

Local Governance, Decentralization and Territorial Development

Haitians set up impromptu tent cities throughout the capital after an earthquake rocked Port-au-Prince, Haiti, just before 5 p.m. 12 January 2010.



Photo: Logan Abassi/ UN Photo

The importance of a balanced territorial development and decentralized governance for Haiti's future

The earthquake of 12 January 2010 has revealed how tragic the consequences of a hyper-centralization of the country's political, institutional and economic life in its capital city area can be. The over-population of Port-au-Prince caused by a massive rural exodus from destitute Haitian provinces, with little in the way of livelihood opportunities and failing basic services, resulted in a huge number of casualties. In addition, the centralization of key governance functions in Port-au-Prince and the institutional weakness left outside of it, has meant that the state machinery in the country as a whole has been affected and left in an even more precarious state than it was before. Since early March, Haitian communes have stopped receiving their monthly budgetary allocation from the Treasury. Given that the vast majority of them hardly generate any local revenue for lack of institutional capacity and adequate fiscal decentralization policies, mayors have started laying off their administrative staff, at exactly the time when responsive local administrations are crucial for dealing with the influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). These are just some of the consequences of weak local governance structures and

the absence of territorial development strategies. As the Minister of Interior recently stated in a conference addressing Haitian and foreign local officials, the earthquake has shown better than any other event before that the need for effective decentralization and balanced territorial development is no longer fuel for political and academic debates among an elite, it is a matter of survival.

The pre-earthquake situation in Haiti shows that some advances had been recently made in strengthening local governance, based on the ambitious vision set forth in the 1987 Constitution. Some of the instruments of local self-rule have been democratically re-established following a long period of instability. Political cohesion around the achievement of decentralization seemed to be moving forward and a host of capacity development support initiatives towards local governments, for a great part through decentralized cooperation channels, were under way. Yet, for the average citizen, local public services remained inefficient, when they existed at all, and economic development opportunities outside of the capital area and a handful of urban centres, were scarce.

Even though the earthquake has badly hit the national and local governance capacities, it opens up tremendous political, institutional and social opportunities for finally implementing effectively the vision of a democratic local governance system in Haiti, thereby sustaining harmonious and sustainable territorial development options chosen on the basis of a broad-based consultation process.

UNDP's approach

The main objective of UNDP's approach is to support the people of Haiti, through their central and local government structures, civil society and private sector actors, in achieving their vision of equitable and sustainable territorial development supported by decentralized governance. It sees an empowered, democratic and effective local governance system as an indispensable vehicle for concrete results in all sectors of public action, be it the provision of equitable basic services, the advancement of the rule of law and human security, reduced vulnerability to disasters or investments in viable local economic development options. UNDP's approach is based on its pre-disaster experience and achievements in governance support and its participation in the extensive post-disaster needs assessment exercise, which covered governance and

territorial development as two of its eight thematic focus groups.

To date, UNDP has made a significant contribution to local governance, decentralization and territorial development in Haiti through its institutional and technical support to the Government of Haiti to develop tools and best practices for land management and development planning. In partnership with the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), it has supported a number of pilot communes in the North-East of the country to achieve participatory governance, develop their social infrastructure and generate economic development opportunities.

In the face of the new situation created by the earthquake, UNDP's involvement and leadership in local governance and territorial development needs to be increased manifold. It is imperative that the UNDP programme provides the Government with strategic policy advice, project implementation and international best practices and that it helps Haitians build fruitful partnerships with regional and global practice networks from which Haitians can gain lessons learnt and innovative solutions. UNDP has vast experience in supporting decentralized cooperation and recognizes that Haiti's local governance and decentralization programme will benefit from it. In addition, synergies are expected to be developed between the Area-Based Recovery, Disaster Risk Reduction and Watershed Management dimensions of UNDP's programme in Haiti.

UNDP will work closely with the Government of Haiti in defining and implementing its local governance and decentralization programme and will continue its on-going cooperation with UNCDF. UNDP will also seek new partnerships with the International Labour Organization on local economic development, and UN-HABITAT on land management master plans. Joint programming will be favoured for area-based interventions, which require several areas of specific expertise. Collaboration with UNV is also foreseen.

Programme Components

During the 2010–2013 period, UNDP will support the Government of Haiti and local governance actors through a phased approach.

For the short-term (0–12 months), it will reinforce existing deconcentrated and decentralized structures through

measures to facilitate the deployment and retention of qualified personnel (including from the diaspora). Key line ministries such as health, education, public works and territorial development agencies will be targeted as well as communes that have suffered most from the earthquake, whether directly or indirectly (influx of IDPs). UNDP will also sponsor public consultations with local authorities and citizens around decentralization and territorial development options.

For the longer term (1–3 years), UNDP will:

- support the institutionalization of more effective deconcentrated service;
- assist with furthering the regulatory framework on decentralization and territorial development (in particular land management);
- strengthen the human resources and institutional capacities of local governments, community-based associations and local private sector organizations to plan, execute, raise resources for and monitor capital development and economic recovery projects coming out of a shared vision and aligned with national and regional territorial master plans;
- contribute to institutionalizing successfully tested local development funding strategies and mechanisms; and
- ensure that citizens are empowered to participate in the decentralization and territorial development project through civic education and a greater access to information.

The key outputs will include:

Functioning deconcentrated services: staffed with motivated qualified professionals, enjoying sufficient delegation of responsibilities and availing financial, technical and logistical resources needed to achieve people-centred service delivery and to support local governments in fulfilling their role. Specific attention will be given to strengthen the delegations and vice-delegations for the coordination of deconcentrated services and technical assistance to decentralized structures.

Enabling decentralization policy framework, which allows for a better subsidiarity between levels of government, a higher efficiency and transparency in the use of public resources for service delivery and more opportunities of inclusive access to decision-making on local affairs for the people. UNDP will provide expertise to

amend the constitutional provisions on decentralization, if Haitians so decide, and help mainstream anti-corruption measures down the ladder of public finance management.

National and regional territorial development master plans and strategies that have been fed by a broad-based consultation process and international expertise and can be enforced thanks to solid regulatory and operational frameworks for land management and socio-economic development at the local level.

Strengthened human resources for local governance:

UNDP will help central government establish the regulatory framework as well as institutional and technical capacities needed to develop leadership and functional skills of local officials, to professionalize the territorial administration and to educate non-state local governance stakeholders to perform better their role as partners in local governance. UNDP will also work to strengthen the capacity of the national local government association to provide services to its members, in particular in advocating their needs to central government and donors.

Increased revenues for local governments: UNDP will work to increase revenue collection by local governments (fiscal decentralization policy, strengthening of local tax collection institutions, civic education on the use of local taxes), to raise their resource mobilization capacity (especially for decentralized cooperation funds) and will support the Government to devise effective general budget support mechanisms (such as Local Development Funds).

Empowered citizenry for participatory local

governance: that understands the mechanisms and advantages of decentralized governance and the rationale for territorial development master plans so that they support them but also know how to advocate for their needs. UNDP will support civil society, local media and civic education agencies so that they can support the demand-side of local governance.

Budget

The Local Governance, Decentralization and Territorial Development component of UNDP's programme in Haiti will require a budget of US\$42.0 million for the 2010-2012 period.