

PROGRESSIO



Thinking local in Haiti

Civil society perspectives on decentralisation

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Cover photo: A meeting at the Henfrasa tent camp in Port-au-Prince, June 2010 (photo © Natasha Fillion/Progressio)

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“Decentralisation can have a significant impact on the process of rebuilding the country. It will give the entire country, not only in Port-au-Prince, the infrastructure urgently needed to launch sustainable economic development. This economic development in turn will allow the vast majority of the population living below the poverty line to have access to basic social services, and most particularly, be able to participate in major decision-making. Rebuilding the country must be an inclusive process where the interests of the excluded are taken into consideration.”

Muller Pierre-Louis, Institut Culturel Karl Leveque

“I will participate in the political process, nationally or internationally, only if I am reassured by those who claim to govern in my name. If trust does not exist, if only corruption and scheming dominates even at local level, I, just like any ordinary citizen, would not invest in this type of politics and would not be interested in the political process, except to fight against it.”

Michelle Pierre-Louis, Fondation Connaissance et Liberte

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Executive summary

This report is based on questionnaires returned by 12 Haitian civil society organisations.

The questionnaires sought views about decentralisation in Haiti in the context of the post-earthquake reconstruction process.

Responses showed that, in the opinion of these Haitian civil society organisations:

- there is currently a high degree of centralisation in decision-making and access to services in Haiti
- decentralisation of economic and political power is essential for any viable reconstruction process in the country
- obstacles to effective decentralisation include the lack of political will and an appropriate legal framework
- decentralisation would promote improved dialogue and trust between the Haitian State, local government, civil society organisations and grassroots communities
- decentralisation would increase the participation of citizens in the reconstruction process
- policies and services would become more responsive to local needs
- decentralisation offers opportunities for investment in infrastructure and job creation
- decentralisation could facilitate improvements in local services within a relatively short period of time
- decentralisation could help address the problem of rural-urban drift, including helping to provide a structured response to the needs of internally displaced people following the 2010 earthquake
- decentralisation should be a shared project (between central government, local government, and civil society)
- a legal and administrative framework is needed, with clear parameters and responsibilities
- there must be clear mechanisms for participation of civil society in decentralisation processes (civil society organisations, grassroots and community groups, and the Haitian people)
- the international community can play a role by supporting a participative decentralisation process.

The hope is that this report will contribute to the thinking of Haitian national and local government, multilateral agencies, donors, national and international NGOs and other relevant stakeholders interested in supporting reconstruction and development work in Haiti.

Foreword

January 12th, 2010, will be forever marked in the annals of Haitian history. The arithmetic says it all – the numbers of dead and injured, the loss of property and other assets, the scale of internally displaced people living in eye-catching and heart-rending temporary accommodation – all this has become part of a familiar story. And we might suppose that all Haiti's ills began at 4.53pm on that fateful January day.

But we'd be wrong. For a start, the earthquake was merely the latest in a long and debilitating series of natural disasters that had already brought the country to its knees. What's more, the political confusion, and the only-too-obvious absence of any capacity within the Haitian State to deliver any response at all, were simply the final fruits of the violent struggle for power and internecine feuding that had ravaged Haiti since the departure of the Duvalier regime in 1986. The responsibility for this must be shared in large measure by the international community which either looked on or looked away or interfered inappropriately or even damagingly.

Nor is that all. Since the arrival of the USS Washington in July 1915 and the subsequent 20 year-long American occupation, the process of centring all meaningful activity (social, commercial, bureaucratic and political) in Port-au-Prince has accelerated and intensified, and distorted Haiti's national life almost beyond repair.

But there are many, both within and outside Haiti, who take a more optimistic view. With the opportunity (yes opportunity!) offered by the earthquake, this may be exactly the right moment to take a radically different view of Haiti's future and to inject some political and financial will into what happens next.

It's not enough to cross our arms and look woebegone, complaining about the inefficiency and even corruption inherent in the immediate response to the earthquake. Nor can we content ourselves with the assumption that Haiti is a basket-case, a failed state, destined ineluctably for doom. Something can be done – and this report points the way forward, arguing that a coherent programme of decentralisation could provide the basis for a better structured Haitian national life.

Decentralisation – that's the key word. There is fertile land in Haiti and it's not at all inconceivable that, properly exploited, this could feed Haiti's population and even create a surplus. Haitian labour could well be harnessed in meaningful and productive activity. Tourism can be revitalised. There is a great market for Haitian art. There remain resources to discover and make use of. But none of this will yield any success unless the country is looked at as a whole.

It's with great warmth that I commend this study in the hope that it will trigger conversation in all the places where the future of this wonderful country and its resilient people is being discussed and decided.



The Reverend the Lord Griffiths of Burry Port
Chair of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group for Haiti

About this report

Prior to the Haitian earthquake, decentralisation had been a subject of research and discussion amongst international donors, the Haitian government and Haitian civil society organisations, and was seen by many as a realistic and positive way forward for the country. Nevertheless, despite the framework for decentralisation provided by the 1987 Haitian constitution, relatively little progress has been made towards implementing and delivering decentralisation. As in any transformative social process, the challenge was to overcome a range of obstacles, from social, political and economic instability, to the lack of political will and funding.

Paradoxically, despite the devastation caused by the earthquake, the attention focused upon Haiti after the earthquake presents an opportunity to develop new beginnings for the country's people. In the aftermath of the earthquake, decentralisation was identified by Haitian civil society organisations as key to 'building back better'.¹ As a result, members of the Haiti Advocacy Platform for Ireland and the UK (HAPI-UK)² commissioned this report to explore if, from the perspective of Haitian civil society organisations, two years on from the January 2010 earthquake, the need for decentralisation remains a priority for the reconstruction of Haiti.

The purpose of this report is to present a snapshot of the views of a selection of Haitian civil society organisations, in order to support a renewed focus on decentralisation as a way forward for Haiti.

The report is published by Progressio in partnership with CAFOD, International HIV-AIDS Alliance, SCIAF and Tearfund. The report does not necessarily reflect or represent the position of the individual agencies.

Objectives

The main objectives of the research were:

- To gather information on the views of Haitian civil society about the decentralisation process and governance in Haiti. Would they indeed view decentralisation as desirable, and if so, why? Were there any examples of good practice? What practical steps would be needed to promote decentralisation and good governance?
- To increase clarity on the possible benefits of decentralisation in Haiti and ways for outside stakeholders such as donors and agencies to support this process.
- To present learning points and recommendations based on the views gathered from Haitian civil society organisations.

Methodology

The research set out to collect a 'snapshot' of opinions from Haitian civil society organisations about the value of decentralised approaches to governance in Haiti in the context of the reconstruction efforts. A questionnaire was designed in a participatory manner by all of the UK NGOs involved, and was sent to 30 Haitian organisations who were partners of HAPI-UK members.

Twelve Haitian civil society organisations responded to the questionnaire, so numerical results are indicative rather than statistically significant. The information collected from these 12 Haitian civil society organisations forms the backbone of this publication. The participating organisations are listed in Appendix 1.

The requested data was both quantitative and qualitative, and included ranking questions as well as spaces for comments. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix 2.

Section 1 of the questionnaire sought views on the role and significance of central government and local government in six areas: the resolution of legal issues, the provision of healthcare, the provision

of education, earthquake reconstruction, support for displaced people, and promoting investment and business. This section also provided space for Haitian organisations to define in their own words what they understood by decentralisation and its relationship to reconstruction.

Section 2 sought views on the advantages and disadvantages of decentralised decision-making in Haiti, particularly in relation to governance (accountability and responsiveness of central and local government), internally displaced people, and investment and reconstruction. The questions also invited comment on the factors influencing people moving in or out of Port-au-Prince.

Section 3 focused on exploring whether Haitian organisations had any awareness of approaches to decentralisation in the Dominican Republic (or elsewhere), and their views on potential collaboration between Haitian and Dominican civil society organisations.

The lead researcher, Lizzette Robleto-Gonzalez, Progressio's Policy and Advocacy Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean, travelled to Haiti in August 2011 to prepare some of the groundwork. During her trip she spoke to some Haitian partner organisations encouraging them to respond to the questionnaires and outlining the purpose of the research. The questionnaires were sent in September 2011. A consultant based in Port-au-Prince, Marilou Agustin, was hired in October 2011 to assist with collecting responses and translation, which was completed in November 2011. Once the questionnaires were completed the consultant sent them to the UK for processing and analysis. The initial findings were shared with the HAPI-UK group who were also consulted during the drafting of the report.

We are grateful to those organisations that contributed to this research in spite of many other pressing priorities.

Context

The basis for decentralisation

Discussions on decentralisation in Haiti are not new – it has incessantly appeared, in donor and academic reports, as an issue of core importance for development in Haiti. At international forums, Haitian civil society organisations have also spoken about the need for decentralisation as a mechanism to facilitate civil society participation in the political process, and a way forward for improving State and civil society relations.

The Haitian Constitution provides a clear mandate for decentralisation. The Preamble of the 1987 Constitution of Haiti states that there must be “concerted action and participation of all the people in major decisions affecting the life of a nation, through effective decentralisation”. Article 87-4 states, “decentralisation must be accompanied by deconcentration of public services with delegation of power and industrial decompartmentalisation for the benefit of the departments”.³ The Constitution also caters for decentralisation of public finance, stating “the finances of the Republic are decentralised”.⁴

The 1987 Constitution also attempted to provide some sort of basic operational guidance on how decentralisation should happen.⁵ Haiti is subdivided into 568 communal sections, 140 communes or municipalities, and 10 departments.⁶ Members of the Departmental Assembly elect the Inter-Departmental Council (CID); and the Executive, assisted by the CID, draws up the law that sets the portion and nature of public revenue allotted to the territorial divisions.

Although the 1987 Constitution mandated a decentralisation or devolution of State authority back to local governments, this has never been fully implemented. The regulatory framework necessary for the implementation of the decentralisation process – namely the Decentralisation Law Framework, the Law on the Commune, and the Law on Municipal Development and Management (designed to define guidelines for national and local financing) – has not been approved.⁷ Without these implementing mechanisms, the decentralisation process remains stagnant. This partly explains why municipalities do not have the capacity, funding and authority to function fully. The full operational structure for local governance is missing and the selection and nomination of important democratic elements – such as municipal assemblies, departmental and inter-departmental bodies, a local judiciary, and permanent electoral bodies that depend on local elections – are still controlled by central government.⁸

The power of the elite

It has been argued that the failure of the Haitian Parliament to adopt the laws on decentralisation is a reflection of the power of the Haitian elite, which is not prepared to open up the political process to the majority of the population through effective decentralisation.⁹

Decades of dictatorship, corruption, social instability, poverty, and more recently natural disasters, have all had an impact on Haiti’s social, economic and political governance. Haiti’s leaders, especially amongst the economic elite, have too often been seen to care more for politics and personal aggrandisement than the people or the country. Consequently, Haitian civil society is frequently critical and suspicious of State institutions. The belief is that the Haitian State has created a system of exclusion and as a result Haitian civil society finds it hard to conceive of the State as a partner.¹⁰

The role of foreign nations through the extensive interventions in Haitian affairs should also not be ignored.¹¹ Foreign policy towards Haiti ranging from the provision of (on-off) assistance-related support to economic embargoes, and even military intervention, has clearly added to the complexities of Haiti’s problems.

The Republic of Port-au-Prince

Haiti’s economic, social and political power has long been centralised in its capital Port-au-Prince. This centralisation dates back to Haiti’s early colonial rule and was later reinforced during the 1915-1934 US occupation.¹² This has led to disparities in the distribution of resources from rural to urban areas, and

more specifically to Port-au-Prince, a city that does not have the infrastructure to cater for its current population.

To date, many Haitians good-humouredly but also frustratedly refer to Haiti as 'The Republic of Port-au-Prince'. Following the earthquake, Haiti's Action Plan for National Recovery (PDNA) recognised that the metropolitan district of Port-au-Prince had become the centre of all political and administrative decisions – 75% of all civil servants and government employees were based in Port-au-Prince – as well as the financial and economic centre, being home to 80% of all industrial, commercial and banking facilities. More than half of the country's hospitals, more than a quarter of its primary, secondary and technical schools, and more than three-quarters of higher education establishments and universities, are also in the capital.¹³ Meanwhile only a fraction of national budget expenditure goes through local authorities (a 2006 estimate put the figure at 1%¹⁴), which places Haitian local authorities under a lot of strain, especially if there are disbursement problems.

The 2010 earthquake

The Haitian earthquake was heavily felt in the departments of Ouest, Sud-est, and Nippes. The Port-au-Prince metropolitan area (including the communes of Port-au-Prince, Carrefour, Petionville, Delmas, Tabarre, Cite Soleil and Kenscoff) suffered severe damage. Eighty per cent of the town of Leogane was destroyed.¹⁵

The extent of the loss of life and destruction in Port-au-Prince was due to a combination of factors, which include:

- The proximity of the epicentre of the earthquake – about 10 miles (16 kilometres) southwest of Port-au-Prince.
- The intensity of the earthquake at the surface – the Haiti earthquake was very shallow, being centred just 6.2 miles (10 kilometres) below the Earth's surface, which increased the intensity of the earthquake at the surface.
- Poor infrastructure, lax building standards, poor construction methods and quality control, which made buildings more likely to crumble.
- High population density in the areas affected by the earthquake.
- Poor education on disaster risk management and prevention, which meant that most Haitians were not prepared for such a disaster.

The centralisation of aid after the earthquake

A widely made criticism of the humanitarian response to the 2010 earthquake is that aid management and implementation was concentrated in the capital and surrounding areas. There were even reports of perishables travelling all the way to Port-au-Prince from the border with the Dominican Republic, only to be sent back to locations near the border.¹⁶ It has been argued that the centralisation of aid management and distribution in Port-au-Prince has reinforced the existing imbalance between the capital and the regions in the distribution of development projects, investment, infrastructure and other resources.¹⁷

Internally displaced people

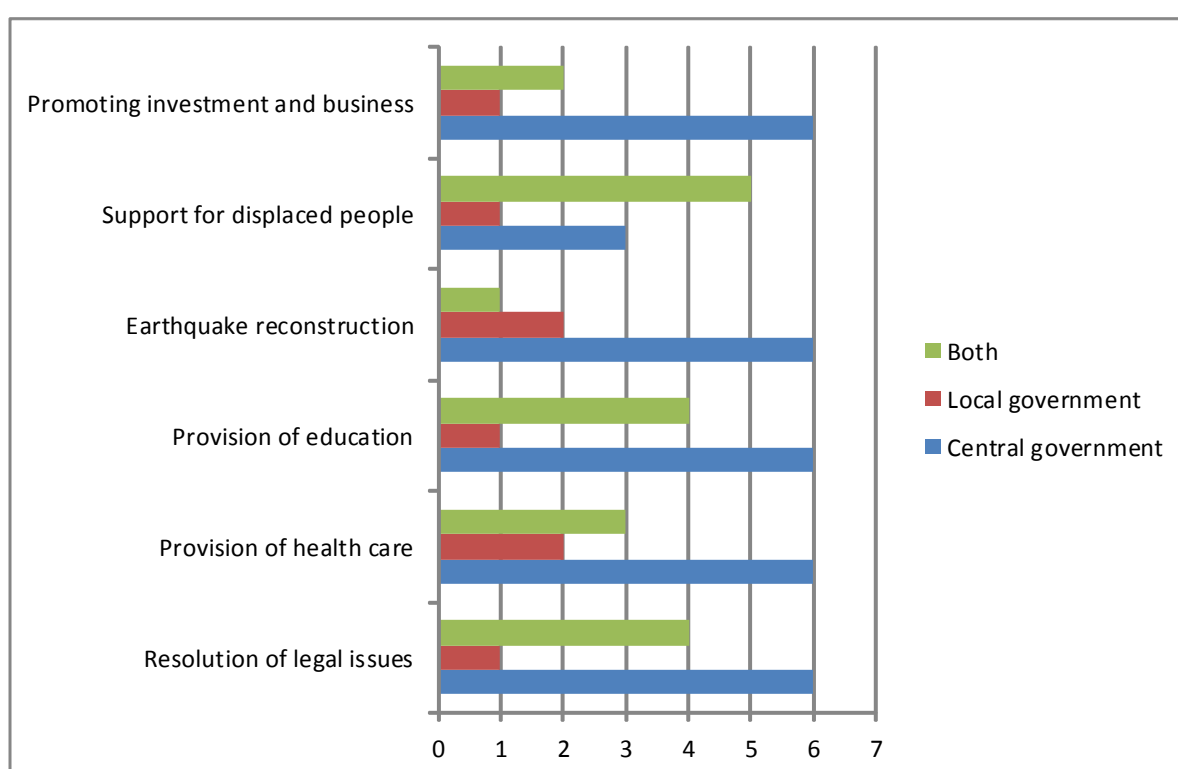
The situation of people displaced by the earthquake has particular significance for the issue of decentralisation. According to the Haitian civil society organisation KORAL, people who were internally displaced after the earthquake now fall into three categories: those that returned to Port-au-Prince; those currently moving back and forth; and those that stayed in the area to which they migrated after the earthquake. In its response to the questionnaire for this research, KORAL estimated that 60% of the people who migrated to five communes in the South department have stayed there. KORAL suggests that the main reason for this is the support given to encourage people to settle in the migrated area. However, many municipalities have struggled to respond to an influx of internally displaced people due to a lack of institutional capacity, weak governance structures and inadequate local resources.

Findings

The current situation: centralisation prevails

All participants were in agreement that centralisation prevails to date. Most Haitians have great difficulties in travelling to the capital given the poor infrastructure (including poorly maintained roads, no public transport, and limited private transport), but are forced to travel to Port-au-Prince to process all their administrative papers and legal documents (eg passports, driving licence, birth certificate, land title, etc). In spite of the long journeys, these bureaucratic offices do not respond quickly to the needs of the population, creating a situation under which corruption (eg bribes) can thrive. The lack of livelihood opportunities also accelerates the exodus from rural areas to the cities. This rural population usually ends up in poor neighbourhoods or slums in the city, living in very overcrowded and unsafe conditions in houses built without the appropriate standards and in areas that experience high levels of crime.

The chart below shows the perceived location of decision-making in Haiti at present:



[Note: The figures are based on the number of participants who responded to the question “Where do you think decisions on the following issues are mainly taken at the moment? – Choose between central government, local government, both.” Some respondents identified decisions being taken by the international community along with central government. Because this was not an option offered to all respondents, these responses have not been included in the chart, but the responses demonstrate that the international community is currently perceived to play a part in decision-making in Haiti.]

The benefits of decentralisation

The questionnaire did not prescribe what decentralisation should consist of, but responses from participants indicated a broadly shared understanding of decentralisation as being the partial transfer, through a legal framework, of decision-making powers and resources from central government to the regional and local authorities. These authorities have responsibilities in the provision of basic services and for implementing plans for political, social, economic, cultural and administrative development in relative autonomy (legal and financial) from, but in coordination with, central government. Those plans

will ensure citizens' participation in the decision-making process and are developed based on their real needs.

Answers from participants reflected a widely shared belief that decentralisation of economic and political power is essential for any viable reconstruction process in the country. There was a broad common view that decentralisation should be part of an integrated process which follows a national vision for reconstruction and so creates the basis for real social integration.

At a practical level, it was felt that decentralisation could facilitate improvements in local services within a relatively short period of time. This may discourage a continued rural exodus, which could contribute to reducing overcrowding in the capital. Effective decentralisation in Haiti would also help to correct the current imbalance in the country. It would allow local governments to make decisions with relative autonomy and to use local resources and local people to deliver services. This would mean, for example, that people could conduct official business locally, such as obtaining a passport, driving licence or a birth certificate, instead of having to travel to Port-au-Prince. Overall, these impacts would mean that decentralisation would be beneficial for the country as a whole.

All participants agreed that decentralisation could:

- increase the participation of citizens in the reconstruction process
- ensure the adoption of programmes that meet the real needs of populations and areas
- encourage the equitable distribution of available resources
- promote the emergence of various economic growth centres
- reduce the exodus from rural areas towards Port-au-Prince
- improve the management and maintenance of environmental resources.

Decentralisation and the reconstruction process

Participants felt that at the moment, decisions are mostly taken by the international community and at central government level on reconstruction issues, through the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC), the big NGOs (with sizeable funds) and multilaterals (eg the United Nations). Local administrations are kept away from this process. Central government is keeping almost all the human and financial resources in Port-au-Prince, decides where to intervene without advising the local administration, and is granting budgets without any transparency. Consequently, opinion at the local level is not currently taken into account.

In contrast to this perception of the current situation, half of respondents felt that the reconstruction process should be a shared responsibility between central and local government, whilst the other half expressed that it was largely the responsibility of local government.

Changing the political framework

Decentralisation was seen not as an end in itself, but as a tool to facilitate regional (or local) development. However, participants noted that in a country like Haiti, with its high level of centralisation, the concept of regional (or local) development challenges the current model of national development, and requires a shift in the existing political framework.

All participants felt that, given the appropriate planning, Haiti could realistically undertake a process of decentralisation. This would require a judicial and legal framework covering, for example, areas of responsibility and limits of jurisdiction; and a restructuring of the country's administrative system, taking into account local realities such as the absence of public institutions, and the existence of endogenous local organisations, in certain areas. All participants emphasised that for decentralised decision-making to work, there would need to be a clear division of roles and responsibilities between central and local governments, depending on the level of socio-economic development and availability of resources.

However, all participants agreed that the main obstacle to decentralisation is not the legal and administrative process. Their view was that decentralisation had remained stagnant due to a combination of factors including the lack of political will; the absence of a clear development vision among the ruling

political elite; and the lack of respect for Haitians as citizens (their capacities and potentials). Participants noted that there are considerable authoritarian tendencies embedded in the current government structures, which makes centralisation difficult to break. Participants felt that the idea of sharing power (and the potential benefits for Haiti) is not fully appreciated by central government and by people with political power, who are reluctant to delegate authority for fear of losing position or power.

Through all the responses it was consistently acknowledged that some of the decisions should be kept at central government level in order to keep the country's unity and overall vision. The underlying objective of decentralisation, given by all participants, was to facilitate processes for local people at local level within a coherent, shared vision for the nation as a whole. All participants shared the view that the Haitian central government should focus on strategic matters concerning the nation and relating to global and macro policies, and should leave more operational tasks to local governments.

One participant argued that a decentralised approach could change the responsiveness of central government to civil society concerns because the influence from grassroots organisations would become more relevant. With the power to directly influence policy and political changes, local communities could regain political relevance and be better able to keep the attention of central government. Decentralisation would also enable central government to better understand the needs of each community and therefore to better target interventions. Central government may become conscious of the important value of civil society contributions and, in a system of delegated power to local authorities, these authorities would be encouraged to plan in consultation with civil society. As a result, decentralisation would build and maintain contacts at all levels of governance, from local communities to the highest national authorities.

Increasing citizen participation

All participants were aware that the adjustments in the political framework required for effective decentralisation would mean changes both in the form and the quality of political participation. They felt that local governance and local management could help change the power relations between citizens. One participant suggested that without this transformative process, decision-making at the local level would remain informal and unofficial in nature, and that the strengthening of local participation in the political process therefore requires the formulation of real political tools that safeguard local powers of decision-making and service delivery. Haitians will be able to participate more in political processes if genuine spaces of political dialogue, in close proximity to the decision-making power, are created.

One participant stated that a decentralised approach – together with a participatory vision, transparency, modernisation of the state, and good technology – will help the local population to become active in decision-making so that citizens are able to take greater responsibility for their own destiny. Participants agreed that decentralisation could help to increase social consciousness and to commit people to work towards the collective good. For example, local budgets could be set in consultation with the grassroots rather than (as in the current system) presented top-down by the delegated Minister, who is usually quite detached from local communities and local realities. By encouraging more attention to local demands and the adoption of decisions that reflect local conditions and situations, the dialogue between leaders and citizens would improve.

Meeting local needs

Participants highlighted decentralisation as a way of helping decision-makers to increase their knowledge of the local area, identify the needs of the local population, better define priorities, and provide specific solutions to the realities faced by local communities.

Participants recognised that a great deal of planning and management is needed, including:

- land management
- the establishment of regional and local infrastructure
- the organisation of regional and local public services
- the creation of a communication network (including telecommunications)
- the design of urban planning adapted to the population's habits, customs and culture

- development of skills
- the mobilisation of local resources (human, cultural, historical, natural)
- the development of entrepreneurs and financial independence based on municipal taxation
- access to credit and other financial opportunities.

Participants stressed that, in the process of formulating these plans, poor and marginalised communities must be able both to participate fully in the decision-making process, and to have full and equal access to services.

Increasing people's trust in government

Participants suggested that local authorities may become more motivated to carry out their mission given that they are in close proximity to the local communities. This proximity may also contribute to giving quicker and more effective responses. Those effective responses from local authorities will translate into improved access to basic services. Local authorities will be seen as actively working towards improving local development, which will boost local public opinion and increase consensus in the implementation of decisions.

A significant achievement will be developing trust between civil society and local authorities in order for citizens to willingly pay taxes, thereby increasing local revenues and socio-economic and political stability. In time, all these practices will contribute to reducing corruption and increasing public accountability through greater citizens' monitoring. These improvements in local development could help correct the power imbalances in the country and so create a level of harmony between local and national development.

Economic benefits and investment

Participants suggested some potential economic benefits of decentralisation:

- provision outside Port-au-Prince of documents such as driving licences, birth certificates, ID cards, passports
- more transparent use of resources by central and local authorities
- more investment in the provinces in services and infrastructure
- promotion of local tourism in order to revalue and revamp Haitian historical sites
- promotion and support of investment opportunities for the Haitian diaspora and foreigners
- job creation outside Port-au-Prince.

Most participants agreed that investment has traditionally been in Port-au-Prince and its close surrounding areas. Several participants suggested that, after the earthquake, it was a grave mistake of the government and NGOs to centralise support in Port-au-Prince, while many earthquake victims went to live in the countryside with little resources. After those first few months following the earthquake, people then moved back to the capital. At present, most investments and reconstruction efforts are concentrated in Port-au-Prince and the vicinity, particularly in those areas identified as having high potential industrial value.

Participants pointed out that investors are interested in the regions outside Port-au-Prince, but currently this is limited to relatively small initiatives of NGOs in some provincial towns, and some investments in free trade zones. One participant proposed that at least 80% of investments should be made outside the capital, to encourage decentralisation, help build services, and create economic development opportunities. This would encourage people to stay in those new areas and others to move out from Port-au-Prince to the provinces, in turn easing the rural exodus to the capital.

Participants mentioned some of the obstacles to investment outside the capital:

- infrastructure problems
- lack of political will for this transformation to happen
- lack of resources from central government for making this possible
- lack of qualified human resources in provincial areas, due to the 'skills drain' from rural areas to the cities

- difficulties in hosting and/or attracting qualified workers and/or professionals due to lack of services, harsh living conditions, and concerns about security.

Participants also acknowledged that consolidation and sustainability of investment in risky areas could be a disincentive.

All participants suggested that investment outside of Port-au-Prince should be primarily focused on infrastructure development – roads, bridges, electricity, schools, hospitals, etc – to ensure that minimum conditions are created in order to attract people to those areas and encourage further development. If Haitian policy makers focus on equipping specific provinces with these basic services, other links and further development of those areas will follow. This might require a high initial investment but the lack of competition and potentially high return in the medium and longer term can provide a balance.

Five participants stated that consideration should also be given to care of the environment in order to minimise environmental degradation.

Internally displaced people

All participants, except one, had no doubt that a large number of displaced people have returned to Port-au-Prince. The main reasons given were:

- the concentration of humanitarian aid in Port-au-Prince
- the absence of a framework to support internally displaced people in the regions
- the temporary nature of displacement for some families
- the lack of a reconstruction plan based on a national vision and capable of bringing hope of improvement in the living conditions in the provinces.

Most participants stated that Haitians living in Port-au-Prince feel they have no choice but to stay there. There is nothing encouraging people to leave Port-au-Prince, in spite of the serious crimes, poor sanitation, and the devastating effects of the earthquake; people still continue to settle in the capital even under the rubble. Yet most people staying in Port-au-Prince are marginalised, with few resources, in search of employment, and living in conditions of great overcrowding – a vicious cycle of insecurity.

Several participants said that an increased decentralisation of power to local government would make a big difference because it would allow the local authorities to assume their duties with greater seriousness and with a clear mandate to meet the basic needs of the community. It would increase the value of living in local cities and relieve the pressure in the capital. It would improve the conditions of the most vulnerable population by creating incentive programmes for people to settle in new areas.

There were several strategies mentioned by participants that could be employed to encourage people to move away from Port-au-Prince:

- activities generating regular and substantial revenues and/or investments
- access to education for children and youth: good primary, secondary and technical schools for children and youngsters
- opportunities to find decent housing
- provision of basic services: healthcare, potable water, electricity, sewage
- employment and job creation, such as by creating commercial centres
- a large mobilisation campaign
- better transport facilities.

Risks of decentralisation

One participant noted the risk of falling into practices such as political clientelism and control by the local elite. If this happens citizens will become disenfranchised and disenchanted with the process, which could lead to the non-participation of local actors, lack of trust in the public authority, and further potential instability. Therefore, for the decentralisation process to succeed, the local authority must take responsibility for following good practice and ensuring accountability, whilst citizens must play their part by providing serious and organised monitoring.

One participant acknowledged that the greatest risk behind decentralisation is territorial and social fragmentation, which creates barriers rather than promoting or strengthening solidarity at the national level. In addition, if the rules are unclear, conflict might arise between central and local authorities in terms of jurisdiction.

All participants noted that the decentralisation process would initially bring a higher economic cost during implementation.

Learning from others

The final section of the questionnaire asked participants if they had any awareness of approaches to decentralisation in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, or of other examples of decentralised models of decision-making that could be useful to Haiti.

One participant stated that the decentralisation process in the Dominican Republic has made possible infrastructure development throughout the country. Important investments have been made in the provinces in the provision of hospitals, universities, roads and other infrastructure, and for facilitating income generation in different areas of the country. This participant noted that the national budget in the Dominican Republic provides a certain amount to regions based on their population size, and that municipalities follow participatory budgeting processes in consultation with the local community and local leaders.

While many participants stated that Haitians could learn from decentralisation processes experienced in other countries (such as the Dominican Republic, Madagascar, Switzerland and Brazil), they mainly concurred that priority should be given to building a Haitian path to decentralisation.

Conclusions

From the responses, it was clear that there is a combination of mistrust and disappointment towards the Haitian State amongst Haitian civil society organisations interviewed, due to the State's role in repressing the population in the past, in asserting exclusionary practices, in favouring the national elites over the needs of most Haitians, and in the concentration or 'centralisation' of power in a few hands. All these elements have contributed towards alienating most Haitians, who have grown weary of State intervention. Years of poor governance, corruption and State repression have also deeply affected State-society relations, leading to a 'culture of exclusion' affecting the vast majority of Haitians.

It is in this context that decentralisation is seen as key for Haiti's short and long term development and for rebuilding Haiti's social and physical infrastructure. Respondents were clear that participation of Haitian people and civil society in discussions relating to Haiti's future is more crucial than ever. This dialogue is essential in order to build trust between the Haitian people, central government, and local government. This in turn will help to combat corruption, build accountable government structures, and decrease the gap between the State and its own population.

Making decentralisation a shared project

It is paramount that the building of the Haitian State and its civil society run in parallel in order to create a unified vision for the country. Generating processes that facilitate dialogue may help to unify those forces that can move the reconstruction and development agenda forward. In that regard, building the capacity of Haitian civil society so that it complements rather than undermines the role of the Haitian State is fundamental in promoting positive interaction. An interesting opportunity is to look into participatory mechanisms that reinforce the capacity of government institutions at national and local level whilst developing forums for reaching political consensus. Otherwise, the risk is that Haitian society will continue with its strong internal divisions, under which democratic institutions cannot be fully consolidated.

As participants indicated, decentralisation implies a genuine sharing of power between central and local government. The challenge for making this happen is enormous since decentralisation requires good rural and urban planning (which is carefully monitored and implemented), and financial investment. Given Haiti's weak State institutions, decentralisation would put enormous pressure on the State to lead and respond, so coordination and collaboration of all stakeholders will be crucial.

As expressed by all participants, for decentralisation to succeed clear parameters need to be created. Central government should largely focus on strategic matters, with responsibility for operational tasks largely devolving to local governments.

A clear opportunity is that planning for decentralisation can help to map the country's resources by providing greater knowledge of the country. It will also help to create multiple jobs outside Port-au-Prince, which would be extremely beneficial to the regions and municipalities.

Building better relationships

Decentralisation has the potential to create closer interaction between local authorities, Haitian civil society organisations and grassroots communities. Appropriate mechanisms for participation should lead to more accountability to local communities, which will favour local development and improve local governance. Consequently the outcomes will be more effective, overcoming the current problem of ineffective responses from central government, and saving time and money.

This will in turn strengthen the social fabric, which might encourage active interaction amongst different segments of the population. This could also help to rebuild trust between Haitian civil society and the institutions of the State, which could generate greater inclusion, participation and ownership. For this to happen, it is imperative that better allocation of resources is given to local authorities and that a degree of solidarity is developed between all regions and among all Haitian citizens (for example, by sharing

examples of good practice). It is also important to consider the role of local elites, which could result in local power struggles.

Finding the political will

The study findings suggest that a major challenge will be to ensure that the political will is there to promote decentralisation. Rather than the State's role continuing to be seen as serving the needs of the elite, decentralisation must be made part of an integrated development agenda that reflects the realities and voices of the population.

The political will to develop the appropriate legal framework, so that the Constitutional provision for decentralisation becomes operational, will also need to be found. This means adopting the necessary laws and regulations to ensure the changes envisaged by the 1987 Haitian Constitution can take place, and making necessary reforms to the administration – for example, to the Ministry of Finance to ensure that local authorities have access to funding allocated for their operations. Another tangible action would be shifting government resources and activities outside the capital.

Support from the international community

Given the involvement of the international community in post-earthquake relief and reconstruction, the international community can play a significant role in supporting the decentralisation process. However, Haitian civil society organisations interviewed expressed profound suspicions of the role of foreign powers and players in the country for a diversity of reasons, which include previous political and military interventions in Haiti, the perceived role of the international community in the post-earthquake reconstruction process, and the top-down agenda of some international NGOs, amongst others. Support from the international community for decentralisation processes in Haiti must be combined with a concerted effort between key players (State, civil society, private sector and international community) to consult, collaborate and work together.

Decentralisation and reconstruction

Reviving interest in and support for decentralisation in the midst of a very serious humanitarian situation is a major challenge. Yet the reconstruction process offers great opportunities for investment and business at local level. The development of Haitian cultural, historical and natural wealth could be a source for job creation and municipal revenues. It is possible to rely on local businesses to manage these resources by providing leadership but trust needs to be built with the local people and also at national and international level (diaspora and tourists). Moreover, building infrastructure (roads, ports, airports, markets, bus stations, public places, etc) also creates jobs and essential transport links, so stimulating the economy and growth. Investments in agriculture can increase production, ensure a certain level of food security and allow farmers to have more regular income.

The essential role of the Haitian people

As is clear from the responses of HAPI-UK's local partner organisations, underpinning Haiti's future potential are the Haitian people. Ensuring the full engagement and participation of the Haitian people in the decentralisation process is vital. Only by sharing ownership of their own transformative process will all Haitians be empowered to work towards their common good and common future.

Notes

- 1 Two reports published in the UK highlighted the importance of decentralisation for future reconstruction in Haiti: Haiti after the earthquake: Civil society perspectives on Haitian reconstruction and Dominican-Haitian bi-national relations, Progressio, December 2010, http://www.progressio.org.uk/sites/default/files/Haiti-after-the-earthquake_low-res.pdf (accessed 10 July 2012) and Building back better: An imperative for Haiti, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Progressio, Tearfund, January 2011, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/building-back-better.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2012).
- 2 The Haiti Advocacy Platform for Ireland and the UK (HAPI-UK) was established in 2005 and re-launched in March 2011 to promote better coordination between UK non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Haiti and encourage a real partnership with Haitian civil society organisations. Its members are: CAFOD, Christian Aid, International HIV-AIDS Alliance, Progressio, SCIAF, Tearfund and Trocaire. The Platform aims to advocate for an effective transition from relief to development, involving civil society, public and private sectors, and multilateral agencies in a transparent and democratic manner, putting the interests of Haitians first and informed by a partnership approach.
- 3 1987 Constitution of Haiti: <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/constitutions/haiti/haiti1987.html> (accessed 10 July 2012).
- 4 Article 217 of the 1987 Constitution of Haiti.
- 5 According to the Constitution, the communal sections should be the smallest section of the political subdivision and the final level of local government is the department, which includes a varying number of communes (communes have administrative and financial autonomy): see Articles 62 and 66 of the 1987 Constitution of Haiti.
- 6 Ramirez, S, Lafondant, A, and Enders, M, Local governance decentralisation assessment in Haiti, USAID, July 2006, p8, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADN818.pdf (accessed 10 July 2012).
- 7 Buss, T, and Gardner, A, Haiti in the balance: Why foreign aid has failed and what we can do about it, Brookings Institution Press, 2008, p100.
- 8 Ramirez, S, Lafondant, A, and Enders, M, Local governance decentralisation assessment in Haiti, as note 6 above, p4.
- 9 See Pierre-Louis, F, Decentralisation and democracy in Haiti, paper to the International Conference on Democratic Decentralisation, May 2000, p14, <http://decwatch.org/files/icdd/049.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2012).
- 10 Relations between civil society and public authorities in Haiti, report of international workshop organised by the Development and Civilisations Lebrete-Irfet International Centre and Karl Leveque Cultural Institute, June 2006, p23, http://www.lebret-irfed.org/IMG/pdf/070125_rapp-Haiti_engl.pdf (accessed 10 July 2012).
- 11 Buss, T, and Gardner, A, Haiti in the balance: Why foreign aid has failed and what we can do about it, as note 7 above, p5.
- 12 Building back better: An imperative for Haiti, as note 1 above, p17.
- 13 Haiti Earthquake PDNA: Assessment of damage, losses, general and sectoral needs, Government of the Republic of Haiti, March 2010, p43, http://gfdrr.org/docs/PDNA_Haiti-2010_Working_Document_EN.pdf (accessed 10 July 2012).
- 14 Relations between civil society and public authorities in Haiti, as note 10 above, p24.
- 15 Haiti Earthquake PDNA: Assessment of damage, losses, general and sectoral needs, as note 13 above, p5.
- 16 Haiti after the earthquake: Civil society perspectives on Haitian reconstruction and Dominican-Haitian bi-national relations, as note 1 above, p15.
- 17 Miles, M, Haiti's answer for six months and sixty years, Let Haiti Live project, Trans-Africa Forum, July 2010, p12.

Appendices

1: Haitian organisations participating in the research

Organisation	Type
Caritas Diocesaine de Fort-Liberte	Humanitarian/human rights/general
Comission Episcopale Nationale Justice et Paix	Human rights
Fondation Connaissance et Liberte (FOKAL)	Development/culture/education
Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatries et aux Refugies (GARR)	Human rights/humanitarian
Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui au Milieu Rural (GRAMMIR)	Human rights/general
Haiti Survie	Humanitarian/development/environment
Institut Culturel Karl Leveque	Human rights/gender/capacity building
Institut de Technologie et d'Animation (ITECA)	Rural development
Jesuit Refugee and Migrant Service (JRMS-Haiti)	Development/human rights
Konbit Pou Ranfose Aksyon Lakay (KORAL)	Development
Programme pour une Alternative de Justice (PAJ)	Justice/human rights
Promoteurs Objectif Zerosida (POZ)	Health/HIV and AIDS

Appendix 2: The questionnaire

Basic information

Interviewer:

Organisation:

Name of interviewee:

Organisation:

What are the main aims of your organisation? (eg humanitarian, development, human rights, other):

Where is your organisation based? (eg province, municipalities, etc)

I am / am not willing for my comments to be attributed to me / my organisation

I am / am not willing for my comments to be quoted in the final report anonymously

Section 1: Central government versus local government

1. What does your organisation understand by decentralisation?
2. What impact do you think decentralisation can have on the reconstruction process?
3. How important (at the present time) is the role of central government for the following?
[Choose between very important; important; not very important; not important at all]
 1. Resolution of legal issues
 2. Provision of health care
 3. Provision of education
 4. Earthquake reconstruction
 5. Support for displaced people
 6. Promoting investment and business
4. How important (at the present time) is the role of local government for the following?
[Choose between very important; important; not very important; not important at all]
 1. Resolution of legal issues
 2. Provision of health care
 3. Provision of education
 4. Earthquake reconstruction
 5. Support for displaced people
 6. Promoting investment and business
5. Where do you think decisions on the following issues are mainly taken at the moment?
[Choose between central government; local government; both]
 1. Resolution of legal issues
 2. Provision of health care
 3. Provision of education
 4. Earthquake reconstruction

5. Support for displaced people
6. Promoting investment and business

Do you agree or disagree? Why? [Space for comments]

6. Ideally, where would you like decisions on the following issues to be taken?

[Choose between central government; local government; both]

1. Resolution of legal issues
2. Provision of health care
3. Provision of education
4. Earthquake reconstruction
5. Support for displaced people
6. Promoting investment and business

If any of the answers between 3 and 4 are different, why is this? [Space for comments]

Section 2: Pros and cons of decentralised decision-making

Pros and cons of decentralised decision-making

1. "Decentralised decision-making" may mean an increase in the decisions taken at a local, rather than national government level. Do you agree with this statement and why?
2. "In general, it is better for decisions in Haiti to be taken at a local level." Do you agree with this statement and why?
3. What do you think are the main obstacles to decentralised decision-making?
4. What are the main advantages of decentralised decision-making?
5. What are the main disadvantages of decentralised decision-making?

Governance

1. How would a more decentralised approach change the accountability of government to community members (if at all)?
2. How would a more decentralised approach change the responsiveness of government to civil society organisation concerns (if at all)?
3. Do you think you will be able to participate more in the political process if decisions were made at central government or local government level? Can you please explain why? [Space for comments]

Internally displaced people

1. Which areas are more people staying in and why?
2. Is it your view that people are returning to Port-au-Prince? If so, why is this?
3. What would encourage people to move beyond Port-au-Prince?
4. Would an increased decentralisation of power to local government make any difference to this?

Investment

1. Currently where is investment and reconstruction taking place?
2. Should the Haitian administration be investing more in Port-au-Prince or outside the capital? Please explain your answer.
3. What would be the advantages/disadvantages for donors and investors when investing in development outside of Port-au-Prince?
4. What are the key obstacles to investment outside the capital?

Section 3: Bi-national and other opportunities

1. Do you know about the decentralisation processes that have taken place in the Dominican Republic? Please elaborate
2. Do you know of any successful experiences of decentralisation that could be useful for Haiti, either from the DR or other countries, and what were these?
3. Are there any advantages or disadvantages in exploring potential collaboration in decentralisation processes between Haitian and Dominican civil society organisations?