises vandalized. In the case of the World Food Programme, we had an attack on our sub-office in Gonaïves on September the 15th. We also had our sub-office – or, that office was looted and then burned. And they kind of also lost a warehouse. The losses of that looting, just for WFP, prevents us from assisting 200,000 people right now. We had food for 100,000 schoolchildren in these warehouses. So, at the very time that these needs in Haiti are increasing – we're talking about food insecurity, displacement, cholera – while the humanitarians have come under attack, that makes the situation quite complex for us.

And another aspect is also that we've – we're actually quite underfunded in Haiti, and I'll come back to that. But the – I would say, we – in spite of the situation, we have been continuing to provide assistance to the Haitian population, through our partners, many of which are local, 68 percent of distributions WFP does are through local organizations, so we couldn't do this without them. But since the "Pays Lock" began, so since this – these conditions that have existed in Haiti – we have provided food vouchers or electronic vouchers to 100,000 people. We've continued our essential role of providing supply-chain services to other humanitarian organizations, including local ones, and that's the Humanitarian Air Service in Haiti. Port-au-Prince is essentially surrounded by armed groups. You can't go in and out safely, except through the air. So, we run a humanitarian air service. We've done 200 flights since September 12th. We're also doing cargo flights to bring essential items for cholera into the country, and we've also been able to do food airlifts from Cap-Haïtien to Port-au-Prince. There's a factory in Cap-Haïtien that produces the nutritious food we need for children here in Port-au-Prince.

So, we are able to meet some emergency needs. We're able to – we've been doing hot meals at the Hugo Chavez, for example, which is the displaced – where displaced people live right near the airport of Port-au-Prince. But we need to be able to scale this up.

And there's actually a challenge and there are gaps there. The gaps that we see – and I'll close on this – I mean, the number-one gap I've faced is awareness, and awareness in the United States. I'd like to thank the Center for Strategic and International Studies for convening this talk, because we – there's not enough awareness in the U.S. about the situation of Haiti.

We also have a funding gap, so the distributions we're doing right now in places like Cité Soleil, Bel Air, Martissant, La Saline, they will end in a few weeks if we don't get more food into this country, if WFP doesn't get more contributions. We have a \$100 million gap for the next six months. Needs are very high, and we're burning through the available resources quite quickly.

And finally, one of the gaps I see is the acceptance gap. Again, humanitarians in Haiti came under attack, and I think a lot of humanitarians actually understand what Marie-Rose and Carine were saying about resilience and working with local communities and going “zepòl con zepòl” – shoulder to shoulder – with communities to achieve greater resilience. But we were still attacked, and we need to think about how can we accept it and continue delivering in this kind of environment.

Thank you.

Ms. Flacks:

Thank you, Jean-Martin, great overview of some – of some challenges. And I want to maybe stay with you for a minute, because the – as you mentioned, this crisis is not getting the attention that other humanitarian crises are getting in Washington, D.C. But in the last few weeks, it has started to pop. And the thing that's made it start to pop is the level of insecurity, and the level of violence.

But particularly, what seems to be impacting people's daily lives is this issue of the port closure, and the bottleneck that that has created in terms of fuel, of water, of just daily goods, and the knock-on effect that that's had on the economy. And so, in a moment, I want to hear from you, Marie-Rose, about sort of what you're seeing in that impact.

But tell us, Jean-Martin, what impact that's having on your ability to distribute goods. You mentioned you've started an air service. That's obviously much more expensive to bring in food that way. But it sounds like in the last few days, there's been some movement, maybe some progress on getting that port reopened. What's your sense of the situation there? Do you see movement? And do you get a sense that you're going to be able to use that option as a delivery option in the near future?

Mr. Bauer:

Well, we're cautiously optimistic that things will get better. You need to know that if the ports reopen, it's a step forward, but we've taken three steps back with this crisis. Conditions were really bad before any armed group came

into Varreux, the fact that they have left is a positive. But you need to know that the food security numbers I quoted in my earlier intervention, that's all data from before this "Pays Lock." Before any of this happened, half of the Haitian population was acutely food insecure, and unfortunately, these conditions will continue.

The fact that the port's open is good, but it won't resolve this crisis. And the impact on humanitarians has been to slow down their supply chains; it's created shortages; it's had us resort to these – yeah, to using air lifts, which are quite expensive. And with insecurity, we'll have to spend a lot more on security in the future, unfortunately. And we have to be careful that we don't lose the really important flexibility we need to be able to reach the population.

So, it's a new world for us. There's going to be a before and an after for the humanitarian community, considering that we were attacked in places like Port-de-Paix, Gonaïves, Jacmel, Jérémie, Les Cayes. We just have to think about how we – how we – our presence in this country, and how we relate to the communities. It's a – it's a big – a big challenge for us, and it's something we need to unpack, the whole issue of around acceptance.

Ms. Flacks:           Yeah.

Marie-Rose, maybe you can help us unpack that a little bit. What's your sense of what's – if you have any sense of what's kind of driving some of that – that anger against the humanitarian community, those attacks, that violence that they've faced. And how are your organizations that you are working with responding to the kind of bottleneck situation that's resulted from that – from that port closure?

Ms. Romain  
Murphy:           OK. (Laughs.) People are angry, and they are hungry, and they are exhausted. People keep talking about the international community and everywhere, you know, the resilience, the resilience.

And the reality is that we have gotten so many knockdowns, I mean we've had to deal with so many disasters. Every day, you have to worry, you hear about kidnappings, you – I mean, there are killings, kidnappings, somebody that you know is getting kidnapped. I mean, I've had several people of my family kidnapped. And it's highly stressful. And you know, it's very – also very difficult. I mean, you have people that are sort of, like, diehard Haiti, I will not move, I will not go, that are considering leaving, or that are going out of the country because their businesses are getting, you know, burned, their – they have to worry about their children, they have to hire security, food is very expensive, you can't really, like, socialize.

Also, as far as functioning, when you have, like, protests and barricades – and, you know, I mean, I realize that people are in favor of protests, and we’re all in favor of protests. But here’s the story. The story is that you’re paralyzed. You’re paralyzed, and you can’t go anywhere. You can’t really help the community. And usually, in terms of funding, there’s a lack of flexibility, because right now, I mean, the gas prices have come down, but it used to be sort of, like, you know, what used to be 200, good, is 500, a thousand, and more, you know, sometimes up to 5,000, if you’re really desperate. People are making money out of that deal.

So, you have asked – and I am trying to tiptoe around, because I tend to be very direct – the issue about, sort of anger, against, you know, international organizations. And part of it dates from the earthquake, and part of it has to do with how well organizations sort of, like, work with the local – you know, with the local communities. And Jean-Martin, I know that you’re out there and really working for us, you’re of Haitian descent. And I also know, because I was looking at your tweets that you sort of, like, know that we have to know on agriculture and become, you know, self-sufficient in terms of food security, which we were in the ‘50s. And because of certain policies and certain international pressures, we no longer are, on the contrary.

And – but, you know, the reality is – good intentions or not, communities have been marginalized from the process. I’m really happy to hear that 68 percent of your distribution is run by local organizations, but when are we going to be at the lead of the country? When are we – our community leaders going to be able to sort of, like, walk, “épaules,” you know, “têtes ensemble,” heads together, with international organizations? And I know that, you know – and I’m very thankful for the work of some organizations, but the reality is that, you know, there really needs to be more resources, more decision making, more program design that’s turned over to local organizations.

So, I want to make it very, very, very clear. These attacks, all of this, I condemn them. But I also want to make it clear that I have worked on the ground, and I’ve worked on projects, and I’ve been consulted, you know, on the ground with certain, you know, projects that were funded by, you know, sort of U.N. organizations, and you know, sometimes, people really have to treat community people better. I’m sorry.

Ms. Flacks: Mmm hmm. Sure.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy: I’m the truth – I’m the truth teller.

Ms. Flacks: Yeah.

Ms. Romain: And it’s got to be said. And it creates, you know, anger, when people are not

Murphy: treated with dignity, when people are not treated or – you know, when there’s an infantilization of Haitian community leaders, of Haitians’ ability to sort of, like, run, to run our communities, to run our country, it’s an issue.

Ms. Flacks: Sure.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy: And having said that, you know, I want to say sort of thank you for the work that you’re doing. Thank you for pushing in front of that. I want to thank Carine for the work that Fonkoze has been doing. But at the same time, we’re not going to get to the bottom of this, until we address the root causes –

Ms. Flacks: Yeah.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy: – and until we sort of like make sure that we get out of that dependency and that short-term thinking, in terms of project by project, drip by drip, throwing us a few bones, and – you know, and that’s it, you know, we know better what you want.

Ms. Flacks: Yeah, yeah, thanks. Thanks, Marie-Rose.

So, I appreciate you coming and speaking your mind and really putting it out there for us, because it’s – I know it’s a difficult conversation to sometimes have. And I know there is – can be frustration between local actors and international organizations.

We’re seeing this trend – and in fact, this morning, I think we had a good discussion about this effort, this trend toward how do we localize our aid, how do we make sure local actors are incorporated into decision-making. And I know that effort is underway at U.N., WFP, and a lot of other international organizations. And it’s good to have fora like this, so that we can talk through how – the strategies for how to do that, right, and how to make sure that those voices are being heard, while understanding that Haiti is obviously in a situation that international assistance is desperately needed. And we need to find a way to get it in there. And the challenges and insecurity that international organizations are facing are making it more difficult to do that. So, we appreciate that reminder of the importance, and we appreciate the work that the international organizations are doing to bridge that gap in assistance.

And so, I want to talk about some of those steps that are being taken to try to fill some of the gaps that we’re seeing on the ground. You know, we talked a little bit about food delivery. I want to talk a little bit about healthcare as well. Carine, I know you’re a – you’re a doctor, I’m going to take advantage of that, even though I know you don’t work in this space. But I wonder if you can talk about what you’re seeing in terms of the cholera situation, if you can speak to the developments on the ground and the response that your

organization or others are to support – you know, I know you don't provide medical assistance, but to support the communities that are at risk for the spread of that disease.

Ms. Roenen: OK, you know, it's a bit like Marie-Rose was saying. The health crisis in Haiti doesn't – it's not the cholera right now. Accessibility of health services and the quality of health services has been very bad for a very long time. So, this is kind of really the – what you say, the straw that broke the camel's back, because the whole system is very, very weak. And so, you put on challenges, like the one that cholera is causing, it makes the situation even more complicated.

Everybody is mobilizing, like, for example, at Fonkoze, we don't have health programs, but we work with our clients to make sure they are aware of cholera, to make sure that they remember that they have to treat their drinking water, that they have to wash their hands. It's really basic preventive messages. And when you talk to people, people say, ah yeah, I remember, you know, we used to have that, and it used to happen to us. And so, they – I've got the feeling the whole response of the community is much faster than what we would have – what we saw in 2010, 2011, for example.

So, there's a lot of information-sharing, but the whole supply chain issue is there, again, really, really hampering efforts. Even if the crisis, the cholera, started in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince, it's now out, I think, in seven or in eight of the departments. And getting products out there to take care of cholera patients, to make sure people can treat their drinking water – there's a huge problem of access to potable water all over the country and to make sure they have oral rehydration. So that whole supply chain issue is there, also, really making our life more complicated.

And as Mr. Bauer was saying, because of all these logistical strains, displacing even one case of water treatment solution costs two, three, four times as much as what it cost six months ago. So, all our operational costs have gone really up also, which makes, you know, the whole issue of the funding gap even more acute.

Ms. Flacks: Yeah.

Jean-Martin, I want to come back to you. You talked about this issue of insecurity, you've worked in some other environments around the world with security challenges, and certainly WFP has a lot of experience working in places – in insecure environments.

Can you talk about how you're thinking about the – some of the strategies that you have deployed, that WFP has deployed in other places, to enable you to continue to work effectively in Haiti, despite the challenges that you're

facing?

Mr. Bauer: Thanks, Marti. I would like to take a second to respond to Marie-Rose. I think the comments that were made earlier by Marie-Rose on indignity, on community involvement, we are 100 percent on board with that.

There are a lot of myths that go around about what WFP does in this country. I've noticed that some people think we bring in food aid from abroad and compete with agriculture. That's not the way food aid works in Haiti. I mean, more – we do 92 percent of our programming with cash. We have had food stocks, and some of those food stocks were looted, but they were prepositioned for the hurricane season and for school feeding. So that's why there were stocks in the country at that time, but we do most of our work through local companies, local businesses, local NGOs. And therefore, we're proud to be a large contributor to these businesses, and to Haitian society at large. We're not – I think – we're not who you think we might be, if you listen to the – to the rumors, or if you dig down, you actually find that we're quite engaged, and we've got a lot of complementarities between our work and what our local partner's doing.

In terms of security, I think my fear is that we might go from a situation in Haiti where we're actually quite close to the community, to one where we might be more distant. In other environments I've worked in, it's compound life. If you think about Afghanistan or Somalia, or environments like that, that are actually hostile to humanitarians, we end up retreating. And we end up – perhaps the criticism is that you lose touch with the society you work in. And we need to avoid that in Haiti. I think we need to have the ability to maintain a presence, to be able to stay in – not just in the country, but close – as close as we can to the communities that we're – that we're meant to serve.

This is not going to be an easy one, because with what happened, we're necessarily going to have to strengthen our security posture. That means more security officers in our international agencies. It will mean more – but it will also mean more engagement with local communities. Hopefully, there's more dialogue, there's continued efforts to understand what the risks might be, and how to better assist these communities.

So, again, it's something we'll have to unpack. These incidents, these serious incidents occurred two months ago. They were a wakeup call for the international agencies in the country, and we'll have to drill down into these issues.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy: Could I have –

Ms. Flacks: You want to come back in? Yeah, yeah.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy:

Jean-Martin, I am aware of some of the programs that Pam (sp) is doing. Tanguy (sp) is a good friend, and other – you know – and I appreciate your efforts.

I was talking about, in general, about international organizations.

Ms. Flacks:

Sure, yeah.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy:

So, I know that it's important for you to make the distinctions. On the other hand, as much as I want to try to avoid that uncomfortable position, I do want to say that international organizations have work to do when it comes to working with communities, and treating community members and leaders as peers, and, you know, as partners.

Ms. Flacks:

Yeah, thank you, Marie-Rose.

And I think that's – it's great that you're in Washington to help share that message with the many international organizations that are based here and that work out of here, and also of course, with our government donor colleagues as well, because that's certainly – it needs to be a priority, in terms of that relationship-building.

I want to take a step back. In a – in a few minutes, I'll just say, to our audience, both in the studio and online, we're going to open it up to questions from the audience in a few minutes. If you're online, you can click on the question button and submit it online. If you're in our studio audience, there's a QR code near your seat. You can actually scan it with your phone, type in a question, and I will get it up here. So please send your questions in, so we can hear from you, and let our experts address the issues that you want to hear from them about.

But I have a few more that I wanted to get into before we do that. One is climate change. We talk about the impacts that climate change is having on a whole range of challenges, and we're seeing that play out in real time in many ways in Haiti, whether that's the hurricane patterns, whether that's impacts on agriculture. And obviously, that has a knock-on effect and a relationship between the other challenges – governance challenges and economic challenges, but even some of the violence.

I wonder if, from each of you, I would love to hear a little bit about how you think about the challenge of climate change in your work, and how that impacts your – both your short-term planning, but also as you think about your organizations in the medium term and long term, what impact you think that's going to have on your – on those efforts.

So, Carine, let me start with you, and then I'll come back around.

Ms. Roenen: OK, thank you, Marti.

Like I was saying earlier, climate change is definitely impacting our work. It's – what we see directly – you know, we work with these ultra-poor women in rural areas, and what they confront is that practices they had for generations on how to do agriculture don't work anymore, because rain has become way more unpredictable, because there is a lot of erosion, because natural resources have been depleted.

And so, we need to work with them to flexibly adopt new practices for agriculture. And one of the gaps from that point of view is that there's very little research being done in Haiti on agriculture, and on agricultural practices that may be better adapted to climate change. And I think that's one of the gaps we see when we work with these very poor people. What should we tell them in terms of how – what kind of crops to grow, where to find the seeds that will actually be more resistant to drought, for example. Because for now in Haiti, what we see is that there is way more drought – and I've been living in Haiti for 25 years, and over the five years, the five last years, there's been repeated droughts, and they are actually really difficult to address, in – especially in some of the drier areas of Haiti.

Ms. Flacks: Great.

Jean-Martin, let me come to you. I know WFP has been thinking about this issue extensively, but particularly in Haiti, how are you thinking about this?

Mr. Bauer:

Well, we're worried that this is going to get worse and increase – (audio break) – country. Haiti's already one of the most risk-prone environments in the world, because you've got earthquakes, hurricanes, also the possibility of drought. The fact that there was insufficient rain earlier this year is one of the factors why we have 4.7 million in food insecurity right now. So, these are extremely worrisome to us.

The – what we've done is try to work on programming, our programming with Haiti's farmers, to make sure that Haiti's farmers are strengthened, so that they are able to do what they do best, which is feed Haiti's people. So, we work very closely at the community level, we do extensive consultations with them to understand what their needs are. And once we have a good understanding of that, we do help them do things to better conserve water, work on making their food production more resilient, and we also have a program that allows, right now, 2,400 Haitian farmers to sell their food directly to schools, so that – the food is used for school feeding. Any given day when schools are in session, 100,000 Haitian children receive a local, nutritious meal, grown in their – in the vicinity of their school by farmer organizations that WFP works with.

So, we're trying to develop these decentralized marketing mechanisms. We're trying to work to make food production more resilient at the local level. And one innovation we're bringing in this year is microinsurance for 5,000 farmers in the south. And we have hopes that by doing these things, and documenting them, and learning from them, we'll be better able to help these communities deal with the threat of climate change.

Ms. Flacks:

Thank you.

Marie-Rose.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy:

In terms of climate change, I mean, one of the things that's striking is that some of the people that are most affected by it, don't – are not even familiar with the term. I'll give you – one of our grantees from Plaisance who is working now for Rouge, which is a fairly remote community in the Gonaïves. And you know, there was – they sort of, like, have citrus. And with the drought, I mean, most of the time, it's like, it means issues as far as the water is concerned in their production. They have had to have access – they have access to some water pump which is defective. They spend most of the night sort of trying to get water, which is not efficient. And you know, you visit them, and you see what's amazing is this sense of solidarity and what they are trying to do, not just for themselves, but for the community. But then you can see the hardship, and you can admire the leadership, because, you know, despite everything, they're just trying to endure, and to move on.

So, what do we do? We try to have – to teach people to – so, like, the fact that, OK, this is climate change, this is being impacted. The country is being impacted. We try to figure out, sort of, like, help them as far as their planting and their seeds, and what to use, what is it that they can do as far as dealing with climate change, you know, along with sort of, like, other things.

We know that part of the climate change issue is the issue of deforestation, which is linked, of course, to the production of, you know, wood charcoal – which, by the way, is sort of, like, one of the few things that Haiti exports at this point, unfortunately. While the Dominican Republic has, like, strict laws about their environment, but they take our charcoal and refuse just a number of other things.

So, this is – there is also the environmental factor, as far as addressing reforestation in a way that makes sense, because when you have, in terms of the agricultural protection, you've got a level of spoilage that's fairly high, because the infrastructure is not there. There are issues as far as the water is concerned – as both of you know, you are nodding. You have any – so – and even in terms of now, with the current situation, how do they get their stuff to Port-au-Prince, which, you know, at this point, is controlled by the gangs. So, when you have charcoal, you know, you say – you know, people will say that, you know, “charbon pas pourri,” charcoal doesn't get spoiled, even if it gets wet and whatever, and it's needed, and people are using it, especially right now that fuel is an issue, OK?

So, all of these things require a fairly comprehensive – because it is not that people want to cut down trees, but when it comes down – because one of the things that I think always breaks my heart, because we are so driven, in terms of making a better future for our children. One of the things that I love when I go to Haiti is to see the schoolchildren. And it doesn't matter if women wake up at, like, 5 a.m., and you know, they've got to go to whatever – they find some water – and we all know access to water is a difficult thing – to just wash the kids, make sure they are clean, you know, their hair ties and their bows, and their uniform is pressed. And so, if you understand that the trees are getting cut down, not because sort of, farmers don't understand that they need the trees, but because they need to pay the schooling for their children.

Ms. Flacks: Sure.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy: OK, you understand that it's a chain reaction, and it's destroying us. It's destroying the environment, and it's breaking the farmers' hearts. But they are doing it because they need to survive, and they want their children to have a future.

Ms. Flacks: Yeah. Yeah.

And so, the question is, how do we – for us in Washington and the international community, help break that cycle, right, help Haitians kind of break that cycle of food insecurity, climate destruction, physical insecurity, economic insecurity.

So, I want to ask each of you, before we turn to the audience questions, what are the needs that the international community – what are the steps that the international community can take to support your work in Haiti, and to support the situation in Haiti right now, in order to address at least some of these immediate needs, and then maybe a bit about the sort of more structural issues. When I – when you talk about the knock-on effects of some of these challenges, it's reminiscent of the panel we had before this on Afghanistan, where you start to see, you know, banks shut down, lack of access to cash, you know, the economy itself starting to shut down.

How do we get ahead of that, or at least tackle that before it gets to that point in Haiti? What do you want to see, in terms of – what are your needs in terms of funding and support?

So I'm going to start with Jean-Martin, because you talked about a funding gap at the beginning of this panel. Talk about WFP's needs. And then Marie-Rose and Carine, we'll come to you in terms of what the international community can do to support your organizations and similar ones.

Mr. Bauer: Hi Marti.

So, there is a funding gap, and the funding gap is, right now, \$100 million for six months. And here's what it's for: It's to meet essential needs for the most vulnerable Haitians. We need to be able to target assistance, emergency assistance and nutrition, food, and also supply chain services, so that the most vulnerable Haitians continue to get services.

The cholera outbreak has also increased the needs. As I said, we needed to shift things around the country. It's quite complicated right now, because of insecurity and because of the high cost of transportation. So, this is the type of thing we need to do. We need to be able to prioritize these life-saving activities.

And also – and I think both Carine and Marie-Rose mentioned it – let's not forget the root causes. We can't all of a sudden turn into the emergency, and leave behind all of the work that we've been doing for years in these communities. We need to be able to do both at the same time to have something that's credible.

Ms. Flacks: Absolutely.

Well, I appreciate you putting a dollar figure, though, on the immediate need, \$100 million for six months.

Marie-Rose, I'll come back to you, and then Carine on that same question. I'll let you go first, and then we'll close with Carine.

Ms. Romain Murphy: Jean-Martin, when you said 100 million, I was trying not to salivate.

Ms. Flacks: (Laughs.) Yeah, yeah.

Ms. Romain Murphy: And I know – I know – (laughs) – I'm sorry.

Ms. Flacks: Why don't you tell us what the international community can do to support your work.

Ms. Romain Murphy: Just put it – just put it – I'm sorry. I'm sorry. You know, we're storytellers. Sorry I'm not staying to task here.

Ms. Flacks: Not at all. Yeah.

Ms. Romain Murphy: What the international community has to do. Can you please listen to local leaders and the community leaders that know the countries best? Can you please invest in the long term, as opposed to short-term projects, flash in the pan? We're tired because it doesn't work, but then we are trying to do cookie cutters because, you know, that's all we know. And we know better, so we'll tell you, and these poor people don't know better. This entire attitude – can you please give us a chance?

I am going to tell you a story that I told, actually, one of our founders who sort of, like, stopped by yesterday. And I said, it really hit me hard, yes, when I heard this story. A friend of mine that I went to college with ended up volunteering at his church for sort of, like, a mission. It was a week. And he, you know, because he knew me for – you know, he knew me, whatever. So, we had a very long conversation, and he works in pharmaceutical, and they were dealing with people with deworming – you know, worm – you know, worms, intestinal worms. So he made sure that medicines were not expired, et cetera. And they were there like, for a week, and they were – so one of the things that they realized, and he told me that very – because he's very laid back and whatever, he's like, oh, but a lot of people didn't really worry about it, and then some people, they actually brought, you know, medicines that were for animals. And I said, what? What? Well, you know, it wasn't really hurting them, they didn't mean to hurt them.

It was so painful, because somehow, if it's Haiti, it's OK. We're sub-humans. If it's Haiti, the crisis, the migration crisis or the (other ?) crisis is not a regional crisis like it is; it's just a Haitian crisis. If it's Haiti, we're being pushed out of every country in Latin America, Central, the Caribbean, or the U.S., and it's an infernal revolving door that keeps spiraling down.

So, I think people need to realize – and one of the positive things, because somehow the leadership, there is so much that the community – this country did not survive 40 years of crisis and political instability without the fact that we had – (speaks in a foreign language) – community leaders in every community, sacrificing themselves and trying to do something, that you had diaspora send in, as of last year, \$4.4 billion, direct injection of money into communities, and you know, did not survive without all of that.

So, there is all this hope and this energy and this effort, and this “Haiti cheri.” You know, we love Haiti, and we’ll sacrifice to make that. And people need to acknowledge the fact that their biases and their prejudices are unfair, and are getting in the way. And it’s time that, as opposed to keep blaming Haiti, we need to see, and leverage some of the local initiatives that have been – nation-building initiatives that have been undertaken, and that are growing, OK, that are led by Haitians, as opposed to starting their parallel work, that are ignoring the local assets. I – very thankful for what Jean-Martin is doing, in terms of working with that, but I’m sorry, Jean-Martin, this is not the rule. This is not – you know, this is not the rule, this is not the way it’s going.

I’m extremely thankful for what you are doing, you know, Carine, with Fonkoze. But there needs to be something that’s systematic, where it is not a choice. There is some work that’s being done in tandem with local leaders, and community leaders, to make sure that we advance all priorities as communities and as a country, as opposed to what the international community has decided to be, and they made enough of a mess. I’m sorry. Enough.

Ms. Flacks: Thank you for that, really powerful reminders of the challenges that we’re facing in how we treat Haiti, how we think about Haiti, our neighbor, which so often gets overlooked, or, as you said, when we think about it, we don’t frame it in the right – in the right way. I’m not going to try and summarize what you just said. But I think it’s really powerful. So, thank you.

Carine, let me turn to you for your thoughts on where the needs are from the international community, what they can be doing right now to help your organization and similar organizations.

Ms. Roenen: Of course, the funding gap is huge. For international organizations, for local organizations, making more resources available for local organizations to

invest in priorities that have been locally decided – I agree with Marie-Rose. It's one of the key aspects of getting out of the – of the situation we're in.

I think the other thing is maybe a bit weird thing to say, but it's patience. Nothing changes quickly. It takes years and years and years to build coherence and local structures and systems that can actually sustain a number of services over time.

One of the difficulties I think there is in the way the international organizations – and sometimes also Fonkoze, even if we try to get out of that – we try to build long-term programs to be able to actually sustain changes, and services over time. Because you have a two-year project, a three-year project, you do – you do what you can and you bring some positive changes in the lives of a couple of people, or sometimes, even many people. But it's there one day, and to the people in the community, it's not there again the other day. And so, it creates even more uncertainty in an environment that is already very, very uncertain.

And so, I think we have to learn to deliver services with a longer term horizon, building solid, long-term structures, with local leaders.

Ms. Flacks: Great. Thank you.

We're getting a lot of questions from our audience, so thank you to our online and our in-person audience for all of the ones that they're sending in. I'm going to run through a few of them.

I'm going to start with a question that – Jean-Martin, you addressed this a little bit, but I'm – I think it's worth going back to, which is, you know, how – it costs hundreds of millions of dollars, obviously, to support an emergency food response to Haiti. I'm just summarizing this question. How do we shift from this sort of very expensive, short-sighted humanitarian response to building long-term, sustainable investments in local Haitian food systems? How do we build up the agriculture sector? How do we make that transition? You talked about this a little bit, but is there anything you want to add to that?

Mr. Bauer: I think what Carine is saying is absolutely right. You need patience. We're not going to rebuild Haitian agriculture overnight. The 1980s Haiti was self-sufficient. It's not self-sufficient anymore in terms of food. It's 50 percent dependent on imports. What we need to do is work with Haitian farmers, again, to strengthen their capacities so that they're again able to feed this country. It will take years, and what we have in Haiti is a response that also includes things like support to smallholder farmers and support to national safety nets. This means that the emergency response can transition to something else, that people who receive emergency one day aren't left

without anything the next.

So, we do have that – it's important to have that longer term concept where someone who receives the emergency assistance would then get another type of assistance later, that would help – hopefully help with graduation. So that's these other resilience programs I told you about, these are the safety net programs that need to be in place.

We also need to equip the Haitian government with the databases, the registries that would allow the delivery of assistance on a sustainable basis, and not have them rely on international agencies longer term.

Ms. Flacks: Great.

Carine, we have a question for you actually, the audience wants to know a bit more actually about Fonkoze's – your presence and network in Haiti, and how that comes into play during a crisis like this, given your relationships across the country.

Ms. Roenen: So, as I said, Fonkoze has two organizations. It was born and founded in Haiti by Haitians, and now has two organizations in Haiti. One is a microfinance institution, which works with close to 200,000 clients through – all over the country, through 46 offices. And of the 46 offices, I'm very proud to say only two of them are in Port-au-Prince, which is the opposite of what happens with most of the other financial service providers.

So, that whole microfinance operation creates a network, which we and the foundation piggyback on to deliver other services, like, for example, services distributing water treatment products, training people on cholera, or training people on COVID three years ago, or identifying clients who have been victims of earthquakes and making sure their names make it into the lists of the emergency intervention.

So, it's very much that microfinance, that stable, long-term microfinance network, that allows us to deliver some emergency support services to the clients we work with.

Now, I need to be very honest with you all, we're not a relief organization. We don't have the logistical capacity to start distributing food or non-food items at a thousand, and 10,000 people. We just don't have the capacity to do that. But we do have the capacity to get them really important information, and to help out when we can.

Ms. Flacks: Great, thank you, Carine.

So we have a question about children, in particular, and food insecurity and

malnutrition. And I'm happy to open this up to whoever might have some information. But are – is WFP or is UNICEF, or other U.N. agencies looking at the malnutrition situation among children? And how are organizations local – I'll say local and international – coordinating to prevent this particular problem? And I mentioned at the beginning, the triple threat that the child rights commission put up, and we may have a slide we can put up on that.

So I don't know if any one – any one of you wants to tackle that question around food insecurity and children.

Yeah, go ahead. Yeah, go ahead, Jean-Martin.

Mr. Bauer:

The situation of malnutrition in Haiti is quite worrying. The alarm went off in April, when a survey by the ministry of health and UNICEF determined that one out of five children in Cité Soleil were acutely malnourished, and out of the overall number, 5 percent were actually severely acutely malnourished, which means that they needed to be brought to the hospital. It's one of the reasons why we determined that that part of Haiti is facing emergency and borderline famine conditions.

We're taking this quite seriously. We are providing support to hospitals, to clinics. We're also distributing nutritious products specifically designed for pregnant women and for children in these areas. But you need to realize that in a place like Cité Soleil, one of the big challenges is water, and that's a big factor in the malnutrition we're seeing there.

I spoke to women in Cité Soleil two weeks ago, and they were telling me that they're mostly drinking rainwater, and in some cases, brackish water, and we need to resolve that. If we don't, we're not going to have a lasting solution to malnutrition in that part of Port-au-Prince. It's very worrying. And everything that's gone on with fuel shortages, with the "Pays Lock," has just made it worse. But we are aware, and we're monitoring, and we're bringing assistance as we can.

Ms. Flacks:

Great, thank you for that.

So, we do have a question about sort of the long – the long-term amount of money that has been spent in Haiti. You know, we are – we're sitting in D.C., we're all sort of making a pitch to leaders to invest in additional resources, financial resources, other resources, in Haiti. You know, this is a challenging question with a hopeful question at the end, which is, you know, how do you explain to people what that assistance has gone toward, what progress has been made with the money invested so far? And how do we emphasize, how do we make the cases you all have tried to do today, that there is hope and opportunity in Haiti, that it's worth that additional investment, that we'll see some systemic change from investing money in a smart way, in the right way,

in that country?

Maybe I'll start with Marie-Rose, and then we can sort of go around. Yeah.

Ms. Romain  
Murphy:

We can't make the case unless the approach changes. The way things are structured right now, and the way money is distributed, very little of it gets to the communities. Actually, close to 50 percent of the money doesn't even leave. For example, if it comes from the U.S. – the U.S. – it's in consulting, it's in different things, it's in export, it's in whatever it is that it is.

But I saw a figure about sort of, like, the level of money that gets spent on logistics, as far as the humanitarian – so, what people love to call the localization approach, which is really trying to make sure that there is some sort of a balance, and that the people that are on the ground and the citizens of a country have a say, and can get out of aid, the traps of aid dependency, should be a priority, the same way that it should be a priority to build societies, you know, civil societies, or a society's ecosystem.

There is something – because I know I sound like a broken record for, you know, for some people who have heard me – aid should be about ending the need for aid. And the reality is that people want to hear that they can continue to do the same thing that has created aid dependency, they can continue to have the same allocations that – and the same process that doesn't involve communities deciding what their priorities are, and communities taking leadership of their own communities, and have different results. So, it is – I believe that's Einstein, says the formula of madness. So, it doesn't make sense. If they want this kind of investment to continue to be the same, where they feel comfortable, they refuse to let go of control and power, and they refuse to actually trust the people, who are here in the communities, and are vested in the future of the country, as opposed to sending people that, some of them are depending on knowledge that is academic and research, that is not grounded in our culture.

So what I have to say is, if people say that they want to invest more money and that we have to prove ourselves – no. They have to prove that whatever method they have done that has led to one crisis feeding into another, and have – (inaudible) – to whatever – not that we are not – we don't have our part of responsibility. We're a fragmented society, and we need to come together, and we are finally coming to that. We have to sort of confess our sins, and take responsibility for what we've done.

But the international community needs to stop hiding behind excuses and behind false narratives. And it's essential that the leveraging assets that are there, there are Haitian initiatives that are critical, important, impactful, that are not acknowledged, that are not leveraged, that are not taken into consideration. Is it, like, right, like, across the board? No, there are exceptions

to that, and there are agencies and there are leaders, but it's not systematically what happens.

So, what I will say to the international community, talk to us. Listen to us. Let's work together. Let's figure out a strategy that reflects the vision, the culture, the history of Haitian people, one that they can embrace, and own, and engage, and get involved, and be proud of, and then you'll see changes.

Ms. Flacks: So, you've got a strategy that makes – that puts Haitians at the center. And I think that's what we've been hearing from Carine and Jean-Martin, too, is that that delivery needs to engage and center Haitians in all of that work.

So, for both of you – I think we'll close out with this. Talk about this question of the investment in Haiti, the returns you want to see, the hope, the opportunity that you see there, why you spend all of your effort, and all of your time working in this place, and the opportunities that you see with the right kind of investment, the right kind of approach.

Carine, I'll start with you, and then Jean-Martin.

Ms. Roenen: You know, this is – this is where I live, and this is where Fonkoze was created, and where Fonkoze exists. So this is our place. We just have to make it work. It will take time, but I remain very, very optimistic in the end, that we'll get there. And what makes me optimistic like that is essentially the women Fonkoze works with. These women, they have treasures of leadership, the way they work with each other to plan their purchases together, to get to market together, to actually help one another through crisis and through hardships, it really gives me hope that if we just persevere, and work with Haitians at the center of what we're doing, we'll get there.

Ms. Flacks: Jean-Martin.

Mr. Bauer: I would say that the situation in Haiti has gotten so bad that there's no cheap fix. It's like if you're a homeowner and you do your maintenance every year, you're fine; but if you delay it, delay it, delay it, then you've got a great big bill coming. I am afraid that with Haiti, the bill has come due.

Now, we need to invest in a way that's smart. I'm proud to say that for WFP, 90 percent of the money we spend stays in Haiti, that when we do 92 percent cash, that helps businesses, it helps food processors, it helps farmers. It's – these are the things we need to do to help drive economic multipliers, create new jobs, and provide for a future. And we can't just do it once. This needs to be sustained.

Now, what I liked about the way we – the way we faced this crisis as an agency in this country, it was very difficult for us. It was very difficult for the

WFP team in Gonaïves and the WFP team in Les Cayes, they saw years of work destroyed by looters. Imagine your office, the place where you worked for 10 years being destroyed, and burned, and vandalized. That's what happened to about 40 of my staff in this country.

I went out and went to see them to see how we can get things going again, and when I – when I first met my staff in Gonaïves, they told me: Sir, we want to get back to work. We want to get back to helping the Haitian population. Our commitments to the Haitian population will not change. We need to be there to – for them, we need to continue the projects we've agreed on. We need to keep our promises to the Haitian population. And I think that's, to me, quite an inspiration. And I do think the solution is in the Haitian people and their resilience.

Ms. Flacks: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all three of you for your insights, for your frank assessment of the situation, for the work that you're all doing every day in Haiti, and your leadership on these issues.

Some of the things that I took away from this discussion, I think, some really interesting opportunities in thinking around climate adaptation, the need for more research, the needs for more education around responding to climate, given how risk-prone Haiti is, and how we're already seeing impacts, the need for immediate financial assistance. We've got \$100 million in the next six months just to meet immediate needs, and obviously, a much larger sustained investment in the long term. As Jean-Martin just laid out, the effort that's going to be required to make this situation better in the longer term, the need to not forget about root causes of the situation, even as we respond to the urgent, immediate situation on the ground, that we can't forget those longer term root causes, and how to address them. And then, of course, we heard very passionately about the need for local ownership, local partnerships, centering the people of Haiti in that conversation. I appreciate some of the statistics we heard from WFP in this regard, 68 percent of assistance through local partners, 90 – 92 percent cash, 90 percent of that money staying in Haiti. That needs to be, obviously, the practice of international organizations across the board, to center the people of Haiti, and to work with the expertise and the knowledge that exists on the ground. And it's heartening to see and hear about the partnerships that the three of you are all engaged in, in that regard.

So, on behalf of CSIS, I want to thank all of you for being here. I want to thank our audience for joining, and for helping us put a spotlight on this very important situation in Haiti. Thank you very much for being here.

(END)

