

“A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS” (*YOUN VWA POU PEP LA*)

An initiative to include the Haitian people’s views for the 31 March 2010 Donor’s Conference

SUMMARY:

By conducting a series of focus groups in Haiti’s ten departments, six partner organizations have sought to capture the opinions and aspirations of Haitian citizens who are not members of organized civil society groups and, as such, would not be included in any of the consultation mechanisms conducted for the donor conference. The purpose of this exercise was to attempt to ensure that the opinions of average Haitian citizens on the country’s reconstruction and development could be heard. In the course of 156 focus groups, 1750 Haitian citizens articulated several clear messages:

- ◆ **There is a strong demand for participation and an end to exclusion.** The exercise was an opportunity, often for the first time, for people to express themselves on issues of concern to their communities and to themselves as individual citizens. After 12 January, the quest of the common man/woman to put an end to exclusion and be part of the decision-making process on the way forward is stronger than ever. There is now a firm expectation from people at grassroots level that they should be consulted on a regular basis.
- ◆ **Haitian people insist on decentralization and deconcentration of public services with increased participation of local management.** There is a common demand that the reconstruction package benefit all Haitians, regardless of their status and location. Most want job opportunities closer to home, no matter how remote their communities and demand a say in the development of their regions. Such aspirations are generally expressed in terms of “*decentralization*” and “*deconcentration*” seen by nearly all as the only way to rebuild Haiti better.
- ◆ **A clear majority of focus group participants, from both rural and urban areas, strongly believe that there is a critical need to invest in people** (“*investisman nan moun*”). The main priorities should be the creation of jobs, the support to agriculture in order to generate development, the building of schools, hospitals, roads and increased access to micro-credit, the main objective being to enable citizens to assume their own family responsibilities.
- ◆ **Responsible aid must reinforce Haiti’s sovereignty.** A clear majority of focus group participants, from both rural and urban areas, strongly believe that there is a critical need to focus on support to agriculture in order to generate development and create jobs. Other priorities in the economic recovery are the building of roads and increased access to micro-credit. The overall purpose of reconstruction should be to enable the country to progress while avoiding aid dependency. Haitians do not see their future as being passive recipients of foreign aid.
- ◆ **Haitian people insist on being treated equally and with dignity.** Any reconstruction programme should be designed to correct existing inequalities between poor/rich, rural/urban and the capital/regions.

OBJECTIVES

1. In order to compile a snapshot of the ordinary people's views on Haiti's future and to endeavour to ensure that their voices are taken into consideration in shaping reconstruction policies, six partner organizations conducted a series of 156 focus groups in urban and rural areas of Haiti's 10 departments in the first week of March 2010. 1750 Haitian citizens took part in the focus groups. The six organizations are Help¹, Kozepep, ATD Quart Monde, Zanmi Lasante, the Office of the U.N. Special Envoy and MINUSTAH. The focus groups aimed to gather perspectives on the country's reconstruction from Haitian citizens who, because of their age, background or social status, stand little chance of accessing more formal consultative mechanisms.

METHODOLOGY

2. The **focus groups** were varied in composition. They comprised between 8 and 15 persons and included IDPs in camps, peasants and farmers, teachers, students, market traders, street vendors, manual laborers, students, the unemployed, the disabled and other groups. Given the specific purpose of the project – giving a voice to the voiceless – people in positions of authority or influence in the public sphere (e.g. senior civil servants and politicians) were not invited to the debates as they have other platforms to express their views. A balance between rural and urban areas was sought and attention was given to gender balance. Adults of all ages were consulted.
3. The partner organizations sent teams of Haitian facilitators to the field and each team conducted a series of five focus groups. Discussions were recorded and written field reports were consolidated in this present document in consultation with all of the partners.

This country-wide exercise does not purport to be a comprehensive opinion poll nor a needs assessment. Despite the limited scope of this survey, those consulted were sufficiently numerous and from diverse sectors that is reasonable to infer from the focus groups that many of the concerns and needs that have been reported are shared, at least in part, by the Haitian people at large. This exercise is, despite its limitations, the most complete

¹ Partner organizations:

- The mission of the *Haitian Education Leadership Program (HELP)* is to provide university scholarships to top high school graduates who cannot afford tuition.
- The *Komite zafè enterè peyizan pou entegrasyon ak pwogrè (KOZEPEP)* is a peasant organization active in Haiti's 10 departments.
- Engaged since 25 years in Port-au-Prince, in the zone of Haut Martissant, more particularly in the neighborhoods of Grande Ravine and surroundings, *ATD Quart Monde* focuses its work on education, health access and support to young children.
- *Zanmi Lasante*: "Partners in Health" is an NGO that has been providing health care to rural Haiti for decades.
- *The Office of the Special Envoy*, whose mission is to support relief and recovery efforts in Haiti, has been instrumental in developing this project.
- *MINUSTAH* has taken part in the initiative through the direct involvement of its national staff in the field, the National Professional Officers.

consultation of its sort as it covered a wide range of rural communities, displaced camps and slum neighborhoods. It is limited but it is the expression of people's views, and it was a significant opportunity for those of disadvantaged background to express themselves.

MAIN FINDINGS

Widespread stress and anxiety

4. More than two months after the 12 January earthquake, Haitians are still suffering from the **psychological impact** of the tragedy. The vast majority of people, even those outside the area between Miragoâne, Jacmel and Port-au-Prince which was directly affected by the earthquake, suffer from post-traumatic symptoms such as stress, anxiety and sleeplessness. There is widespread fear of another disaster. Many of those not physically affected by the quake continue to grieve for friends and relatives killed, particularly when bodies still remain under rubble and for those wounded or made homeless. This stress is compounded by feelings of frustration among the unemployed and the pressure on local services caused by the weight of numbers of displaced people.
5. Adding to the stress generated by the catastrophe, there are concerns about its **social and economic impact**. Thus, in several departments, focus groups reported on the effect of an economic downturn which has coincided with the arrival of those fleeing the capital. Examples reported by focus groups include:
 - A general increase in prices, especially for basic goods.
 - The loss of remittances from relatives who used to live and work in the capital.
 - An adverse effect on women entrepreneurs, a key actor in the marketing system for agricultural products (as wholesale dealers and street merchants), after the country's main market – the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area – was disrupted.
 - An additional burden placed on individual households by newly arrived IDPs.
6. Various focus groups reported that anxiety is also exacerbated by **security concerns**. Residents in the metropolitan area have reported an increase in robberies and assaults. They also fear a return in their communities of prisoners who escaped from the national penitentiary. Those in the regions tend to be worried about the arrival of outsiders who have no local support mechanisms. There is fear that criminals and escapees are among the new arrivals.

A surge of hope

“Tout sak rive se volonte Bondye”

“Everything that happens is God's will”. (Grande Ravine, Port-au-Prince)

7. In these dire circumstances, it is important to note that Haitians have shown remarkable **resilience**. They have shown a determination to come to terms with last January's devastation and to reconstruct their own lives. In the focus groups, many expressed a profound sense of gratitude for having survived and many Haitians of all beliefs have seen their religious faith strengthened.

8. In addition, there were many reports of a sense of **renewed solidarity** between Haitians. (Participants are proud to cite examples of victims rescued or survivors supported). There is a strong sense of attachment to their locality and a desire to stick together, no matter what. In the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area in particular, where thousands have lost their homes and possessions, focus group discussions underlined the extent to which residents are attached to their own particular neighborhoods. Overall, despite the trauma and the losses, field teams detected signs of fresh hope, including among the displaced.
9. An overwhelming majority of the participants believe that Haiti can change for the better, but they insist that this transformation depends on a change of **“mentality”** at all levels of society. They envisage a complete transformation in the way individuals and institutions act through:
 - A new *“Awakening”*, fostering a greater sense of civic responsibility
 - *“Unity”*- overcoming social divisions and joining forces for a common purpose²
 - *“Accountability”*, the establishment of a State which fights corruption for the public good

Expectations for the future

“Nou wé Palé Nasyonal kraze. M ta renmen se pas engenye etrange ki ta rekonstwi l. M ta renmen ke se engenye ayisyen ki ta jwenn travay sa a pou le y ap gade sa yo ta di se Ayisyen ki te rekonstwi l”.

“We saw the National Palace destroyed. I would like to see Haitian engineers rebuild it not foreign engineers so we can look at the Palace proudly in the future and say that Haitians built the National Palace.” (Grande Ravine, Port-au-Prince)

10. Focus groups revealed that people are concerned that the reconstruction may not adequately target and reach its intended beneficiaries. There was a general appeal for **“trustworthy authorities”** who will manage aid responsibly. In fact, it is generally acknowledged that the central state together with local authorities should play a role in the reconstruction, in partnership with the international community. Great stress was put on the relative accountability of local authorities compared with national authorities.
11. Several groups emphasized **Haitian involvement** in the reconstruction. Foreign support should help Haiti become a functional country without becoming dependent on aid. The demands are clear:
 - The benefits of international aid must be shared equitably.
 - Aid should not be concentrated in the capital and physically damaged areas, but also reach the regions which have been indirectly affected i.e. by the arrival of IDPs, loss of relatives and friends and commercial networks and contacts etc.
 - The reconstruction of Haiti should also draw upon Haitian, and not only foreign, resources and competencies.

² Various segments of the population feel excluded, discriminated against or lacking status, notably peasants, the poor, the youth and even the residents of certain neighborhoods.

- Mutual accountability through international, national and local oversight of spending is seen as necessary to ensure that aid reach the intended beneficiaries.
12. Worried about being sidelined in the reconstruction process and also eager for jobs, **young men and women** want to be consulted and participate actively in the reconstruction of their country.
 13. Many voices also called for reconstruction to be designed to deliberately **strengthen the capacities** of Haitian civil servants and engineers and other technical professions.

Reconstruction priorities

“Yon timoun ki pa gen konezans, li pa gen anyen nan men li, li pas konsidere nan sosyete a”.

“A child who is not educated has no tools for the future, he/she is not important in the society”.
(Grande Ravine, Port-au-Prince)

14. Focus groups highlighted the following **five key immediate priorities in reconstruction**:
 - ▶ **Housing**: new dwellings for displaced people and the introduction of earthquake resistant building methods.
 - ▶ **Education**: overhaul of the education system throughout the country, the reestablishment and regionalization of universities, larger schools to accommodate the children of the displaced people, civic education
 - ▶ **Health**: better healthcare, building of primary healthcare facilities and hospitals
 - ▶ **Local public services**: potable water, sanitation, electricity
 - ▶ **Communication infrastructure**: primarily roads to link cities and the countryside, but also national ports and airports

“Pitit boujwa ak gran nèg yo al lekòl e genyen yon metye, men pitit malere se pafwa ya

l lekòl e yo pa menm ka rantrè nan inivèsite”.

“The children of the bourgeois go to school and develop a profession; the children of the poor get to go to school sometimes but do not get a chance to go to university”. (Port-au-Prince)

15. Although the exercise has not ranked the priorities identified by the focus groups, there seems to be unanimity about the need to **invest in human capital through education** (including higher education) and training opportunities at the local and regional levels. The Haitians want more schools and regional universities, vocational training centers, more and better trained teachers, increased equality of access, and in general the creation of an efficient educational system. Haitians want quality and standardized education for all children. They want to make academic and vocational education available to all in both rural and urban areas. Nationwide, young people are acutely aware that education not only provides knowledge and training, but also the social standing which they often lack and aspire to.

« Pou nou granmoun tèt nou, fok nou ka bay tèt nou manje, kidonk si y ap ede nou toutbon fok yo envèsti nan agrikilti peyi a »

“For us to take care of ourselves, we must be able to feed ourselves, so if they really want to help up they need to invest in agriculture.” (Pétionville)

16. **Support for agricultural production** was stressed as a top priority, including by city-dwellers. All Haitians support increased national agriculture production (instead of dependence on food imports). According to the focus groups, agriculture – perhaps more than other sectors – is considered essential to the country’s wealth and the prevailing sentiment is that the peasantry has been neglected. Invariably, interlocutors made concrete demands for training, equipment, seeds, easier access to credit and the introduction of modern techniques. Agriculture is also seen as a key source of employment: many would rather work on the land rather than seek informal jobs in the towns. All agree that the country can and should become self-sufficient in food.
17. People want to see concrete measures that can boost **job creation** and **small businesses**. **Micro-credit** for small farmers and small retailers was mentioned regularly.
18. Concerns about law enforcement and access to justice have prompted repeated demands for more **police stations and courthouses** in the districts.

Choosing where to live

“Menm si peyi a kraze li pap mouri”

“Even if the country has been destroyed it will not die” (Port-au-Prince)

19. People showed great attachment to their districts (communes) and neighborhoods. First and foremost, social ties are strong and many would prefer to remain in their community whatever the obstacles. Focus group facilitators sought to understand the other incentives for people to stay in their current locations, relocate or move back to where they lived before the earthquake:
 - **In the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area**, most displaced people would like to return to their former residences provided they can find a job and basic living conditions. Citing security problems, people in camps are keen to leave as soon as possible.
 - **In the regions**, when interviewed on their motivations to stay in their department and commune of origin, a large proportion of focus group participants – including people displaced since 12 January – say that, although they want to return to their original homes, their decision is contingent on jobs and educational opportunities as well as access to public services.
20. If these opportunities do not materialize or if public services are not available, many participants stated that they will have no choice but to return to Port-au-Prince.

Displacement

“Si wal andeyó e w pa gen fanmi nan zón la wap sibi plis imiliasyon”

“If you go out into the provinces and you do not have relatives there you will suffer from more humiliation” (Port-au-Prince)

21. In the wake of the earthquake, thousands of people left their place of residence and moved into camps across the capital. Hundreds of thousands, estimated to be as many as 600,000, returned to their regions of origin.
22. Focus group participants stated that Haitians are all together in the same situation and must support each other. In the regions, most people have relatives or friends who lived in the capital at the time of the earthquake so people empathize with the victims and want to assist. Yet, the impact of displacement has become a matter of concern in host families and communities. Families often do not have the necessary capacity and space. Expanded households lead to pressure on very limited resources, especially food. **To meet such challenges, suggestions vary among the focus groups: some want more food aid be directed to the regions, while others call for an effort by the state to register and support the displaced, and even to help them relocate permanently outside Port-au-Prince.**

OBSERVATIONS

“Depi tranbleman de tèa, tout moun siniste ke l te rich ke l te pòv. Mwen ta renmen lè rebati peyi a, ke tout moun fè yon sèl san divizyon”

“Since the earthquake, we are all homeless, whether rich or poor. I would like to see the country rebuilt as one, without divisions.” (Port-au-Prince)

23. **All Haitians have been victims of the January 12th earthquake.** Most refer to the disaster as a life-shattering experience, materially and emotionally. Focus groups revealed a high degree of stress and anxiety among the Haitians in all 10 departments, regardless of their gender, age, social status or their location at the time of the earthquake. The effects of the trauma – even among those not directly affected by the earthquake – should not be underestimated.
24. **Haitians want their country to change profoundly and rapidly:**
 - With regard to reconstruction priorities, the answers in the focus groups are remarkably homogeneous.
 - Many view the earthquake as a watershed and the beginning of a period of (re)construction where all Haitians, rich and poor, could participate in their country’s development. There is hope for profound change.
 - Strong expectations that the international community will provide adequate support.
 - People want to be in control of their own future, without discrimination and dependence on aid. They called for an end to inequality.

25. Discussions have also revealed the deep and historic scepticism about the effectiveness of the state itself, its ability to articulate a vision and to bring about positive change. A key finding is that there is a **crisis of confidence** in the Haitian State, which is explained by perceptions of historical corruption, inaction and official neglect. In the focus groups, there was a **repeated demand for a “responsible” state**. It should improve its capacity to respond to people’s needs which requires an administration staffed with “*competent*” civil servants. There is also a general recognition that public institutions must be strengthened, in particular the local government system. It is worth noting that this latter demand suggests that Haitians still believe in the potential of empowerment through a strengthening at the levels of sub-municipal units, municipalities and departments.
26. The earthquake has shattered the image of Port-au-Prince as the aspirational place of opportunity and there is a **very strong social demand for “decentralization” and “deconcentration”**. This points to a balanced and coherent development of the country, easier access to public services as well as more job and educational opportunities outside what is often referred to as the “*republic of Port-au-Prince*”. A clear message was that a very large majority want to be able to live near places of origin without having to relocate to the capital to study, make a living or access public services. **Decentralization is widely seen as the remedy to the country’s ills and the unsustainable drift to urban areas.**
27. This consultation has been an opportunity for people of disadvantaged backgrounds to express themselves on historic **imbalances, which pre-existed the earthquake** and whose impact has been reinforced by the disaster. People are not only looking at the negative consequences of 12 January. Many want the reconstruction process to support Haiti by tackling pre-existing structural problems such as an over-populated capital, social inequalities and an atrophied agricultural sector.
28. Field teams reported a **very positive and enthusiastic participation** from the focus groups they facilitated. Those involved were delighted to have the opportunity to express their views on their lives and how their country should be rebuilt. In many places, this dialogue drew intense interest and people spontaneously joined the discussions. Some stated that it was the first time they had been asked their opinion on issues related to the governance and the future of their country.
29. Participants not only feel concerned about reconstruction, but they also want the state and the international community to regard them as **fully enfranchised actors** in this process. They stressed their desire to be consulted in setting priorities, selecting projects, and assessing tangible and measurable outcomes.

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