

Accountability Briefing

“Building back better” needs open doors: Accountability is essential for a just reconstruction

Moderator: **Ian Schwab, AJWS**
Speakers: **Ricot Jean Pierre, PAPDA**
Doudou Pierre Festile, RENHASSA/Je Nan Je
Brian Concannon, IJDH
Jean Ariel Joseph, Haitian Senate
Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA)

Access the full presentation [here](#)

Description

The Accountability Briefing around the third commemoration presented an opportunity to consider a range of issues related to accountability in Haiti: Haitian government accountability to Haitian constituents; US government accountability to US taxpayers and Haitians; accountability for other donor-funded projects and investments to Haitians; and UN accountability related to the cholera epidemic in Haiti.

According to the latest available figures, only a small percentage of the funds allocated to Haiti after the earthquake have been spent. Key projects, such as the building of permanent housing, have experienced severe delays. This has been linked to a lack of transparency and accountability on the part of all actors involved in Haiti’s reconstruction, as most participants noted.

Analysis

After introducing the panelists, **Ian Schwab** (AJWS) noted with disappointment the refusal of USAID to be present on the panel, despite repeated HAWG invitations.

Ricot Jean Pierre (PAPDA) was the first to speak. He noted that accountability to Haitians means that there should be cooperation between the government and its people/constituents and between development actors and the intended beneficiaries. Ricot stressed that accountability is not the end, but rather part of a process that should begin with an evaluation of the problems Haiti is facing and the mechanisms that enable Haitians to solve them through participation in their society. Ricot noted that accountability requires development actors and Haitians to engage in meaningful dialogue, exchange key information, and work in collaboration with one another. Ricot then assessed the current state of affairs in Haiti. He acknowledged that although Haitians should be actively participating in and leading their country, they are usually the last to know what is happening, and international NGOs are the ones informing the Haitian people about what the Haitian government is doing. There is a lack of dialogue between Haitians and the government, making it very difficult to engage in talks about accountability.

Ricot then talked about the evaluations that his group PAPDA has done of USAID projects. Ricot specifically criticized USAID’s consultation process as lacking any real dialogue with Haitians. He ended his presentation by outlining three points: first, there must be a

fundamental shift in the mindset of donors from just giving “charity” to engaging with Haiti in a way that builds true solidarity and acknowledges that Haitians themselves are capable of building up Haiti, and must be engaged in the process from the beginning. Second, all actors must respect local community organizations, and work with them to build capacity so that they can take ownership and participate fully in development programs that directly benefit them. Third, Ricot stressed, there must be space at both the local and national levels to allow people to express their needs so they have a voice in shaping their future.

The next speaker, **Doudou Pierre Festile** (RENHASSA) corroborated Ricot’s observation that the Haitian people are often not consulted about development projects, nor do they participate in implementing, monitoring or evaluating them, partly due to a lack of transparency on the part of the Haitian government. Doudou also highlighted the lack of transparency on the part of international NGOs, as they “do whatever they want” in Haiti, even when it is with good intentions. This is why the Haitian people have historically resisted foreign aid and NGOs. He also cited the Caracol project in northern Haiti as an instance of good intentions that were insufficiently explained and poorly executed. He lamented that this lack of explanation or consultation in development efforts often lead to protests, and occasionally violence, on the part of a population who thinks that projects conceived in Washington are being imposed on them without consideration of their actual needs.

Doudou proposed that in order to increase accountability and improve development efforts, impacted Haitian communities must participate fully in projects and they receive timely and accurate reports from implementers so that they can be fully invested in the project. Additionally, projects from international organizations should not compete with similar projects already supported by local groups in Haiti.

The third speaker, **Brian Concannon** (IJDH) focused on accountability for the UN’s role in bringing cholera to Haiti. IJDH represents 5,000 cholera victims who had a claim before the UN. Victims are asking for a water and sanitation system in Haiti that provides clean water, compensation for the victims, and an apology from the UN. Brian affirmed that a UN response to cholera in Haiti is the right thing to do for Haitians, the UN itself, and the US. A water and sanitation system is needed to stop the spread of the disease that has killed 8,000 Haitians so far, and has seen a 40 % increase in fatalities between December and January relative to the same period last year. A water and sanitation system would also stop other waterborne diseases from spreading, and is an opportunity to improve the lives of women and rural citizens. The liability of the UN in the case of cholera is so clear and the harm caused is so great that the UN must recognize its role in sparking the epidemic. Brian added that such an admission would be an opportunity for the UN to fulfill its mission of fighting disease and supporting the rule of law. Brian also said that funding a water and sanitation system would be a much better use of US\$ 677 million budget currently going to Minustah, the largest share of which is paid by US taxpayers. In reference to the Cholera-Free Hispaniola Initiative, Brian noted that 24 months after the initiative was started, it is only 10% funded, 9% of which was a repackaging of previous pledges. Stopping cholera is possible, he urged, as it has been done elsewhere in the world as early as the 1840s. Brian encouraged member of Congress to continue explaining to the US government why this issue is important and urged others to work with the HAWG on several initiatives, including a petition on Avaaz.org.

The fourth speaker, **Jean-Ariel Joseph** (Secretary General of the Haitian Senate) spoke about housing in Haiti. The housing problem touches everyone in Haiti, no matter where they live. At the heart of the issue is the question of land – what type of land is available to build houses, and who owns it. That is why, he noted, it is difficult to provide housing to all of the currently displaced persons in Haiti. Senator Joseph talked about the quality of Haitian land and the need to make sure that land has sufficient irrigation systems in order to be productive. According to Mr. Joseph, land for housing falls in two categories: public lands (owned by the Haitian government and used for public services) and private land. In the earthquake, many people died because of the poor quality of the buildings. Senator Joseph acknowledged that buildings need to be constructed to withstand earthquakes and that it is the Haitian government’s responsibility to make sure that this happens. To do so, the Haitian government, according to him, needs to ensure that all communities impacted by the housing crisis are able to participate in the drafting and convening of housing legislation. He asked all civil society organizations and international partners to work with the Haitian government to accomplish this goal. He ended his presentation noting that housing is a right and procuring it cannot be done in an exclusionary way.

Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) spoke at the event and noted that although the US government has allocated US\$ 1 billion for Haiti, much of it is sitting in its Treasury. The American Red Cross has an estimated US\$ 500 million in aid in its account. Much of the money that was disbursed in Haiti was not actually spent but merely shifted from account to account. She argued that it was the Haitian government’s responsibility to ensure that Haitians are

Accountability requires oversight in Congress and in the donor community.

It also requires effective political institutions and stable, just and democratic governance in Haiti.

– **Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA)**

being provided for, that houses are being built, etc. Reaffirming her longstanding interest in Haiti, Representative Waters said that the Haitian government bears the primary responsibility for holding aid agencies accountable, engaging in urban planning and providing clean water, all of which require good, effective governance. Representative Waters recalled the US’ infamous role in Haiti’s governance problems since the time of Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier. She noted the centrality of holding credible elections for Haiti’s future. Citing “long overdue” elections, Representative Waters said that the small number of Haitian Senators currently in office means that if only a few are absent, quorum is not reached. She also noted that Haitian President Michel Martelly had appointed a large number of mayors who lack the legitimacy of elected mayors and the problems within the electoral commission (CEP), all in the midst of the ‘shameful’ situation of internal displacement in Haiti. Representative Waters ended with a call to the Haitian government to reform itself to better respond to the needs of its people, and for all to “focus on what we can do to support a representative government in Haiti.”