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What Is In Haiti's Future?

Summary

- Haiti's slow pace of recovery from the January 2010 earthquake is due to the magnitude of the calamity, pre-existing conditions, institutional weaknesses, resource limitations, a cholera epidemic and disputed elections.
- The pace of new cholera infections and deaths has begun to slow, although infections and death rates remain high in rural areas and risk of renewed high infection rates is significant.
- Following protracted controversy after presidential and parliamentary elections held in late November 2010, second round runoffs have been scheduled for March 20th with President Rene Préval remaining in office through mid-May.
- The unexpected return to Haiti in mid-January of former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier and the potential return of exiled former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide have added to the country's turmoil and uncertainty.
- Scenarios for Haiti's future are based not only on the international community's ability to provide needed support, but also on the ability of Haiti's leaders and people to successfully elect a credible national government.

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A Slow Recovery

Despite \$5.3 billion pledged in recovery assistance at the March 2010 donor's conference, the pace of rebuilding Haiti has not met expectations. Fifteen months after the quake, only five percent of quake-created rubble has been removed and some 750,000 Haitians remain displaced, mostly in makeshift encampments in and around Port-au-Prince. Rubble removal has been hampered by a lack of authorized rubble deposit sites (only one exists), limited resources, ineffective coordination and the Haitian government's failure to adopt clear policies. Of the funds pledged at the donor's conference, about \$2 billion went toward recovery in 2010. Roughly 63 percent of the \$2 billion was disbursed among public sector donors and little of that has translated into improvements and activities that benefit Haitians.

Popular expectations for rapid recovery following the donor's conference have proved unrealistic in the face of Haitian realities. Even before the quake, Haitians were plagued by massive poverty, limited opportunity and weak institutions that had pushed the country to the bottom tier of social and economic development indicators such as life expectancy, infant mortality and access to health care, education and electricity. Worldwide, the country ranked second to last in income disparity between rich and poor. Overcoming these obstacles even in pre-quake Haiti presented huge challenges. Moreover, Haiti's earthquake was a historic natural disaster. More than 300,000

were killed, an equal number injured and some 400,000 children orphaned. Haiti's government lost virtually its entire physical infrastructure and some 20 percent of its workforce when 16,000 civil servants died in the tragedy. Economic damage equaled roughly 120 percent of annual GDP. Yet, within three months of the quake, Haiti and its international partners undertook a post-disaster needs assessment, developed a blueprint for the future and established two institutions—the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission and a Multi-Donor Trust fund—to guide the country's reconstruction. Given these developments, Haiti still has an outside chance of matching average disaster recovery timetables if it hits its stride about 18 months after the earthquake.

Cholera

Cholera is caused by bacteria that spread through contaminated food and water and can lead to a quick, painful death through dehydration. If detected early, it is easily controlled. Haiti's cholera epidemic, which has taken more than 4,550 lives and infected at least 231,070 since its outbreak in the Artibonite Valley in October 2010, was not linked to the January 2010 earthquake. Rather, it was driven by pre-existing conditions of poverty and a lack of sanitation and access to clean water, as well as the country's weak public health, transportation and communication infrastructures. Unproven accusations that U.N. peacekeepers from Nepal brought cholera to Haiti has led to anti-U.N. demonstrations and calls for a U.N. withdrawal.

In the aftermath of cholera's appearance, there have been serious efforts to improve access to clean water along with extensive interventions by government and nongovernmental health workers aimed at prevention, identification and treatment of the disease. A proliferation of internationally funded cholera treatment facilities staffed by Haitian and international personnel combined with greater awareness and prevention training have helped stem the pace of new infections and deaths. Nevertheless, death rates remain high and an estimated 400,000 to 600,000 Haitians will ultimately become infected. People in rural areas, especially those exposed to contaminated water in the Artibonite rice producing region, are particularly susceptible. Although some NGOs have begun to scale back cholera treatment efforts, there is widespread fear among Haitian and international officials that the next rainy season will bring another surge in infections.¹

Politics and Elections

Widespread irregularities plagued the presidential and parliamentary elections of November 28, 2010. Following street protests and complaints of fraud by all candidates, the Haitian government requested an investigation by a verification team from the Organization of American States (OAS). The team confirmed allegations of election tampering and recommended that the preliminary results announced by Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) be changed. Those results indicated that former first lady Mirlande Manigat received the most votes and Jude Celestin, the governing party's candidate, finished second just slightly ahead of Michel Martelly, a popular entertainer. The OAS recommended a runoff between Manigat and Martelly, and that Celestin be removed from the race. The verification team also recommended CEP reforms and other actions to restore public confidence in the election process. Following U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's visit to Haiti in late January, the CEP announced that the presidential runoff would be held on March 20th between Manigat and Martelly. Campaigning began on February 17th. The official results are expected on April 16th.

Concurrently, Préval, whose term was scheduled to end on February 7, will remain in office until May 14th, five years to the day after he was inaugurated for a second and final presidential term. Préval based his action on controversial legislation adopted by the Haitian parliament before it

left office last spring. Bilateral and multilateral funders signaled their agreement that this strategy would avoid a dangerous power vacuum during the election process.

Added Complications

As if earthquake recovery, the cholera epidemic and electoral politics were not enough, reverberations from Haiti's past have added to the country's complexities as two former leaders have elbowed their way back into Haiti's political arena. After 25 years in exile, former dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier unexpectedly returned in mid-January, traveling from France on an expired diplomatic passport and proclaimed his desire to help in the reconstruction of the country. The timing of his return, however, appears to have more to do with trying to gain access to millions of dollars frozen in a Swiss bank account than with charitable endeavors.² Duvalier's appearance, enthusiastically welcomed among those formerly affiliated with his regime, horrified others. Since his return, Haitian authorities have charged him with embezzlement and corruption. An investigating judge has until mid-April to decide whether the case will go to trial. Concurrently, several prominent Haitian citizens victimized or brutalized by Duvalier's henchmen have launched civil cases against the former despot, while Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have called for Baby Doc's prosecution for corruption and human rights violations during his reign.

Duvalier's return triggered speculation that former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide—in his seventh year of exile in South Africa—would also return to Haiti. Aristide's supporters demonstrated and began a vigil at Haiti's international airport, while Aristide fueled speculation by requesting—and receiving—a new diplomatic passport from the Haitian government. Aristide claimed he wished to return to contribute to Haiti's reconstruction by working as an educator. The U.S. State Department immediately issued a statement warning that a return by the former president before the completion of the election process could be destabilizing.³

Toward the Future

Haiti's future is filled with diverse prospects and scenarios, dependent mainly on the comportment of its leaders—past, present and future. The world is closely watching how the country will select its new president and anxious to see how Haiti's key political and economic actors will proceed after elections. The world hopes that they will transcend past practices of all-or-nothing politics and a rent-seeking economy based on venality, exclusion and archaic deal-making, and embrace political and economic actions based upon collaboration, compromise, support for the development of human capital and greater inclusion to alleviate poverty and achieve national reconstruction and growth.

Haiti's future might be boiled down to three broad scenarios: bad, good and better. In the worst case, the country misses the opportunity to build back better and continues down the path of poor governance, with key economic and political actors placing their interests ahead of the nation. The messy outcome of November's elections combined with the exclusion of Haiti's "voiceless voices" in the dialogue points toward this future. Key donors have expressed concerns about continuing to support Haiti should this scenario come about.

A second "good" scenario sees foreign investment flowing and available resources used effectively to promote development and growth. In this case, investment enters Haiti not just to take advantage of abundant cheap labor, but also to help develop the country's agricultural and tourism potential. Development of agriculture, which employs 60 percent of all Haitians but yields only 25 percent of GDP, is particularly important in achieving this scenario, which envisages increased small farmer income and employment in the agricultural sector.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This report is based on views expressed during a January 26, 2010 event hosted by the U.S. Institute of Peace's Haiti Working Group titled "What is in Haiti's Future?" The event featured presentations by Thomas Adams, the U.S. State Department's special coordinator for Haiti; Alexandre Abrantes, the World Bank's special envoy to Haiti; Mark Schneider, senior vice president of the International Crisis Group; and Robert Fatton, University of Virginia's associate dean for graduate programs. Robert Maguire, chair of the Haiti Working Group at USIP and associate professor of international affairs at Trinity Washington University, served as moderator. Robert Maguire and Tara Nesvadnerani, a research assistant in the Centers of Innovation at USIP, co-authored the report.

A third scenario, "better still," envisions Haiti as leapfrogging into a brave, new future as a creative and courageous government takes the reins to lead the country away from exclusionary and short-sighted bottlenecks that have hindered its development for decades. Greater transparency improves governance and policies are implemented that focus on solid fiscal policy and a social agenda that improves health and education, housing, infrastructure, agricultural productivity, environmental rehabilitation and disaster preparedness.

Although international actors will play important roles in Haiti's future, ultimately prospects for addressing the tangle of complex pre- and -post quake challenges and building a better Haiti will depend largely on Haitians themselves.

Endnotes

1. Ben Fox, "Cholera Takes a Breather in Haiti, but Could Surge," *The Miami Herald*, January 24, 2011.
2. Ginger Thompson, "Duvalier Charged with Corruption in Haiti," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2011.
3. Moni Basu, "New passport for Haiti's Aristide moves him step closer to home," *CNN* February 9, 2011.



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