

Haitian Civil Society Consultation:

Key Principles and Best Practices

The US Government, other donor governments and most international institutions currently working in Haiti have officially committed to the process of civil society consultation, in order to improve Haitian ownership and sustainability of the reconstruction process. This is evident in USAID's own Policy Guidance from 2003 on PVP partnerships, which they are working to apply to US funded projects in Haiti:

- "Consultation occurs when USAID draws on the experience and knowledge of PVOs...by soliciting their advice, suggestions and comments. The congruence on objectives between USAID and the PVO community can be deepened, sustained and better defined ***through a structured process of consultation and dialogue...***"
- "***It is USAID policy ...to build opportunities for participation*** by host country organizations and peoples in the development processes..."
- "Participatory mechanisms must be developed and carried out in a way that ensures host country organizations and people...are provided ***with opportunities to define their developmental priorities and approaches.***"

This USAID policy and commitment to civil society consultation is absolutely crucial. Yet, it can be difficult to implement such policies on the ground in substantive ways that help truly direct and sustain local ownership. Interaction, the largest consortium of US-based NGOs, gives further analysis of this reality in a recent report:

- "...Consultations with limited inclusiveness, scope and accountability have tended to ***substitute for a process leading to strong development partnerships.*** Consultations have often resembled one-off opportunities for governments to announce plans, conduct public briefings, secure stakeholder endorsements of government strategies or satisfy donor requests."
- "Perhaps most important, consultations should establish processes to follow up on and assess the extent to which ***stakeholder input has been factored into*** national development strategies and programs."

- "...To be successful, consultations *must result in visible and significant changes*...consistent with stakeholder recommendations. The credibility of government outreach will quickly evaporate if consultations fail to deliver such changes."

Interaction's assessment reflects a current reality in Haiti, where civil society consultation can be difficult and/or lacking. Moving forward, the Haiti Advocacy Working Group (HAWG) and its Haitian grassroots partners encourage the US government to improve their *processes* of engaging local, regional and national community and grassroots stakeholders, especially marginalized groups, in order to ensure greater trust, accountability and sustainability for all involved.

Key Principles: Many members of the HAWG, as well as most of our Haitian grassroots partners, believe that true Haitian Civil Society consultation must incorporate the following elements:

- 1) Consultation must take place with civil society groups at the beginning stages of a project, in order to
 - a. Identify what the real needs and assets of a community, sector, or group are.
 - b. Get civil society feedback on the needed corresponding creation and design of an intervention.
- 2) Consultation must take place with as broad a range as possible of civil society actors. This includes:
 - a. Local and community-based organizations, as well as larger grassroots networks and coalitions that operate at the regional and national levels and can help network and communicate more broadly.
 - b. Women's local groups as well as corresponding larger women's coalitions at the department, regional and national levels that are tapped into macro policy formation and can also help network.
 - c. Rural peasant and farming groups and larger movements and coalitions able to provide key information and recommendations that are specific to the unique needs of their communities.
 - d. Urban community development organizations and larger coalitions that are tapped into the unique needs of urban communities and vulnerable groups.
 - e. Vulnerable citizens not connected to Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), including those living in extreme poverty, renters, disabled, elderly, children and youth, women and girls at risk of violence, and IDP camp members.
- 3) Consultation should be a dynamic process, in which consulted groups can continue to give feedback, monitoring help, and overall evaluation of the effectiveness of a program, project or intervention.
- 4) The results of consultations should be made public, in both Creole and French, and proactively shared with the represented groups as well as relevant local NGOs and larger grassroots networks, that will be able to share and disseminate the information in culturally appropriate ways.

Best Practices: Recognizing that civil society consultation overall is not an easy process, and that it can be even more difficult in Haiti due to a long history of miscommunication, lack of communication

and distrust between national and international government actors and grassroots groups, the HAWG recommends the following culturally appropriate best practices for both US government and international agencies:

- 1) Development practitioners should outreach to larger grassroots/peasant/women's coalitions in a particular region or sector, and request that both local and national Haitian government officials do the same, to help identify and connect to the right local NGOs and communities for consultation.
- 2) Consultations should be performed in Creole, so that a broad range of groups and individuals can have access and be able to communicate their needs, concerns and recommendations in their native language. Grassroots networks and 'connectors' should also be present to help with cultural translation.
- 3) Project budgets should include funding to help facilitate participation of key community leaders and grassroots groups who might not be able to pay for transportation, lodging or other costs to participate.
- 4) Development practitioners should use a broad range of communication techniques to advertise civil society consultations in advance. These should still include local/national radio media, flyers, billboards and meetings at places where the community naturally congregates (churches, soccer matches, and cultural events, etc.) Print and social media should also be used as necessary. It should also include personal invitations to grassroots leaders through phone calls face-to-face meetings ahead of time to get buy-in, as well as email and mail.
- 5) Materials and messaging should be shared with local and national grassroots groups that explain the process by which a project is chosen, designed, funded and deliberated, with clear justification for these choices and a list of involved actors from the government, civil society and international community, and their contact information as appropriate.
- 6) Factor in the needs and constraints of women, especially farmers and those in poor urban areas, into consultation design. This includes scheduling consultations during days/hours that work best for mothers, women working in the fields and women at risk of violence. Women should never have to sacrifice their safety, children's safety or their families' income to participate. Haitian women's NGOS can help navigate solutions.
- 7) Explore ways to incorporate the following into a project's consultation process in order to get key civil society inputs at the design and evaluation stages: community and grassroots led situation analysis, assets assessment, power mapping, social and environmental auditing, budget tracking and public reporting.

These recommendations are offered in the spirit of collaboration and are grounded in the experience of Haitian civil society partners and non-governmental organizations dedicated to a just recovery in Haiti.

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