

Lessons learned from Past Experience for International Agencies in Haiti

External aid can facilitate or hinder long-term peace and development. In light of the massive on-going relief effort in Haiti, it is critical to minimize harmful impacts and maximize positive impacts. Aid can worsen polarization and violence, often inadvertently, or can have positive effects on conflict and social cohesion. Although Haiti has not experienced a civil war or a war with neighbors, nevertheless, it must be considered as an active conflict zone, in which the level of violence has been high for decades. We highlight here a number of lessons drawn from several initiatives led by CDA Collaborative Learning Projects over the last 20 years, in partnership with thousands of colleagues in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding organizations. As we continue to learn more about the current context in Haiti, this document will be continually updated—please see www.cdainc.com for the most recent version.

How can the disaster response contribute to long-term development? Key Lessons from *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies at Times of Disaster*

1. ***Even the most devastated communities retain capacities.*** Even if the physical/material infrastructure is destroyed, the communities still have strong relationships, personal skills, organizational abilities, important norms and values, effective leaders and the ability to make decisions.
2. ***Hold relief work to development standards.*** Every disaster response should appreciate and draw upon local capacities—and should be designed to support and increase them.
3. ***Relief efforts can be designed to address long-term vulnerabilities and to further the long-term development agenda.*** Short-term labor intensive projects can address ecological and environmental issues by undertaking needed mitigation measures. Similarly, housing reconstruction can adopt disaster reduction standards for earthquake-resistant homes and buildings.
4. ***Relief and reconstruction programming should not be preoccupied solely with meeting physical/material needs.*** It must also integrate measures that support and enhance social and organizational elements (relationships, leadership, decision making, group capacities) and motivational factors (sense of hope, ability to affect their world, feeling that efforts will lead to change, sense of community and social cohesion).

For more information, see [*Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*](#) (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

How can we prevent humanitarian aid from worsening conflict? Lessons From the Do No Harm Project

The Do No Harm Project of CDA has been gathering evidence about the impacts of aid when given in the context of conflict. Aid has impacts on the Dividers (threats to peace and stability) and Connectors (supports to peace and stability) in a society. We have learned that there are predictable Patterns of Impact that assistance has on the Dividers and Connectors. These patterns are identifiable through Resource Transfers (what materials are provided, how they are distributed, to whom and who makes decisions about distribution) and Implicit Ethical Messages (aid workers' attitudes and actions).

1. ***The way aid is delivered can increase Dividers or tensions when:***

- Only those belonging to a particular area, religion or group receive assistance, jobs and other benefits while others in the same (or nearby) community with the same needs are left out.
- There is not enough assistance to meet the needs of all who are affected or vulnerable.
- Refugees or IDPs are assisted, but not those who stayed behind during the crisis.
- Different agencies use different approaches, have different policies or compete with one another.
- Goods meant for distribution are stolen or diverted.
- Staff members use goods and support systems for their own purposes or pleasure.
- Aid undermines or substitutes for existing and functioning local structures or support mechanisms.

2. ***The way aid is delivered can increase Connectors or positive relations between people when:***

- Neighboring people and/or communities are also assisted.
- Communities are involved in decision-making, implementation, and evaluation
- Everyone has access to information (this decreases suspicions and rumors).
- Capacity is built as part of the process, especially in analyzing local conflicts.

Do No Harm has also created a list of key questions to use when planning and reviewing a project. Evidence shows that Beneficiary, Partner and Staffing decisions can have an impact on Dividers and Connectors, as can the ways an organization interacts with Authorities. These questions only highlight **some** of the ways a project can have impacts on Dividers and Connectors and give ideas about how to make changes to a project. More information can be found on our website

When Considering Beneficiaries:

1. Do all beneficiaries of the project ***share an identity?***
2. Do beneficiaries share an identity with ***staff?***
3. How do we select beneficiaries? Do these criteria bias the program toward one group?
 - a. Using ***political criteria?***
 - b. Using ***technical criteria?***
 - c. Using ***geographical criteria?***
 - d. Using ***social or economic criteria?***
4. Are beneficiaries selected by ***authorities?***
5. **WHOM DID WE LEAVE OUT AND WHY?**

When Considering Partner Organizations:

1. Does the organization come from an area with only ***one identity group?***
2. Is the staff of the organization ***biased?***
3. How do we select partners?
4. Does the organization have ***military or political interests?***
5. **WHOM DID WE LEAVE OUT AND WHY?**

When Considering Hiring Staff:

1. Do all staff share an ***identity?***
2. Are all staff from the ***same area?***
3. How do we select staff?
4. Are there technical criteria for hiring that ***favor one identity group?***
5. Are staff selected by ***authorities?***
6. **WHOM DID WE LEAVE OUT AND WHY?**

When Considering WHAT is Distributed:

1. Are goods being ***stolen or diverted*** by non-beneficiaries?

2. Are the goods of **broad usefulness**?
3. Does the distribution make one group **better off** than others?
4. Is there a **surplus** of goods meant for distribution?
5. Are goods delivered in a **timely way**?
6. Is the project or programme **substituting for an existing and functioning local structure**?
7. Who Benefits?
 - a. Individuals
 - b. Families
 - c. Entire communities/groups

When Considering Authorities:

1. Are authorities **stealing or diverting** goods meant for distribution?
2. Do authorities say **when and where** projects take place?
3. Are authorities using interactions with the organization to **create legitimacy**?
4. Are authorities using interactions with the organization to **create the appearance of serving people**?

For more information and tools, see The Do No Harm Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict, available in both [English](#) and [French](#). Additional information on the historical background of conflict in Haiti is available [here](#).

How can the international community effectively strengthen social cohesion? Lessons from the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project, with new insights from the recent case study on cumulative impacts of peacebuilding in Haiti (2009)

The Reflecting on Peace Practice project (RPP) has worked with over 200 agencies and 1,500 practitioners to analyze the experience of peacebuilding and conflict prevention practice. The lessons help people working in peacebuilding projects to address, mitigate or prevent conflict and build social cohesion develop effective strategies and monitor and evaluate their programs.

1. **Reducing violence and achieving relative social harmony requires more than development and conflict sensitivity.**
 - *Conflict-sensitive humanitarian assistance will not bring resolution to Haiti’s deeper social and political conflicts.* A relief or development program may adhere faithfully to “Do No Harm” principles, but in so doing does not necessarily address the continuing feelings of injustice and grievance seen as a key obstacle to social cohesion. Collaborative work may help provide valuable support to existing connectors (personal relationships and friendships that existed before the disaster), but without further attention to internal dynamics that affect violence and inter-group relations, the activities will not “add up” to improve relations at a societal level.
 - *Development will not necessarily promote conflict prevention.* One of the most persistent myths among international aid workers is that development efforts will contribute to the prevention of violent conflict. Early evidence shows that there is only a weak association between “normal” development programming and conflict prevention.
2. **Conflict Analysis is essential.** Analysis is not optional; it is essential for work in conflict zones. A good conflict analysis—formal or informal—is necessary for good work, including disaster assistance and reconstruction. But programs often do not do sufficient analysis and, as a result, programs often fail to address the main dynamics of conflict and can even worsen them. A good conflict analysis:
 - Is different from context analysis. Context analysis seeks a broad understanding of the entire political, economic and social scene in order to design and implement programming. Conflict analysis

focuses more narrowly on the specific elements of that broader picture that may trigger violence and social tensions.

- Identifies and prioritizes *key driving factors* of tension and violence, and the relationships among them.
- Identifies “key actors” (not key to program, but key to the evolution of the conflict or peace).
- Identifies points of leverage for intervention.
- Takes account of and/or builds on previous efforts to determine why they have succeeded or failed, and why this effort will be different or add value.

3. In Haiti, the problem has often been misdiagnosed.¹

- Haiti has often been *treated by multilateral, bilateral donors and NGOs as a 'post-conflict country'*, yet "it is not a country that has undergone war - neither a civil war, nor a war with its neighbors - and it is a context where violence and conflict have become deeply entrenched in the fabric and politics of Haitian society." (p5)
- Different Haitians...hold contending views regarding the causes of violence in Haiti. “These differences manifest in a variety of perspectives on how to address violence and political instability. *This in turn impacts assessments of what is working and not working; what is complimentary and at cross-purposes.*" (p15)
- “*Policies in support of decentralization have been consistently dismissed in Haiti for political reasons. Are we willing to acknowledge and question the biases driving development policy when these policies may potentially be at odds with what is needed to bring about peace write large?*” (p43)
- "Reconciliation as a (external) goal is treated at best with suspicion for wanting to avoid dealing with Haiti's most difficult issues of the past and present." (p19)

4. ***It is not too early to think about building greater social cohesion.*** Large-scale natural disasters have created opportunities for resolving social and political “contradictions.” In some places, people have recognized and used these opportunities (such as in Aceh, Indonesia), while in others, they have been lost and conflict has become further entrenched (such as Sri Lanka). Many people are asking whether the earthquake has created opportunity for a national dialogue including all layers of society in Haiti, particularly as all levels of society have been dramatically affected. Evidence suggests that it is not too early to engage in analysis and explore opportunities. What would such a dialogue be about: a political settlement/a new social compact/developing a common vision for Haiti’s future? Where and how could it be conducted?

5. ***Work with the “hard to reach” and engage them early on.*** RPP’s evidence suggests that it is essential to engage with the “hard to reach” and with the government (however weak or recalcitrant) in order to promote sustainable peace. The study on cumulative impacts of peacebuilding in Haiti shows a surprisingly positive record of engagement with youth, gangs and other ‘at risk’ groups that can be harnessed in the current situation. The challenge has been to bring such positive initiatives to scale. Similarly, there has been widespread praise for MINUSTAH (UN) operations where *hard-line/cleansing’ strategies were avoided* with a focus on keeping casualties to a minimum and building confidence of Haitian people.

For more information, see RPP articles, manuals and cases:

- [“A Distinction with a Difference: Conflict Sensitivity and Peacebuilding”](#) (2009), by Peter Woodrow and Diana Chigas.

¹ All page numbers refer to the RPP Cumulative Case Study: “Haiti’s Fragile Peace” by Marie Pace and Ketty Luzincourt, November 2009.

- “Haiti’s Fragile Peace: A Case Study of the Cumulative Impacts of Peace Practices” (2009), by Marie Pace with Ketty Luzincourt (forthcoming, check www.cdainc.com).
- RPP Participant Training Manual (2009), on conflict analysis and program strategy, available in [English](#) and [French](#).
- Additional information on the historical background of conflict in Haiti is available [here](#).

How can external providers of assistance make sure aid meets the needs of the population? Lessons from the Listening Project

The Listening Project gathers evidence on the ideas and insights of people who live in aid-recipient societies in an effort to improve aid effectiveness by sharing their judgments of what has been useful (and not useful) with assistance providers and donors. A few prominent lessons have emerged so far:

1. **Slow down.** Even people who survived the 2004 tsunami in southeast Asia said that aid agencies should “go more slowly,” “invest the necessary time” and “listen to people” in order to “learn about the real circumstances,” “get to know people” and improve the outcomes and impacts of assistance. People associate haste in planning and implementation with wasteful and often inappropriate programming. As a community member in a tsunami-affected village in Sri Lanka said: “Take time to use the local system. Temporary shelters are important and need to be provided fast. Permanent housing needs more time to set up properly. Do it right, and don’t rush.”
2. **Listen More.** People on the receiving end of aid efforts ask that aid providers listen to them more to “show respect for peoples’ ideas, resources, and opinions,” and to be sure that the assistance meets local needs and builds on local resources and capacities.” People want donors and aid agencies to be open to listening and discussing with local people: 1) the local context and realities; 2) agendas (external and internal); 3) expectations (communities’, aid agencies’, donors, national government’s); 4) assumptions and definitions behind approaches; 5) process/criteria for selection; 6) constraints and limitations; 7) plans and potential; 8) exit strategies and more. All too often, locals describe mistakes that could have been prevented with just a little more time spent in getting to know local realities. In an [article](#) written for the Humanitarian Response Index, Mary Anderson highlights some of the findings that have come out of the Listening Project regarding the perceptions of relationships between aid providers and aid recipients and how listening can play a role in how these relationships take shape.
3. **Be accountable to beneficiaries, not just to donors.** Beneficiaries and participants in international aid efforts say that agencies pay far more attention (and invest more resources in) being accountable to their donors (private and public) than to the people in communities where they work. Local people often question why they do not get to see the reports aid agencies produce, why many donors do not check whether the reports are true, and why no one seems to check on whether the assistance provided has made a positive difference in recipients’ lives. It is important for aid agencies to have a mechanism to receive and provide feedback to communities and to be accountable for their actions.

For more information, see Listening Project Issue Papers (for forthcoming issues, check www.cdainc.com)

1. International Assistance as a Delivery System ([English](#)) ([French](#))
2. The Cascading Effects of International Agendas and Priorities ([English](#)) ([French](#))
3. Presence: "Why Being Here Matters" ([English](#)) ([French](#))
4. "Discuss Together, Decide Together, Work Together" ([English](#)) ([French](#))