



Robert M. Perito
and Members of USIP's Haiti Team

E-mail: rperito@usip.org

Phone: 202.429.4173

Haiti After the Earthquake

Summary

- On January 12, 2010, Haiti suffered a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that destroyed much of the capital city of Port-au-Prince and caused the death of perhaps as many as 200,000 Haitians. The quake—the greatest natural disaster in the country's history—occurred at a point when Haiti appeared to be on the path to stability and progress.
- U.S. military forces will provide security during the emergency response phase, but aid to United Nations peacekeepers and the Haitian National Police is required to ensure that criminal gangs will not take over once the Americans withdraw.
- Reconstruction must target unemployment and poverty. Removing rubble and rebuilding essential structures will provide jobs, but it will be important to improve conditions and provide employment in rural areas so people will not return to the overcrowded and slum-ridden cities.
- The massive inflow of financial aid must not exacerbate Haiti's reliance on foreign nongovernmental organizations to provide essential services. Foreign aid should help Haiti's government expand its ability to manage resources and programs by providing training and budget support.
- In providing for Haiti's recovery, the international community must look ahead to the long term consequences of its action and work to place Haiti back on the path to sustainable development.

“As humanitarian requirements are fulfilled, an effective reconstruction effort in Haiti must immediately target the twin problems of unemployment and poverty.”

On January 12, 2010, Haiti suffered a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that destroyed much of the capital city of Port-au-Prince and caused the death of perhaps as many as 200,000 Haitians. This was the greatest natural disaster in the country's history. The presidential palace and the parliament were among the buildings damaged or destroyed. Among the many victims were the head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, Hédi Annabi, and 150 members of the U.N. staff that were trapped in the collapse of the U.N. headquarters. The magnitude of the destruction—human and material—poses an extreme challenge for the U.N. and the U.S.-led recovery effort. USIP will participate in this massive international program to rebuild Haiti over the coming year.

A Natural Disaster Halts a Period of Political and Economic Progress

The disaster that struck Haiti came during a period of political and economic progress that seemed likely to place Haiti on the path to sustainable stability and prosperity. After four major storms devastated Haiti in September 2008, the U.N. used a series of high profile visits to Haiti to energize the international community and the Haitian people. On March 9, 2009, Secretary-General Ban

Ki-moon arrived in Port-au-Prince accompanied by former President Bill Clinton, who subsequently was named U.N. Special Envoy for Haiti. Another series of visits followed by members of the U.N. Security Council, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Oxford economist Paul Collier, who prepared a report for the U.N. on Haiti's recovery, and other foreign government officials, and movie and rock stars.

On April 14, 2009, 200 delegates from 28 countries, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector convened at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C., to hear speeches by the U.N. Secretary-General, Secretary Clinton, former President Clinton, presidents of the international financial institutions (IFI) and the chairman of the Organization of American States. These presentations were inspired by renewed interest in assisting Haiti in what was characterized as a unique opportunity to bring about real change. Statements were tempered, however, by admonitions that the Haitian government's failure to provide leadership and shoulder responsibility would cause donor disillusionment, precluding a second chance.

The conference adopted a comprehensive development strategy paper—"A New Paradigm for Haiti"—and pledged \$353 million in new economic assistance.

In the eight months following the conference, Haiti experienced a rare period of relative tranquility and progress. A drop in the rate of kidnapping and violent crime caused the U.S. State Department to revise its travel advisory against Americans visiting Haiti. Investors responded to trade incentives for textile and apparel exports provided by Congress in the "HOPE II" bill. U.N. Special Envoy Bill Clinton led two successful business delegations. The annual economic growth rate turned positive. Hurricane season passed without incident. On November 10, Haiti's parliament confirmed Jean-Max Bellerive, the former minister of Planning and External Cooperation as Haiti's new prime minister. Indeed, Haiti appeared to be on the path to stability.

It was in this context that the January 12 earthquake caught Haitians, the U.N. and the international community by surprise. Haiti's government and international donors had been focused on legal and constitution reform programs that were going forward and on preparing for parliamentary elections scheduled for February 2010.

Haiti Needs a Framework for National Recovery

The strategy approved by the April 2009 donors conference provided a strategic plan for reforming Haiti's economy that will have to be revised in light of current realities. However, Haiti needs more. It needs a framework for nation building that covers all aspects of the state and society. The USIP "Strategic Framework for Stabilization and Reconstruction" identifies the conditions and the end states that must be achieved by the international community and the Haitian government. The USIP framework also provides the structure for an analysis of Haiti's requirements once the immediate phases of search and rescue and emergency response (food, water, shelter and medical care) are completed. The following is a preview of Haiti's needs in the areas of security, governance, rule of law and economic and social well-being.

Sustaining a Safe and Secure Environment

The arrival of 10,000 American military personnel from a combat brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, and the U.S. Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard will ensure that looting and communal violence do not spin out of control. Longer term, however, security in Haiti will depend upon the U.N. peacekeeping force that has done a credible job of defeating armed gangs and providing stability in Haitian cities. This lightly armed and barely

equipped force has lost its leadership in the collapse of U.N. headquarters, but its soldiers and police are on the streets providing assistance within their limited capacity.

Secretary of State Clinton said during her recent visit to Haiti that U.S. forces would support, but not try to supplant the U.N. peacekeepers. This is the proper approach. Assistance in the form of helicopters, transport, harbor and border patrols and the interdiction of drug flights from Venezuela will be particularly important. The U.N. peacekeeping force is led by Brazil with contingents from Argentina, Chile and other South American countries. These nations have demonstrated the capacity to provide leadership and resources in Haiti in addition to sending military personnel. The involvement of our South American allies should be promoted and military to military contacts enhanced to build relationships that can be utilized in future contingencies.

The U.S. must also refocus on building the Haitian National Police (HNP), the country's only indigenous security force. The U.S. created the HNP in 1994, but the force was allowed to dwindle to 3,000 members before being rebuilt by the U.N. to the current level of 7,000 with a goal of 14,000 in 2011. Despite nearly two decades of international assistance, the HNP remains dysfunctional, corrupt and incapable of controlling crime and maintaining public order without the presence of U.N. forces. Included in the State Department's still unannounced policy review were plans for reforming the HNP development program. Hopefully, this review will provide the impetus and funding for change. Needed is the redesign and expansion of the HNP into a national security force with appropriate air, border and coastal control capability. In particular, the HNP, which was modeled on U.S. municipal police departments, needs a gendarmerie or constabulary force that is trained and equipped to handle civil disorder and to rapidly deploy to trouble spots around the country. The HNP must be equipped and trained to control the growing volume of narcotics trafficking from South America to the U.S. through the island. Haiti does yet not have a domestic "drug problem," but the threat that drug money and foreign criminals will exploit Haiti's current weakness to take over areas of the country is real and must be prevented.

Achieving a Sustainable Economy and Social Wellbeing

As humanitarian requirements are fulfilled, an effective reconstruction effort in Haiti must immediately target the twin problems of unemployment and poverty. Removal of rubble and the rebuilding of transportation infrastructure, housing, businesses and government buildings will provide jobs, but will also draw people from the countryside into the already overcrowded and slum-ridden cities. After the earthquake, people streamed from the cities into the countryside where there was less damage, and food and water was available. Efforts should be made to create incentives for people to remain in the rural areas through programs to improve agricultural production and provide services such as health care and basic education.

Historically, a major obstacle to Haiti's development has been an absence of attention to its rural economy. Prior to the imposition of international sanctions on Haiti in the early 1990s, Haiti's farms were prosperous and a source of employment, food and financial resources. The sanctions are gone, but the damage done must now be reversed through programs that provide investment in rural infrastructure (roads and bridges), promote rice and other food production, and encourage cash crops such as mangoes that already have found a ready U.S. market. Programs such as a Haitian youth service corps for rural areas should be pursued as a means of providing employment and skill training for the vast army of unemployed young people. Such programs should be coupled with microcredit programs, particularly for women, and programs that financially reward families for ensuring that children attend school and receive regular health care.

Natural disasters create major disruptions in familial and community support networks on which the poor depend for survival. In the case of Haiti, both the rich and poor have been dislocated, and the smooth and equitable provision of temporary housing is critical to ensure that families and communities are able to stay together and that schools, health care facilities and other services are situated in ways that contribute to social inclusion. Men and women, young and old should be a part of the consultation process when designing and evaluating food distribution, food for work programs, employment generation, microfinance and business reconstruction programs. The same approach should also apply to construction of permanent housing that will provide living environments that meet minimum international standards. Security for women and children is of particular importance in all aspects of disaster recovery. The provision of reproductive health care services and psychological trauma counseling are particularly critical in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Establishing Stable Governance

The destruction of the presidential palace, the parliament and numerous ministries reduced Haiti's government to isolated meetings of leaders in the homes of surviving officials. Even before the earthquake, Haiti's government was ineffective in providing basic services and was deeply affected by incompetence and corruption. President Preval's leadership style — which avoids public appearances and giving speeches — has fed the impression among Haitians that their government has disappeared in this crisis.

In truth, the massive destruction and human suffering caused by the earthquake was due to the absence of good governance. The failure to establish and enforce building codes and zoning restrictions allowed the construction of flimsy, multistory buildings on unstable hillsides. The lack of an indigenous response to the earthquake was due to government's failure to develop a national disaster management system and develop the means to provide emergency services to people in crisis. This failure to provide effective governance was exacerbated by the international community's practice of funneling financial and material assistance through foreign NGOs rather than through the government. Haiti has been called the "Republic of NGOs" with perhaps as many as 6,000 private agencies serving a population of nine million. These organizations recruit educated Haitians and provide higher salaries and better working conditions than the government. They also outperform the government, which is hampered by outdated and restrictive laws and regulations, antiquated administrative structures, and widespread corruption.

Unfortunately, the massive inflow of international assistance is likely to expand the size and reach of the NGO community in the rush to provide assistance and restore services. The Haitian government's need for time to reconstitute itself before it can undertake operations will compound the problem. Only if the U.S. and U.N. make a concerted effort to stand up to the Haitian government authority and almost force it to function can indigenous governance have a chance in this environment. In this regard, it will be critically important to obtain Haitian participation in setting priorities and in strategic planning for recovery. This may be achieved by providing development funding through the Haitian government budget. From the outset, international assistance should include an intensive effort focused on strengthening Haiti's budgeting capacity and public finance system, which is a precondition for almost all Haitian government-led public functions, including security, essential services and social wellbeing, the rule of law and a sustainable economy. As soon as key elements of the public finance system meet minimum standards for accountability, an initially small but gradually increasing amount of international assistance should be provided in the form of direct budget support to the Haitian government and those of its institutions that have met the minimum standards. In many cases, the magnitude of the destruction will provide an

opportunity for a fresh start in addressing longstanding national problems. This opening should be exploited before poorly constructed multistoried buildings, hillside shantytowns and other improvised solutions that previously characterized Haiti reappear.

Promoting the Rule of Law

Prior to the earthquake the focal point for judicial reform in Haiti was the Haitian Justice Group, which brought together Haitian authorities with international donors, including USIP. The Justice Group had taken promising steps toward improving the rule of law throughout the country. Today, the status of group and many of its Haitian members is unknown. Also unknown is the extent of the damage to the Haitian judicial system both in terms of the loss of personnel and the destruction of essential infrastructure. The ministry of justice collapsed, but the minister of justice survived. Courthouses around the country have been heavily damaged. The national prisons in Port-au-Prince sustained structural damage that allowed 4,367 prisoners to escape, including former gang leaders. The fact that the judicial system has ceased to function impedes efforts to restore security since police have no place to incarcerate offenders or for judicial authorities to decide cases.

The dearth of judicial actors and the debilitation of judicial infrastructure redoubled the problems that Haiti experienced before the earthquake. Haitian courts were notorious for corruption and for failing to process cases in a timely manner. As a result, Haitian detention facilities were clogged with people held in pretrial detention who in many cases were never officially charged. In the midst of this massive disaster management operation, there is a need to create institutions to handle emergency rule of law and security challenges. Longer term issues are also pertinent. Donors and national partners have already heavily invested in resuscitating the justice system. Much of the infrastructure that was built with international assistance lies in ruins. Some justice personnel trained with the support of donors have been lost. A justice sector strategy developed by the U.N. and approved by the Haitian government was in place but will need to be amended to respond to the new reality. National and international partners will need to recommit additional energy and resources to building a stronger rule of law in Haiti.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The catastrophic scale of Haiti's disaster was the result of social as well as geological factors. The combination of poverty, poor governance, absence of rule of law, and ubiquitous social exclusion left Haiti extremely vulnerable. Haiti's recovery should aim to correct factors that left Haitian society unprepared to deal with the impact of a natural disaster.

The first recommendation is to reduce the risk of future natural disasters. Each component of the Haitian recovery framework should identify the roles and responsibilities of the Haitian government, the Haitian people, and the international community in reconstruction and development to reduce the impact of future natural disasters.

The second recommendation is to develop a clear approach to conflict sensitivity. Extreme social inequalities are the root causes of Haiti's chronic civil strife. The processes of disaster response and recovery generally reinforce existing inequalities, since those with education and capital are better placed to gain employment and obtain benefits. Conflict sensitive approaches ensure broad-based participation in disaster recovery planning and implementation.

The third recommendation is that recovery and reconstruction planning be gender sensitive. The strategies for reaching men and women, boys and girls in these vulnerable predicaments must consider designing programs with equitable access to food, shelter, medicine, jobs and education.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This report was prepared in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2009. It represents the views of USIP staff members involved in the Institute's Haiti program, which has held public forums on Haiti, conducted conflict resolution training for Haitian civil society and provided legal assistance to Haiti's government. Robert Perito, director of the Haiti program, prepared the report. Contributors to the Peace Brief included Colette Rausch, Vivienne O'Connor, Mary Hope Schwoebel, Kathleen Kuehnast and Jeremy Pam.

Recovery programs should seize the opportunity presented by the current crisis to redress the inequalities that make large segments of the Haitian population vulnerable to ongoing natural disasters. It should also not repeat the past practice of providing Haiti with just enough relief to tide the country over until next disaster.



United States Institute of Peace

1200 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036
202.457.1700

www.usip.org

USIP provides the analysis, training and tools that prevent and end conflicts, promotes stability and professionalizes the field of peacebuilding.

For media inquiries, contact the office of Public Affairs and Communications, 202.429.4725