



From post-disaster solidarity to long-term development

The Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society
for the reconstruction of Haiti

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The Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee for the reconstruction of Haiti

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“In spite of the difficulties and shortcomings experienced by the HMJC, all of its participants emphasise the advantages over traditional international development cooperation. Even with limited resources, one interviewee argued SSDC has deeper effects and it is “richer” than traditional top down interventions.”

Summary

The Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society for the reconstruction of Haiti (HMJC) is a South-South development cooperation programme created in 2010 by Mexican and Haitian CSOs after the earthquake. It is convened by Centro Lindavista, a Mexico City-based NGO which has been active in promoting CSO engagement with Mexican development cooperation. The HMJC operates as a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement, having agreed a five-year comprehensive reconstruction programme with government officials and the private sector and developed a set of criteria and guidelines for reconstruction work. The most successful activities of the project have been the Committee’s agricultural initiatives that have focused on strengthening Haiti’s agricultural and rural economic development through farmer-to-farmer exchanges with Mexico.

Key points

- **The Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society (HMJC) was perceived by all stakeholders as offering an alternative approach** to the often top down infrastructure and housing projects promoted by international agencies. The strengths of the initiative were the emphasis on consulting with local people and being flexible to the needs of the community.
- **A multi-stakeholder dialogue involving government, civil society and private sector resulted in the establishment of the Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society (HMJC).** The HMJC had the objective of providing relief and long-term development assistance to Haiti one month after the earthquake and facilitated debate on development cooperation strategies. The HMJC was formed by 35 civil society organisations in both countries, and convened by Centro Lindavista, a Mexico City-based NGO. The funding of the initiative comes from Caritas Mexicana as a result of donations from Mexican citizens.

There has been a coordination challenge between these stakeholders. Most private foundations, as a result, opted to work directly with the government, setting a public-private partnership mainly addressed at developing infrastructure projects.

- **Visits by Haitian farmers to Mexico offered them an opportunity to exchange knowledge with rural producers and learn new practices.** Haitian people learned food storage and distribution techniques developed in Mexico, as well as the development of the cactus crop, nopal. The Haitian farmers emphasized the value of the learning process taking place in practice. Rather than a process in which one expert is telling farmers what to do and how to do it, in the exchange among farmers “they learn from someone who is working with them in the field”. For Mexican farmers, the exchange process was mainly valued as in intercultural experience in which they acted as “cultural ambassadors” of their country.
- **The sense of ownership in this project largely derives from the attributes of adaptability and flexibility that are often characteristics of SSDC, particularly when promoted by CSOs.** In this case, such a sense of ownership is strongly associated to the capacity developed by the members of the HMJC to listen and incorporate the priorities of the people. Ownership is achieved, according to an interviewee, because rather than a process in which one expert is telling farmers what to do and how to do it, “they learn from someone who is working with them in the field”. The HMJC’s notion of ownership goes beyond that of national ownership, but to farmers and grassroots organisations. Stakeholders recognise this is a key contribution civil society has brought to this project.
- **One of the challenges of the initiative has been achieving a plural and diverse group of civil society actors engaged in the project in Haiti.** With a fragmented and weak civil society in Haiti, however, the project has focused mainly on Caritas Haiti and one district of the Catholic Church.
- **Transparency and accountability mechanisms** of the initiative are largely internal within the HMJC. Financial reports are made to Caritas Mexicana as the main funder of the project, although accountability could be improved by establishing a public information mechanism by which any citizen could have access to information about the activities and budget of the HMJC.

Supporting post-disaster reconstruction and long-term development in Haiti: the Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society for the reconstruction of Haiti

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Abstract

The Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society for the reconstruction of Haiti (HMJC) is a South-South development cooperation (SSDC) programme created in 2010 by Mexican and Haitian CSOs after the earthquake. It is convened by Centro Lindavista, a Mexico City-based NGO which has been active in promoting CSO engagement with Mexican development cooperation. The HMJC operates as a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement, having agreed a five-year comprehensive reconstruction programme with government officials and the private sector and developed a set of criteria and guidelines for reconstruction work. Specific projects have been implemented by the organisations which form this Committee in areas such as education, agriculture housing and infrastructure with varying degrees of success. The Committee's work has also made attempts at developing initiatives to strengthen citizenship and civil society in Haiti. This case study examines the general lessons learned on strategies for CSO-led multi-stakeholder engagement in a fragile post-disaster context.

Background

In February 2010, Mexican and Haitian civil societies engaged in a South-South cooperation scheme with few precedents. One month after the earthquake, which resulted in 250,000 human loses, 300,000 injured and 1,500,000 homeless people, as well as great damages in the country's infrastructure, a Mexican CSO active in international issues, Centro Lindavista, proposed organising a multi-stakeholder dialogue to the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss key aspects of the reconstruction and develop a comprehensive five year programme. During two days, 90 representatives of Mexican civil society, private foundations, academic experts on international development cooperation and government officials came together with a mission of three Haitian representatives who managed to travel to Mexico at a rather difficult time –the bishop of Nippes and president of Caritas Haiti, Monseigneur Pierre-André Dumas; Dr. Johny Callonges, from the Haitian Medical Association and Marie-Genevieve Perry-Brun, a businesswoman.

In the *Social Dialogue*, which took place on the 23rd and the 24th of February 2010, a rich debate on international development cooperation took place. Priority areas for the reconstruction of the country were discussed, mainly in agriculture, infrastructure, productive activities, education and the strengthening of civil society. Those present in the meeting established a set of criteria, guidelines and concrete proposal, largely inspired on the principle of ownership, both at the national and community levels, and the central idea that “the main protagonist of the reconstruction should be the Haitian people”, that listening to them was “an obligation of the Mexican government and Mexican civil society”, while “everything should be done with Haiti rather than for Haiti” (CEPS 2010a:6, 8). This approach was not always evident in the reconstruction efforts in Haiti, with the perception that Haitian people did not necessarily have the opportunity to participate in the decisions around the reconstruction.

One of the most important outcomes of the Social Dialogue was the formal establishment of a binational SSDC scheme, the Haiti-Mexico Joint Committee of Civil Society for the reconstruction of Haiti, formed by 35 organisations in both countries, aimed at debating development cooperation strategies and promoting mid- and long-term initiatives in Haiti. The main objectives of this committee, as stated in its first document, was “strengthening networks, exchanging of information and identifying necessities and capacities, as well as coordinating civil society initiatives which have emerged from civil society in different areas such as housing and infrastructure reconstruction; education, micro-credits and productive projects, systematisation and dissemination of information, as well as fostering the importance of sustainability of the environment in a self managed fashion”.¹

In early 2010, Haiti was amidst in chaos. An already weak State, collapsed by the tragedy and incapable of acting, had been substituted in its basic functions by the international community. These efforts, however, were criticised (both within Haiti and worldwide) for their duplicity and lack of coordination as well as for the way in which they failed to include

¹ http://www.comitemixtohaiti-mexico.org.mx/archivos_index/index.html, visited on 06/04/14.

the Haitian people and its institutions.² The founders of the Joint Committee were not satisfied with the type of intervention under way, the assistentialist approaches and the lack of a long term vision. Although it was necessary to act in a moment of tragedy, they considered, it was also necessary to adopt a comprehensive development strategy for Haiti. The promoters of the HMJC also wanted to offer an alternative strategy to “already made” infrastructure and housing projects promoted by a number of international agencies. They wanted to advocate for an “alternative partnership” (Dumas 04/04/14) in which they would consult Haitian society and engage in a process in which Haitian people could decide how, when and where to concentrate reconstruction efforts.

Most of the efforts on international cooperation were concentrated in urban and peri urban areas of Port au Prince. Although this was the place in which the effects of the tragedy were more visible, the entire Haitian economy also collapsed as a result of the earthquake. In such a context, the Joint Committee considered that it was important to work in rural areas in order to avoid a further decapitalisation which would result in migrations to large cities, and in increasing the contingents of informal economy (which amounts for almost two thirds of the labour market in Haiti). Working in rural areas was also important in order to tackle the food security crisis, the high dependency of Haiti on food imports and the overall precarity of the food supply system in Haiti. The deforestation of the country, the lack of potable water, the enormous environmental damage, and the lack of a proper education system, in which more than 70% of the teachers in elementary and basic education like the necessary training (Voltaire 02/04/14), were also relevant issues to be tackled.

Mexican citizens were shocked by the tragedy in Haiti and made donations to Caritas Mexicana (the main funder of the initiatives developed by the HMJC) to work in Haiti. Instead of spending these resources at once in immediate relief efforts, as many other organisations, the Committee decided to engage in a different type of cooperation –one that could deliver benefits in the longer term. Rather than engaging in yet another “big project” that would show quick results, they decided to engage in a longer term strategy, by gradually spending the existing resources on a set of projects in which the HMJC could have and added value. In a context in which national and international NGOs were acting in isolation, often competing among each other and advancing their own agendas, it was important to act as a network with common objectives. Hence, instead of launching another isolated initiative, the HMJC opted for concentrating its efforts on facilitating a *formative process* that could render benefits at the community level, by promoting the exchange of knowledge, strengthening social organisation and creating social articulations.

Key activities

The HMJC was set up as a network of CSOs working in two countries. In its creation, the HMJC established an institutional structure which comprised a Pro Tempore Secretariat

² A documentary made by the Haitian cinema maker, Roul Peck (2013), shows many of the contradictions of the interventions promoted by the international community in reconstruction efforts.

based at the Centro Lindavista, in Mexico, an Articulation Board, in which key decisions are discussed, and sections in both countries in which the main drivers have been Caritas Mexico and Caritas Haiti. The network was made up of 35 CSOs in Mexico and Haiti. The Mexican section was formed, among others, by the Mora Institute, the Habitat International Coalition, Doctors without Borders, Scholarly Network for Disaster Relief and Prevention [Red Universitaria para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres, UNIREDA], the Faculty of Psychology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Centre for Education Studies [Centro de Estudios Educativos], the Latin American Institute for Educational Communication [Instituto Latinoamericano de la Comunicación Educativa, ILCE]; NOPALVIDA, Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla, Kaluz Foundation [Fundación Kaluz] and the Mexican Centre for Strategic Analysis and International Negotiations [Centro Mexicano de Análisis Estratégico y Negociación Internacional, CAENI]. The Haitian section comprised organisations such as Group Support for Refugees and Repatriated [Groupe d'Appui aux Réfugiés et aux Rapatriés, GARR], Haitian Group for Research and Pedagogical Actions [Groupe Haitien de Recherches et d'Actiones Pedagogiques, GHRAP], National Centre for Research and Training [Centre National de Recherche et de Formation, CERFAS], Célule de Reflexion et Action Nationale, Haitian Confederation for Reconciliation [Confédération des Haïtiens pour la Réconciliation, CHAR] and Citizens' Action [Initiative Citoyenne].

The Joint Committee established seven working groups in the areas of Productive Initiatives (later renamed as "From Peasant to Peasant"), Education, Psychosocial care, Comprehensive Habitat (or Housing and Infrastructure), Citizenship, Environment and Observatory of Cooperation. Not all of these groups, however, have been equally active. The three most important initiatives are described below:

Peasant to Peasant WG

The *WG From Peasant to Peasant*, which has already completed five stages in its development, has developed the most dynamic and successful activities of the HMJC. It is an exchange between peasant producers and organised small rural traders in the two countries. Since the first mission to Haiti, Mexican CSOs working in areas such as fair trade, micro-credits and sustainable local development, met a number of civil society organisations in Haiti. As a result of these meetings, a delegation of 25 peasant leaders from the rural communities of Paillant, in the South-West; the coastal area of Maidan, the city of Lascahobas, near the border with Dominican Republic, and Noailles, in the outskirts of Port au Prince, together with five Haitian promoters, travelled to Mexico for a month, lived with Mexican peasant families in the states of Morelos, Tlaxcala, México, Puebla and Mexico City.

Participants refer to this experience as a "unique opportunity" to exchange knowledge with rural producers and small peasants. Haitian peasants could learn from Mexico's long agricultural tradition, observed techniques such terracing and *chinampas* located in watersides. Two experiences were particularly relevant according to the actors involved: one of them was the opportunity to learn from storage and distribution techniques developed in Mexico, by meeting the Coalition of Vegetable Producers at the largest food supplier in Mexico City, the *Central de Abastos*. Another experience was the development of the cactus crop, nopal. This wild cactus exists in Haiti but is not part of the regular diet. Yet during their visit to Tlanepantla, Morelos, Haitian peasants could learn from the nutritious properties of this plant, which is very common among Mexicans, its potential for

retrieving the soils and its utility to feed animals. Supported by a group of Mexican technicians who followed up on the implementation of productive projects in Haiti, peasants from the department of Nippes were successfully able to develop nopal crops near their homes.

Peasant to peasant exchanges are clearly different from technical assistance methods provided by the traditional cooperation. Mexican technicians described it as a “learning by doing” process in which rather than transferring technology they exchange experiences and facilitate a formation process on capacity development. Interviewees in Mexico argue that this was also an enlightening experience for Mexican peasants, who derived learnings on agriculture and small catering and it was a valuable cultural learning process.³ In any case, it should be said that the extent to which a mutual and equal learning process between the providing and the receiving partner is relative. Technicians interviewed for this study acknowledged during interviews that it is more what Haitian peasants learn from them than what Mexicans, with a millenary agriculture tradition, learn from their counterparts in Haiti. For Mexican peasants, this process was mainly valued as in intercultural experience in which they acted as “cultural ambassadors” of their country (Valadez 2013:28).

Education WG

The second most dynamic effort of the HMJC took place in the area of education. This was presented as a relevant issue, given the fact that more than 2000 schools were destroyed in the earthquake (Voltaire 02/04/14). The Joint Committee considered that it was particularly important to professionalise teachers, as nearly 70% of them lack proper qualifications in Haiti. As part of this efforts, they decided to create the Institute for Education and Communication Pierre Toussaint, recently inaugurated in the Department of Nippes, to provide classroom and long term training courses to improve the technical capacities of both educational authorities and teachers. If proved successful, this institute will be replicated in other regions of the country. In a nation with an almost inexistent public education system such as Haiti –in which almost 90% of the education is provided by non state actors, most notably the Church–, education has a strategic importance for faith based organisations such as Caritas, the main drivers of this project.

Habitat Working Group

Less scope has been achieved by the WG on Habitat. The housing initiatives of this group have attempted to promote innovative mechanisms of self-construction and participatory approaches. Since the outset, the HMJC considered that the reconstruction should not only focus on technical aspects, neither be limited to isolated infrastructure projects. Rather, this component of the Joint Committee sought to advance a comprehensive program by which reconstruction efforts could help to promote job creation, productive activities, education and sustainable development. Such a programme, it was stated,

³ “They learnt from their vision of the world, their mysticism, their capacity to organise themselves, to resist and to fight”, said Álvaro Urrea, president of the Coalition of Vegetable Producers.

should incorporate the participation of local communities and take into account local building cultures, strengthen mutual assistance structures and housing cooperatives, and at the same time provide training and technical solutions that are not available to them.

As part of its innovative approach, the WG on Comprehensive Habitat suggested a mechanism by which families receiving training and materials to work on reconstruction would commit themselves to develop agro-ecology crops (CMMH 2010b:3). This WG wanted to promote consultation processes among families in different regions of the country in order to make them co-participants in the design, planning and implementation of reconstruction projects (CMMH 2010c). Some of these activities were attempted with a camp of refugees from Port au Prince set in Lascahobas, near the border with Dominican Republic. Nevertheless, this initiatives faced great difficulties at finding reliable sources of funding and the WG on Comprehensive Habitat eventually dissolved itself.⁴

Principles in practice: Busan and emerging SSC

Busan principles of multistakeholder action, ownership, transparency and accountability as well as inclusiveness have been meet by the HMJC to different degrees.

Multistake holder approach

The Social Dialogue promoted in February 2010 was a significant as well as an innovative effort towards the promotion of a multistake holder alliance between NGOs, rural organisations, academic experts, private foundations, government institutions and even some cooperation agencies and multilateral organisations based in Mexico. However, not all of these actors worked together in Haiti in an articulated fashion and the dialogue they established at the time of the tragedy did not last long.

On the one hand, the HMJC, was mainly formed by more development oriented NGOs. On the other hand, a group of private foundations which had been working in disaster relief initiatives in Mexico since 2002, *Unidos por Ellos* [United for them], decided to work more directly with the government by setting up a public-private partnership –the Mexico for Haiti Alliance, MHA– mainly addressed at funding physical infrastructure projects by which private companies involved received fiscal incentives.⁵ The foundations of some of the largest Mexican banks and enterprises, such as Fomento Social Banamex, Fundación Azteca and Fundación Televisa participated in this initiative.

The two groups –the MHA and the HMJC– did not manage to work together, in spite of attempts made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mexican First Lady, Margarita Zavala, who summoned the two groups in a meeting celebrated in October 2010. According to Juan Carlos Sánchez, one of the promoters of the Mexico for Haiti Alliance, it was a question of timing, not necessarily of incompatibility or animosity. In his view, when

⁴ GARR eventually completed a similar project funded by Christian Aid. Although this cannot be considered an activity of the HMJC, some of the members of the Comprehensive Habitat WG think that their initial efforts did have an effect in the project that was eventually accomplished.

⁵ At the Donors Conference held in March 2010, Mexico announced a \$8 million contribution for recovery efforts in Haiti: \$5 million would be channeled directly through the Haitian Government, while the remaining \$3 million would be implemented through the public-private partnership (see more in UNOSSC and JICA: 46-52).

the HMJC was established, the private foundations had already prepared its projects for Haiti. "We met quickly and took decisions as we had done in previous occasions with *Unidos por Ellos*", he emphasised. However, identity, interests and approaches towards development cooperation seem to be more powerful reasons. One of the most influential members of the HMJC in Mexico considers that the HMJC and the MHA were not really "in tune with each other". Members of the HMJC argue that their own approach differs from private foundations projects, in particular, because they are "mainly addressed at *doing bussiness* for their own benefit and completing their work quickly". Like governments, private foundations "tend to deploy methodologies and processes that are usually not participative", they contend.

Although Juan Carlos Sánchez rejects that the infrastructure projects completed by the Mexico for Haiti Alliance disregarded the opinions of the community, the tension between MHA and HMJC show that private foundations and governments tend to face different types of constraints than development oriented NGOs. Sánchez (07/04/14) stresses that MHA worked in collaboration with Haitian CSOs but also notes that "when you handle the money of government or businessmen there is an administrative calendar that you have to respect. Therefore, things need to be done as quickly as possible or you risk that funding may be cut down".

Ownership

The documents of the HMJC emphasised from the beginning that "the protagonist of the reconstruction of Haiti should be Haitian people", that listening to them was "an obligation of the Mexican government and Mexican civil society", and "everything should be done with Haiti rather than for Haiti" (CEPS 2010a:6,8). The question of "whose ownership counts?" is a relevant one for this project, as a particular emphasis is given on the communities and families involved. The Committee's notion of ownership, therefore, goes beyond that of national ownership. Indeed, an important added value which civil society has brought to this project is the work with grassroots organisations, as well as the promotion of a bottom up participatory approach.

The Peasant to Peasant program is a good example of how the HMJC has been able to successfully develop a sense of ownership among the Haitian peasants. Ownership is achieved, according to interviewees from both countries, because "the learning process takes place in practice" (Mora and Bacilio 02/04/14). Because rather than a process in which one expert is telling peasants what to do and how to do it, in the exchange among peasants "they learn from someone who is working with them in the field" (Mora and Bacilio 02/04/14).

It is likely that the sense of ownership in this project largely derives from the attributes of adaptability and flexibility that are often characteristics of SSDC. In this case, this is strongly associated to the capacity developed by the members of the HMJC to listen and incorporate the priorities of the people. For instance, one of the main organisations with which the HMJC works in the Peasant to Peasant program, the Women Assembly of Nippes, requested training and support to develop animal husbandry next to their existing home gardens as a means to improve food security. Although the Peasant to Peasant is mainly centred on agriculture, the Joint Committee accepted to provide such a training. The fact that the Joint Committee flexibilised its original objectives and responded to this request has been very positively regarded by the families who have started breeding hens outside their houses and are very happy about the fact that they are now eating eggs.

Less successful at achieving social ownership was the Comprehensive Habitat project, in spite of its objectives. The Mexico City based focal point of Habitat International in Latin America worked with the Refugees and Repatriated People Support Group [Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés, GARR] on a project that sought to develop 34 houses and incorporated a comprehensive approach to include urban agriculture spaces to secure the economic viability of the community, and dry latrines. When the project was completed, however, its funder, the German organisation MISEREOR, decided to step out and fund another project in which it could build a larger number of smaller houses without all of the distinctive components of the WG. A second attempt was made with an organisation from Uruguay and the Swedish cooperation, with which a contract was eventually signed. Once the process was underway, however, a conflict arose when GARR perceived that its counterpart was seeking its own project rather than developing one with the community. "They did not make any effort to understand Haitian reality and did not even speak Creole", was the statement made by a member of GARR.

Transparency and accountability

Regular reports are issued by the Secretariat of the HMJC in which information on progress is shared among the members of the Articulation Board. However, the creation of a Consultative Council, which had originally been announced by the HMJC to be in charge of monitoring and evaluation, has not been established. On the financial side, mutual accountability exists between Caritas Mexicana, as the main funder of this project, and Caritas Haiti. As an authorised donor in Mexico, Caritas Mexicana is also accountable to the Secretariat of Finance, the Private Welfare Board [Junta de Asistencia Privada], and to other institutions within the Church. Transparency and accountability in this project, however, could improve by establishing a public information mechanism by which any citizen could have access to information about the budget of the HMJC, both programme and exercised. At the time of writing, the large public could not access freely to the main figures of the project.

Inclusiveness

An emphasis on vulnerable groups has characterised this project from the outset. The Joint Committee has sought to include a wide range of actors, particularly women, children, displaced persons, elderly and disabled people. Many of these groups have been actively participating in programs such as the Peasant to Peasant in which several women organisations have had a very active role from the co-ordination of the programme to the activities in the field (Valadez 2013).

Shortcomings of the HMJC

The Social Dialogue process from which the HMJC emerged envisaged a very ambitious programme which has only been fulfilled in part. Among seven working groups originally created only two –Peasant to Peasant and Education– are operating within the HMJC umbrella. While Peasant to Peasants has already completed five stages, the WG on Education has made slower progress. Other groups, such as Comprehensive Habitat and Observatory on International Cooperation no longer exist. Beyond the limited number of projects implemented, one of the main shortcomings of the HMJC is the limited number of

organisations which have engaged in its concrete projects and its reduced geographic scope. According to the priest Patricio Sarlat, Executive-Secretary of Caritas Mexico, only 8 out of the 35 CSOs in the Joint Committee actively participate in specific projects today.

One of the main objectives of the HMJC was to facilitate an articulation *process* between two civil societies. Such a process has been only achieved in part, as a number of interviewees for this study recognise, because only the Mexican side has worked in a more or less articulated fashion. Interviewees in Mexico argue that the desarticulation and hyper fragmentation of Haitian civil society has made difficult to work with its organisations due to their multiple and not easily reconciled agendas and interests.⁶ Haitian CSOs have even more difficulties at working in networks than their Mexican counterparts and are largely divided along partisan lines. Hence, rather than working with Haitian civil society at the national level in an articulated fashion, the Mexican Section has opted for working separately with small groups or organisations and, even in some cases, directly with families (which reduces the potential multiplicatory effects).

Perhaps the main weakness of the Haitian section of the HMJC is the lack of a plural and diverse group of CSOs engaging with HMJC. The project focuses mainly on Caritas Haiti and one district of the Catholic Church, under the leadership of the bishop of Nippes Monseigneur Pierre André Dumas, where the majority of the activities of the HMJC have focused.⁷⁸ One example of this is that despite a number of peasant leaders from different regions of Haiti came to Mexico in 2010 to participate in the Peasant to Peasant initiative, future following up missions from Mexico mainly worked in Nippes, where this program has been confined. Both Caritas, in Mexico and Haiti, argue that the idea was to develop a pilot project in a specific region, and latter on replicate it in other regions of the country.

A further consideration for the lack of diverse civil society groups involved is whether Caritas had the legitimacy to fully represent civil society in this project. Because of this, and the lack of both human and financial resources, the HMJC has not been capable of promoting a larger articulation among Haitian CSOs.⁹

The Catholic Church holds great social and political authority in Haiti and it is also a key organisational power.¹⁰ However, not all CSOs in Haiti –particularly the most progressive ones- look favourably the role of the Church, which in spite of having a socially concerned sector also has a strong conservative one. On the Mexican side, interviewees described that, very often, things do not move on if the religious authorities do not get involved, even if the financial resources are readily available. These interviewees said that they feel

⁶ Members of CSOs in Haiti acknowledge that fragmentation is a problem and cite it as one of the reasons why civil society is not strong enough in their country. In their views, “there are far too many organisations working in an isolated manner and do not know each other” (Deiby 04/04/14).

⁷ Many interviewees consider that this personal factor is an important intervening variable to explain the fact that the activities of the HMJC have focused in one region of the country. In the Haitian Catholic Church, the social work of bishops tends to concentrate in their constituencies and it is not well regarded when a prelate steps into another territory. It is interesting to note that even Monseigneur Dumas acknowledged during the interview conducted for this study that this “personal factor” is one of the reasons why this project has circumscribed to his constituency, the Department of Nippes.

⁹ This task, in any case, is not easy. As members of the Mexican section reveal, it is not easy to find social actors in Haiti with sufficient capacities and the necessary leadership to secure success in the projects.

¹⁰ It might not be a mere coincidence that the Mexico for Haiti Alliance also selected faith based organisations such as Nos Petits Frères Et Soeurs [Our Little Brothers and Sisters], Messengers of Peace or the Paules Fathers, to work with. According to Juan Carlos Sánchez, one of the promoters of the MHA, there was a simple reason for this: “It is difficult to work with Haitian society and faith-based organisations do things quicker because they are already organised” (07/04/14).

constrained by the hierarchical religious structure and the excessive protocols that have been transposed to the project and slowed down its implementation. Some Mexican members of the Committee perceive that the HMJC process is too dependent on the local priesthood, while grassroots leaders with whom they work lack independency and capacity to act outside the realm of the Catholic Church. Some members of grassroots organisations in Haiti also consider that Caritas has too much power within the project, from the provision of funding to the planning processes.¹¹

Another reason for frustration has been the fact that public institutions in both countries have offered very limited support, which reduced the potential and scope of the activities undertaken. Members of the committee interviewed for this study said that they approached several government departments in Mexico, but many of them did not respond, reacted at a very low pace or acted in an extremely bureaucratic fashion. On the ground, the fact that there was no interlocutor for these institutions in the Haitian government seemed to be a reason to avoid engaging in concrete efforts in Haiti.

Lessons learned

1. SSDC initiatives promoted by civil society have clear advantages over IDC. In spite of the difficulties and shortcomings experienced by the HMJC, all of its participants highlight it. One interviewee argued that even if limited in its resources, SSDC has deeper effects and it is “richer” than traditional top down interventions (Urreta 26/03/14).¹² Haitian organisations do not necessarily value civil society SSDC initiatives for the size of the projects implemented. In their perceptions, it is mainly European agencies, with their traditional cooperation strategies, which still bring the “big projects”. In contrast, they value SSDC as carried out by the HMJC because “they emphasise a personal relationship with concrete people: individuals who are facing difficulties” (Rosenberg 03/04/14).¹³
2. Multistakeholder efforts in development cooperation are not easy to develop when different objectives and paradigms of development cooperations cannot be reconciled. What happened in Mexico after the Social Dialogue, in which several sectors were summoned is a good example. Given the specific objectives of the HMJC and the MHA –in one case completing infrastructure projects and deliver them quickly, in the other case promoting processes of articulation, knowledge exchange and social organisation– it is possible to understand why development oriented NGOs and large private foundations and government institutions could not find it easy to work together.¹⁴

¹¹ It is important to mention, however, that they also consider that working with the Church is by far better than doing it with the Haitian government, as the former is more participatory and open to society than the latter.

¹² The member of a Haitian NGO reflected on his experience at working with Canadian official aid and Mexican civil society led cooperation. “We have long believed that the fact that we both spoke French was an important element of connection with the Canadians. However, I have seen that there is more that we can learn from countries like Mexico because we share similar social problems” (Joseph 04/04/14).

¹³ A former member of Caritas Haiti who promoted the articulation work of the HMJC in its early stages, also argued: “I think the work of the HMJC is valuable because it touches directly on popular organisation” (Anis 04/04/14).

¹⁴ It is important to say that, in spite of the importance of Mexican efforts in Haiti, responses in general took a long time to materialise. The difficulties experienced at coordinating public institutions, and their joint efforts with the private sector and civil society organisations showed that a specific cooperation agency was necessary to act in emergency situations. In order to better coordinate institutions and actors, one year after the earthquake in Haiti the Mexican government created The

3. Often, SSDC projects led by civil society are more relevant for the long-term processes they promote than for achieving short term “big results”. By promoting articulation processes, the HMJC has managed to put in contact groups and actors interested in engaging in cooperation and capable of working together.
4. Civil society bring a set of “added value” to SSDC initiatives, particularly at the community level in which they have experience working on the ground. CSOs often have a greater capacity to work with “the people” and listening to them. Instead of deploying standardised methods or a single intervention model applicable to all contexts, many of them tend to have more flexibility and capacity to adapt. During a focus group conducted among Haitian CSOs, one of the participants agreed that, unlike government initiatives, CSOs from the South are “less imperialistic” and, “rather than imposing their approaches, they exchange points of view”.¹⁵
5. CSOs are not likely to have meaningful influence and considerable effects in SSDC if they act alone or in an isolated fashion. Small and medium NGOs, in particular, need to act as a network and in an articulated manner if they want to potentialise their actions. The reconstruction experience in Haiti shows that the lack of coordination among thousands of national and international NGOs and government agencies working in that country after the earthquake weakened their efforts considerably and caused all sorts of additional problems. Within the HMJC, the establishment of a proper linkage between the civil societies of Haiti and Mexico still needs to be encouraged, far beyond faith-based organisations.
6. Many of the CSO-led projects in South-South cooperation tend to be marginal. In order to scale up, organisations need to overcome vices such as hegemonism and personalism which often characterise them, as well as the tendency of certain groups and actors to claim the representation of civil society as a whole. These issues may limit the scope of their efforts because they reduce the capacity of CSOs to act in larger and more articulated networks. Providing CSOs with institutional support, leadership formations and the like is also important.
7. SSDC projects implemented by civil society are not likely to have meaningful effects if they lack support from public institutions, particularly in context in which funding from IDC is limited. The state should support SSDC without impositions of

Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID). This agency, according to Mexican diplomats, is better prepared than the former Directorate General for Technical and Scientific Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to respond to emergency situations. It remains to be seen whether AMEXCID is capable of fully developing a multistakeholder approach and act in a more articulated fashion with all sorts of CSOs, including the more development oriented as well as private sector foundations.

¹⁵ Focus group session conducted on the 4th of April 2014 with members of Caritas Haiti, the Cel of Reflection and National Action [Cellule de Relfextion et d’Action Nationale, CRAN] and the Confederation of Haitian People for Reconciliation [Confedédération des Haïtiens por la Réconcilliation, CHAR). During a field trip to Petit-Rivere, in the department of Nippes, a Haitian peasant argued that, in her experience, working with civil society has been very different than working with government agencies. In the latter cases, she said, “there is never a direct relationship with the beneficiaries”. In contrast, she emphasised: “the Mexicans work with us and spend time with us. They even know what we eat!” (Jeuty 02/04/14).

any kind and respecting independent efforts conducted by civil society. This does not mean, however, that national or international NGOs should not be seen as a substitute for a weak state as it largely occurred in Haiti after the earthquake. In situations of tragedy in which the state is weak and there are no interlocutors within the institutions further complications arise. It is not by attempting to substitute the state but by strengthening its institutions that international donors should promote the work of civil society.

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Role of Civil Society in South-South Cooperation

This case study report was produced as part of a project highlighting how civil society organisations (CSOs) contribute to the roles middle income countries play not just as recipients of aid, but also as innovators and providers of development cooperation. The project drew on a review of available literature, evidence from BRICS countries and Mexico collected by the IDS Rising Powers in International Development programme, and four case studies. These case studies, undertaken by number of partners and organisations including Articulação SUL, PRIA and Shack/Slum Dwellers International, illustrate the role of civil society organisations cooperating across a range of contexts. These include fragile and post-disaster situations, as well as cooperation between middle and low income countries. The case studies examine CSOs' international roles in providing services, promoting social accountability, supporting post-disaster reconstruction and sharing rural and urban development knowledge that derives from their own domestic experiences.

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