

Haiti: The slow road to reconstruction

Two years after the earthquake

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Golf Camp, Petionville, Haiti, 2010. Two years after the devastating earthquake, more than half a million Haitians remain displaced and the government has yet to devise a comprehensive resettlement and housing plan. Photo: Julie Gilbert/Oxfam.

In the two years since the devastating earthquake, Haiti's government has still not implemented comprehensive plans to address the key issues of shelter; sustainable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene; and secure livelihoods. Donors have failed to meet UN humanitarian appeals and have delivered less than half of promised reconstruction funds. The international community must renew efforts to bolster the government's capacity to effectively co-ordinate reconstruction, while consulting and engaging with Haitian citizens in the process.

Introduction

The earthquake that hit Haiti on 12 January 2010 resulted in one of the largest and most complex humanitarian emergencies in history.¹ In response, humanitarian agencies undertook one of the biggest and most challenging operations ever, mainly in a densely urbanized area.²

Prior to the earthquake, Haiti suffered from a long-term structural crisis – a ‘crisis of poverty’, as a senior Haitian presidential advisor told Oxfam (see Box 1).³ Nearly 80 per cent of Haitians lived below the poverty line and the country had the worst income inequality in the western hemisphere.⁴ Most economically active people worked either as smallholder farmers or in the informal economy. Gender-based violence was rampant, and women had less access to education and economic opportunities than men.⁵ Since independence in 1804, the Haitian state has maintained the privileges of a small elite at the expense of the majority, leaving what Haitian political scientist Robert Fatton has called a ‘chasm between rulers and ruled, wealthy and poor’.⁶

Box 1: Key facts⁷

• Share of population below national poverty line (2001)	77%
• Share of workforce in self- or informal employment (2010)	80%
• Income share of richest 10% (2001)	48%
• Income share of poorest 10% (2001)	0.7%
• Urban slum population (2007)	70%
• Human Development Index (2011)	158 of 187
• Corruption Perceptions Index (2010)	146 of 178

Two years after the earthquake, over 519,000 Haitians still live in tents and under tarpaulins in 758 camps, mainly in metropolitan Port-au-Prince;⁸ half of the rubble remains uncleared;⁹ cholera has claimed thousands of lives and poses a major public health threat;¹⁰ few Haitians can access basic services;¹¹ much of the workforce is unemployed or underemployed;¹² 45 per cent of the population face food insecurity;¹³ and elections, followed by a political stand-off between the new president and parliament, have impeded reconstruction progress.¹⁴

Emergency relief efforts saved lives and provided basic services to more than a million people, but inadequate progress has since been made in meeting Haitians’ long-term needs. The international community has only slowly delivered the billions of dollars pledged for reconstruction in March 2010, and likewise has fallen short in meeting UN humanitarian appeals. Many NGOs are transitioning from humanitarian to development work, sometimes leaving a service provision gap. The Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) – composed of representatives of the government, civil society, and donors – sought to ensure a coherent reconstruction process, but did little to build government capacity, and during its original 18-month mandate did not help establish its successor, the Authority for the Development of Haiti (ADH).

This briefing note updates Oxfam's 2011 paper, 'From Relief to Recovery', produced one year after the earthquake.¹⁵ It explores the changes needed to put Haiti on course to sustainable reconstruction and development, social justice, and a better future. It focuses specifically on governance issues and the role of Haitian civil society, the government and related bodies (such as the IHRC), donors, and NGOs (national and international) in reconstruction, particularly in ensuring adequate basic service provision (water, sanitation, housing) and sustainable livelihoods (employment opportunities and social protection).

2

An on-going emergency

Between January 2010 and mid-2011, humanitarian agencies provided temporary shelter and free drinking water to over 1.2 million Haitians.¹⁶ They also constructed latrines and showers in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, and provided livelihood support.¹⁷

Some Haitian government agencies also played particularly important roles in the disaster recovery. The National Directorate for Water and Sanitation (Direction Nationale de l'Eau Potable et de l'Assainissement, or DINEPA) shared leadership of the WASH Cluster (the co-ordination body for humanitarian water, sanitation, and hygiene services) with UNICEF.¹⁸ Similarly, the Ministry of Public Health and Population played an important leadership role in combating cholera.¹⁹

Humanitarian agencies have attempted to ensure that assistance has engaged beneficiaries as key actors, rather than treating them as 'victims'. For instance, hygiene promoters and community mobilizers trained beneficiaries in good hygiene so that they could take care of themselves.

The humanitarian response has also attempted to move beyond traditional in-kind food aid to broader livelihood support. In addition to local food aid procurement²⁰ and cash-for-work projects, humanitarian organizations have provided beneficiaries with cash grants to start or maintain small businesses.²¹ Oxfam targeted such transfers to women's micro-enterprises and provided business skills training.²²

Rochelle Laurenceau, an IDP living in a camp in Port-au-Prince's impoverished Carrefour Feuilles neighbourhood, used a grant to start selling snacks in her camp. 'I use the money I earn to send my four children to school', she says. But, she adds, her local women's savings association cannot provide her with enough credit to expand the business.²³

Humanitarian challenges

Despite the achievements, the humanitarian response in Haiti has faced major challenges and limitations. First and foremost, humanitarian assistance is short-term by design and cannot be expected to overcome structural problems of poverty and injustice.

Second, donor response to emergency appeals slackened in 2011 (see Table 1). This has had drastically negative consequences for IDPs. The \$30 million shortfall in the 2011 WASH appeal forced DINEPA and the UN to cut back on regular desludging of camp toilets. Lack of protection funding has hampered prevention of acts of gender-based violence that up to 4 per cent of women IDPs have reported.²⁴

Table 1: Donor response to UN humanitarian appeals for Haiti (share of requested resources provided)

Cluster	2010	2011 (to 20 November)
WASH	88%	60%
Shelter/non-food items	67%	38%
Early recovery	40%	24%
Protection	60%	51%
Food aid	78%	123%
All clusters	75% (\$1.1bn of \$1.5bn requested)	60% (\$230m of \$382m requested)

Source: UN OCHA

Humanitarian agencies arranged daily trucking of water to the camps from January 2010 until mid-2011, at no charge to residents.²⁵ In Oxfam's case, this cost \$167,000 monthly.²⁶ By the end of June 2011, most agencies had ended free water trucking at DINEPA's request, as the agency wanted to move towards a more sustainable approach.²⁷

Humanitarian organizations did try to facilitate access to WASH services. For example, before Oxfam stopped paying for water trucking, it consulted closely with DINEPA and the Port-au-Prince Water Company, and provided training, tools and materials to help camp WASH committees maintain latrines and manage access to water.

A third challenge stems from the 'Republic of Port-au-Prince' phenomenon. Public administration and services are heavily concentrated in the capital. For instance, in 2011 Oxfam found only two DINEPA staff in Nippes, home to over 300,000 people and with the third highest cholera death rate of Haiti's ten departments.²⁸

Fourth, contentious issues surround the question of shelter. Due to the complexities of land tenure in Haiti – there is no comprehensive cadastre, and often corrupt private notaries monopolise knowledge of land ownership²⁹ – humanitarian agencies have had difficulty building permanent housing. By October 2011, they had completed nearly 96,000 transitional shelters (t-shelters), but had only constructed 4,600 new homes and repaired 6,600. The earthquake claimed 250,000 dwellings.³⁰ T-shelters are a step up from canvass, but are usually made from wood, are relatively expensive, and can only withstand a few of Haiti's fierce hurricane seasons.³¹

Meanwhile, 120,000 IDPs face the threat of forced eviction. Private land owners want rental income, and some municipal governments regard camps as breeding grounds of crime and indolence. The national government has yet to promote an equitable solution, such as compensation to owners to let IDPs stay until permanent housing is available.³²

3

Reconstruction at a snail's pace

Reconstruction has moved too slowly and not always very effectively. Lack of a government for five months created a major impediment, and in part because of this, donors were cautious in disbursing reconstruction aid.

President Michel Martelly's new administration has promised an ambitious programme, including free primary education, revival of the disbanded armed forces, and IDP resettlement. However, both chambers of parliament are controlled by the opposition INITE party. The legislature rejected the president's first two prime minister nominees, leaving no government to lead reconstruction or protect citizens' rights. Parliament finally approved Gary Conille as prime minister in October 2011.

He delivered an ambitious policy speech, emphasizing '5 Es': education, employment, environment, energy, and 'état de droit' (rule of law). His programme presupposes 9 per cent economic growth over five years and cutting inflation from 14 per cent. Conille entitled his address '*Pèp la pa ka tann ankò*' in Kreyòl ('The people can no longer wait').

This welcome vision of accelerated development faces severe implementation constraints, such as government capacity and financial weaknesses. Seventy per cent of the budget derives from development assistance.³³ Like his recent predecessors, Conille has emphasized deconcentration of power and devolution of responsibility to local governments, but he has not yet offered an operational plan that provides local authorities with the resources to carry out their tasks. Nor has the Haitian state systematically engaged civil society in planning and managing reconstruction.³⁴

Donors have also contributed to the slow speed of reconstruction in Haiti. They have only delivered 43 per cent of the \$4.6bn pledged for 2010–11.³⁵

Moreover, donors had pressed for the IHRC's establishment, to ensure coherent and co-ordinated rebuilding. The Commission, co-chaired by the prime minister and the UN Special Envoy for Haiti, former US President Bill Clinton, helped align donor and government priorities. By the end of its mandate in October 2011, it had approved over 100 projects worth \$3.2bn.³⁶ However, the IHRC failed to help set up its successor, the Authority for the Development of Haiti (ADH).³⁷ Former IHRC Executive Director Gabriel Verret says that ministries viewed ADH as a threat.³⁸ The Martelly administration recognized that donor funding depends on an IHRC mandate extension,³⁹ but by the end of 2011 parliament had not yet acted on this.⁴⁰

Shelter

The Haitian government has not moved swiftly and decisively on IDP resettlement. In particular, it remains reluctant to expropriate land for new housing.

The Martelly administration has focused on moving 5,239 IDP families (30,000 people) out of six camps in public spaces. Most came from 16 poor neighbourhoods in metropolitan Port-au-Prince. Another 28,000 families living in damaged houses in these communities will also benefit from this '16/6' initiative, which gives beneficiaries \$500 to rent existing homes and property owners up to \$3,500 to repair homes and provide them rent-free to returnees for two to five years. The government will assess the safety of repaired houses. So far, the government has secured only \$30m of 16/6's \$78m budget,⁴¹ and overall, donors have disbursed less than half of the \$97m pledged for 2010–11 housing reconstruction.⁴²

Haiti needs a comprehensive resettlement and housing policy, with a clear timeline for camp exit. 16/6 is but one piece of such a policy. Moreover, it does not make sense to build transitional shelters without a phase-out plan. Otherwise they will become *permanent* housing. Martelly administration officials concede that, similarly, some camps will likely become permanent.⁴³

The government has so far resisted incorporating public housing into its shelter strategy, but this approach could engage the expertise of Haiti's public housing agency (Entreprise Publique de Promotion des Logements Sociaux, or EPPLS) in building affordable housing. Though lacking in budgetary resources, EPPLS has experience designing structures able to withstand Haiti's severe weather.⁴⁴

WASH

According to the WASH Cluster coordinator, beyond IDPs' immediate WASH problems, the country must grapple with a structural 'catastrophe' (see Table 2).⁴⁵ Lack of access to clean water and safe sanitation in rural areas means many people simply rely on rivers and streams for their needs and those of their livestock.⁴⁶

Table 2: Haiti WASH Indicators, 1990–2008

Indicator	1990	2000	2008
Proportion of population with access to improved drinking water sources	41% (rural)	49% (rural)	55% (rural)
	62% (urban)	67% (urban)	71% (urban)
	47% (total)	55% (total)	63% (total)
Proportion of population using improved sanitation facilities	19% (rural)	15% (rural)	10% (rural)
	44% (urban)	34% (urban)	24% (urban)
	26% (total)	22% (total)	17% (total)

Sources: World Health Organization, UN Children's Fund, UN Statistics Division

The government's post-disaster needs assessment called for \$1.1bn over three years to rehabilitate WASH systems to make them 'more effective and fair'.⁴⁷ However, DINEPA has severe capacity constraints in managing sanitation, having focused almost exclusively on water.⁴⁸

Donors pledged \$271.4m for water and sanitation reconstruction during 2010–11 (far below the requirements of the post-disaster assessment), but by September 2011 had disbursed only \$214.5m. While Spain, the leading donor, has provided crucial budget support, other key donors, such as the United States, have not.⁴⁹

Box 2: Working with Cité l'Eternel residents to improve sanitation

Cité l'Eternel is a slum located just south of Port-au-Prince's container port. Most residents have not had access to improved sanitation; they defecate on the beach or into a nearby canal.

In 2011, Oxfam worked with slum dwellers to build community latrines. Residents donated labour and learned operation and maintenance. Neighbourhood development committees will collect 35 Haitian *gourdes* (about 88 US cents) monthly from user families to pay for desludging every other year.

Lajoie Lesline, a woman living in the community, commented that the new latrines 'are better for us, for health, for life, to avoid disease'. She added, 'We will take care of them like our houses, like our kids.'

Livelihoods

The overwhelming majority of Haiti's economically active population of 4.5 million earn their living as small-scale farmers or in the informal sector.⁵⁰ The government is seeking new foreign investment in garment factories and other export-oriented manufacturing.⁵¹ However, the authorities also need to ensure that informal businesses have access to credit and technology and must provide agriculture with research, extension, access to credit, irrigation, and rural infrastructure. At the 2010 reconstruction conference, the government requested \$260m for agriculture, but donors pledged only \$148m, and have disbursed less than half of that.⁵²

Haitian women have fewer livelihood options than men. Only 39 per cent of girls complete primary school, compared with 46 per cent of boys. Women account for the majority of economically active Haitians and most of the low-income workforce in small and medium enterprises, petty commerce, and hotels and restaurants. But they hold few industrial, transport, or service jobs.⁵³

Haiti lacks a public social protection system.⁵⁴ Most other countries in the region have conditional or unconditional cash transfers to low-income families that have reduced poverty and improved well-being.⁵⁵ Once in place, the government can scale them up quickly after a disaster.⁵⁶

4

Conclusion and recommendations

Now that a government is in place in Haiti, it is imperative that it take the lead in greatly accelerating the pace of reconstruction and fully engage the Haitian people in planning, managing, and evaluating the process. The international community must provide the necessary financial and capacity-building assistance, and also ensure that Haiti receives the humanitarian assistance that it needs. International NGOs should make certain that their activities fully support Haitian-led and nationally owned reconstruction plans.

In order to achieve these objectives, Oxfam recommends that **the Haitian government** take the following actions:

- Create a national reconstruction agency to take over the functions of the IHRC;
- Establish and/or revitalize state-led national and local co-ordination mechanisms;
- Involve, consult, and communicate with Haitian citizens, including women, to arrive at equitable humanitarian, reconstruction, and development policies;
- Implement administrative and fiscal decentralization to eliminate urban/rural inequalities;
- Devise a comprehensive resettlement policy, with a clear timeline and budget, including new public housing, return to safe existing structures, and a transparent mechanism to swiftly resolve land tenure issues;
- Appoint a high-level, multi-stakeholder taskforce to devise an equitable policy that prevents forced evictions while ensuring that landowners are able to earn income from their holdings;
- Develop a comprehensive, time-bound plan ensuring universal access to clean water and safe sanitation;
- Support the informal economy and small-scale agriculture, including strategies that target women;
- Take effective steps to prevent gender-based violence and to apprehend and prosecute those who perpetrate such crimes; and
- Develop public social protection programmes, such as conditional and unconditional cash transfers and public works employment.

Aid donors should:

- Meet the requirements of UN humanitarian appeals;
- Fulfil reconstruction pledges for housing, WASH, and agriculture;

- Provide additional budget support for these sectors and for a social protection scheme, and help strengthen government capacity;
- Align assistance with government plans and policies; and
- Support creation of a Haitian national reconstruction agency.

International NGOs should:

- Support creation of a Haitian national reconstruction agency;
- Align activities with government policies and strategies; and
- Help build the capacity of Haitian civil society organizations to participate in policy, advocacy, and reconstruction activities.

Notes

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- ³ Interview with Patrick Rouzier, Advisor to the President of the Republic of Haiti for Reconstruction and Housing, Pétionville, Haiti, 15 November 2011.
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- ¹¹ UN Statistics Division (2011) *op. cit.*
- ¹² Bureau International du Travail (2010) *op. cit.*
- ¹³ UN OCHA (2011) *Humanitarian Bulletin* (21 September–18 October), Port-au-Prince : OCHA, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%20Haiti_Humanitarian%20Bulletin_11_ENG.pdf (last accessed December 2011).
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- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
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November 2011; interviews with Oxfam staff in Haiti, May and July 2010 and January, February, October, and November 2011.

- ¹⁹ Interview with members of the US Agency for International Development Haiti Task Team, Washington, D.C., 22 February 2011.
- ²⁰ See: Oxfam International (2010) 'Planting Now: Agricultural challenges and opportunities for Haiti's reconstruction', Briefing Paper 140, Oxford: Oxfam International, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/planting-now> (last accessed December 2011).
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- ²⁴ Human Rights Watch (2011) *op. cit.*
- ²⁵ United Nations (2011) *op. cit.*
- ²⁶ Information on pre-earthquake access to water provided by Oxfam WASH staff in Haiti.
- ²⁷ UN OCHA (2011) *op. cit.*
- ²⁸ Information provided by Oxfam cholera response staff; in Haiti, a department is an administrative unit equivalent to a state or province.
- ²⁹ Based on research for Oxfam by Professor Harley F. Etienne of the Georgia Institute of Technology.
- ³⁰ Interview with Shelter Cluster staff, Port-au-Prince, 15 November 2011.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*; Haiti Support Group (2011) Haiti Briefing No. 68, London: Haiti Support Group, www.haitisupportgroup.org (last accessed December 2011).
- ³² Based on research for Oxfam by Harley F. Etienne and information provided by Oxfam staff in Haiti.
- ³³ *LA Times* (2011) 'Haiti doesn't need an army', Editorial, 17 November 2011, <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/editorials/la-ed-haiti-20111117.0.3585045.story?track=rss> (last accessed December 2011).
- ³⁴ A November 2011 forum on rebuilding Port-au-Prince, bringing together national government and municipal officials, donors, and civil society organizations, represented a step forward in this regard. Oxfam took part in the forum, which was sponsored by the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation, and helped facilitate the participation of Haitian civil society organizations.
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- ³⁶ Interview with Ann Valérie Timothée Milfort, Acting Executive Director, IHRC, Port-au-Prince, 14 November 2011; Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (2011) 'IHRC Fact/Fiction', Port-au-Prince: Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, http://en.cirh.ht/files/pdf/ihrc_presskit2011_factfiction.pdf (last accessed December 2011).
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- ³⁸ Interview with Gabriel Verret, Pétionville, 21 November 2011.
- ³⁹ Interview with Patrick Rouzier.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Ann Valérie Timothée Milfort.
- ⁴¹ Interview with Patrick Rouzier; Government of Haiti Powerpoint presentation on 16/6, presented at 10 November 2011 meeting with the NGO Coordination Committee (CCO); interviews with Oxfam advocacy staff in Haiti.
- ⁴² UN Office of the Special Envoy (2011) *op. cit.*
- ⁴³ Interview with Patrick Rouzier; Government of Haiti Powerpoint presentation on 16/6.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Elonge Othelot, Director General, EPPLS, Port-au-Prince, 16 November 2011.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with Herbert Schembri.
- ⁴⁶ Oxfam research in rural Haiti, May 2010.
- ⁴⁷ The assessment can be found at: http://www.refondation.ht/resources/PDNA_Working_Document.pdf (see p. 68 for quote) (last accessed December 2011).

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- ⁴⁹ UN Office of the Special Envoy (2011) *op. cit.*
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- ⁵² UN Office of the Special Envoy (2011) *op. cit.*
- ⁵³ Bureau International du Travail (2010) *op. cit.*
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Gérard Germain. The government does maintain modest programmes providing old age pensions to formal sector workers and disability benefits.
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This paper was written by Marc Cohen. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Aimee Ansari, Ana Arendar, Angela Bruce-Raeburn, Gilda Charles, Peleg Charles, Anne Pieter van Dijk, Harley Etienne, Amélie Gauthier, Caroline Gluck, Lina Holguin, Gansly Jean, Vincent Maurepas Jeudy, Figaro Joseph, Tonny Joseph, Anita Kattakuzhy, Jonathan Mazliah, Alivelu Ramisetty, Sandrine Robert, Claude St. Pierre, and Hérold Toussaint in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International under ISBN 978-1-78077-025-3 in January 2012. Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

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