

IV. Haiti

Robert Muggah, Lead Author
Edited by Talaat Abdel-Malek

Introduction

Building better governance takes time and sustained commitment. This is especially so in countries wracked by chronic and systemic instability. Haiti has been described alternately as “failing”, “failed”, “fragile” and “collapsed” and rated the poorest and most corrupt country in the Western Hemisphere (Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index, 2004). At least six separate UN missions have sought to promote governance reforms since the early 1990s. Not surprisingly, multilateral and bilateral efforts to promote governance yielded meagre returns. Despite decades of investment, the country’s problems appear to have grown more intractable, not less.

Measuring the effectiveness of technical governance promotion is exceedingly challenging. The overall lack of donor coherence and co-ordination on strategic priorities in states in situations of fragility means it is difficult to evaluate the practical outcomes of specific technical interventions on the ground. All the more so when one recalls that there is comparatively little evidence of a causal relationship between specific governance inputs and outcomes.

This policy paper issues a critical overview of past and present efforts to promote good governance in Haiti. Divided into three sections, it first considers the factors contributing to a “governance impasse” in Haiti; it then chronicles external efforts to promote governance between 1990 and 2008; the paper closes with a review of strengths and weaknesses in governance promotion and identifies several entry points for improving technical assistance.

A Chronology of State Failure: 1987-2008

Routine instability and shifting geopolitical priorities repeatedly frustrated the emergence of a coherent and nationally owned governance strategy in Haiti. Haiti has, in fact, suffered from a profound crisis of governance for decades. After the promulgation of a new constitution in 1987, the country was crippled by political instability at the centre in Port-au-Prince. Positive gains arising from the democratic transfer of power to President Aristide and his Lavalas party in 1990 were quickly reversed after his forced removal less than twelve months later by Lieutenant General Raoul Cédras of the Haitian Armed Forces (FADH). To reinstate Aristide, donors applied mandatory and voluntary sanctions and authorised the first of several US-led intervention forces and a UN Mission (UNMIH) between 1993 and 1996.

Upon being reinstated, Aristide promoted a series of reforms. He rapidly disbanded the FADH and reconstituted the Haitian National Police (HNP) as the sole legitimate providers of state security. Following a limited US/UN-supported disarmament and demobilisation programme directed at FADH, Aristide was replaced by President René Préval - then a close ally of Aristide - during elections in 1996 and aid poured into the country. However, donors grew increasingly wary as these reforms bore few returns. By the end of 1997, the UN ended many of its peace support operations. Meanwhile, the Préval administration faced a succession of political deadlocks as well as popular discontent, shored-up in large part by pro-Lavalas groups and thugs.

The years 1998 to 2002 witnessed a rapid surge in insecurity. Widespread corruption became difficult to conceal and political violence flared anew. By mid-1998, more than USD 340 million was held back by international financial institutions for reasons of "political instability, woefully poor governance and corruption" Sporadic efforts to promote governance were supported by the Organization of American States (OAS) and bilateral donors - including the strengthening of public sector functions such as the treasury, judiciary and human rights monitoring through NGOs. Since these interventions were disconnected and uncoordinated, they were often prematurely abandoned. By 2001, the UN had almost entirely shut-down its operations in the country and the World Bank announced that it was suspending its loans.

From 2002 onwards the country began to implode. A rash of cross-border massacres by paramilitary death squads and former FADH soldiers were tipping the country into chaos. Few actors were prepared to intervene. Donors grew progressively uneasy with the president's autocratic style and use of armed militia. Officially adopting a "hands-off" approach, certain donors such as the US, Canada and France began channelling 'governance' assistance toward the recruitment and training of so-called "opposition groups" in and out of the country. Almost exactly a decade after the last peacekeeping mission had come to an end, the UN Security Council sanctioned a Chapter VII intervention and UNSC resolutions 1529 and 1542 set up the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH).

Within months of the intervention and installation of MINUSTAH, a caretaker government was established to pave the way for legislative and presidential elections in 2005. Although the interim government periodically demonstrated a will for genuine reform, it was paralysed by a marked inability to absorb funds, weak institutional capacity, flagrant corruption and a massive "credibility gap". The executive was undermined by the absence of a sitting legislative body. At its heart was a centralised planning and funding mechanism - the Interim Co-operation Framework (ICF) - that combined a needs assessment with a mechanism for pooling pledges and harmonising assistance. It advanced a four-pronged approach to guide recovery - focusing on political governance and national dialogue, economic governance and institutional development, economic recovery and access to basic services. More than USD 1.089 billion was pledged by over a dozen countries. It was also expected that the ICF would serve as the basis for a future Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

But expectations exceeded realities. Part of the problem was inherent to the multi-donor ICF itself (Winters, 2008). The ICF lacked vertical and horizontal legitimacy. It was hastily cobbled together over a two-month period in mid-2004 by 26 bilateral and multilateral partners and was jointly overseen by the UN, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. It was never "owned" by Haitians. Twelve months after its creation, fewer than ten percent of the allotted resources were disbursed. Commitment to the ICF was also erratic - with the United States and France bypassing it almost entirely. Pledged funding failed to materialise.

With the "successful" election of Préval in 2006, a degree of political and economic stability was established. A semblance of macro-economic progress appeared to emerge. The GDP growth rate

steadily climbed and, with nudging from the World Bank, “governance promotion” assumed a priority once more. Promising interventions supported by the World Bank Institute (WBI), including a large-scale diagnostic study and follow-up studies of public sector capacity focused on the effects of weak governance on economic growth. Sustained interaction between public and private actors during the preparation of the diagnostics also helped legitimise a national governance strategy. But owing to “serious constraints at the sector level”, the WBI aimed to invest in strengthening capacity of non-governmental players and promote collective action, reinforcing the “demand side of governance” as the key ingredient to improve the overall governance environment.⁶

The Anatomy of State Failure: from Below and Above

“Bad” governance is typically viewed as a consequence of endemic weaknesses in Haitian society. Lip-service is occasionally paid to the crippling effects of geopolitics and the latent racism of outsiders. It is, of course, true that certain segments of Haitian society are responsible for the collapse of governance “from below”, due to deep political, social and economic cleavages in Haitian society. These political and social problems are compounded by systematic corruption at the centre, poor macroeconomic planning and systemic poverty.⁷

Over the past five decades, political power in Haiti was narrowly confined to the political and commercial elite. Vertical and income inequality is extreme: almost fifty percent of the country’s wealth is concentrated in the hands of just one percent of the population. Likewise, most citizens have and continue to work in the informal sector. Donors were content with the stability such dictatorships afforded -especially given the proximity of nearby Cuba -and the visible order they seemed to inspire. Following the meteoric rise of Aristide in the 1990s, however, a strong populist and pro-poor sentiment briefly defined the Haitian political landscape. Nevertheless, with the exception of a brief interlude in the mid-1990s, the state has been manifestly reluctant to, and incapable of, sustaining and managing accountable, legitimate and accessible public services for the vast majority of Haitians. A volatile cocktail of corruption, divisive (zero-sum) politics, weak and predatory state services outside of the capital and a precarious economic environment have together contributed to a series of violent outbursts over the past two decades.

Corruption is another monumental obstacle to legitimate, predictable and efficient governance in Haiti, endemic since the 1970s. In 2004, Transparency International rated Haiti the most corrupt country in the world (out of 145) and the situation appeared to decline even further in the following years (Carrillo, 2007). Corruption extends far beyond the ruling elite: it is burrowed deep into the security sector, judiciary, line services and parts of the private sector. As a result, donors adopted a risk-adverse approach in their dealings with Haitian institutions. Haiti today registers amongst the lowest human development indices in the world (UNDP 2004).

External factors “from above” have also done much to cripple the state’s capacity to govern. Arms transfers, narco-trafficking, in-migration of deported convicts and criminal elements and geopolitical factors have all severely hampered efforts to promote rule-based and predictable governance (Gauthier, 2008; Muggah, 2005). Other external factors include multi/unilateral interference and conditionality. Pressures by the OAS on the president and his allies through threats, sanctions and withholding of aid have not yielded their desired effect (keeping Aristide from being re-elected). The fractious relations between donors and Haitian authorities resulted in uneven and wasted investment to the extent that “of the roughly USD 2 billion spent by the international community between 1994 and 1998, there is today virtually no legacy” (Hawrylak, 2005, 35; Muggah, 2006). As a measure of discontent, donors progressively bypassed Haitian authorities altogether and aimed to support civil society organisations directly.

Given Haiti's politicised environment, donors found it exceedingly difficult to locate alternative entry points to promote governance. Certain donors began to provide covert support to anti-Lavalas groups. Even in the best of circumstances, it is challenging to identify and strengthen civil society groups, typically viewed as a fundamental component of the governance agenda. Despite considerable efforts to strengthen voluntary associations, co-operatives, trade unions and NGOs as service providers, the World Bank concluded that "the country appears to have a weak civil society with limited capacity to challenge public authorities in order to enhance their performance and responsiveness to the citizenry" (World Bank, 2002).

Lessons Learned: Old Wine in New Bottles?

What lessons can be learned from this experience? Governance promotion with difficult partners in states in situations of fragility is immensely challenging. A number of lessons are drawn below to help guide policy-makers and practitioners promote good governance.

Correctly define external and internal bottlenecks: owing to the scale, magnitude and regularity of Haiti's governance impasse, diagnosis and decisions on aid allocation are often rendered rapidly and in a reactive manner. In the process, donors frequently adopt conflicting objectives, fail to consult, in some cases "punish" partners by prematurely withdrawing assistance, and in others fail to provide guidance to set priorities, execute programmes, and monitor or measure outcomes. Because of the complexity of Haiti's political and social realities, it is not especially "legible" to donors.⁸ The Haitian case amply reveals that donor behaviour matters. The presence of too many donors with competing interests consumes the scarce time and energy of domestic policy-makers.

Privilege political solutions over technical quick-fixes: the scope for direct outside intervention and governance promotion with states in situations of fragility and difficult partners is perhaps more limited than once believed. In some cases, the most appropriate course of action may be to do nothing at all, however unpalatable this might at first appear to politicians, interest groups and human rights activists. Also accepted is the idea that public institutions cannot be created by transposing models from wealthy to poor countries, but by a process of state-society bargaining. In Haiti, bargaining is tricky due to the challenges of locating appropriate agents and interests, the politicisation of public institutions and their lack of accountability and the violence that so often accompanies formal and informal state-civil society exchanges.

Avoid either/or approaches to governance promotion: one lesson is that "either/or" approaches to governance - targeting public institutions or civil society - may do more harm than good. Neither on its own holds the key to unlocking good governance. Instead, governance strategies could explicitly take account of the dynamic relationships between the two clusters of actors, and build incentives toward collective action. Such a strategy carries certain risks as successful intervention depends on a sound grasp of the political and social context. This requires competent and relatively unbiased (and Creole-speaking) personnel - individuals in distressingly short supply. In Haiti, the low levels of perceived legitimacy of the government, high levels of illiteracy and weak systems of communication limit the prospects for progressive collective action.⁹

Move beyond the labels: too often, apolitical labelling leads to formulaic interventions. To be effective, good governance requires thinking differently about civil society. A key strategy adopted by donors following Aristide's contested election win in 2000 (and again since 2004) was to redirect aid to supposedly "progressive" elements in civil society and effectively bankrupt a "morally bankrupt" state. But there is nothing intrinsically benign about civil society. Stung with poor returns, civil society is now treated with suspicion as a dangerous entity not to be trusted. Again, this misreads the

inherent complexities within civil society.¹⁰ There are, of course, opportunities to support “change agents” from within civil society - but it must be understood that these actors operate with a heterogeneous constellation of interests that are alternately independent of and reliant on state institutions. More attention needs to be given to diagnosing the relationships between particular state authorities and civil society actors, and the design and support of representative institutions to facilitate (peaceful) political exchange and the channelling of grievances.

Adopt a long-term approach: there are no shortcuts for achieving good governance. Donors must know how to adopt a long-term vision, challenging conventional aid cycles and domestic political-electoral horizons. They need to improve their own internal organisational and policy coherence, and create a more positive environment in which to adapt policy, paying attention to the rules and mechanisms of engagement. Failure to do so could yield more difficulties.

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