

HAITI ADVOCACY WORKING GROUP (HAWG)

HAWG is a working group of international development, faith-based, human rights and social justice organizations advocating on issues related to U.S.-Haiti policy.

HAITI'S DIASPORA CONTRIBUTING CAPACITY-BUILDING AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER TO HOMELAND

In pre-earthquake Haiti, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) stated over 83% of the country's professionals are abroad, mostly in the United States and Canada. Both countries constituted and remained the major pull factor for Haitian immigrants and migrants for nearly five decades, causing over time a severe “brain-drain” that depleted the human resource stock that could have sustained the viability of the Haitian state. Chronic social unrest, which began in the mid-1980s with the collapse of the Duvalier Dictatorship, has significantly hampered Haiti's human capacity development. In the wake of the January 12, 2010 disaster, the public sector, according to government officials, has registered a loss of over 20,000 career employees. Countless Haitian professionals in the private sector have also lost their lives. Among those who survived the earthquake, a not yet quantified number has resettled outside of Haiti. Meanwhile, as of June 2010, the Government of Haiti (GOH) still has not conducted a human resources needs assessment designed to help rebuild the country and render government agencies fully operational.

Given the country's current condition, Haiti has very few choices as it grapples to address its human capacity building issues. Moving forward, the country has two options: it can rely on experts from the international community almost exclusively, or it can make use of the large wealth of talent and support from its Diaspora; allowing the Diaspora to join in the process by setting appropriate mechanisms and incentives to integrate its expatriates into government ministries, and local government offices, and the Non Governmental Organization (NGO) sector. While the first option is highly prohibitive in terms of cultural differences, long term commitments and costs, the second option is much more appealing in both short and long terms.

Officials from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) stated recently at a symposium on knowledge transfer, that they anticipate Haitian expatriates being assigned from 12 to 36 months on the ground in Haiti. UNDP, along with the Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad (MHAVE), have expressed interest to begin the deployment of Diaspora personnel as soon as September 2010.

On June 10, 2010, MHAVE, along with UNDP and the International Office on Migration (IOM), coordinated a symposium to discuss best strategies to integrate human resources from the Diaspora into the reconstruction process. One of the main challenges to pursuing this endeavor is Haiti may not have the required resources to quickly implement a UNDP-like TOKTEN program designed for knowledge transfer. The government of Haiti will have to build closer collaboration with its partners who are willing to invest in capacity building initiatives like the fellowship program presented by the U.S. Department of State at the Organization of American States (OAS) Haitian Diaspora Forum this past March. At the forum, the Haiti Permanent Ambassador at the OAS

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warned participants that the GOH did not have the capacity to pay them at the same rate that they were making in the United States. Meanwhile, Haitians in the Diaspora who have made a home outside of Haiti and have acquired education and professional experience abroad, carry the same financial and other obligations, as their non-Haitian colleagues working on Haiti-related projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are other major roadblocks that must be cleared before expatriate Haitians can be fully integrated into Haiti's society. The central government needs the support of U.S. policy makers to change and adapt itself to stricter administrative rules and regulations within the state apparatus. The concept of citizen participation in the public policy process must be followed by government institutions. An action plan aimed at the integration of members of the Diaspora must also be employed. In addition, the following elements are crucial for a successful integration:

- Securing passage of bill HR-417 introduced in the House by Congresswoman Barbara Lee, (California) could provide the U.S. Congress and the Obama Administration with the necessary outlet to provide Haiti with Haitian-American cadres trained in a variety of disciplines, including public sector management and accountability. Bill HR-417 needs to be amended in order to be responsive to the needs of Haitian-American professionals.
- Implementing rapidly the Haiti Diaspora Fellowship program, under the leadership of the Department of State, to help identify appropriate Haitian-Americans to be assigned in key government agencies as consultants or advisors in order to fast-track the functionality of government agencies.
- Developing a two-track system for deployment of Haitian-American professionals willing to serve in Haiti: track-one aimed at paid professionals willing to serve for 12 months or more in the country, and track-two aimed at non-paid professional volunteers willing to serve for less than one year in Haiti.
- Strengthening the Haitian Diaspora through widely distributed and accessible information regarding opportunities related to Haiti
- Supporting Congressman Alcee Hasting's call for a White House Conference on Haiti
- Supporting the GOH in conducting a thorough human resources needs assessment and ascertain how existing resources within the Haitian Diaspora can be deployed effectively and efficiently in the post-earthquake era.

It is evident that saturating Haiti with foreign NGOs and relying on Foreign Donor Programs, while neglecting the wealth of resources in the Haitian Diaspora community, are not adequate formulas for the self-sustainability of the Haitian state. The challenge before us today is to ask what kind of Haiti do Haitians want. Haitians in Haiti and Haitians abroad want to see a prospering, self-reliant homeland. If we are to Build Haiti Back Better, then we must do things better, differently - and fully availing ourselves of the professional experience and cultural and language capabilities of the Haitian Diaspora, is a clear way of doing better.

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