

Reconstructing Haiti

Summary of recommendations:

- **All actors should ensure that the people of Haiti have a central role in the process of reconstruction and that reconstruction is equitable.**
- **Those delivering assistance on the ground should immediately work to coordinate within the UN established system and with the Haitian government**
- **The UN and the US government are trying to ensure that there is adequate fuel to support the relief effort. Fuel supply will remain a concern for humanitarian agencies in the near term. In consultation with NGOs, the UN should establish a system to determine who receives fuel, for what purposes and in what priority.**
- **The Haitian government, UN and international military actors must work together to improve the security situation, pre-empting a potential deterioration of the situation, with increased patrols, transparency in operations and clear conjoined rules of engagement and chain of command.**
- **Protection, particularly for women and children, should be mainstreamed into the design of all programmes, including any camps for affected people or expansion of patrols, in consultation with affected people and local civil society.**
- **The government, UN, donors and other actors must ensure that efforts to restore and improve public services, infrastructure and economic activity prioritise poorer communities.** In a socially divided society such as Haiti, there is a real danger that the better off and politically influential will secure their needs first.
- **It is not too early to lay a new foundation for Haiti's reconstruction and development with complete debt forgiveness, aid in the form of grants not loans and a "pro-poor" approach that prioritises livelihoods and sustainable development led by Haitians from the start.**

Background

On January 12, 2009, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti ten miles from the capital, Port-au-Prince. Already the poorest country in the western hemisphere with 76% of the population living on less than \$2 per day, Haiti could ill afford this blow to its fragile development. Rapid deforestation, a growing population, increasing unemployment, corruption, food prices crises, weak infrastructure, gender violence, a history of natural disasters and many years of political instability had all contributed to a precarious existence for most of Haiti's population.

In the capital, shantytowns had been haphazardly built in unsafe areas to accommodate a rapidly growing population including migrants from the countryside. At the best of times, these settlements were unhealthy and faced the risk of landslides, floods and water and land pollution. The earthquake left them destroyed and difficult to reach.

The Government estimates that 1 million people have been displaced and 75,000 people have lost their lives.¹ The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that 370,000 people are living in makeshift settlements.² Destruction is not distributed homogeneously throughout the city; it is concentrated in some 15 areas where more than 70% of the houses have been destroyed. Every family in the earthquake zone has been affected.

Oxfam has been working in Haiti since 1978. We have focused on supporting communities and local government in sustainable livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, good governance and humanitarian assistance. In response to the earthquake, Oxfam is providing life-saving water and sanitation, working closely with other organisations to ensure that assistance is well-coordinated. We are also supporting local organisations with which we have a long-term relationship to assess and respond to the humanitarian crisis in other affected areas.

General Coordination

The United Nations operation in Haiti has been devastated by the earthquake, with 300 employees still unaccounted for. Oxfam sympathises with the UN and recognises that the death of staff, including senior leaders, is a loss for Haiti and for the international community. The earthquake in Haiti is likely to be the single largest aid effort since the 2004 tsunami in East Asia and will require an extraordinary effort by the UN, NGOs and governments. In order to ensure that adequate aid is delivered appropriately and gets to those who need it most, when they need it, **the United Nations needs to demonstrate strong political leadership. It must coordinate the international relief effort**, and ensure it focuses on the humanitarian and reconstruction needs of the communities. The UN should ensure:

- Close cooperation and coordination with the government and state institutions, at national and local level. **The aid effort must support and strengthen the government and public sector of Haiti.** Many donor governments are adept at supplying "ministries in a box."³ This is one possible solution to ensure that the government can start to operate. We are seeing some good examples of government involvement, particularly in working with national and local water authorities. Local government bodies are organising solidarity committees; these need to be linked into broader coordination efforts.
- While the US aid effort has been remarkable and the US has great capacity to support immediate relief efforts in Haiti, **the US government and military must actively and**

¹ OCHA, 22 January 2009, <http://ochaonline.un.org/OCHAHome/WhereWeWork/Haiti/tabid/6412/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

² See <http://ochaonline.un.org/OCHAHome/WhereWeWork/Haiti/tabid/6412/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

³ These are large tents that include the basic tools needed for a government department to operate, such as desks, chairs, stationary, file cabinets, telephones. Where the items can be found on the local market, they should be purchased in-country.

visibly coordinate efforts with the UN and Haitian Government on every level. It is unclear how and with whom the US is coordinating their relief and assistance.

- **The role of international military forces must be well defined and communicated publicly, including to those receiving assistance.**
- The leadership of the response must remain clearly in the hands of the United Nations and the Government of Haiti and **international military actors must coordinate their delivery of assistance with others, supporting where appropriate and necessary and in accordance with the Oslo guidelines.**⁴ As the capacity of the UN, government and NGOs expands, the role and profile of military forces must be focused in areas where their skills and capacity can best support others.
- Oxfam's experience is that current coordination on a sectoral level is working well, particularly in WASH and shelter. However, there are a number of gaps:
 - **Local organisations are not currently included in UN coordination mechanisms.** International NGOs and the UN should actively seek out local organisations, ensure they are aware of meetings and ensure that their views and experience are incorporated into planning.
 - **The Humanitarian Forum currently is a useful for information exchange, but should evolve into a body capable of strategic oversight and coordination.** At present, the forum is a mechanism for humanitarian actors to share plans and issues of concern and does not respond to the IASC guidelines for humanitarian coordination.⁵ The government and UN should ensure that there is appropriate engagement of national and international civil society in the design of the development of the reconstruction strategy.

Delivery of Assistance and Coordination

At a national level, the coordination mechanisms set up by the United Nations in support of the Government of Haiti have started to operate. This will help to ensure that assistance is effective. Donors should continue to support coordination mechanisms, including cluster leads that do not have other agency responsibilities.⁶ At a local level, **assistance and assessments should be done in close cooperation with the Civil Protection Committees**, which include local government and civil society. Oxfam and others, as a part of the National Disaster Risk Management Response Plan (PNGRD),⁷ have worked with these committees to build their capacity in disaster response; this should be capitalised on. In the current response, Oxfam has found that these committees are best placed to support us in determining needs and where and with whom to work.

- While all affected people are suffering, the structural poverty and inequality that characterises Haitian society must not be reinforced. Those most vulnerable, including women, children, the elderly, the disabled and people living with HIV/AIDS, must be not be forgotten. **Careful consideration of beneficiaries ensuring their participation in decision-making, based on good rapid assessments done in cooperation with communities** will ensure that assistance reaches those who most need support, including those who have left Port-au-Prince for other cities or the border area.
- **All organisations should be encouraged to join clusters and coordinate their activities with others.** The clusters should be led to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of assistance.

⁴ Guidelines On The Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets In Disaster Relief - Revision 1.1 November 2007

⁵ <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/19483583/INTER-AGENCY-STANDING-COMMITTEE-Guidance-for-Humanitarian-Country>

⁶ For other lessons learned about clusters and coordination, see, Oxfam, 2009, "Missing Pieces: Assessing the Impact of Humanitarian Reform in Pakistan" and the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project, 2009, "Synthesis Report: Review of the Engagement of NGO with the humanitarian reform process".

⁷ http://www.protectioncivile.gouv.ht/Plan_Nat_GRD.htm. This is the "Plan national de gestion des risques et des désastres."

Protection of Civilians and Security

For the people of Haiti, it is crucial that those who have perished are afforded dignity. Proper identification and burial will be key in ensuring that the people of Haiti recover psychologically from this crisis. In Port-au-Prince, mass burial of unidentified dead is continuing at a rapid pace. In other crises, including the 2004 tsunami, governments have given technical assistance to the affected governments, but is has not yet happening in Haiti. Working closely with local authorities and ICRC, more must be done to ensure that those who have died get the respect they deserve. The collective burial sites should be designated as public spaces and reconstruction plans should ensure that Haitians will be able to visit those they have lost.

At the same time, **people in Port-au-Prince are increasingly concerned about their own safety and security**. Many people sleeping on the streets have told Oxfam that they are being attacked and their meagre belongings looted.⁸ While security support is needed for distribution sites, the protection of the people of Haiti should be the primary concern. The international community should support the government of Haiti to address the **protection needs of the civilian population in Port-au-Prince as well as in other localities** affected by the earthquake. Protection of civilians should be clearer and more prominent in activities of the UN response and recovery effort and be mainstreamed in all projects.

- With urgency, **the police and the United Nations should expand night patrols to ensure the security and safety of the most vulnerable**, based on an assessment of threats done in cooperation with affected people and local organisations. All donors should guarantee that international resources and aid are allocated to reinforce Haitian police, law enforcement and justice bodies and systems.
- In light of the increase in troops in Haiti and the chaotic situation, **MINUSTAH should conduct a threat assessment with local communities, focusing on those who are most vulnerable**. MINUSTAH should work closely with the protection cluster, government and local civil society, to determine people's protection needs and the appropriate response to them.⁹ Oxfam calls on the Secretary General to report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians within a month. This report should include all military and police forces operating under the guidelines set out under Security Council resolutions 1542 and 1892, as well as clarity of the rules of engagement or standards of operation by any international forces and/or police units present in Haiti but *not* operating under MINUSTAH¹⁰ command.
- Lastly and most importantly, **the Haitian government and international military forces need clear agreements with each other on how they will operate and coordinate on protection and security**. These agreements and the Rules of Engagement and Concept of Operations should prioritise the protection of civilians and should be clearly communicated to the people of Haiti and all actors on the ground.

Reconstruction and Future of Haiti

The UN and the international community as a whole should begin working on the strategy for a **sustained international reconstruction effort which will effectively translate into a new start for Haiti**, not only reconstructing what was destroyed, but also meeting the country's **long-term development needs**, complementing strategies developed in Haiti's National Strategy for Growth and the Reduction of Poverty (DSNCRP)¹¹. Decisions made now will shape Haiti's future for decades to come.

⁸ It is important to note that insecurity is not spread all over Haiti or all over Port-au-Prince; where insecurity was a problem before the earthquake it is also an issue now. Areas such as Jacmel, Petionville, that were relatively secure before the earthquake remain so.

⁹ The lessons learned paper presented by UNDPKO to the General Assembly's committee on peacekeeping policy should be a key background document.

¹⁰ The MINUSTAH mandate currently calls for "protection of civilians under imminent threat" and "within the capabilities."

¹¹ <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2008/cr08115.pdf>, in English

Haiti is a divided and highly unequal society so there is a great risk that, in the weeks and months after the earthquake, the politically influential and less disadvantaged sectors will secure their interests first. **The government, UN, donors and other actors must ensure that efforts to restore public services, infrastructure and economic activity prioritise poorer communities.**¹²

In the upcoming international donor conference, closely coordinated and led by the Haitian Government and United Nations, donors and the UN should:

- **Ensure that the people of Haiti have a central role** in the process of reconstruction, ensuring that civil society organisations at community and city-wide level are active and influential participants. This can help ensure that reconstruction is equitable. Haiti has lost many leaders and key staff, including ministry and local government workers and NGO leaders. This capacity will have to be rebuilt.
- **Cancel Haiti's outstanding \$890 million international debt** and ensure that the \$100 million loan announced by the IMF is converted into a grant. If these debts aren't cancelled, Haiti will be sending tens of millions to the IMF and other international bodies even as it struggles to rebuild.
- **Prioritize support to livelihoods for low-income Haitians** in order to get them back on their feet as quickly as possible. Lessons from other earthquake responses indicate the importance of cash for work, youth employment, paying people to clear the rubble, cash grants for reconstruction and cash distributions to allow people to determine their own priorities and restart markets.
- Support Haiti's damaged agricultural sector. Haiti's agricultural sector was in urgent need of support prior to the earthquake, and food insecurity was a serious problem. With planting season coming and with many Haitians leaving Port-au-Prince for the rural areas, urgent action is needed to **provide adequate support to enable Haitian farmers to elevate their food production capacity**, boost local incomes, and decrease dependency on imported food aid. Irrigation system repair and transportation routes need urgent attention.¹³
- Ensure long-term reconstruction takes into account the impact of climate changes, and consider the use of **alternative energy sources** that will enable Haiti to restore its forest resources.¹⁴
- Make reconstruction pro-poor and more effective at mitigating future disasters, meeting high standards for reconstruction, investing in disaster preparedness capacities of the Government and local organisations and diminishing as much as possible dependence on imported materials for the reconstruction of houses. **Disaster risk reduction should be an integral part of all reconstruction projects**
- Ensure that new urban settlements are designed to guarantee that **public services are easily accessible to the poor**. Care should be taken to ensure that the camps planned to assist people affected by the earthquake humanitarian response have clear exit strategies to ensure that they do not become shantytowns.
- Support a long-term commitment from United Nations and the international community to the economic and social reconstruction of Haiti that is **pro-poor and focuses not only on infrastructure but also on its civil institutions**.
- Donors must investment in good governance, developing capacities not only in the government bodies but also in the civil society and free press.
- **Reinforce the government's ability to lead long term development process and stabilization of the country**. This is an opportunity to develop effective and responsive state institutions.

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¹² The challenge of ensuring fairness will range from water and electricity provision (which neighbourhoods have supply restored or permanent services installed?) though to business recovery (who has access to assistance and credit – street sellers or hotel owners?) and access to safe building land and construction materials (the shanty-town dwellers or the better off?).

¹³ 40% of food is imported.

¹⁴ See Oxfam International, 2009, "Haiti: A Gathering Storm: Climate Change and Poverty." 98% of Haiti's trees have been cut down, partly due to use of charcoal for cooking. Lack of secure land tenure has deterred reforestation by farmers.

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This paper was written by Aimee Ansari. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Yolette Etienne, Michael Bailey, Nicole Widdersheim, Krista Riddle, John Slater, Francisco Yermo, Ofelia Ferreira and Alison Hayes 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.



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