

“Burning Issues for Haiti’s Recovery”

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Thanks for the opportunity to be with you today to talk about your efforts to support recovery and reconstruction from the devastation of the 12 January 2010 earthquake. You’ve asked me to give a short overview of some of the burning issues in the recovery effort to serve as background to your development of advocacy strategies both in the US and in Haiti.

In a nutshell: the recovery process is not going well and reconstruction has barely started. Too many people are continuing to live in extremely precarious conditions. About 1.3 million displaced persons are living under tents and tarps in about 1300 settlement sites.¹ On the financial side, more than seven months after the earthquake, the 22 top donors from the Haiti Donor’s conference who pledged \$5.997 billion for 2010 and 2011 had disbursed \$538.3 million by August, about 20% of the amount for 2010 and less than 10% of the total amount pledged for the first two years.² And the Haiti Reconstruction Fund has so far only received \$66.8 million.³ After every major disaster, there is a gap between the amounts pledged and the amounts actually received, but the gap is particularly large in the case of Haiti. The sheer scale of the damage and the unprecedented flood of funds in the days following the earthquake gave rise to a hope that this time the recovery effort could move more quickly. But not only has that not happened, the recovery efforts on the ground have been slower than usual – slower than for the 2004 tsunami or the 2005 Pakistan effort.

Why are things moving so slowly in Haiti? The political will of the donors seems to be high and the UN and NGOs have sent experienced and skilled staff to the country, but particular difficulties in four areas are impeding Haiti’s recovery: governance, displacement, housing and violence. Problems in these four areas didn’t suddenly emerge after the earthquake – rather they are rooted in Haiti’s history. While they are particularly crucial now, they have always been problems. The four challenges are all inter-related – when people are displaced, it makes it harder for them to vote; poor housing contributes to violence, etc. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to any of them.

* With thanks to Daniel Petz for his research assistance.

¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Haiti, Humanitarian Bulletin # 9*, 17 August, 2010, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/MYAI-88F4MX-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/MYAI-88F4MX-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)

² Office of the Special Envoy for Haiti, *International Assistance for Haiti, Key Facts as of August, 2010*, http://s3.amazonaws.com/haiti_production/assets/22/Overall_Financing_Key_Facts_original.pdf

³ Haiti Reconstruction Fund, Pledging Donors, <http://www.haitireconstructionfund.org/hrf/members>

Governance

Haiti has a turbulent political history: slavery and rebellion, occupation by the US, tyranny by two father-son dictators (Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier, Papa Doc and Baby Doc). Finally democratic elections in 1990, followed by a military coup a year later, ushering in a period of UN peacekeeping efforts – six different missions between 1993 and the present. Since independence in 1804, Haiti has had 55 presidents (or chief executives), of whom only nine completed full presidential terms.⁴ But in the last few years, things have been looking up for the country, as indicated by the relatively free election of Preval as president in 2006 and improving economic and security indicators although a series of four major storms hit Haiti in 2008, killing more than 800 and leaving a million people in need of assistance.

In reviewing evaluations of reconstruction efforts following major natural disasters over the past decade or so, the following elements emerge over and over again as central to successful rebuilding.

- Strong national government willing and able to play leadership role
- Public trust in government and its institutions
- Strong government-private sector collaboration
- Solid long-term planning; in the best case scenario, a clear vision of how disaster reconstruction fits into long-term development
- Effective coordination of the reconstruction effort
- A focus on community organization and capacity-building of local organizations
- Sufficient resources to ensure that minimum needs of communities are met and that funds are available for the long haul

On all of these measures, except perhaps the last one, Haiti is in a very difficult position. The fact that the Haitian earthquake was centered near the nation's capital meant that government, UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were all badly affected and unable to get relief programs up and running quickly. The last time a major earthquake struck a capital city was in Mexico City in 1985 when casualties were far less than in Haiti. It is also important to note that Haitian governments for the past 40 years have concentrated resources and power in Port-au-Prince – to the detriment of rural areas and small towns -- and that the city suffered serious infrastructure and social problems long before the earthquake. Most of the attention in the recovery effort thus far has focused on the national level of government – which is very complicated itself – but municipal authorities are also crucial to long-term recovery.

The lack of government capacity before the earthquake was a defining feature of Haitian political life as noted above. A turbulent political history, shortage of competent leadership (or a system which ensured that competent leaders would not attain power), a proliferation of

⁴ Theo Buss, Haiti: Foreign Aid in the Balance: why foreign aid has failed and what we can do about it, Brookings University Press, 2008.

political parties, and lack of public trust (or indeed of expectations that government would respond) meant that the government simply did not have the capacity to coordinate – much less manage – the response to the earthquake.

Moreover, the recovery process has been characterized by a lack of long-term planning due to the magnitude of the disaster, competing political agendas, and inadequate coordination mechanisms. The Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, co-chaired by Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and President Bill Clinton, is tasked with overseeing reconstruction and development projects for the first two years after the earthquake. It is guided by a Board, which includes Haitian and non-Haitian stakeholders in reconstruction efforts. The Commission had its second session on 17 August 2010 and agreed on projects worth \$1.6 billion, of which it says that about \$1 billion have already been committed, but only \$66.8 million has been deposited by donors in the Multi-Donor Trust Fund.⁵ The commission has finally been assigned an executive director, but there are still some 30 positions to fill. In the development of the Interim Cooperation Framework or the plan of action, there was not much consultation with Haitian stakeholders, in part because of the lack of capacity of the Haitian government. A group of NGOs and grassroots organizations filed their own 'Gender Shadow Report of the 2010 Haiti PDNA'⁶ to present an alternative vision of development for Haiti and to raise awareness on the lack of consultation by the Post Disaster Needs Assessment presented by the government. Having a secure and predictable source of funding is crucial – otherwise plans are continually in flux, projects are scaled back, public expectations are disappointed, etc. But aid is more volatile when there is poor governance; donors' perceptions that money is well-spent is crucial. "The stronger the grip the recipient country has on its aid process, the better equipped it will be to coordinate donors."⁷ Haiti is in a particularly weak position in this respect. The main reason that so few funds have been disbursed is the lack of government capacity to spend the funds effectively.

It is against this backdrop that the first round of elections for both parliament and presidency are scheduled for November 28. In the last parliamentary elections in 2006, 60% of the population voted in the first round and 28.8 % voted in the decisive second round. " Voting was hampered by late poll openings, delays in distributing ballots and a shortage of election workers. Four people were reportedly killed on polling day in crowd crushes."⁸ The upcoming elections are marred by uncertainties as voters many have lost their identification cards, voter registries have been buried in the rubble, polling places have been destroyed, and many people are displaced and living outside of their districts. Thirty-four candidates registered for the

⁵ Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, "Interim Haiti Recovery Commission Announces Over \$1.6 Billion in New Project Proposals, Outlines Priorities", Press Release, 17 August 2010, <http://www.cirh.ht/index.jsp?sid=3&nid=9&y=2010&m=7&d=17>

⁶ A Gender Shadow Report of the 2010 Haiti PDNA, See at: http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5095/images/HaitiGenderShadowReport_preliminary_version.pdf

⁷ Harry Masyrafah and Jock MJA McKean, *Post-tsunami aid effectiveness in Aceh: Proliferation and Coordination in Reconstruction*, Brookings Wolfensohn Center for Development, Working Paper 6, November 2008, p. 24.

⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Haiti – Last Election - Chambre des Députés (Chamber of Deputies)", http://www.ipu.org/parline/reports/2137_E.htm

presidential elections, 19 of which the election commission deemed eligible. Haitian elections are known for “too many candidates, most of them profoundly insignificant; too many one-man parties, or ‘groupuscules’, as they are called”⁹ and there are no indications that the coming elections will be any different. But this time, the candidates are spending lots of money – the Miami Herald reports that candidates will need \$10-20 million each in the presidential campaign, up from \$3-\$6 million in the last elections in 2006.¹⁰ Elections in Haiti are volatile events in the best of times, but with the recovery process going slowly and the fact that candidates will be spending millions on their campaigns, there is a potential for conflict.

Internal displacement and slum dwellers

When people are displaced, they lose not only their homes, but often also their social networks and access to public services. In recognition of their increased vulnerability resulting from displacement, many international and national organizations prioritize working with IDPs over other communities affected by conflict or disasters. But this is particularly problematic in Haiti where there is a possibility of tension, or violence, between IDPs and other slum dwellers. The inhabitants of the slums or *bidonvilles* in Port-au-Prince have not been identified as victims of the earthquake and are not therefore targeted for aid. This creates resentment and conflict between the groups. As one observer in Haiti noted, “even the provision of latrines is a symbol of significant social upward mobility.” It also raises questions about how internal displacement is defined. Many slumdwellers argue that they are long-term IDPs who migrated from the country to the city in the 1970s as the rural agricultural economy collapsed (largely due to international trade policies, resulting in dumping of subsidized rice.) An estimated two-thirds of Port-au-Prince’s population were slum dwellers before the earthquake, a percentage which probably increased after earthquake.

Latest numbers show that there are more than 1350 spontaneous settlement sites for internally displaced persons in the earthquake affected areas. By early August, IOM had registered IDPs from 602 sites representing 964,381 individuals.¹¹ The registration process itself has been flawed and there are concerns that some have been double-counted. When IDPs receive more assistance than other urban poor, there is pressure to be registered as an IDP in order to access assistance. Moreover, there are no good estimates on the number of IDPs who have returned to their communities and different organizations use different criteria for estimating how many people are displaced, resulting in large disparities in figures. While the

⁹ Amy Wilentz, “Running on the Ruins, Haiti prepares to elect a president”, The New Yorker, 6 September 2010, page 26

¹⁰ <http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/09/02/1805922/in-haiti-where-money-is-scarce.html#ixzz0yqvKVxsJ>

¹¹ Haiti Camp Coordination Camp Management Cluster, IOM, *Registration Update, February 25th – July 31st, 2010*, 2 August 2010, http://cccmhaiti.googlegroups.com/web/Registration+Update_02+08+10.pdf?gda=b2DvTVMAAACK-Tc7XQZwImTUbkanfGdfex0KQC9UMFKagr-zReDE3qN-Ovebs6-BrQnOc4TDTyZlr1cy6W0T2fGKv4Xn3w2rMrYifh3RmGHD4v9PaZfDexVi73jml0822J6Z5KZsXFo&gsc=mnGtBgsAABymRhzk-yU6wm56qVsvkJs

IOM tracking matrix suggests that there are over 2 million IDPs, this estimate needs to be treated with caution.

The distinction between the homeless and the displaced reveals a gray area in our definitions. Many Haitians' homes were destroyed by the earthquake, but they have remained on or near their property. In other words, they are homeless but not displaced. Most of those displaced are also homeless. But the word 'homeless' implies that people owned a home which was subsequently lost. And that is not an accurate assumption in Haiti where many people rented homes from others or held the land through customary land tenure or simply squatted on the margins of urban slums.

The hurricane season poses a grave threat of another disaster. Humanitarian actors have been working hard to provide disaster mitigation measures in many of the IDP camps and some IDPs were even resettled to safer locations. However no one really knows how the tent and tarp cities would withstand a major hurricane. Apart from those living in IDP settlements, thousands of Haitians live in high-risk areas, e.g. ravine dwellers.

While an estimated 500,000 people were displaced from Port-au-Prince to the countryside, which was generally seen as a positive element in that it decreased the pressure on the capital city and offered at least a hint of the possibility of a more de-centralized country in the future, there are reports that some of these IDPs are returning to Port-au-Prince.¹² The government has identified four options for the IDPs: they can return to their homes; they can return with tents to their previous location if the rubble has been cleared; they can stay in proximity sites; or they can remain with host families. The *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* include another durable solution: they can resettle in another part of the country, but there is no indication that this option is being discussed in the Haitian context.

So, displacement has turned out to be a major problem on several levels. We'll turn to the issue of housing in a minute, but I want to point out that the issue of displacement is linked to problems of governance. Historically, urban slums have provided the core votes for all successful presidential candidates since 1990 (Aristide and Preval, twice each.) This means that politicians have an incentive to prioritize projects in urban slums – and have less of an incentive to prioritize IDPs who are less likely to vote in any event.

Housing

In order for IDPs to return, homes must be built – or at least temporary provision made for them until the homes are habitable. Building homes is a very expensive part of reconstruction efforts and there are questions about design (how big? earthquake/hurricane-resistant?), equity (is there a common standard or do some people get better homes? whose houses are rebuilt first?), and planning (where to rebuild? physical relationship to jobs and services?) But

¹² The New York Times, "Rural Haiti Struggles to Absorb Displaced", 16 March 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/17/world/americas/17rural.html>

one of the biggest problems in rebuilding housing is the question of land titles and ownership. While temporary shelters and tents can often be erected on public property or on land rented by private owners, when it comes to transitional or permanent housing, questions of ownership are key. Building homes for people who do not have clear titles to the land is fraught with potential conflict. Similarly compensating people for lost homes can create resentment, particularly when ownership is disputed. Moreover, many of those who lose homes are not homeowners, but rather renters and squatters. Their needs also must be considered in rebuilding plans. In Haiti, the question of land ownership and titles is nightmarishly complex and is the major impediment to large-scale reconstruction of housing.¹³

Displacement is thus tied to housing. And housing is also related to governance as large-scale reconstruction of homes needs to be carefully planned, criteria need to be developed for potential beneficiaries, consultations must be carried out with affected communities, standards need to be developed, and procurement and delivery carefully overseen. These are not areas where the Haitian government has a good track record.¹⁴ Moreover, in all housing reconstruction programs, there are winners and losers and there is potential for resentment and anger at the government for its decisions.

Security

Finally there is the issue of security and the high levels of violence in the country, particularly in urban areas where most of the displaced are living and where as we have seen, there is the potential for conflict between IDPs and slum dwellers. This is also related to governance. The police still haven't recovered from the heavy losses suffered in the earthquake. Presently Haitian national police number 8-9,000 for the entire country (and 1300 registered IDP camps) while MINUSTAH has a police contingent of around 3,000.¹⁵ Berg reported on a survey of IDPs conducted in June-July which found that 75% had hardly ever or never seen any Haitian National Police nor MINUSTAH presence in the camps.¹⁶ The judicial system was also heavily impacted which further complicates efforts to provide security.

¹³ Elizabeth Ferris, Daniel Petz, *Haiti Six Months On*, 12 July 2010, http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2010/0712_haiti_six_months_ferris.aspx

¹⁴“Some international donors have complained that Préval's government keeps changing priorities -first children's needs, then road-building, then security issues such as high rates of crime and kidnapping, leading Préval's government and MINUSTAH to focus on improving security. The Haitian government is frustrated that U.S. and other foreign aid is provided through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) rather than directly to the government. The Préval Administration indicates it wants more accountability by NGOs, so that the government knows what projects are being carried out. Donors are worried about the lack of Haitian capacity to design and implement programs, as well as corruption.

See at: Congressional Research Service, *Haiti: Current Conditions and Congressional Concerns*, 17 June 2009, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40507.pdf>, page 6 f

¹⁵ United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, “Facts and Figures”, 31 July 2010, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/minustah/facts.shtml>

¹⁶ Louis-Alexandre Berg, *Security After the Quake? Addressing Violence and Rape in Haiti*, Presentation at United States Institute of Peace, August 31, 2010

Security is also related to housing. The camps are overcrowded, lack sufficient lighting, and tents offer scant protection from marauding gangs. Conditions are desperately poor and food distribution ended months ago which means that many are desperate for basic resources to survive. The urban slums of Haiti have been notorious for their gangs and violence. Unfortunately, reports are that criminal violence has increased since the earthquake, due in part to the escape of 5136 prisoners in the earthquake (only 627 had been recaptured by July 2010.)¹⁷ Gangs have been consolidated and new gangs have been formed. The infusion of large amounts of relief has led to a growing phenomenon of extortion of aid workers.

Gender-based violence, historically high in Haiti, seems to have increased since the earthquake although it is notoriously underreported. The breakdown of community networks and the stigma around GBV have made it particularly difficult for women to get the support they need to prevent violence or to get care after violence occurs. As in other sectors, the earthquake destroyed the Women's Ministry and some of the top leaders in the National Task Force to Counter Violence against Women lost their lives. At a time when the needs have probably never been greater in Haiti, the Haitian institutions to respond are particularly weak.

Concluding thoughts

I'm aware that I've painted a grim scenario in discussing these four issues and their interconnectedness. But Haiti also has many assets, including a 3-million strong and engaged diaspora, the good will and support of the international community, and strong and vibrant civil society organizations. Success in building back a better Haiti will only be achieved if we build on those strengths and assure that they all work together towards a shared goal. This process will take two ingredients that our current humanitarian and media world is in many instances rather short of but which church-based groups have shown in a lot of circumstances: patience and persistence.

My suggestions for your advocacy areas:

-Keep the big picture in mind, but focus efforts locally. Work with local authorities, community leaders, civil society. Find ways to build capacity of local organizations. Provide support to them in administrative and financial management. Ensure that the plans made are done in full consultation with local partners, even when these processes seem frustratingly slow.

-Regarding housing, while physical reconstruction is needed, consider supporting programs of legal assistance to homeless Haitians to help them deal with complicated questions of land ownership. Consider sponsoring legal clinics for lawyers, paralegals, and others to provide some basic guidance on how to support Haitian landclaims. Work with a local university to organize a national or local conference on land and property issues in Haiti. Making progress on this front will probably move progress along a lot faster than physically constructing a few

¹⁷ Louis-Alexandre Berg, Security After the Quake? Addressing Violence and Rape in Haiti, Presentation at United States Institute of Peace, August 31, 2010

homes. Look at what's worked in other recovery efforts after disasters. For example, after the 2005 Pakistani earthquake, rather than rebuilding houses, UN agencies provided materials to families who rebuilt their own homes.

-With respect to security, supporting police forces is probably not typical of church-based advocacy, but is urgently needed to increase security. I'm certainly not an expert in this issue, but you could educate yourselves on the role of the police and MINUSTAH and work with your congressional representatives to make sure they understand the importance of this issue. By drawing awareness to the reality of the violence in Haiti, you can keep the spotlight on. Work with women's group to promote and strengthen the protection of women and children in IDP settlements.

Above all, for those of you working outside of Haiti keep international attention focused on the country. The world's attention span is notoriously short and Haiti, perhaps more than most countries, has been the object of many promises which didn't materialize. For those of you working in Haiti, work with the civil society organizations and networks which are rooted in the community and find ways to support them.