

Haiti Aid Coordination: Objectives vs Ego

Short Through Long Term Aid Requires Special Structure

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Haiti has experienced yet another setback on its road to a self-sufficient social and economically viable state. This latest tragedy is clearly the most devastating. The actual number of dead and injured will probably never be known: some buried forever in rubble, some suffering in silence, and others having simply disappeared by managing to wander off one way or another to other locations, with no-one left to miss them.

The magnitude of the decimation is almost incomprehensible. In terms of relativity, it is probably the most devastating single event ever in the context of a country of some 9 million souls.

A Complex, Long Term Objective-Oriented Response Needed

The response from around the world, especially from the western hemisphere, seems proportional. It is heartfelt and substantial funds are being raised with the very best of intentions. The underlying assumption is that the contributions will be put to best use efficiently and effectively, and herein lies the challenge. The capacity of the Government of Haiti, never a model of efficiency, has for all intents and purpose been destroyed. The intentions of donors appear to be on the right track, recognising that there are three overlapping levels of aid needed: immediate medical, food/water and accommodation aid; transition accommodation, services and essential infrastructure for the coming year or two; and medium term infrastructure, training, education, medical and developmental projects to lead Haiti toward true independence to live their own dreams.

The complexity of the first phase and the movement into the transition phase are rather easily visualized: they are complex but manageable. Phase 3, however, is quite a different matter. It is not a response to an immediate need, but a carefully integrated mix of infrastructure, training, economic/business programs (including property law and regulatory adjustments), and social development initiatives all managed together in a comprehensive yet flexible directed rebuilding plan with clear longer term objectives. Projects could range from simple road construction to community and family involvement in local development programs designed to meet specific needs in specific places. The timing and meshing of each project with each other can be in many cases as critical as the projects themselves, such as training combined with construction. Moreover, this is not the place for cookie-cutter replicas of something done elsewhere, but action that derives from actual local culture, needs and circumstances. They need to be done consistently over time, with modifications made as needed to meet changing circumstances.

Ultimately, Haiti needs its own politically directed planned change with built-in evaluation feedback permitting needed adaptations for longer term objectives leading to real self-sufficient independence to be realized.

Organizational Challenge

There is no power vacuum as some might argue, but the potential exists, given the plethora of NGOs and state agencies all doing their best from their own perspective, for a stall in accomplishments to occur due to unintended competition for resources, isolated decision-making and overlap resulting in chaos. All the agencies involved, including local structures, have some record of success, especially for achieving limited results through specific projects. None, however, have any experience in achieving success in the kind of longer term, integrated, cooperative and comprehensive approach needed now in Haiti. The Marshall Plan that achieved so much in Europe after WWII operated under an entirely different set of rules and circumstances, yet that is the type of effort (and to a degree structure) needed in Haiti.

How to form a structure and organizational effort sufficient to achieve the complex but obvious objectives for Haiti will be a unique challenge: first to set it up, but more importantly to make it work to produce the desired results. Every organization involved in the process believes they are doing the right thing and know how to achieve their specific goals, and in the context of their limited view, they are right. The sheer complexity of the disaster relief (physical, political, medical, security, educational and infrastructure needs) and medium term social and economic development efforts, needs to be combined and integrated to achieve initial agreed-upon goals. The necessity to build up local capacity as soon as possible must be done concurrently with the recovery efforts. The long list of individual initiatives of many organizations must be meshed into a comprehensive strategy, taking all factors into account. This is critical so that implementation takes place in ways that complement each other, rather than compete (e.g. for the same supplies or expertise), offset or cancel each other out. It also means that the developmental initiatives fit together in such a way that the end result is one that the Haitian society is capable of operating on its own, ultimately without external assistance. That is the definition of independence! It is not acceptable for outsiders to impose their values and sense of basic needs onto the people of Haiti. It is important for these outsiders to seek out what is appropriate within the culture and medium term capacity of Haiti, and gear their efforts to help them succeed.

A Public Service Capacity

Perhaps the most difficult challenge will be the development of a public service capacity to provide Haiti with the expertise required to manage independently. This implies capacity not just to build roads and hospitals; train technicians, electricians and plumbers; establish a democratic form of local and national government; and attract business development. It also carries with it a powerful need for a managerial cadre with the ability to see into the future, to manage in a world where the results of their decisions may not be evident for 5, 10 or 20 years

into the future. Decision-making capacity to make decisions where the results are immediate, or show up in a matter of days or weeks, is clearly a part of a viable economy. However, to realistically determine the energy or water needs for twenty years hence, along with higher education requirements, medical treatment beyond acute and institutional needs for finance, public services and structures requires foresight that does not evolve overnight. The nature of redevelopment of Port au Prince needs long term consideration: should some of its roles be elsewhere, rather than where it is on a fault? Careful selection and development of internal managerial capacity must be understood to be a priority for an independent Haiti 10 or 15 years down the road. Initiatives to attract experienced managers from “ex-pat” cadres in Canada, the United States and France warrant consideration.

Coordination of Effort

Discussions have taken place about the need for coordination. The challenge is not to just talk about it, but to put in place a system that will work, drawing together the capacity of international organizations and governments to focus on integrated delivery. That means the interests and egos of all need to be set aside in recognition of the larger objective of an independent Haiti.

An effective decision-making body must be in charge. Clearly, this should be Haiti, but they need considerable assistance at this time to grow a capacity to take on the role. The UN might also be considered, but their decision-making bureaucratic processes do not lend themselves to a job where immediate but significant on-site decisions must be made. The US could do it, and risk accusation of colonialism. Thus, some practical amalgam of these bodies, with the view to Haiti ultimately taking up the reins, needs to have authority on a provisional basis for direction, under UN auspices (if they can decide quickly enough). A “Coordinator” of the stature and competence of persons such as President Bill Clinton or General Colin Powell (these two, taken together, represent a coalition of credibility, authority, power, influence and decisiveness necessary to move into action) needs to be appointed by this amalgam with full powers to in fact coordinate all the efforts of all contributors. This person(s), with a small staff (their role is to coordinate, not “do”), needs to have access to and commitment from all sources/contributors so as to “sub-contract” with them to do the work they do best. All work must be done within the context of a comprehensive, progressive plan to achieve objectives in a sequence that yields the most efficient use of funds and energy. Keeping a balance amongst numerous objectives will imply careful management and coordination and persuasion. Logistics is everything, but only within a context of clear timing and objectives that recognize local values, cultures, needs and longer term capacity to manage and operate.

Interestingly, the crisis may present an opportunity for “Big Banks” to improve their image by stepping up to the plate and offering their services to manage the “fund”. Moneys raised and allocated for reconstruction and development need to be pooled and managed centrally on direction of the Coordinator. By allocating budgets to “sub-contractors” according to the

objectives they agree to accomplish and paying advance instalments based on actual progress, success is possible. It also provides the flexibility, within a longer term plan, to shift funds between projects in the short term based on implementation realities. Each initiative acting solely on its own lacks this flexibility and leaves to risk of missing opportunities and reducing impact. This central “fund”, consisting of all contributions from all parties, needs to be professionally and transparently managed, with monthly statements publically available to all interested parties. Although there is limited precedence for such “pooling”, the Canada-Manitoba Interlake Fund for Rural Economic Development (FRED) Agreement of 1967 operated effectively under this arrangement over a ten year period.

In the absence of reliable information at this time, it will be important to develop and maintain an interactive data set of information for all to draw from and contribute to, so that as quickly as possible credible information replaces unsubstantiated rumours. An evaluation program must operate concurrently to measure the degree of achievement of objectives, and this evaluation also needs to be open to public scrutiny. The history of duplication, graft, greed and careless spending of developmental funds can only be changed with full transparency.

A Management Board, chaired by the President of Haiti, and consisting of 4 Haitian representatives and one from each of three main donors (e.g. perhaps the United States, Canada and Brazil) plus the UN (perhaps represented by the World Bank) would meet regularly to provide advice and guidance to the Coordinator. Records of discussions need to be available publically. After a year, a “general conference” on progress and direction might be held in Haiti, involving representatives from different local communities, along with international contributors, to review progress and needs, with a view to moving towards real social and economic independence within 10 years. Clearly, complete independence may not be possible that soon, but it is important to try, on the assumption that it may well take two generations before it will be fully self-generating. Public education and skill development, with public commitment to it, is the prime underlying solution and the cultural necessity.

This approach requires the inherent self interest of all contributors to be subordinated for the good of the people of Haiti. If it proceeds, it will be a testament to the will of the contributors to put the needs of Haiti above their own recognition, and in the end, they will receive the recognition they truly deserve for a job well done.

Is such a radical departure from the history of past failures achievable? Or, is the business as usual approach to development going to be another impediment to achieving the real objective of Haiti moving toward a truly independent state?