

Testimony for the Congressional Black Caucus Hearing on Haiti

Tuesday, July 27, 2010 - Camille Chalmers, Executive Director of PAPDA



The January 12 earthquake was a disaster of unparalleled proportions that killed over 250,000, displaced over 3 million people and orphaned more than 1 million children. Over 80% of the nearly 1.6 million people living in makeshift camps lack food security. Daily survival is threatened by wind, heat, disease, flooding, hurricanes and the lack of access to basic services such as education and health. At the same time, this earthquake has presented an unprecedented opportunity to change social structures that prioritize the needs of the wealthy over the poor, the urban minority over the rural majority, the State over Civil Society and foreign investments over national priorities. In order to maximize this new opportunity, we must create formal structures that can open the dialogue in Haiti between Civil Society and the State. We must also develop national mechanisms for the inclusion of public opinion and Civil Society expertise in the redevelopment of our country.

The present Government has put in place an action plan for recovery and national development submitted and adopted in New York on March 31, 2010 without any serious consultation with national stakeholders. However, Social Movements and Civil Society platforms are well established throughout Haiti and can provide valuable recommendations and local expertise. Tet Kole, for example, which works on rural and agricultural development, engages over 55,000 throughout the 10 geographical departments of Haiti. KNFP (National Coalition of Popular Finance,) which works with banks, cooperatives and micro-finance initiatives, helps to stimulate local economic initiatives and improves the lives of over 1 million people in rural zones. SOFA, which works with women's movements, leads the fight for women's rights and the inclusion of women in the political process.

Despite this great wealth of national expertise and local inclusion, reconstruction planning has been quite exclusive. None of these Platforms, nor the vast network of Civil Society Organizations that work closest with the Haitian people, were consulted during this process. For example, the National Reconstruction Plan contains no information on the rights of women, the need for women's inclusion in redevelopment work or the need for a gendered analysis of reconstruction efforts. Civil Society Platforms have been calling out for such inclusion. And furthermore, they have been calling out for greater transparency, so that they may understand and have the ability to comment on the reconstruction plan that has been developed.

Haitian Government has similarly been disempowered during the Reconstruction planning. The weakened state of Government, which is an inheritance of the economic integration policies of the 1980's, has led to a broad dismissal of sound redevelopment recommendations. The Haitian Senate, for example, convened back in April, 2010, to debate the reconstruction process and offer suggestions to for the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC.) One strong request was for the IHRC to integrate a required report to the Haitian Senate every 3 months. However, to this date, no such requirement has been included in the Plan. Hence, even the Haitian Senate is excluded from reconstruction efforts and has lack of access to information.

IHRC systems of planning, implementation and reporting must be more democratic, transparent and inclusive. The current state of exclusive reconstruction planning has the potential to launch Haiti into a new stage of instability. The IHRC's mandate to "ensure coordination and effective deployment of resources" in Haiti's redevelopment plan can only be achieved through coordination with Social Movements and Civil Society Platforms. In addition, it requires coordination with the State, and a rebuilding of State infrastructure and social investments.

Reconstruction priorities must include the following:

- Investment in local agricultural production, access to local markets and the conversion of food aid into cash for local purchase.
- The mobilization of formal systems of Civil Society participation in National and International Reconstruction planning, implementation and evaluation
- Investing in women's organizations that can help increase women's inclusion in development projects, political processes and economic initiatives.
- Land reform that improves land access for the peasantry, prioritizes agricultural trainings and increases access to inputs, credit and agricultural infrastructure.
- Reinforcing Government capacity with attention to infrastructure, fair elections, transparency, democracy and formal avenues for dialogue with Civil Society.

In closing, I would summarize my testimony to Congress on Haiti reconstruction priorities by quoting the famous economist, Kari Polanyi Levitt, from his book, Reclaiming Development. "Development does not impose from the outside. It is a social process designed within the central nervous system, nourishing the matrix that lies within its cultural sphere. Development is not a matter of money, capital or foreign currency. It is the ability of people to take advantage of the roots of popular creativity, to free and exercise their intelligence and collective wisdom. It is the responsibility of those who aspire to lead, in government, business, school, church, trade union, the arts or civil society institutions, to protect society against the destructive forces of a market which enacts that 'the winner takes all.'

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