

NOREF Report

President Martelly – call on Haiti's youth!

Henriette Lunde

Executive summary

Half a year has passed since Michel Martelly was inaugurated as the new president of Haiti, and so far the earthquake-devastated country has seen little progress from his presidency. The reconstruction process is slow, and frustration and disgruntlement are growing among the population. Important time was wasted during the five months it took to appoint a new prime minister and put a new government in place. Martelly's mandate was largely given to him by the country's youth, who have high expectations of him. Integrating youth into the reconstruction process is important for reasons of political stability, but young people also represent the country's most important resource *per se* by constituting a large and – relative to their parents – better-educated part of the workforce. To battle the image of Haiti

as a weak state in a land of strong NGOs, the Haitian state needs to assert itself and take on the responsibility of providing services to its citizens. Recruiting young people on a large scale for public sector employment in basic service provision and establishing a national youth civic service corps would strengthen the position of the state and let youth participate in the reconstruction process in a meaningful way. However, a civic service corps would demand high levels of co-ordination and transparency to avoid becoming an empty institution reinforcing patrimonial structures. The youth who brought Martelly to power represent a great potential asset for the country and need to be given the place in the reconstruction process that they have been promised.

Henriette Lunde is a researcher at Fafo with a regional specialisation in Haiti and a focus on youth and marginalisation in conflict and post-conflict areas. She holds an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Oslo.

Michel Martelly – a president with a mandate from the youth

More than six months have passed since Michel Martelly, also known as “Sweet Mickey”, was inaugurated as president of the Republic of Haiti and thereby assumed what has been termed “the toughest job in the Americas”.¹ President Martelly will be responsible for the immense task of rebuilding the country after the 2010 earthquake that flattened the capital, Port-au-Prince, killing an estimated 220,000 people and injuring even more. As we approach the two-year mark for the disaster, the reconstruction tasks are still overwhelming. Progress has been slow due to, among other things, a long and challenging path towards forming a new government. Not until October 18th 2011 – five months after Martelly was sworn in as president – was Garry Conille approved as prime minister by the Haitian parliament after the first two candidates nominated by the president had been rejected. Finally, a new government is in place. In addition to managing a parliament where the opposition holds the majority, Martelly also needs to master the delicate balancing act of co-operating closely with international donors and at the same time demonstrating autonomy and strong leadership to the Haitian people.

As any other politician entering a position of power in Haiti, Martelly has influential friends and allies supporting his candidacy. In particular, he is known for his links to the former army, which was disbanded in 1995. Despite his middle-class background, he never completed any higher education and prior to his electoral campaign was known to Haitians as a famous *compas*² and carnival singer. Thus, when he took over the office of president, his political experience was limited to writing satirical carnival songs. Why would Haitian voters elect a president with no previous political experience at one of the most decisive times in the country's history? More than a vote of confidence in Martelly, the election result shows the deep mistrust that the Haitian people have

1 Robert Maguire, “Haiti's new president: welcome to the toughest job in the Americas”, *American Quarterly*, Spring 2011, <http://www.americasquarterly.org/maguire>.

2 *Compas* is a popular music genre in Haiti, a derivative of the Haitian *méringue*. It is called *compas direct* in French and *kompas* or *konpa* in Haitian Creole.

towards the established political class. One may claim that Martelly was elected not *despite* his lack of political experience, but *because* of it. “I am not a politician, and I am proud of it”, is one of the statements he was recorded as making to crowds during his election rallies – a message that finds resonance in the ears of many young Haitians. Being a politician is perceived as something “dirty” in Haiti, associated with corruption, nepotism and elitism.³ During his campaign, Martelly aimed to represent a break with this image. As a critic of the traditional political elite and its ways, he appealed to the youth, despite being 50 years of age. His election rallies, where he performed on stage together with Haitian superstar Wyclef Jean, turned into public parties attracting tens of thousands out onto the streets of Port-au-Prince and strengthened his position as a spokesperson for the young. Through his anti-politics rhetoric and carnival-flavoured campaigning he probably attracted voters who would not have cast their ballot for any member of the traditional political class.

That being said, voter turnout for the election was extremely low: less than 25 percent of registered voters cast their vote during the two rounds of the election. The reason for the low turnout was partly linked to logistical problems after the earthquake, such as large displacement and problems with replacing ID cards lost in the earthquake. The exclusion of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide's party, Lavalas – still claimed by many to be the most popular party in Haiti – also alienated many registered voters. In addition, the election was marred by accusations of fraud and ballot-box stuffing. All in all, the low turnout gives President Martelly a weak mandate, primarily from the country's youth, which needs to be administered well.

Youth – the country's largest resource

Martelly is faced with high expectations from his young electorate. In many ways he is perceived as their candidate. His ability to include young

3 Henriette Lunde & Ketty Luzincourt, *Politics Is Dirty: The View of Haitian Youth*, NOREF Report, 2010, <http://www.peacebuilding.no/eng/Regions/Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean/Haiti/Publications/Politics-is-dirty-the-view-of-Haitian-youth>.

people in the effort to rebuild the country will be one of the factors with which to measure his success. Failing in this important task could lead to young voters falling back into political apathy or antipathy,⁴ or to demonstrations and riots of the kind faced by Haiti many times before.

Integrating youth into the reconstruction process is important for reasons of political stability, but young people also represent the country's most important resource *per se*. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, they make up a large part of the country's population. Thirty percent of Haitians are between 15 and 29 years of age and they constitute a large proportion of the country's potential workforce. In total, people younger than 30 make up two-thirds of the Haitian population.⁵ Investments to increase the opportunities for the present and future youth majority are crucial for long-term and sustainable development. Whether Haiti will manage to transform the reconstruction process into a sustainable development path will depend on the country's ability to facilitate youth to take on a productive role and move from being dependents to becoming caretakers. Job creation aimed especially at youth will be key to integrating the young people into the reconstruction of their country, utilising their potential, and preventing idleness and frustration.

Secondly, there is the issue of education. Although poorly educated compared to the youth of other countries in the region, young Haitians are better educated than their parents. While more than half of Haitians in their 20s have completed at least nine years of schooling, this is the case for only one in five of Haitians in their 40s.⁶ Despite the Haitian education sector being severely challenged,⁷ there has been an improvement in enrollment and graduations over the last decade.⁸

4 See Lunde & Luzincourt, *Politics Is Dirty*.

5 Henriette Lunde, ed., *The Haiti Youth Survey 2009, Vol. I: Tabulation Report*, Fafo Report no. 2009:53, Oslo, Fafo, 2009, <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20143/20143.pdf>.

6 Lunde, *The Haiti Youth Survey 2009, Vol. I*.

7 See Henriette Lunde, "Youth and education in Haiti: disincentives, vulnerabilities and constraints", Fafo Paper no. 2008:26, Oslo, Fafo, 2008, <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/10070/10070.pdf>.

8 Silje Sønsterudbråten, "Education", Henriette Lunde, ed., *The Haiti Youth Survey 2009, Vol. II: Analytical Report*, Fafo Report no. 2010:44, Oslo, Fafo, 2010, <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20188/20188.pdf>.

A certain basic education is necessary in order to train people to conduct the many tasks needed in the reconstruction process within a realistic timeframe. Prioritising training young people with long working lives in front of them is also a good investment in terms of longer-term development.

Thirdly, it is essential for successful reconstruction that Haiti creates opportunities for the most qualified parts of its youth population in order to reduce their incentives to emigrate. A vital part of Haiti's human resources are to be found in the U.S., Canada and France, or in neighbouring countries in the Caribbean. The importance of attracting assistance from the diaspora in terms of both human and financial resources has been given much attention after the earthquake.⁹ Less attention has been given to the aspect of encouraging resourceful youth to stay in the country. Roughly it can be said that youth emigration from Haiti falls into two brackets: rural youth, predominantly male, with little or no education, engaging in illegal work migration to the Dominican Republic, or urban, educated youth, with family members already part of the diaspora, migrating to the U.S., Canada or France to work or continue their studies.¹⁰

In particular, it is important to create incentives for the latter group of potential emigrants to remain in the country. For them to stay, they need to be given opportunities to practise their skills and contribute with the competence and expertise they have developed through their education. Prior to the earthquake, unemployment rates for youth with primary or less education was already high at 27 percent. However, unemployment rates for youth with some secondary or higher education was drastically higher at 47 percent and for educated women it exceeded 50 percent.¹¹ The high unemployment rate is a consequence of the Haitian state's inability to utilise the potential of its educated youth. Interviews with university students reveal that a strong intergenerational distrust exists and that educated youth feel deliberately marginalised and excluded by the

9 Republic of Haiti, *Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti*, March 2010, http://www.haiticonference.org/Haiti_Action_Plan_ENG.pdf.

10 Henriette Lunde, *Young Haitian Labour Migrant: Risks and Opportunities in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic*, Fafo Report no. 2010:24, Oslo, Fafo, 2010, <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20168/20168.pdf>.

11 Sønsterudbråten, "Education".

elder generation holding positions of power.¹² One of the important tests for Martelly and his new government will be whether they manage to open up space for resourceful youth and maximise the latter's potential for contributing positively to economic development and social change. During his election campaign, Martelly promised to fight the culture of patronage and nepotism so widespread in the Haitian public sector. An important step in this regard would be to ensure career opportunities for educated youth in the public sector, including trainee positions with possibilities of advancement for youth with education and qualifications, but lacking in experience.

How to ensure the meaningful participation of young people in the reconstruction process

The national plan for reconstruction recognised the need for large-scale job creation, and the International Labour Organisation and United Nations Development Programme provided cash for work programmes shortly after the disaster.¹³ These initiatives were rapidly followed by those of a number of international humanitarian organisations. The number of cash-for-work programmes currently active is unknown, but in total, cash for work is probably the largest source of employment in Haiti at the moment.¹⁴ Cash-for-work programmes are serving an important function in an emergency phase by absorbing some of the spare labour capacity and inserting money into local markets. However, the effort is not sustainable and is not intended to be. It therefore does not contribute to the country's development either through expanding the formal labour market or through building the capacity of the workforce.¹⁵ One of the main tasks for cash-for-work groups in the capital, Port-au-Prince, has been to remove the enormous amount of debris from collapsed buildings. Allocating this work to a manual workforce instead of using machinery has led to problems of waste and

space management that has halted the process of rebuilding infrastructure.

Creating jobs needs to remain a top priority for the new government, but not at any cost. The jobs created should be "good jobs" that contribute to the country's reconstruction and overall development. According to the World Bank, "good jobs" are those that can "support increases in household consumption over time, contribute to faster productivity growth at the aggregate level, contribute to social inclusion and gender equality, and minimize the risk of conflict".¹⁶ Implicit in this is the aim that jobs should not only contribute to improved living standards for the individual workers and their households, but should contribute to national economic growth, social change and cohesion. These are ambitious aims, but they should be kept in mind for the country to benefit from the development potential of job creation strategies.

Youth as representatives of a stronger Haitian state

In order not to lose the momentum of opportunity, President Martelly needs to battle the image of Haiti as a weak state in a land of strong non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The fact that the main employer of youth after the earthquake appears to be the NGO community is maintaining this image rather than weakening it. It is important for Martelly to show vigour and leadership by creating meaningful jobs within the public sector, based on well-defined national needs. Before the earthquake, the public sector carried out a marginal part of the basic provision of services to the country. The new government needs to show that it is able and willing to serve its people and not leave service provision in the hands of the NGOs and a mainly unregulated private sector. This presupposes that substantial parts of the money currently channelled through NGO projects should be used for strengthening public sector employment. NGOs will be needed in Haiti for the foreseeable future, but their activities must be co-ordinated with those of the government. The responsibility for providing

¹² See Lunde & Luzincourt, *Politics Is Dirty*.

¹³ Republic of Haiti, *Action Plan*.

¹⁴ Antèn Ouvriye, "Haiti: labor rights", *United Nations Universal Periodic Review 2011*, p 3, <http://ijdh.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Haiti-UPR-Labor-Rights-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ouvriye, "Haiti".

¹⁶ World Bank, "Moving jobs center stage", discussion note for Development Committee meeting, August 30th 2011, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DEVCOMMINT/Documentation/23003986/DC2011-0013%28E%29Jobs.pdf>.

services needs to be transferred back to the Haitian state if the state is to gain legitimacy among the population, and the international community needs to ensure that this is done in a transparent manner.¹⁷

The strengthening of the private sector is also important to spur economic growth and employment. Attracting foreign investments, particularly from the Haitian diaspora, has been high on Martelly's public agenda since he entered office. Important progress in this regard was made in May 2011, when the Haitian parliament amended the Constitution to allow dual citizenship. This reform allows the two million people of Haitian heritage living abroad to own land in Haiti and as such invest in their native country without giving up their primary citizenship.¹⁸ The national reconstruction strategy also highlights the private sector. The strategy is highly influenced by Paul Collier's report to the United Nations secretary-general¹⁹ prior to the earthquake and in the same way encourages Haiti to capitalise fully on the trade benefits negotiated through the HOPE II agreement,²⁰ which ensures certain types of garments produced in Haiti duty-free and quota-free access to the U.S. market until 2018. Two industrial parks are planned, one in the north and one outside the capital, to attract foreign clothes producers and create employment opportunities for Haitians.

Haiti's main comparative advantages are abundant access to cheap labour and proximity to the U.S. market.²¹ The Haitian minimum wage is approximately \$5 per day for non-textile manufacturing jobs, but only \$3 per day for textile workers. Documents made available on WikiLeaks shows that massive lobbying from the U.S. State Department on behalf of U.S. textile producers is

the reason why textile workers were not entitled to the same increase as other workers when the national minimum wage for Haiti was adjusted in 2009.²² The pressure from foreign investors to retain sub-standard conditions shows the need for strong regulations and supervision of factory workers' conditions.²³ For the new industrial jobs to contribute to improved living conditions for individual workers and their families, it is necessary to ensure that labour laws and regulations are obeyed. But one also needs to take into account these new jobs' effect in a broader context. The last time Haiti sought economic development through utilising its access to cheap labour for export-oriented production in the manufacturing industry (textiles, baseball stringing) was in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁴ Combined with aggressive development strategies encouraging a shift from subsistence agriculture to agricultural production for export and large-scale dumping of subsidised rice on the Haitian market, the result was an undermining of rural livelihoods and food production and a flow of migrants from the countryside to the manufacturing industry.²⁵ In order to learn from past mistakes, it is necessary for the Haitian state to ensure that investments in new industry are combined with the creation of economic opportunities in the countryside, both within and outside the agricultural sector.

Although the Northern Industrial Park is initially planned to support 20,000 jobs, the main bulk of private sector jobs will need to be created within agriculture, construction, and small and medium-sized businesses. Interviews with Haitian youth

17 Henriette Lunde, *Can Haiti Rise from the Rubble?*, NOREF Report, 2010, <http://www.peacebuilding.no/eng/Regions/Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean/Haiti/Publications/Can-Haiti-rise-from-the-rubble>.

18 The reform was debated after the decision was taken and at the time of writing of this report has still not been implemented; see J. Charles, "New Haiti government begins work", *Miami Herald*, October 19th 2011, http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/10/19/2462078_p2/new-haiti-government-begins-work.html#ixzz1dmn5VP1X.

19 Paul Collier, *Haiti: From Natural Catastrophe to Economic Security – A Report for the Secretary-General of the United Nations*, January 2009, <http://www.focal.ca/pdf/haiticollier.pdf>.

20 Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act of 2008 (HOPE II).

21 Collier, *Haiti*.

22 *The Nation*, "WikiLeaks Haiti: let them live on \$3 a day", June 1st 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/article/161057/wikileaks-haiti-let-them-live-3-day>.

23 The responsibility for enforcing national labour rights lies with the Ministry of Social Affairs and the labour courts. However, as a part of HOPE II, monitoring labour rights in the textile industry has been outsourced to a labour ombudsman and Better Work Haiti, a partnership organisation of the International Labour Organisation and the International Finance Corporation. Together, they oversee an independent monitoring system called Technical Assistance Improvement and Compliance Needs Assessment and Remediation. This system is financed by the U.S. Department of Labor, but up to this point no evidence is available on its level of efficiency. For new industrial jobs to contribute to improved living conditions for individual workers and their families, it is necessary to ensure that labour laws and regulations are obeyed.

24 Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1997.

25 Henriette Lunde, "Youth migration and relocation", Henriette Lunde, ed., *The Haiti Youth Survey 2009, Vol. II: Analytical Report*, Fafo Report no. 2010:44, Oslo, Fafo, 2010, <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/20188/20188.pdf>.

show that there is no lack of initiatives and ideas for economic opportunities. In the reconstruction phase, it is important that young entrepreneurs with ideas that can support livelihoods and make a positive contribution in their local communities encounter structures that enable them to turn their ideas into action. Access to credit, support and necessary training is important in this regard.

A national youth civic service corps

Shortly after being appointed, the new prime minister, Garry Conille, launched an initiative to create a youth civic service corps.²⁶ The plan is to recruit one youth from every two hundred households and train them as community health workers specialising in dealing with the cholera epidemic that so far has cost more than 6,700 lives.²⁷ The idea is not new. Article 52 of the Haitian Constitution commits citizens to national service, but the article has never been activated. Several policy advisers have called for the establishment of a youth civic service corps after the earthquake.²⁸ The idea has considerable potential, but also entails an element of risk. Done right, a youth corps would represent large-scale meaningful participation for young people in the reconstruction process, establish a higher level of much-needed skills in the Haitian labour force and show a strong state presence. However, it is necessary to be aware of Haiti's history of political patronage in this regard, where the public sector has been used to buy loyalty and quell political opposition.²⁹ A civic service corps would demand a high level of co-ordination and transparency both in the capital and outside the central areas to avoid becoming an empty state institution reinforcing patrimonial structures. Active co-operation with the private sector and civil society

is important to add checks and balances, reduce the risk of abuse, and as such strengthen the legitimacy of the corps.

Haiti is geographically located in a disaster-prone area. One of the suggestions has been to train young Haitians in disaster management by providing large numbers of youth with skills such as basic health care, emergency response and community policing.³⁰ A youth civic service corps could also be used, for instance, for basic service provision, civil education, environmental work or physical reconstruction. What is important is that youth participants are given skills needed in the country and from which they can benefit and develop further. The realisation of such an initiative would be costly and in the foreseeable future would depend on external financing. However, it would potentially involve hundreds of thousands of young Haitians in the necessary reconstruction of their own country in a way that would have positive effects on economic, social, and political development in both the medium and long term.

The window is closing

Martelly's election raised the hopes of many of the country's youth. As a politician, he represented something new; as an artist he was already well known and a role model to many. For the youth who registered to vote for him, the election meant that they had a voice and that their opinions mattered. But young voters are impatient. Important time was wasted during the five-months-long political gridlock before getting a government in place. After more than six months in office, Martelly has little to show for his presidency, and frustration and disgruntlement are growing among the population. The youth who brought Martelly to power need to be given the place in the reconstruction process that they have been promised. By utilising their numbers and resources, Martelly can strengthen the capacity of the weak Haitian state. If he manages to take advantage of the great potential his young electorate represents, there might still be a chance to "build back better", as the reconstruction slogan goes, but the window of opportunity is about to close.

26 Charles, "New Haiti government begins to work".

27 USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development), "Haiti – earthquake and cholera", Fact Sheet no. 2, 2012, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/11.14.11%20-%20Haiti%20EQ%20and%20Cholera%20Fact%20Sheet%20%232.pdf>.

28 See, for instance, Rob Muggah & Robert Maguire, "To rebuild Haiti, start with its young people", *Los Angeles Times*, January 31st 2010, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/31/opinion/la-oe-maguire31-2010jan31> and William O'Neill, "Haiti update", SSRC Features, April 2011, <http://www.ssrc.org/features/pages/haiti-now-and-next/1338/1404/>.

29 Alex Dupuy, *The Prophet and Power: Jean Bertrand Aristide, the International Community, and Haiti*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

30 Muggah & Maguire, "To rebuild Haiti".