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,
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