

*Rescued Yes, Recovery No, Redevelopment: by whom, for whom?*

## Plus ça change – the Republic of NGOs, but which ones?

**F**irst the good news. To date there has been no second disaster in Haiti, in the form of epidemics, famine or tropical storm damage in the wake of the most deadly earthquake this century.

Second, the bad news. It could still happen.

If a Katrina-force hurricane tracks a path across central Haiti before the end of the storm season in November there will be thousands more deaths. And this time there will be massive protests and maybe more than that.

Tempers are fraying. Graffiti is everywhere. Some is overtly political such as *Aba Préval!* [Down with Préval!]. But the equally ubiquitous *Nou Bouke!* [We've had enough!] probably more accurately captures the general public mood.

Everyone agrees on the problems. Explanations vary as to why a humanitarian relief juggernaut that has averted another disaster is stalled at the junction leading to recovery. Visibly, very little has changed since 12 January. Rubble removal is sporadic and low-tech. By mid-July just 3,722 'transitional', hurricane-proof shelters had been completed. With each designed to accommodate a family of five, that's about 18,610 displaced Haitians. By any measure, there's a long way to go.

**State v NGOs: Power and Glory**  
Many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) at the sharp end

of providing water, food, shelter and medical care blame the Haitian government for indecision, failure to evoke eminent domain laws to expropriate land for new camps, a lack of strategic planning. The government has frequently pointed the finger back at the NGOs. They have the money, capacity and personnel that it does not, it claims.

Simmering tensions between the two have become more public since June. In this, as in almost every other aspect of public life in

**Even before the earthquake, Haiti was home to nearly 10,000 Aid agencies, the second highest number per capita anywhere in the world**

Haiti, what were fissures before the earthquake have become chasms since.

Even before the earthquake Haitians jokingly referred to their country as the 'Republic of NGOs'. By 2009 there were just under 10,000 known aid agencies, the second highest number per capita anywhere in the world. This was not just the result of poverty, underdevelopment and glaring need. It was policy – but not Haitian policy.

Blaming corruption, inefficiency



'Republic of NGOs' – but the Haitian to Haitian humanitarian effort since the earthquake has gone largely unreported.  
Picture: UN photos/Sophia Paris

and ineffectiveness, for the past three decades major aid donors have increasingly channelled their aid funds through NGOs or multi-lateral agencies like the United Nations, rather than the Haitian government. In 2007-2008 alone USAID disbursed a staggering US\$300m through foreign NGOs.

Politics, with a large helping of hypocrisy, played a key role here. Funnelling 'budget support funds' to the Duvalier dictatorships (1957-86) was never a moral problem. But when Haitians began to reject Washington's favourites in elections from 1990 onwards, by-passing the government through NGOs started to become standard operating procedure. It was another means of forcing weakened governments to accede to destructive neo-liberal economic policies that the electorate had rejected – reversing and perverting democracy.

For foreign politicians, there was the added advantage of eclipsing the impact of smaller, mostly privately-funded NGOs who tried to foster development projects designed to be sustainable, environmental, and progressive at the real grassroots. Often organized on cooperative, religious or community principles, these civil society organizations (CSOs) played a huge role in getting Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his successor, René Préval, elected.

Yet, despite the deaths of so many thousands of such CSO activists in the fearsome post-coup

repression of 1991-94, the 2004-05 strife that followed President Aristide's second ouster and now the January earthquake, that vision is anything but dead in Haiti.

In fact, it is being reinforced daily by the necessity of communal effort in the camps and informal *komite katye* [camp committees] in the streets of Port-au-Prince. By far the biggest humanitarian effort since the earthquake has been Haitian to Haitian. *Lè ou bezwen, se ou k'mache* [When it's you in need, it's you who takes the first step] as Haitians say. They have. Many experienced relief workers have been amazed by the organization, skill and humanity Haitians have demonstrated in the camps.

### Follow the Money, if it Arrives

Given the flow of funds, the balance of power between NGOs in Haiti and the government has been shifting for years. With most government buildings now in ruins, the death of 18% of civil servants, and the near total collapse of government revenue – while donations to NGO budgets have swollen by hundreds of millions of dollars – that position has become untenable.

What has made it worse is that while virtually all the humanitarian relief funds have been received and are being disbursed, less than \$150 million of the \$9.9bn pledged for the recon- **page 2 ►**

► from page 1 struction of Haiti at the donors Conference in New York on 31 March has been banked. To date Brazil, Venezuela and Norway are the only states that have deposited cheques. And only a fraction of that has gone to the Haitian state.

"They ask me to move more reconstruction projects when the money is still on hold," chuckles Jean-Max Bellerive, Haiti's Prime Minister. "I can't even pay our regular bills. Our income has gone down, not up." Leslie Voltaire, the Haitian government's liaison to the UN confirms a convergence of interest in perpetuating a myth. "The international community does not want to admit it has not come up with the money, the Haitian government does not want to admit it has not received it," he claims. "Meantime, the Haitian people think the government has stolen it."

It has been clear for years that NGO activity in any developing country that does not deliberately and determinedly build public capacity, work to agreed government plans, train and employ locals, buy local products and hand over infrastructure when built, undermines not just government, but the emergence of local businesses – the private sector.

"They ask why the government is weak but they never ask what they are doing to make it stronger – or if they have made it weak," complains one Haitian trade unionist. "What do you say – killing with kindness?"

### A Restavèk Government

The desperate need in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake has massively reinforced power relationships that needed to be changed. Nothing illustrates more starkly the almost total eclipse of the government than the formation of the new key power centre: the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (CIRH *Commission intérimaire pour la reconstruction d'Haiti*) – 50% of whose voting members are foreign donors. With parliament dissolved, President Préval in the last months of his term and the United Nations, if anyone, running the country, the imploded National Palace seems a fitting symbol of the collapse of national power.

"The CIRH has made Haitian government a *restavèk* [a child servant or slave]," says Antonal Mortimé, a human rights activist. "Saving lives has been the raison d'être for this and who can argue with that. But the price has been our fragile democracy – the mini-

mal accountability we had through elected officials," says one Haitian exile. "It will be a long struggle to win back the people's powers and God knows what the price will be."

All experience in development shows that an effective and accountable state apparatus at municipal, provincial and national level is essential to any measure of success. In contrast, externally-imposed, management solutions such as the CIRH rarely, if ever, succeed in the long term. Duncan Green, Head of Research at Oxfam, points out the key flaws: "No politics, no exit strategy, no voice for Haitian civil society? Where are they represented in all this? They are the people who have already been 'reconstructing' Haitian society for years."

### The Real Reconstructors

Although not on the CIRH, veteran 'reconstructors' are on the streets – and they are being joined by others. Watching thousands of new organizers and activists emerge from the camps, transmuting their probing questions about their living conditions to national and even international policy, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that a new movement, or a reinforced reincarnation of an old movement, is taking shape in Haiti.

This movement is working hand-in-hand with the more enlightened NGOs (the 'hand-up' rather than 'hand-out' agencies, as one shorthand term put its), who are in Haiti for the long-term and are now training every type of organiser and doer: flood prevention 'engineers', water technicians, health promoters and co-operative organisers.

As new and reinvigorated old CSOs emerge in Haiti, new models will be needed for a new circumstance. Ironically, Haiti, the hopeless case to so many, provides one of the best models there is for moving from immediate relief to long-term development independence, for integrating NGO work with a government ministry, for foreign aid workers working themselves out of a job.

In a future issue of the *Haiti Briefing* we will ask what both NGOs and the Haitian government can learn from *Zanmi Lasante*, arguably the most successful NGO in Haiti, and if what has worked in the health care sector, can, with the same persistence and vision, be applied to other fields.

■ A longer version of this article is now available on our website: [www.haitisupportgroup.org](http://www.haitisupportgroup.org)

# "The country that never..." The Clinton back better

"They used to call him America's first Black President so perhaps there's some logic in him becoming President of the world's First Black Republic," joked one Haitian last month. "How many jobs does he have now? Perhaps it's time to give us back some!"

It's no joke. All roads to Haiti go through Bill Clinton, the aid czar posing on the front cover of the August edition of *Esquire*. Hands in pockets in a three-piece suit, lips determinedly pursed, he looks the perfect image of the business leaders he loves. "HOW ABOUT HAITI? TOO HARD TO FIX RIGHT? THE CLINTON SOLUTION" ran the backdrop headlines.

Clinton's main job is the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Haiti. With 10,565 UN troops and police in the country and some \$9.9bn for reconstruction pledged under UN auspices, he enjoys a sort of pro-consul status, even though he is based in New York.

But Clinton also co-chairs, together with Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive, the de facto power in Haiti now, the Interim Commission for the Reconstruction of Haiti (CIRH). This body, composed of 12 foreign donor representatives and 12 Haitians, with four non-voting members – who include the only two Haitian civil society representatives – will determine how any reconstruction funds that do arrive are spent.

But Bill Clinton's power in Haiti goes well beyond the UN and its government, stretching into that other vital power centre, the country's Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In the Clinton Foundation he heads one of the richest and prestigious NGOs in the world; in the Clinton Global Initiative he is chief salesman for private sector investment in Haiti. The Clinton Foundation has substantial programs in Haiti – most prominently its Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) on AIDS treatment and prevention – but it also funds other NGOs and declares as one of its aims nothing less than "plans and training programs to reconstitute Haiti's health care system."

No one doubts Bill Clinton's star power. If anyone can strong-arm world leaders into fulfilling their reconstruction pledges to Haiti it is him. But as the relief opera-



"The Impossible", "Possible" – from reconstruction of Haiti and Bill Clinton

tion winds down, reconstruction loom, what does Clinton mean? Or as a Haitian would say: *ale, Bill!* [Where are you going?]

Let's start with the positive. public pronouncements on Haiti with commitments to decent sustainability, even that old CIRH culture. Ten years out of the a decade into development is manitarian affairs, Bill Clinton talk.

In a speech at New York on 25 March, designed as a pep rally for representatives, he set out a sustainable, government-led agenda. Wearing one hat, a lawyer but appealing to this and another, as a major NGO blunt:

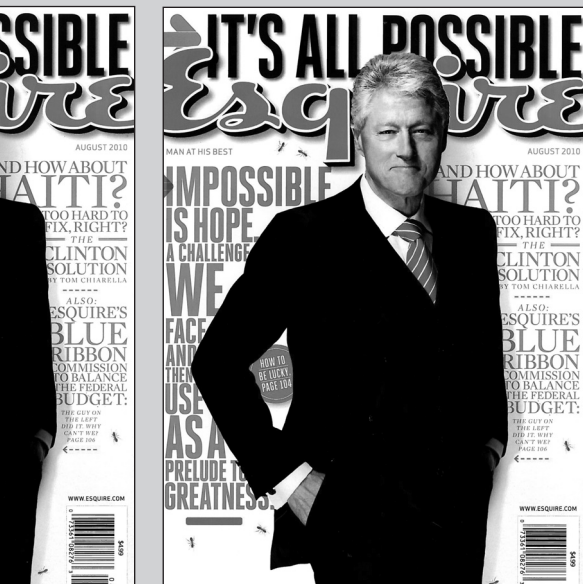
"I know a lot of you are asking the right thing in terms of hiring consulting with your government part, constructing your plans, people in mind. We have to do every time we spend a dollar now on we have to ask ourselves have a long term return? Are they become more self-sufficient creating local jobs, are we paying for teachers, doctors, nurses servants? Are we giving money to agencies that provide them? In short, are we serious about ourselves out of a job?"

In the face of months of



was," the President who is

# on solution: building er or just bigger?



front covers of the August edition of *Esquire* magazine with the Clinton's role top of the list.

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tions about what has gone wrong in Haiti, Bill Clinton has picked up on that *il faut changer* message. In the most extraordinary admission to the US Senate Foreign Relations in March he seemed to take full responsibility as President for the consequences of forcing the Haitian government to slash import tariffs on rice from 35% to 3% in 1995, as part of a broader neo-liberal, economic agenda.

"It has not worked. It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas but it has not worked. It was a mistake. It was a mistake that I was party to... I did that," he said pointing at himself, then jabbing his index finger into the desk. "I have to live every day with the consequences of the lost capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed these people. Because of what I did. Nobody else."

The consequences Bill Clinton did not spell out are of course malnutrition, food dependency, starvation, disease and death. Precisely the kind of legacy that NGOs, the Haitian government and peasant groups are struggling with everyday; precisely the kind of policy that swelled the slums of Port-au-Prince with the farmers and labourers who were put out of business growing rice in places like the Artibonite valley after 1995.

But how much has Clinton learned? Is he now rejecting what Haitians without irony call "The American Plan" or the "Death Plan?"

In action, as opposed to words, there are

some scary signs. Bill Clinton still seems wedded to the less acceptable elements of what is known as the "Collier Plan", a half-baked, 19-page UN roadmap for economic development put together on the basis of a short trip to Haiti by Professor Paul Collier of Oxford University in 2009. Indeed, the CIRH is straight out of the Collier playbook, a complete by-pass of the Haitian state, equating development with technocratic management, top-down cabal dictate rather than bottom-up consultative consensus.

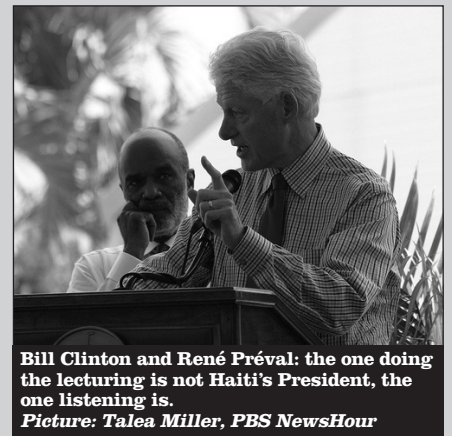
The old "export zones" textile plant hobbyhorse is the key plank of the Collier Plan. Paying minimal wages, suppressing labour rights and exporting all profits, these sweatshops are clustered in two zones in Port-au-Prince and near the Dominican border in Ouanamainthe. Collier's argument that the concentration of such firms into clusters boosts their attractiveness to foreign clothing multinationals does not of course apply to workers – many of whom, having poured into the slums of Port-au-Prince in the hope of picking up one of these elusive jobs, died on 12 January.

In fact, textile sweatshop development models fly in the face of the Clinton-declared Haitian development aims of decentralization, sustainability and self-sufficiency in a "beggar thy neighbour, race to the bottom approach" to wages, conditions and environmental standards that is a model of dependency development.

While no one in Washington is rowing back on agricultural tariffs or food exports to Haiti – despite Clinton's admission of their deadly impact – Congress has rushed through HELP (the Haiti Economic Lift Program Act) reinforcing and extending duty-free, quota-free access to the US market for Haitian-sewn clothes.

Meanwhile, staple agriculture, always the poor relation, faces another crisis, despite employing many times more Haitians than any number of foreign textile plants ever will. Haitian rice farmers are being further undercut by a post-earthquake food relief effort that flooded their market with imported staples rather than making even the most minimal effort to give local industry a hand up by buying in Haiti.

Foreign investment, masquerading as development, is a logical Bill Clinton weakness. Carlos Slim, the Mexican billionaire standing next to Bill Clinton in Haiti to announce a US\$10m investment



Bill Clinton and René Préval: the one doing the lecturing is not Haiti's President, the one listening is.  
Picture: Talea Miller, PBS NewsHour

in June will not solve the country's problems. Haitians will. And not within Clinton's remaining three-year term as UN Special Envoy. Despite being free of domestic lobbies like his Arkansas rice farmers, and having no electorate to satisfy beyond Haiti, Bill Clinton remains a politician.

He seems to feel a compulsion to show instant results, despite knowing that what is all too essential in a relief operation is often inimical to long-term development.

Clinton's vision for development in Haiti is at best a vision for reconstructing something that had serious flaws, at worst, to adapt the semi-official mantra of the reconstruction plan, 'Building Back Bigger' rather than 'Building back Better' simply because there might be more funding.

It's a vision that says decentralize the economy but centralizes for textile plants; it's a vision that says agriculture for people but sees only mangos for export; it's a vision that says co-ordinate, operate, collaborate with government, but supercedes, overrides and usurps it to do so.

Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, on a recent trip noted that Haiti has to stop being a laboratory for "failed foreign economic experiments". Switching between *Kreyòl*, French and English, Jean told the press on a trip to Jacmel, her former home: "There must be Haitian solutions for Haitian problems."

Bill Clinton hardly looks a better start on that front than any other. But Michaëlle Jean will join him in the UN stable in September, becoming yet another Special Envoy with a mandate from UNESCO to "rebuild Haiti's national educational system". As the daughter of a single mother who did not leave Haiti until she was 12, she and Bill Clinton should talk. Perhaps she can put Bill back in school – in Haiti. ■

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Phone: 0208 676 1347

Email: info@haitisupportgroup.org

Website: www.haitisupportgroup.org

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Editors: Andy Leak, Phillip Wearne and Christian Wisskirchen

# KANAVAL

VODOU, POLITICS AND REVOLUTION ON THE STREETS OF HAITI

Photography and Oral Histories by Leah Gordon

Words by Madison Smartt Bell, Don Cosentino, Richard Fleming, Kathy Smith & Myron Beasley



"The most disturbing but most exhilarating photographs you're ever likely to see" BILL DRUMMOND  
SOUL JAZZ PUBLISHING

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## "I saw a donkey dressed like this in a dream..."

To most westerners today, the word Carnival would probably evoke the dazzling glamour of Rio or the slow-moving floats and throbbing sound systems of Notting Hill. The carnival of Jacmel, revealed to us by Leah Gordon's photographs, seems to belong to another world. The images deliberately negate the expectations aroused by the title: in place of the spectacle, we have subjects that look back at us; in place of colour, we have a washed-out black-and-white that evokes a kind of 'darkness at noon'; in place of the glamour, we have a reality revealed in tatty close-up; eschewing the spontaneous, Gordon poses her subjects down some quiet back street, away from the gaze of the crowd, and asks them to look at her/us. A very few of the costumes are elaborate (the huge papier mâché heads for which Jacmel is famous), most are schematic and

indicative: take an old, grubby suit, pin on a few bits of crepe paper and you have a Chaloska: the very embodiment of military brutality. The images are not so much complemented by, as contrasted with two different kinds of text: first, five excellent essays by subject specialists that explain how carnival performs history, myth, religion, perpetually renewed battles between good and evil etc.; second, twenty 'oral histories' elicited by Gordon from the performers. Here, the erudite, external commentary on the characters is replaced by an endotic understanding ('I saw a donkey dressed like this in a dream, and that is why I do this year after year'). The book imparts an uncomfortable truth: this is not another world or someone else's history: the eyes that stare at us from behind the masks force us, above all, to look at ourselves. ■

## HSG AGM and international London conference on Haiti Two vicious circles outlined

The Haiti Support Group held its Annual General Meeting in South London at Stockwell Methodist Church Hall on 19 June. A new constitution was adopted, an executive committee elected (see below) and the members who attended also heard a talk by Wasley Demorne, a Haitian agronomist working as Oxfam's livelihoods project officer.

Wasley outlined the context of the 12 January earthquake by linking the increasingly high death toll of ever more frequent natural disasters in Haiti with the country's political instability and mounting environmental degradation. "What we have here is a vicious circle," Wasley said introducing a talk entitled *Confronting Political Instability: Environmental Damage and Natural Disaster in Haiti*. "Political instability has compounded the weakness of an already feeble state apparatus. That leads to all types of injustice – social, economic and political, most obvious in rural areas in uncontrolled land use, and in particular

deforestation and the loss of topsoil associated with it."

Such environmental degradation stimulates a continuous rural exodus and a corresponding concentration of people in urban areas. "In the cities and towns, density and poor construction standards – again the result of a feeble state which has little resource for urban planning or building code enforcement – make new migrants more vulnerable to natural disasters." Wasley cited the huge loss of life and property in the floods in and around Gonaïves in 2008 and the earthquake in January this year, as just two recent examples.

Wasley produced some startling figures. In just 55 years, from 1950 to 2005 Haiti's population nearly trebled, from 3.22 million to 9.29 million. In just 25 years to 2005, the Haitian coastline lost 23% of its mangroves, nature's buffer against the tropical storms and hurricanes that threaten the country from June-October. An estimated 43 million cubic meters of topsoil are washed away annually from the denuded slopes of Haiti's fields and mountains. In the 21 years to the year 2000, the country's forest cover was reduced by 53%, with some estimates putting the annual toll at more than 10 million trees a year.

Wasley argued that NGOs should be striving to build-up government capacity to take over their role even as they answer the call for emergency assistance by more than 1.5 million Haitians left

homeless by the earthquake. It was a call echoed by Christian Wisskirchen, the newly-elected Chair of HSG two days later at one of the most significant international conferences ever held on Haiti in London on 21-22 June.

The conference, entitled *From Duvalier to Préval: Haiti Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, organized by the Institute for the Study of the Americas at the University of London and supported by the David Nicholls Memorial Trust, attracted some of the leading academics, authors and authorities on Haiti. In a talk entitled, *The Battle over Development and the Role of NGOs*, Christian argued that Haiti has suffered from decades of misguided international assistance policy which has impeded the development of government institutions and thus real democracy.

NGOs were key protagonists in another vicious circle not unlike that detailed by Wasley Demorne he pointed out. With little or no confidence in the Haitian government's capacity or competence, donors, both national and private, have chosen to channel a growing proportion of their funds through NGOs. Yet the long-term consequences of meeting short-term needs in this way can be disastrous. A lack of co-ordination around agreed national policy objectives and a complete lack of accountability to Haitians are just two obvious results.

● Transcripts of the papers can be found at <http://americas.sas.ac.uk/>

### Your New Executive Committee

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**Vice-Chair:** Phillip Wearne

**Secretary:** Andy Leak

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Email: [info@haitisupportgroup.org](mailto:info@haitisupportgroup.org)