



Citizen-Centered Approaches
to State and Market



How to Help Haiti Rebuild

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Five experts on nation-building, economic development, and emergency aid weigh in on how best to help devastated Port-au-Prince.



Focus on the Structure of Aid

By Clare Lockhart

The catastrophe in Haiti presents the world community with the immense responsibility of a wise response. In the immediate time frame, the priorities are clearly to provide the emergency relief that will save as many lives as possible, stem outbreaks of disease, and comfort the bereaved and wounded. Lessons from other humanitarian disasters reveal the pitfalls to avoid. As well-wishers send in assistance and thousands of organizations turn up to help, one key challenge is providing appropriate direction, enabling the right decisions to be made.

This requires the careful design of a management system that combines the discipline of command and control -- and maintenance of order -- with flexibility to respond to continuously evolving circumstances. This task will fall to U.S. leadership under the ambassador, with the military under Lt.-Gen. Ken Keen providing the backbone of transport and logistical response. Although money, people, and supplies might be plentiful, the greatest challenges will be information gathering, sense-making, and careful logistical planning to match those resources to the greatest needs.

Although some inefficiency can be expected, much waste and corruption in the aid effort can be avoided. First, donors must insist on full transparency in tracking funding. These systems can be set up from the start, and donors must understand some mistakes will be made. Second, the multiple contracting layers and duplication can be minimized through smarter design of programs that put as much trust as possible in communities to manage their own affairs. Simple and fair rules will overcome the sense of random allocation that can breed resentment and distrust. Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program is one example of a program that reaches communities directly and empowers them to make their own decisions about how to use resources.



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Once the immediate concerns are addressed, attention must turn to the task of helping Haitians recover from the crisis and return to the path of creating their nation. Reconstruction often focuses mainly on physical infrastructure, but must also take account of the psychological toll and trauma of bereavement and dislocation. The terrible tragedy will present an opportunity for a renewed partnership between Haitians and the global community. Action must be taken to avoid the pitfalls of previous efforts in Haiti -- for these a frank account can be found in the National Academy of Public Administration's 2006 report, "Why Foreign Aid to Haiti Failed" -- and elsewhere.

First, no amount of external coordination can ever match a national policy framework led by a country's legitimate authorities. Allowing the space for the country's leaders in consultation with their citizens to define their own needs and future is imperative. Second, accountability systems must be in place both for the use of the country's own resources -- which will allow greater trust in direct support -- and in aid provided by public and private donations. The use of multidonor trust funds with strict rules for disbursement can help, if they have the flexibility in the short run for rapid disbursement against programs that are well designed. Third, neither the state, nor civil society, nor private enterprise alone can solve the political instability and poverty. The key is finding the right balance between the three. Attention to institution-building, as well as market-building and civil society engagement, must be carefully balanced. Fourth, instead of always looking to what is not there and needs to be brought in from the outside -- whether human or financial capital -- the international community must look for the assets that already lie within Haiti's natural, human, and institutional capability. For example, instead of bringing in outside experts, the emphasis should be on vocational training within Haiti. Instead of looking to a perpetual flow of donor funding, the medium-term goal should be a Haiti that grows its own economy and moves toward fiscal independence. Fifth, this might present the time for imaginative solutions to some of Haiti's persistent problems, including the opportunity to create smaller towns and ports in different parts of the country that would open up the country to new opportunities. Haiti could look not only to government aid, but to private foundations, universities, cities, and other sources of knowledge for new types of partnership.

Clare Lockhart is co-founder and chief executive officer of the Institute for State Effectiveness and co-author with Ashraf

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