
Aid to Haiti: Reconstruction Amidst Political Uncertainty

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Theme: Following the 20 March 2011 elections, Haiti faces a potential political stalemate whilst confronting the massive reconstruction needs created by last year's earthquake.

Summary: The electoral process started more than half a year ago and is being strongly influenced by the international community. Historically, election campaigns in Haiti have fomented instability and, under the conditions resulting from the 2010 earthquake, the level of risk is high. Besides, many organisations have criticised the government for its lack of leadership in addressing pressing issues of relief, relocation and reconstruction. This paper analyses the effects of the political situation on aid effectiveness, good governance and the strategies of the international community.

Analysis: Haiti is at a highly critical political moment with the end of René Préval's Presidency. A first round of presidential and legislative elections took place on 28 November 2010 amidst complex post-earthquake conditions and only 22% of eligible voters participated. The international community and the Haitian government forged ahead with constitutionally-mandated elections. However, the government did not adequately update voter lists and changes in the location of polling stations gave rise to frustration among the citizenry. There were numerous allegations of electoral fraud. After a mission by a special team from the Organisation of American States (OAS), the government's Provisional Election Council (CEP) passed the centre-right candidate Myrlande Manigat and the extreme-right Michel Martelly on to the 20 March presidential run-off, with official results to be released on 16 April. While elections always seem to coincide with instability and violence in Haiti, the return of ex-Presidents Jean-Claude ('Baby Doc') Duvalier and Jean Bertrand-Aristide, two key political figures in Haiti, did not help to make the prospects look any better. Nevertheless, balloting turned out to be mostly peaceful.

The political cycle that started more than half a year ago is highly charged and strongly influenced by the international community. Furthermore, many organisations have criticised the government for its lack of leadership in addressing pressing issues of relief, relocation and reconstruction, as well as for focusing excessive attention on political manoeuvres. In addition to this 'distracted' government, the political landscape includes a multi-stakeholder, multi-national Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) that was very slow to take off and carry out its mandate, and a UN stabilisation force that is still taking

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the lead on security. This paper looks at the effects of this fraught political environment on aid programmes in Haiti.

Internal Politics

After the departure of long-time dictator Duvalier in 1986, Haiti experienced two periods of military rule (1986-90 and 1991-94), with only two Presidents having been democratically elected: Jean-Bertrand Aristide and René Préval. Only Préval completed his full term in office (1996-2001). For the first time in 20 years, electoral power is slipping away from the traditional pole, the supposedly left-wing Lavalas and Lespwa (now INITE) parties. Candidates from the centre-right and extreme-right now dominate the political stage and count on the strong support of various groups.

In the run-up to the voting, Myrlande Manigat received support primarily from the elite and the intellectual class, as she herself is a highly respected scholar and vice rector of the private Kiskeya University. Among her supporters were voters over the age of 40, who comprise approximately 40% of the second-round electorate. Women, who account for 51% of the population, identify easily with her and some surveys showed that they were ready to vote for her.

Michel Martelly, on the other hand, enjoyed the support of the young (those old enough to vote), another large voting bloc, as they identify with the Compas music of the ex-singer, who performed as 'Sweet Micky'. His electoral base also includes branches of the ex-*Tonton Macoutes* (the Duvalier family's dreaded secret police) and former officers of the Haitian army, which Aristide disbanded in 1994.

Initial, unofficial electoral results suggest a decisive Martelly victory. Reports also indicate a somewhat higher voter turnout than during the first round.

Jude Celestin was the first-round presidential candidate who received the superficial support of Préval loyalists, without a strong popular base. Initially, the CEP listed him as runner-up to Manigat in the first-round balloting. The OAS report said that, in fact, Martelly finished second and Celestin third. Most Haitians view the CEP, the key actor during elections, as a discredited body that lacks legitimacy. Twelve of the 19 presidential candidates accused the CEP President, Gaillot Dorsainvil, of orchestrating the fraud. Of the nine CEP members, one resigned and four others have refused to sign off on the official results of the first round. The Council is reputed to be manipulated by President Préval and his INITE party. Furthermore, the CEP announced the second-round presidential candidates without giving out their first-round vote totals. Both run-off candidates have also expressed their discontent with the CEP. Martelly called for the removal of its President and Director, while Manigat asked for a change in the body's management structure.

With international and national attention focused on the presidential candidates, the alleged fraud and the OAS investigation, the CEP quietly tallied the votes for the legislative seats and –surprisingly– Préval's INITE party captured a significant number of seats in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Although several seats in both Houses of the National Assembly had to be filled during the second electoral round, INITE is guaranteed a majority in each chamber. This means that the new President will have little decision-making power compared to the legislature. Haitians widely assume that the President holds the ultimate authority in the country; however, in fact most decisions are voted on or vetoed in the Parliament. So there is a strong likelihood of a political stand-off.

The international donor community provided US\$29 million towards the cost of the first round of elections, showing a strong commitment to the democratic process and to Haiti's first democratic political transition since 2001. However, such a large sum and the donors' fundamental interest in stability may have thwarted the process. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, showed up unexpectedly just before the announcement of the official results of the first round of voting. The most significant move by the international community was the US decision to deny visas to several Haitian officials until the government implemented the OAS mission's report recommendations. Adding to the disrepute and uncertainty about the electoral process, the head of the OAS mission in Haiti spoke in an interview of the blatant foreign interference in Haiti's internal affairs.

In the electoral processes over the last six years, the UN stabilisation mission (MINUSTAH) has always provided logistic and security support. However, although MINUSTAH also had a prominent role and a strong mandate to assist in the political process before the earthquake, it is now being reduced to just a security force and has become a weak actor in the country's reconstruction.

The processes and institutions involved in the elections, along with external actors, have generated a great deal of volatility. In contrast, Haiti's citizens have sought change and better living conditions through the exercise of their political and civil rights and responsibilities. In the future, if electoral processes in Haiti are to have both credibility and legitimacy, then there must be improvements in voter lists, the location of polling stations (as recommended by OAS) and the independence of the CEP, as well as less external interference and more transparent coalition-building by contending politicians.

Aid in a Political Vacuum

The political uncertainty and discontent of the last few months has contributed to the extremely slow pace of post-earthquake reconstruction. Nearly 1 million Haitians continue to live in flimsy tents, more than 200,000 are under threat of eviction and almost 90% of the earthquake debris still awaits removal. According to both Haitian and donor government sources, the unstable situation and clear lack of donor confidence in the Préval Administration mean that donors are waiting to see what will emerge from the elections before disbursing the bulk of their reconstruction pledges.

That said, the political situation has not had much of a strategic impact on donors' reconstruction policies. Most donors have continued to work with the Haitian government and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) as usual, without re-directing aid to one or the other. As one donor-country official put it, 'We know Haiti is full of surprises, we just don't know when, how and who, so we will deal with the surprise when it comes'. Without naming anyone, donors, governments and the international community are nervous about Aristide's return; his party was not allowed to participate in the elections and his supporters have staged street demonstrations.

Long-time donor practices and poor governance in Haiti have created substantial barriers to effective aid. Since the late 1980s donors have channelled a large portion of their aid through international NGOs or the private sector, and have provided the government with little in the way of an unconditional budget. Also, donors have repeatedly pledged substantial reconstruction aid following natural disasters and political-economic crises but have then failed to deliver, thereby undermining the aid effectiveness principle of

predictability.¹ For example, in April 2009 donors promised nearly US\$400 million to help rebuild the damage from four severe tropical storms (this was only about a quarter of the assessed needs). One year later, the implementing agencies (including the government, NGOs and others) had received only 30% of the funds.²

Similarly, donors have only provided 30% of the US\$5.5 billion they pledged for post-earthquake reconstruction in 2010 and 2011.³ In addition to their unease about Haiti's political situation and accountability capacity, donors are holding back funds because of concerns about Haiti's absorptive capacity and because they face pressures at home to cut back on development aid budgets.

For its part, the Haitian state faced severe capacity constraints even prior to the 2010 earthquake, which destroyed much of the government infrastructure and killed at least 20% of the country's civil servants.⁴ The government has little ability to provide services to citizens: the state's presence outside metropolitan Port-au-Prince is limited to tax collection offices. Public clinics, schools and agricultural extension offices are few and far between in the countryside, where most Haitians live. Too many educated and capable Haitians have either left the country or have stayed on to work for the private sector, donor agencies, international organisations or NGOs rather than the government, which pays much lower salaries.⁵

In Oxfam's view, when donors provide aid in ways that strengthen the compact between effective governments and active citizens, development assistance supports recipient governments' efforts to meet citizens' needs and also helps citizens to hold their government accountable. The condition of that compact in Haiti today is somewhere between fragile and nonexistent. Since Haiti's independence in 1804, governance has focused less on the pursuit of the common good than on preserving and enhancing the power, privileges and position of the country's elite.⁶ Transparency International ranked Haiti among the world's five most corrupt countries in 2009.⁷ In such a setting, low-income Haitians have a profound lack of faith in their government's ability to help them improve their lives.⁸ The widespread perception of electoral fraud further undermines the citizens' confidence in public institutions.

¹ Robert Maguire (2009), 'Haiti after the Donors' Conference: A Way Forward', *USIP Special Report*, nr 232, US Institute of Peace, Washington; Robert Fatton (2010), 'Hope Amidst Devastation: Towards a New Haitian State', 20/II/2010, <http://www.ssrc.org/features/pages/haiti-now-and-next/1338/1330/>; Mark Schneider, International Crisis Group, US Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee Testimony, 4/II/2010; interview with Yvenock Alcide, Director, Agro-Presse, Pétiion-ville, Haiti, 27/II/2011.

² UN Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti (2010), 'Washington Donors' Conference for Haiti April 2009, Status of Pledges at 29 March 2010', http://s3.amazonaws.com/haiti_production/assets/7/Haiti_Washington_pledges_Mar_29_original.pdf, accessed 24/II/2011.

³ UN Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti (2011), 'New York Conference Recovery Pledge Status and Modalities as of February 2011',

http://www.haitispecialenvoy.org/download/International_Assistance/6-NY_pledge_status_Feb_2011.pdf.

⁴ UN Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti (2011), 'Key Statistics', http://haitispecialenvoy.org/key_statistics, accessed 24/II/2011; Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2010), *Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti*, IASC, Geneva; Robert M. Perito (2010), 'Haiti After the Quake: Six Months and Counting', *Peacebrief*, nr 41, US Institute for Peace, Washington; Intermón Oxfam, 'Haití en su Laberinto', *Informe de Intermón Oxfam*, nr 29, Intermón Oxfam, Barcelona.

⁵ Maguire (2009).

⁶ Robert Fatton (2002), *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder.

⁷ Transparency International (2009), *Global Corruption Report 2009*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁸ See, for example, Marc J. Cohen *et al.* (2008), 'Social Policy in a Fragile State: Institutional Issues in the

Since the earthquake, the number of NGOs working on relief, recovery and reconstruction activities has reached an estimated 4,000, according to knowledgeable Haitian sources. This plethora of relief and development actors operates without much coordination or a clear sectoral and territorial division of labour. Observers agree that many donors and NGOs have excellent projects but that, in the absence of a harmonised approach, the overall result is an incoherent “cacophony” that does not align itself with government development plans.⁹

The humanitarian response to the earthquake had similar characteristics. Rapid and massive international intervention unquestionably saved lives and prevented feared disease epidemics –the cholera outbreak later in 2010 started far from the earthquake zone or the main concentrations of displaced persons–. But the earthquake response failed in important ways to comply with the principles of good humanitarian donorship that most donor governments have endorsed: there were too many actors, poor coordination, lack of transparency in expenditure, little emphasis on participation or Haitian ownership and inadequate attention to accountability to beneficiaries.¹⁰

The donors’ reconstruction assistance has so far not always supported key Haitian priorities. Residents of the earthquake zone have clearly indicated that reconstruction should put job creation at the top of its agenda.¹¹ However, most camp dwellers and Haitians displaced in rural areas have yet to find sustainable livelihoods. In addition, according to the IHRC’s Executive Director, Gabriel Verret, achieving the government’s goal of removing 40% of the earthquake rubble by the end of 2011 will require US\$200 million in aid, but so far donors have only provided around 25% of the amount. Yet without rubble removal it remains impossible to build new housing for displaced Haitians. In general, Verret told Oxfam, donors have provided the requested funding for agriculture, infrastructure (especially roads) and education but have lagged behind in providing the needed resources for debris removal, shelter construction, health and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).¹²

In Oxfam’s view, certain approaches to aid can be helpful to give recipients a share of control, including sector-wide approaches, pooled funds and development-focused budget support. In reviewing donors’ approaches to aid to agriculture and health in Haiti, we found that the US, Canada and the EU provide assistance to these sectors primarily through projects that are implemented by international NGOs or for-profit consulting firms, rather than through budget support. On the positive side, international implementing NGOs often lead consortiums that include Haitian NGOs, but it is not always clear whether these partnerships lead to sustainable capacity development for the Haitian organisations involved.

Spain is the largest donor to the health-related WASH sector and provides resources through multiple channels –support to Spanish NGOs, contributions via the Inter-American Development Bank and bilateral agreements, working with Haiti’s National

Implementation of a Conditional Cash Transfer Program in Haiti’, paper presented at the 49th annual convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, 28/III/2008,
http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/3/4/4/pages253445/p253445-1.php.

⁹ Interviews with Haitian government officials and civil society organisation leaders, 26/II/-10/II/2011.

¹⁰ DARA (2010), *The Humanitarian Response Index 2010: The Problems of Politicisation*, DARA, Madrid.

¹¹ Raphael Yves Pierre (2010), *Haitians Talk About Rebuilding the Country after the January 12, 2010 Earthquake*, Oxfam International, Pétiion-ville, <http://www.oxfamamerica.org/files/april-2010-oxfam-haiti-public-opinion-poll-english.pdf>.

¹² Interview in Port-au-Prince, 8/II/2011.

Directorate for Water Supply and Sanitation (DINEPA)–. Such sectoral specialisation and the use of multiple aid modalities are in keeping with the principles of effective aid but lack a balanced strategic framework and a long-term predictable budget to be negotiated with the new elected government.

Haiti's contentious political situation reinforces the disorderly recovery and reconstruction processes. In order to improve coordination and ensure well-managed reconstruction, the Haitian government established the IHRC in April 2010. The international community strongly supported this move. The Commission includes representatives of the Haitian government, the business community, trade unions and donors. International and Haitian NGOs, as well as the Diaspora, have non-voting representatives. The IHRC's mission, according to its website, 'shall be to conduct strategic planning and coordination and implement resources from bilateral and multilateral donors, NGOs and the business sector, with all necessary transparency and accountability'.¹³ Its mandate also includes providing technical assistance to government ministries in order to strengthen their capacity.¹⁴

However, Haitian government officials, civil society organisation spokespersons, international NGO staff and even some donor representatives agree that, so far, the Commission is just one more actor in the vast cast of Haiti's development drama, and has yet to bring greater order to the process. There is also concern about the Commission's lack of accountability to the Haitian state: even though it was created under Haitian law, the IHRC is not subject to government audits. Donor-country governments obtain seats on the Commission's board based solely on the volume of resources that they provide; whether their aid advances country-led processes and the development of a consensus between the Haitian state and its citizens are not considerations. Some of the more critical commentators say that creation of the IHRC represents a surrender of state sovereignty, or even a kind of international trusteeship over the country.¹⁵

The legislation creating the IHRC limits its existence to a period of 18 months, which will end in mid-October 2011. After that, a new national Authority for the Development of Haiti is supposed to take the place of the Commission. Given the slow progress in reconstruction and in bringing the development authority into being, it seems likely that the Haitian government will exercise its option to extend the life of the IHRC. Donor sources believe that Martelly would be willing to do this: he has said that the IHRC should be judged on the results it produces. For her part, Manigat had indicated that the continuity of the Haitian state and the upholding its legal obligations were her top priorities vis-à-vis the Commission; this suggests that she would have worked with the IHRC for at least its 18-month tenure.

Moving forward, if Haiti's reconstruction is to succeed, the government will need to take a more forceful leadership role and donors will need to provide assistance to strengthen state capacity, while supporting Haitian ownership of the process.

¹³ <http://www.cirh.ht/sites/ihrc/en/About%20Us/Pages/Mission%20Statement.aspx>.

¹⁴ Oxfam International (2011), 'From Relief to Recovery: Supporting Good Governance in Post-Earthquake Haiti', *Briefing Paper*, nr 142, Oxfam International, Oxford.

¹⁵ Interviews in Haiti, 26/I/-10/II/2011; Professor Alex Dupuy, remarks at the November 2010 Haitian Studies Conference.

Conclusions

What Next?

After the election, there is a strong risk that priorities might change. Donors are encouraging Haiti's political class to see to it that there is a peaceful democratic transition and continuity around the IHRC, the National Reconstruction Plan, the multi-donor Haitian Reconstruction Fund and the priorities and projects that are already in place. The inauguration of the new President will be Haiti's fourth change of government in seven years, following Aristide's 2004 departure from the country. Key policies have shifted with each new administration. UN officials affirm that the lack of government continuity is an obstacle to institution building and ownership is a major issue. It is still unknown how the incoming President will act or react to current plans, however well-grounded these may be in past experience. Readjustments and yet another shift in priorities as a new government takes office may well slow down the progress that Haiti desperately needs.

The new Haitian government must break the political stalemate and take charge of post-earthquake reconstruction, articulating a vision and a strategy that a majority of Haitians can support. In order to be viewed as legitimate by Haitian citizens, the government must undertake a much broader process of consultation and policy dialogue than it has done previously; for too long, policy making has been a matter by and for the elite. All development actors need to consult and engage Haitian citizens, so that programmes reflect the priorities that citizens have identified. It is also crucial that the government, with donor support, accelerates the process of decentralisation, making public services available in the rural areas and smaller towns.

Donors must increase their support for the institutional strengthening of the government, accelerate the transfer of pledged aid in a transparent way and harmonise their actions in keeping with the Paris Principles. The IHRC, working closely with government ministries and the international community, has a vital role to play in ensuring a well-coordinated process.

The United Nations should prioritise the protection of civilians, particularly vulnerable people living in camps, in MINUSTAH's mandate. In connection with this objective, MINUSTAH should increase its focus on assisting the Haitian National Police to become a professional police force that upholds the rule of law and protects citizens from crime.

International NGOs need to cooperate closely with other development actors and the government to ensure the coherence of reconstruction and development activities. They also need to strengthen their partnerships with Haitian civil society organisations, helping to build the capacity of local partners to plan and carry out programmes and engage in policy debates.

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