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Haiti Six Months On: Good Intentions, Bad Memories and Local Frustrations

Was Communication, Community-Engagement and Accountability
considered in the 2021 Haiti Earthquake Response?

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Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
ASEC	Assemblées des Sections Communales
CASEC	Conseils d'Administration des Sections Communales
CCEA	Communication, community engagement and accountability
CDAC Network	Communicating with Disaster-affected Communities
COUD	Centres d'Opération d'Urgence Départementales
COUL	Centres d'Opération d'Urgence Locales
COUN	Centres d'Opération d'Urgence Nationale
CwC	Communicating with Communities
DGPC	Direction Générale de la Protection Civile
DPC	Direction de la Protection Civile
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EIP	Community intervention team
ETS	Emergency Telecommunications Sector
GBV	Gender-based violence
GTS	Ground Truth Solutions
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
MPCE	Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation
MSP	Multi-stakeholder platform
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCHA	Organization for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
PSEA	Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse
SCLR	Survivor-community led crisis response
SNGRD	Système National de Gestion des Risques et des Désastres
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme

A Note about the Study

This review was commissioned by CDAC Network to provide a snapshot of the status of Communication, Community Engagement and Accountability (CCEA) in Haiti six months into the earthquake response. The study aims to identify common themes and critical questions that response actors should be asking to improve sustainable, collective, localised action in CCEA moving forward. Several recommendations are put forward for consideration going forward.

1. Background

Haiti was still reeling from the 7 July 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse when the country was hit by a magnitude 7.2 earthquake six weeks later, on 14th August 2021. National response efforts were led by the Direction Générale de la Protection Civile (DGPC) with international disaster response and humanitarian relief efforts responding to requests for support, ramping up soon after. This would be the third time that a large international response has been initiated for Haiti since the earthquake in 2010. Each response has seen significant donor and agency investment in building relationships but, unfortunately, the impact of these interventions has often been minimal and without sustained funding post-emergency, there is little room for sustainability.

It must be noted, however, that there had been considerable work done prior to the 2021 earthquake; a reasonable disaster risk reduction (DRR) coordination structure was in place after the 2010 earthquake yet for numerous reasons, as will be discussed below, these structures largely disappeared except for the DGPC which, while facing resource constraints, is still operational with a particularly strong unit in the country's south where the earthquake struck.

Compounding the difficulties in the 2021 response effort has been the escalation of gang violence that has affected 1.5 million people and displaced 19,000 people since June 2021. The combined effects in Haiti of disaster incidents, pre-existing needs, an ongoing political crisis, socio-economic challenges and increasing violence have significantly worsened an already complex humanitarian scenario.¹ Insecurity and violence hampered the travel of nearly anyone working for an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) or United Nations (UN) agency.

In Haiti, where the electrical grid is unreliable, all the services and institutions that keep the country running – banks, hospitals, cell towers, businesses – get their power from generators. But the severe fuel shortage meant that many of the generators for these institutions had no power. According to Maarten Boute, the chief executive of Digicel Haiti, the country's largest mobile and broadband network provider. Without fuel, “everything just shuts down,” Mr. Boute said, adding that one in four Digicel cellular towers were out, without fuel to operate.²

¹ OCHA Situation Report 31 August 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-08-24%20HT%20FA%20Summary%20%28ENG%29.pdf>

² Kitroeff, N. & M. Abi-Habib (2021). Gangs rule much of Haiti. New York Times. 27 October 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/world/americas/haiti-gangs-fuel-shortage.html>

And without mobile connectivity there can be no digital engagement – critical to any communication and engagement efforts.

In such a challenging environment, the CDAC strategy focusing on greater intentional inclusion and localised leadership in Communication, Community Engagement and Accountability (CCEA) is especially important. CDAC’s vision “is that communities will have the information and resources they need to determine their own solutions and be central stakeholders in humanitarian and development decision making”.

In addition, the proposed priorities of the Grand Bargain 2.0 are also particularly valid; one of the priorities is to ensure there is greater support to local leadership as well as participation of affected communities. Indeed, two weeks after the earthquake, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) stated that “localisation, Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and effective two-way Communication with Communities (**CwC**), **including women’s organisations, are key priorities of the humanitarian community’s response strategy**, with a view to ensure local capacities, knowledge and expertise are at the core of these efforts.”³

Furthermore, OCHA noted that the response “**must be grounded in national leadership and capitalise on local capacities, knowledge and expertise** [emphasis added] which is complimented by regional and international assistance ... An increased focus on localisation in response efforts goes hand in hand with the mainstreaming of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and effective two-way Communication with Communities (CwC), including women’s organisations, into all response and early recovery efforts. ... Participatory and inclusive assessments and spaces for dialogue must be rolled out with the leadership of local organisations, including women and youth-led groups, to enable community participation in programme design, provide information on available services and how to access them, and transparently communicate the limitations of humanitarian assistance.”⁴

Indeed, local capacities, knowledge and expertise were already responding prior to the arrival of international responders and both the DGPC and Haitian Red Cross were instrumental to the local response efforts in what was a particularly complex response environment characterised by access and security constraints and multiple simultaneous crises amid a global pandemic. This exemplifies CDAC’s strategy which suggests CCEA responses should begin by supporting “efforts to place national governments, local civil society, local communities, and private sector actors at the centre of CCEA initiatives that empower local communities”.⁵ In addition, efforts should be made “to include a broad range of national actors in the leadership and delivery of CCEA, including government, private sector, civil society, media organisations and communities. Help place informed communities in a position of influence, particularly those groups that lack visibility and voice.”⁶

³ OCHA (2021). Haiti Situation Report. 31 August 2021.
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-08-31_Haiti%20earthquake%20-%20SitRep%233.pdf

⁴ OCHA Situation Report 31 August 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2021-08-24%20HT%20FA%20Summary%20%28ENG%29.pdf>

⁵ CDAC Network (2021). CDAC Network Strategy 2022-2027.

⁶ CDAC Network (2021). CDAC Network Strategy 2022-2027.

But to what extent was this achievable, or feasible in the wake of the 2021 earthquake? To answer these questions and others as part of the CDAC commitment to learning, the CDAC Network commissioned this learning review of the international support to the earthquake response regarding the use of CCEA. This learning review is designed to help the Haiti response efforts to improve collective CCEA in Haiti. The objective being to “help response actors to look beyond the first year of response and help provide ideas for additional capacity building needed and any onward action that may be supported by CDAC and/or its members. It should explore solutions and possible innovations in the onward response (including involvement of private sector, local partners, etc.)”.⁷

2. Methodology and Limitations

This is a qualitative review with the consultant using mixed methods including literature review and key informant interviews (KIIs) with staff from local partners, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders. A total of 20 KIIs were conducted, eight of which were Haitians. It should be noted that many local actors were unwilling to grant interviews simply because they feel the only time NGOs call on them is when they need to conduct evaluations or studies such as this one, indicative of what can be construed as a certain level of polarisation between local and international actors.

Due to the challenges of reaching local partners, the consultant developed a brief nine question survey in French on Google Forms. The survey was distributed to 45 contacts from a mapping of local organisations produced by CDAC. Fourteen of these emails bounced and three people responded to the survey resulting in a response rate of about 10 percent and thus not particularly representative.

Key informants interviewed for this report were told they would not be identified which allowed them to speak more freely.

There are several limitations to this review. First, the timing of the research looks only at the immediate application of CCEA in the first six months of the response, which is a critical moment for including CCEA, especially for good accountability. However, many activities have only just started. One informant noted that “the timing of the report is unfortunate as it is only now that many activities are underway”. Second, this report being produced by mid-February can also be seen as indicative of the limitations presented by funding cycles rather than the needs and reality on the ground.

Another limitation was that of working remotely for both the consultant and the CDAC team on the ground; all interviews were conducted via Zoom or mobile phone. This scenario was not ideal due to the hesitancy on the part of many Haitian partners to be interviewed and resulting in a limited number of Haitian voices included in this review.

Despite the short timeframe in which both this review was conducted and the length of the current response in Haiti, this review is able to provide some concrete recommendations. This

⁷ CDAC Network (2021). Terms of reference: Haiti learning review.

review is structured in four sections. The first section outlines the CCEA response in Haiti with information largely gleaned from OCHA, UNICEF and WFP situation reports and interviews. The second section examines the current progress of the CCEA response with a focus on localisation, community engagement structures and accountability. This section is based almost exclusively on informant interviews. The third section examine challenges and opportunities as well as common themes that should be considered going forward. The final section presents a discussion of lessons learned and recommendations that may be pursued in future responses.

3. The Response

The day of the earthquake, the Prime Minister declared a one-month national state of emergency, activated the *Système National de Gestion des Risques et des Désastres (SNGRD)*, the *Centres d'Opération d'Urgence Nationale (COUN)* and the *Centres d'Opération d'Urgence Départementales (COUD)*. The same day, the Ministry of Planning and External Cooperation (MPCE) notified all national and international partners of the authority of the *Direction Générale de la Protection Civile (DGPC)* to coordinate and guide the immediate earthquake response. As such, the DGPC led efforts to coordinate national relief and response together with line ministries and humanitarian partners, through the (COUN).

The Haitian Red Cross, local NGOs and faith-based organisations were also quick to respond, however, it is unclear to what extent these organisations implemented communication and community engagement activities. Clusters were not activated but rather national sectors, including the Emergency Telecommunications Sector (ETS) and others who supported the government response efforts.

In the days following the quake, humanitarian actors had limited access to the remote areas due to damaged roads and security issues. Most of the humanitarian assistance reached the city centres of the affected departments and communes while rural areas were most in need.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) prioritised the *reactivation of the CwC Working Group* “to develop a common strategy and priority actions for communications and community engagement, positioned as a key part of the humanitarian architecture”.⁸ The HCT also identified the integration of AAP, CwC, PSEA and Gender priorities into multisectoral and sectoral needs assessments and deliver transparent, clear and timely information on how affected communities can access aid, responding to needs and concerns and addressing the challenges and limitations of providing humanitarian assistance. UNICEF was designated as the lead for AAP while OCHA must be credited for the tremendous efforts made in their coordination efforts.

Two weeks after the earthquake, the 31st August OCHA situation report outlined the *needs for AAP/CwC* which included: Providing relevant, transparent and well-coordinated humanitarian action; integrated mechanisms across the response strategy, operations and

⁸ The Flash Appeal goes into further details about the key priorities for AAP and CwC.

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Haiti%20-%20Flash%20Appeal%20-%20Earthquake%20%28August%202021%29.pdf>

coordination **including effective two-way CwC**; engagement and open dialogue with those in the most affected areas to explain the challenges and limitations of humanitarian assistance; a **mapping of existing PSEA and AAP capacities** to share relevant experience and information with partners.

The same report also noted **potential gaps and constraints** including:

- Multiple sectoral- and agency-based needs assessment currently being rolled out without having effectively integrated AAP, unintentionally fuelling affected communities' frustration level due to extractive and lengthy questionnaires that do not result in immediate results/solutions to people's needs.
- **Assessments and analysis failing to reflect communities' priorities and recommendations.**
- Lack of priority and dedicated resources in humanitarian response plans to enable a localised and accountable response. Financial mechanisms not considering AAP as a minimum requirement for selecting proposals.
- Potential delay in the reactivation of the AAP/CwC working group at the national level due to competing priorities and required coordination with multiple actors.
- Potential delay in the deployment of dedicated capacity required to support the coordination of the AAP/CwC working group.
- AAP/CwC and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) focal points to support information management not assigned by lead agencies, partners and inter-agency coordination.
- A fast-changing context with mounting unmet needs that fuel anger, rumours and misinformation which outpace response efforts.

By the 15 September 2021, one month after the earthquake, OCHA and UNICEF situation reports said the following had been accomplished:

- A **hotline** for better information and support is being set up with the support of the Ministry of Health. A strategy on CwC is being designed in collaboration with the COUN and partners. UNICEF and WFP are working together to set up an interagency hotline for community feedback.
- To help the CwC/AAP WG advance in its collective approach, dedicated capacity will soon be deployed to support **mid-term coordination** of the CwC WG. Global interagency capacity, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), is being deployed to support in the short-term. CDAC Global Network is in the process of hiring a local expert to support local networks and integrate them with the CwC/AAP working group.
- UNICEF developed **key messages** on the prevention of family separation, hygiene, the use of basic health services and post-earthquake behaviours, including child supervision, which are being broadcast through the network of community radios (SAKS).
- UNICEF trained more than 150 **U-Reporters** in both the Grand'Anse and Sud departments on PSEA, gender-based violence (GBV) and hygiene in emergencies, while strengthening the GBV capacities of 431 adults (180 women and 251 men) and 450 youth U-Reporters from Nippes.

- UNICEF’s **GBV prevention key messages** have been validated by the GBV sub-sector to be released. Additionally, 60 enumerators have been trained to deliver awareness raising messages on PSEA during education assessments.⁹

In addition, UNICEF used its convening power to coordinate between PSEA-AAP actors and the WASH sector for an interagency approach to streamline community engagement and AAP in quake affected areas. UNICEF also reported that youths who signed up on U-Report were among the first to bring assistance to their families.¹⁰

The World Food Programme initiated a **community feedback mechanism** which it opened to other UN agencies with UNICEF being the first to join.

CDAC, with H2H funding, was able to provide important contributions to CCEA efforts to assist with coordination and build local capacity as well. Activities included preliminary mapping of important actors and partners was undertaken and passed on to OCHA for further consolidation; training of local media and national actors in CCEA in partnership with Panos and RedR (also with H2H funding); and advocacy work to ensure further integration of local actors into the process.

4. Findings

Coordination is not easy and AAP coordination is even harder.

–Key informant

Nearly six months after the earthquake, there has been some progress in localisation, community engagement and accountability but there remains much more to be done. This section outlines some of the areas in which there has been progress and highlights those areas that are lacking.

4.1 No institutional capitalisation or memory

While several informants noted that there had seemed to be significant **progress in the area of CCEA** post-2010, in 2021, “it was like no one remembered anything.” Some said the response to Hurricane Matthew in 2016 was better organised than the 2021 response; some informants felt this was due to the security situation particularly after the July 2021 assassination of the President.

Indeed, one overarching challenge was the lack of institutional memory. Much was learned in the 2010 response to that earlier earthquake, with some of this carried over to the 2016

⁹ OCHA (2021), Haiti Earthquake Situation Report #5, 14 September 2021 and UNICEF Earthquake Haiti Humanitarian Situation Report #6, 15 September 2021.

¹⁰ UNICEF (2021). Haiti Earthquake Situation Report No.1. 14-15 August 2021.

[https://www.unicef.org/media/104916/file/Haiti%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%201%20\(Earthquake\),%20August%202021.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/media/104916/file/Haiti%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%201%20(Earthquake),%20August%202021.pdf)

response to Hurricane Matthew. However, several informants lamented that, five years later, there is almost a complete **lack of institutional memory** on some of the things previously done in response to both the 2010 earthquake and 2016's Hurricane Matthew. For example, one informant said that "between 2010 and Matthew we moved from having a separate mechanism to more integration with national DRR mechanism" which they felt was effective. This began in 2010 and saw a number of international organisations working closely with the DPC and supporting the SNGRD. This collaboration and coordination on preparedness led to a certain level of trust and understanding between local and international actors which enabled the effective integration of the CwC working group during Hurricane Matthew. He stressed, however, that subsequent personnel changes led to a lack of leadership or convening in the years leading up to the latest earthquake and the previous levels of integration and cooperation dissolving.

The informant further explained that "agencies like UNDP, OFDA, the World Bank (WB) who were to support the system of the SNGRD slowly got thinner. This went with the degradation of the Haitian state over the past four years. Now we have had people who died from Covid who were key high up folks. [All of this] contributed to the loss of memory and a complete change of leadership of the DGPC".

Another informant said there has been "no capitalisation institutional" and that nothing has been integrated. As a result, according to one Haitian informant: "After the earthquake NGOs came up with their own response elements. This is understandable, we were not prepared. Until now, there is not yet a process of accountability, or communication with local communities ... Until now, the population is not consulted, local actors are not integrated. Some NGOs take the pleasure of contacting us during the implementation of their project, just to have local coverage. We are invited here and there in meetings, just to have our presence: « **Yo jis fè nou yo akonpaye yo pou yo ka pran on kouvèti lokal, pandan yap fè afè pa yo** ». Concretely, there is nothing in terms of community engagement in humanitarian actions."

Clearly, the lack of pre-positioned CCEA structures, or the dissolution of previous such structures, hampered an integrated response.

Finally, one international informant felt that there was simply no prioritisation to information and communication in the response. "All those interested on AAP were interested in feedback rather than informing the population" which effectively serves the organisation in providing relief rather than serving and involving communities.

4.2 Local leadership largely bypassed

Il faut intégrer la population, les médias communautaires et les acteurs locaux dans les actions de relèvement. On ne peut plus parler de réponse aux urgences maintenant. C'est le relèvement.

– Key informant

There was broad criticism of international organisations in the wake of the 2010 earthquake that **local capacity that existed in the country was ignored**, largely untapped and that there was a systemic failure “to promote local civil society leadership” at that time. “[Local actors] disappeared from our view. They were very busy. They were doing their thing. But they were not part of that big circus” that was the international relief effort, according to Bruno Lemarquis, a former UN resident coordinator in Haiti.¹¹

While this should have been a significant lesson learned from the 2010 response, Haitian informants interviewed for this study noted an almost complete lack of consultations or communication with local communities in the current response. For example, several local informants said that the rural areas were completely forgotten during the response. One informant said: “The NGOs make interventions without consultation with the CASEC (*Conseils d'Administration des Sections Communales*). The NGOs come and set up there without consulting the population. There is no two-way communication”.

Respondents provided several examples of what happens when such consultations are lacking. In one case, “humanitarians gathered people on some vacant land not knowing why the land was vacant in the first place; it was because the land floods during torrential rains”. Another informant said that “some organisations distribute food, such as pre-made food, that is not adapted to the cultures of the victims”. The same informant also noted cases where women have been sexually harassed and propositioned in exchange for support. They also noted that there has been little or no consideration for the most vulnerable: people with reduced mobility, pregnant women, elderly people and children.

Several key informants stated that **finding local capacity with relevant experience was a significant challenge**, yet Haitian informants expressed frustration with this sentiment. One Haitian informant acknowledged that much was learned from 2010 and that many things have changed for the better since then. “Humanitarian organisations are more aware of the way to better involve communities. But it’s a big challenge. Until now there are organisations that don’t like it because it’s like much of it is being imposed.” The informant added that “it is very important to remind the [international] organisations that they should be more inclusive of local actors”.

One international informant expressed relief that they were finally able to hire some people in the south after the earthquake. “The bulk of the work is being done by local partners on

¹¹ Macon, D. & J. Alexander (2022). In Haiti, disaster risks linger as another earthquake anniversary passes. The New Humanitarian 12 January 2022. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2022/1/12/have-the-lessons-of-Haiti-2010-earthquake-been-learned>

the ground. I train them and they do the work on the ground; they have the trust of the community”. The informant added that they can **localise the work** to some extent because they are working with local people. “Sometimes it would be easier for me just to do it but then if I leave, I take the capacity with me. So, we are working to building local capacity” by working with and through organisations including the Haitian Red Cross and the Scouts.

Some informants, however, credited the local organisation that is the lead for emergency response, the DGPC. The DGPC “have done some good work in Les Cayes -- monitoring where aid should go and involving the community. It didn’t use to be this way [and] they could have done more if they had more resources,” said one local informant.

Another informant said that while some changes have been slow, the latest earthquake response “was much more locally led by DGPC than during any other disaster”. But, she added, challenges do exist: “We need to train every time mayors change, for example...and [the response] needs to be determined by the community as do the solutions. But the community needs to know what their role is”. This suggests the **need for a strong, embedded institutional framework** rather than one that is largely reliant on individuals.

One DGPC staffer said that while the DGPC may have the most decentralised structure in the country, the agency “as the state institution of risk and disaster management has once again shown all of its shortcomings in the management of major disasters”. The staffer went on to explain that Centres d’Opération d’Urgence Locales (COUL) were one example of not being sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of the victims. They continued: “Each municipality should have the operational resources. In this sense, they would be the first to intervene in the event of a problem. Due to a lack of resources and equipment, local communities were unable to meet the demands of the disaster”.

One informant also noted some **weakness on the part of local authorities** tasked with coordinating the response. “We are here to support and follow the lead of the government but there are not enough resources in government to take into account all the humanitarian responses including AAP”. Another informant added that “this level of **disorder in the coordination** further demonstrates the lack of dialogue and communication between the DGPC and humanitarian actors”.

Despite the lack of coordination between internationals and nationals, UNICEF and OCHA must be credited for their operationalising and coordination efforts, despite the fact that this should have been done by the DGPC.

Several informants stressed the need for **sustainability of localisation**. Many of “these local organisations need to be strengthened. They don’t have organigrams, there is a lack of management skills [but] there is a base on which to build, and we need to invest in this. AAP needs to be integrated into all streams of humanitarian response”.

One informant stressed the challenges presented by connectivity issues and lack of physical access because most international organisations forbid staff to travel due to security issues. These same challenges, however, can also present an opportunity to work with national organisations and people who can access these areas. “We find key partners that can lead

activities,” said one informant. But, they warned, “We are transferring the [security] risk to them and that may not work [in the long-term]”.

4.3 Context matters

Several informants noted that the context in the south, the region most affected by the earthquake, is quite different from that in the country’s capital. “There is a **way people do things in the south**. It’s different than in Port-au-Prince. So, when you work with those communities you need to know how to communicate with them”.

Working through and with local structures is likely one component for the way forward. Several informants pointed to the community structure of the CASEC. These councils “should be the first ones to give information. We also need to strengthen the municipalities to work with DGPC and train the Community Intervention teams (EIC). They are living in their own communities. What they need is training and respect and they can be a good tool for CCEA”.

One international informant with long experience in Haiti and with CCEA, said that one large international NGO had no clear community outreach plan which, he said, should involve CASEC, Assemblées des Sections Communales (ASEC) and mayors who can then provide connections to local organisations. This, he added, would also serve as a trust building exercise. “This was completely missing”, he said.

Some localisation efforts were also thwarted because much of the work, due to the pandemic, was conducted remotely. Most informants agreed that any CCEA work in Haiti **should be conducted in person**, but this was largely impossible for UN agencies and INGOs due to security concerns. This appears to have led to a **massive disconnect** between needs and actions. Yet, had there been robust connections with local communities and local organisations this could have been avoided to some extent. It would appear, therefore, that the perception by some internationals that they need to be on the ground to embed CCEA in a response does not ring true. Rather it suggests that partnership models, which largely exclude local organisations, are outdated.

4.4 Local media largely absent from CwC response

It would seem that one structure that is critical for community engagement, particularly in an emergency context, was largely missing for CCEA activities – **the media**. Several informants noted that there is a significant gap on working with media in Haiti. “There is a big issue with engaging with the media – both local as well as community radios in the south and at the national level”. The informant noted that the entity that, in theory, should be spearheading this would be the DPC. He suggested they hold a weekly radio programme at least in the south or even have all local radios in the departments meet locally to discuss community engagement and accountability. However, the informant noted, there is a lack of capacity on the part of the DPC to do this as their staff already overstretched.

One Haitian working for a large international organisation said some work was done with local radio stations but “we are **missing Haitians who could do communications and AAP work**, but they didn’t have enough training to be able to share the information with the community”. The informant provided an example of what is missing: “Shortly after the earthquake, there

were a significant number of emergency health teams responding yet the community didn't know where to find them. While a map was produced showing the locations, it was **not in Creole** and so many of the affected population were unable to make use of it".

One informant noted that the "media crowd just doesn't relate with the humanitarian community. They talk a different language".

4.5 CASEC well placed to assist in localisation efforts

There are at least two research studies being conducted to assess and understand community needs and perceptions. Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) is conducting a perceptions study and is collecting feedback from affected communities and providing that to humanitarians. The study has dual objectives of providing operational agencies with actionable recommendations based on community views and finding out to what extent they feel 'empowered' by aid.

Some preliminary findings regarding localisation suggest that CASEC was best placed to conduct distribution; community members said this was because they were perceived to be less involved in corruption, nepotism and know their communities very well. This finding was particularly prevalent in rural communities in the south. Similarly, it was noted that civil society organisations are best placed to bring aid to community because authorities weren't perceived in positive light.

Another study is being conducted by UNICEF. This survey is focused on community engagement, AAP and PSEA and is being organised by UNICEF in coordination with OCHA and other specialised stakeholders, including 12 municipalities of the three earthquake-affected departments, targeting key informant groups such as community leaders and community-based organisations, women head of households, children and disabled people, among others. The survey will allow the affected population to provide feedback to UNICEF and partners on the relevance and effectiveness of their humanitarian response.

UNICEF and GTS have been coordinating throughout to ensure there is no duplication in their studies but rather that they are complementary.

4.6 AAP Working groups slow to take hold

As mentioned above, there are two AAP working groups – one at the national level and one sub-group in the south, based in Les Cayes. A national AAP Working Group was set up in April 2021, prior to the earthquake, yet was not particularly active. After the earthquake, there was a clear need for AAP response, yet there were no resources dedicated to AAP or CCEA. In October OCHA decided wanted to decentralise and have personnel in the south and, as a result, some financial and human resources were allocated to setting up an AAP Working Group in the south. By November, this AAP sub-group had been set up and included 12 members including four local organisations. By December, four months after the quake, a terms of reference and workplan had been completed.

The national working group held two meetings after the earthquake, however, the first overall AAP coordination meeting in January 2022, five months after the earthquake and one

month before CDAC Network, GTS and others completes their work. One informant said that while the goal is to share their work with others, including local actors, “we’re not there yet”. Indeed, the attendance sheet from that meeting suggests nearly all internationals and few locals were in attendance and no media representative.

The regional working group in the south holds weekly face-to-face meetings in Les Cayes. Because it is in-person, it is impossible to attend virtually due to the lack of connectivity at the meeting site.

One informant said that it seemed that neither international or local actors were really aware of the AAP working group even while they were implementing programmes including community engagement and accountability.¹² This was echoed by other informants. Haitian local authorities complained about poor communication in the emergency management process and response. “No one knows who is doing what and where. The Direction de la Protection Civile is not managing the communication group as it should be done, and there is also lack of coordination in the field,” said one informant.

One local official said there were a number of coordination problems. The way it is being done “is completely dysfunctional,” he said. “There is no communication in the process whether at the level of the communication pool of the DPC (Direction de la Protection Civile) or information sharing between stakeholders. There is no fluidity in the communication process of emergency management. Local actors are not involved at the same level as NGOs or state institutions. One cannot speak of accountability or community engagement in this sense”.

One Haitian informant who heads up a local NGO, said there has been **little coordination or cooperation between his organisation and internationals**. “Some humanitarian actors have contacted me either by phone, email or they invite us to participate in a meeting. No more. There has never been a real working relationship or a definition of responsibilities. At the moment, I only have relations with OCHA.... The only thing that has worked is the establishment of the AAP group. At least we can have a meeting schedule, work tools ... it is a very interesting initiative. Also, the integration of the four local associations in the group is super interesting.

4.7 Accountability but not enough transparency

As mentioned above, there does appear to be an emphasis on accountability, particularly feedback, on the part of international organisations but little more than that. Some informants noted that there was a system in place in previous disasters, but personnel changes and processes had not been maintained in the interim. Several emphasised again the **need for local leadership**.

One Haitian informant noted that AAP should, in principle, **be practised by all actors** because all actors need to be accountable to their populations. The reality, they said, is quite a different story.

¹² Four local organisations were represented at the January 2022 AAP national WG. Four of the 12 members of the regional (sud) AAP working group are national (ASFECO (femmes en Construction), ACCODDEP, Raniph, Espere).

According to one international informant, there seemed to be a lot of focus on the end game – on the accountability and feedback part – while not even coordinating information and communication. Several informants said that a significant impeding factor regarding the practice of accountability is the **centralised nature of the Haitian state**. “We have to wait for Port-au-Prince for everything”.

One informant suggested that the communication specialists from each cluster could collaborate in a cross-cluster working group to ensure cohesion and further coordination. This would allow for a clear mainstreaming of communication with affected communities.

Another informant suggested that in terms of accountability, more transparency is needed. Humanitarian actions must engage communication spots, giant billboard posters of information in terms of who does what, they can also use social networks for the dissemination of their information. In addition, transparency can include sharing feedback with the communities for their own purposes and decision-making.

5. Challenges and opportunities

Communication and communication engagement during this response face significant challenges, yet there are also opportunities.

It was evident, for example, with the production of this learning review that **funding cycles and time constraints** are serious challenges that can impede effective, sustainable and appropriate implementation of activities. This extends also to any future locally led, sustainable multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) with a focus on CCEA: there must be durable, **long-term funding**.

Human resources are also a challenge in Haiti. Years of insecurity have forced many educated Haitians to leave resulting in a significant **brain drain**¹³. This coupled with high turnover in both local and international organisations mean stability and institutional memory are unable to take hold.

One international informant noted that many **local actors do not have the computer** skills or the access that international agencies rely on. As such, they explained, there is often a delay or lack in response to email and a lack of knowledge in how to use platforms such as Google Drive, important for sharing documents. There are, however, relatively simple remedies to this. CDAC, for example, builds in such capacity bridging in the initial part of any response because they believe it is critical for localisation.

Technology and connectivity were cited by many informants as a challenge in reaching affected populations. In the 2010/2011 earthquake response, for example, Internews and others used two-way humanitarian SMS messaging which was ultimately supposed to be transitioned to local partners. Several key informants from international NGOs said they

¹³ Brain drain refers to the departure of educated or professional people from one country, economic sector, or field for another usually for better pay or living conditions.

continue to do almost everything over WhatsApp with their local staff, which for one organisation is 90%.

If activities are not conducted in an inclusive manner vis-à-vis technology and connectivity, then it will be largely impossible to reach the most vulnerable populations. “The digital divide is keeping people apart”. This is evident with the ***modus operandi of the regional working group*** which holds its meetings in person thereby eliminating the possibility of including actors from Port-au-Prince or other parts of the country and further isolating the region. This perverse twist of the digital divide means that these meetings would be more inclusive if they were to include participants virtually.

In addition, both the pandemic and security issues mean that many ***organisations are operating on a nearly fully remote basis*** maintaining a certain level of centralisation and a disconnect from the affected regions and populations.

Finally, one informant noted the fatigue of the international community which is combined with low trust on the part of the affected populations. “Where are the national partners in these meetings? There is no memory of past work. It’s as if things are starting from scratch every time”, the informant said. The informant noted that this is frustrating for humanitarians who feel that they have made little, if any, progress during the response.

Some of these challenges, however, also present opportunities.

The lack of computer literacy can provide those working in CCEA to not only learn what is most appropriate to affected populations but to incorporate computer literacy modules into their capacity building efforts. Doing so also addresses a longer-term need.

While numerous informants noted a lack of capacity in the country, this was refuted by many other informants. Some of the ***most effective, trusted local groups are run by Haitian professionals***, but they continue to fall outside the view of international organisations and donors, according to one informant who has been working in Haiti for over 15 years. Another informant noted that it has taken his organisation years, but they have successfully built up a database of vendors and others they can call on when needed. This, he said, proved particularly helpful after the August earthquake when he was able to share these vendors and experts with others who needed their skills.

There are also significant opportunities to ensure that local actors take part in international coordination efforts. ***Before 2021, there had never been any national NGOs sitting on the Humanitarian Country Team***, the senior decision-making body for humanitarian response. Last year, that changed. Five national organisations were added, including some that focus on youth, women, or people living with disabilities. “It has made a huge difference,” said Bruno Lemarquis, the UN resident coordinator. “They are engaged, and they question the issue of financing to local NGOs. They ground us. It’s a breath of fresh air. It’s not UN talk, it’s fantastic.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Macon & Alexander.

While some informants felt that the media sector is not sufficiently well organised to play a substantive role in CCEA and are also affected by disasters and security, the sector also presents an opportunity and play a critical role in communicating and engaging with the population. There is a **significant media sector** not only in the capital but also networks of community radios across the country (see Annex III). These media can serve as partners in many ways yet in most cases they are largely ignored by CCEA efforts, yet they are the actors who perhaps have the most effective way of reaching affected populations. Essentially, media workers and journalists are an untapped talent pool when it comes to CCE and while they may not have specific humanitarian experience, they have important skills that can be readily adapted.

Some organisations have adopted **participatory approaches** that “not only allowed the staff to better understand the community’s needs, desires, and context, but also provided a forum”.¹⁵ Habitat for Humanity, Haiti, for example, found that by using a sustainable **livelihoods framework** that this could lead to longer-term sustainability in the housing sector. Can this serve as an inspiration for CCEA/AAP? Is there some way to include **income-generating activities** as part of AAP activities?

One informant from the DGPC was critical of his organisation. “The **Directorate General of Civil Protection** as the state institution of risk and disaster management has once again shown all its shortcomings in the management of major disasters ... the delivery of aid has been complete anarchy”. They also said that the COUL are not sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of the victims. Each municipality should have the operational arms as they are to be the first to intervene in the event of a problem. Due to a lack of resources and equipment, local communities were unable to meet the demands of the disaster.”

6. Lessons learned and recommendations

The proposed Grand Bargain 2.0 seeks to achieve “better humanitarian outcomes for affected populations through enhanced efficiency, effectiveness, and **greater accountability** [emphasis added]”. Many of the recommendations below are in line with the proposed Grand Bargain Framework with one of its two enabling priorities being: “Greater support is provided for the leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders and the participation of affected communities in addressing humanitarian needs.”¹⁶

Key learning from CCEA response	Key recommendations going forward
1. Do not reinvent the wheel every time as you may not need to.	1. Don't forget best practices from previous interventions and work to ensure the longevity of institutional memory.

¹⁵ Senat, R., Barron, R., Boano, C., Carpi, E., Leon, B.L.M. and Meaney, M. (2017). Making Community Engagement a Priority: A Case-Study on Earthquake Response in Simon Pelé, Haiti. Summary Report. Urban Crises Learning Partnership (UCLP), p.13.

¹⁶ The Grand Bargain 2.0: Endorsed framework and annexes, June 2021.

2. Survivor and community-led response efforts acknowledge that crisis-affected people are the first and last responders.	2. Including SCLR approaches can strengthen the communal resilience of affected people, whether in sudden-onset or protracted crises.
3. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus is critical to coherently address communities' needs before, during and after crises.	3. Working on linking humanitarian, development and peace processes can lead to enhanced sustainability and the ability to respond to crises.
4. Coordination with longer-term development actors can address gaps in disaster risk reduction and CCE efforts.	4. Promoting coordination with development actors can build more sustainable and robust DRR and CCE institutions.
5. Practical, hands-on and face-to-face relevant capacity building activities coupled with longer-term coaching and mentoring can be effective and should include media. There is a particular need in the South.	5. Participatory, longer-term trainings and mentoring can ensure participants, including the media, use what they learn leading to longer-term sustainability.
6. Systems and organisations that are decentralised may be able to respond more quickly and effectively and reach those most in need.	6. Ensuring that international organisations have a presence outside Port-au-Prince will go a long way to reaching the most vulnerable and making sure responses are appropriate.
7. Incremental capacity building of community-based organisations and community governance structures can contribute to the effectiveness and sustainability of CCEA interventions.	7. Supporting CBOs and community governance structures in a participatory way can help build their capacity so they are better prepared for and able to respond and engage with their communities.
8. An understanding of the social context and the key players (e.g., CASEC, ASEC, mayor, schools, churches and voodoo priests, media) can go a long way to ensure responses are appropriate, needed and localised.	8. Conducting a social mapping of key communities will go a long way to ensure that local partners are identified in advance of a disaster and can benefit from support in development interventions.
9. Systemic inclusion of local actors into CCEA responses contributes to the effectiveness, appropriateness and sustainability of CCEA actions and will lead to a stronger community connection, empowerment of community structures and better outcomes.	9. It is imperative to support systemic inclusion of local actors, in a participatory way, at all levels in order to ensure sustainable results.

6.1 Revisit what worked in 2010

A previous learning review on CDAC's response to the 2010 earthquake mentioned the importance of CDAC's regular email updates. "These updates varied in nature and content (e.g., summaries from meetings, copies of newly approved cholera messages, updated lists of cholera treatment centres, radio spots, new survey findings, reports, etc.) and were sometimes targeted to certain types of stakeholders. Several informants (including those from the GoH) were highly appreciative of the updates, which they said included pre-digested and packaged information from clusters and government meetings. The updates were described as "succinct", "useful", "reliable" and "a great service" that helped stakeholders analyse the situation. The information provided by the CDAC Haiti secretariat was viewed by many informants as saving valuable time and resources. Some explained that they did not

have the time to attend the many different meetings but needed the information that was generated by them.”¹⁷

There does not appear to have been these types of updates in this response, however, in future it may be helpful to reintroduce such a mechanism.

6.2 Survivor/community-led crisis response

Consider a survivor/community-led crisis response (SCLR) to CCEA in which the focus is on the affected community and recognises that crisis-affected people are the first and last responders in any disaster.

SCLR has a naturally built-in accountability system and is a way of working which uses a range of mechanisms (including appreciative inquiry, rapid transfer of microgrants and networking of knowledge and capacities) to enable large numbers of self-organising groups to quickly identify and implement their own self-help initiatives.

There are challenges to such a response in that it can be difficult to provide donors with the specifics they often require. One informant who works extensively with SCLR said that it is “hard to work this way because it is hard to say what exactly you’re going to do or what you’ll achieve or what the impact will be. That’s because it’s the community that is going to decide what they need and what they’ll do.” The informant added that such an approach requires advocacy with donors but can be highly effective

6.3 Don’t forget the peace nexus

In addition to the importance of development, it is clear there is a need to address in some way the security situation in Haiti. As one informant noted: “If the security situation isn’t resolved, then none of that [humanitarian and development support] will matter any way”.

While there not be any obvious solutions, what is clear is that the security is severely impeding both humanitarian and development efforts and as such, there should be, at the very least, discussion about how to include peacebuilding efforts.

6.4 Coordinate with longer-term development actors

While emergency support is necessary after any disaster, it will be for naught if there is little support or resources dedicated to **longer-term recovery and reconstruction**. While funding for Haiti has largely been emergency-related, it is clear that this needs to be coordinated with development actors. For example, there is a clear need to strengthen civil society in a disaster response, but much of that work is traditionally done through development actors.

One option may be to work with the CASEC and develop community outreach plans which could also allow for building connections with other local organisations.

Similarly, development can focus on capacity building which simply is not conducive to emergency response and thereby ensuring capacity is in place for the next disaster. This

¹⁷ CDAC Network (2012). CDAC Haiti Learning Review: Final Report. May 2012.

means, there will have to be considerable advocacy for development funding for Haiti. It also means there will have to be considerably more coordination between the humanitarian and development actors to ensure there are appropriate linkages and continuity.

6.5 More focus on accountability and include the media

There is also a need to **ensure accountability** and one way of doing that is to **involve and support the media**. Building in accountability measures or activities post-disaster can go a long way to engaging the community and the media. As one informant noted: “Giving a voice to the population is the best friend that CCEA could have. The local authorities have been largely absent and have no means to help the population but there is a close connection between media and the population”. The informant provided an example of community members going to the media about houses that were supposed to be earthquake proof but collapsed. “This has pushed some organisations to be [held] accountable.”

The media should be a key partner in CCEA efforts and there should be appropriate funding by both humanitarian and development actors to allow them to play this critical role. It may also be useful to find a way to include a representative of the media in the AAP working group.

6.6 Decentralise and localise

Related to inclusion of local actors and knowing who the local actors are, it is also important to decentralise. The intense level of centralisation in Haiti not only slows things down when trying to reach the countryside but there is a substantial disconnect in knowledge, infrastructure and community engagement and communication.

The “pervasive presence of **NGOs centralised in Port-au-Prince**” reinforces the “postcolonial state neglect of the countryside, with little comprehension of or desire to understand the realities of rural residents.”¹⁸

But such decentralisation will also have to consider the differences in context and infrastructure. According to one informant who conducted a needs assessment early on: “We talked to local organisations about their needs. We learned that best way to get this assessment was through WhatsApp. We were able to get locals’ points of view. There needs to more localisation. It can never be enough”.

Include local institutions and “operate under the guidance of local government officials and/or with organizations that understand the needs and already have systems in place on the ground. Bypassing the institutions weakens their ability to provide the needed services to the affected communities.”¹⁹

It would be useful to revisit the integration of **a locally-led, pre-positioned CCEA platform** that links to the national disaster and management architecture.

¹⁸ Hsu, K.J. & M. Schuller (2020). Humanitarian aid and local power structures: lessons from Haiti’s ‘shadow disaster’. *Disasters* (2020, 44(4):641-665, p. 642.

¹⁹ Schuller, M. (2016). Rebuilding Haiti, one commune at a time: Experience from Haitian people in Zabriko and elsewhere. *Stabroek News*. 17 October 2016. <https://www.stabroeknews.com/2016/10/17/features/in-the-diaspora/rebuilding-haiti-one-commune-time-experience-haitian-people-zabriko-elsewhere/>

6.7 Capacity building and reinforcement

While capacity in Haiti may be in short supply, according to some, it does exist. There is, however, a need to **reinforce capacity of local actors**. Many informants, however, were quick to add that there is also a need to change **how** capacity building is done. “We’ve done tons of training but have not seen much in the way of results. We need to think more long-term and use practical exercises.” Another informant noted that there is a need for longer term training with practical applications. “People want that, and they want support beyond the training [like] coaching and mentoring”. Ideally, the informant noted, face-to-face trainings add in the element of networking which can “also can lead more to sustainability.”

6.8 Know the local actors and social context

You have to know your community. If you don’t know your community, you can’t ever work with them. You won’t know who to talk to or how to talk to them or whether to use radio or TV or face to face.

– Informant

In order to include local actors, however, it is necessary to know who they are, where they are and what they are doing – a **social mapping**. “There is a need for a greater understanding of linkages and learning between individuals and organisations. There needs to be more of a research element as to what is going on at the community/local level ... what’s going on and what’s working and not.”

“Why not go commune to commune to find out who is who so we can find out to distribute to. Who are the community leaders? Go to the communes, go to the justice of peace, women’s organisations. All organisations are listed at the mayor’s offices. Go to churches and voodoo priests, schools, radio stations and market day and transportation routes. Learn what people do for livelihood and this will lead you to important information”.

In humanitarian circles, these 3Ws or 4Ws, as they are called, are critical yet often lack the specificities of local communities. A social mapping at local levels can serve as a living document owned by the individual community and could also serve to build relationships. Annex IV presents a possible framework.

Informants noted that this could be a very useful exercise with entities such as the CASEC, ASEC and mayor’s offices being starting points for gathering such information. One informant noted that a working group on localisation could assist in such an exercise and could play a useful role in cutting across various sectors thereby allowing for better coordination.

“In many cases local organisations don’t feel comfortable coming forward but if they are approached then that could work”.

6.9 Include local actors from the outset and aim for systemic inclusion

How are you going to communicate [with the population] if you don't have Haitians on the team? We need Haitians in key positions.

– Key informant

There is a need for **greater systematic inclusion of national actors** from the outset to ensure contextualisation and local ownership. As stated in the CDAC strategy: “Foster efforts to include a broad range of national actors in the leadership and delivery of CCEA, including government, private sector, civil society, media organisations and communities. Help place informed communities in a position of influence, particularly those groups that lack visibility and voice.”

Ultimately, there needs to be a move from global response to local preparedness but to do this means including national actors across the board. This includes government (national, regional, local), local NGOs, associations, communities.

Currently, for example, there is only one Haitian in the OCHA coordination team. When UNDAC teams were deployed to the three affected departments, OCHA had only one local who knew the context, the language and who could provide support. There is a need for advocacy to ensure Haitians are in key positions so they can make decisions that affect their communities. According to one informant: “We can always have internationals come in but they should be coming in to support local organisations and local staff,” said one informant. Another echoed this: “Make sure they [Haitians] have a say, can participate, build capacity and find ways to include them. Let them develop their capacity. Opportunities are there they just need a little push”.

6.10 Communication is coordination

There can be no coordination without communication. As such, strong communication mechanisms are vital to any coordination mechanism. This also needs to include coordination with local actors.

Annexes

I. People interviewed

Jean Claude Louis	Panos Caribbean
Jessica Hsu	Haiti engagement specialist/researcher
Jethro Joseph Sereme	CDAC Network
Lara Chlela	UNICEF
Mohamed el Hady Bal	OCHA
Katie Bitten	RedR
Victor Bouisset	RedR
Vladimir Lovinsky	CDAC
Caroline Giraud	CDAC
Shedna Italis	OCHA
Jean Sémé	RANIPH, Membre du Groupe AAP
Ben Noble	IFRC
Charlotte Greene	Diakonie
Eva Soltesz	Ground Truth Solutions
Reike Vingerling	Ground Truth solutions
Anonymous	DGPC
Naika Charles	Project Ste. Anne
Skyler Badenoch	Hope for Haiti
Anonymous	Elected official, Beaumont
Frendy Jasmine	Plateforme des Organisations Haïtiennes de Défense des Droits Humains (POHDH)

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III. Community radios in Haiti



Figure 1 Community radios in Haiti. From sakshaiti.org

IV. Sample framework for social mapping²⁰

To accurately identify potential partners and build on valid local networks, it is essential to understand the social layout of the land - a process akin to mapping the physical layout of the area. The categories of information gathered should be tailored to needs and objectives of the activity in question. These might include, but would certainly not be limited to, the following:

- Types of groups
- How and where they operate
- Criteria for group membership
- Rules and procedures for selection of leaders
- Rules of decision-making
- Procedures for mobilising and disbursing funds
- Arrangements for accountability and transparency
- Social analysis of leaders, including locality of origin and their leadership roles in other organisations or sectors
- Specific localities represented in the membership base, and how they are represented (locality of both officers and members)
- Internal factions or rival leaders within the organisation
- Local competition for members among rival organisations
- Special organisational or leader relationships with external federations, religious leaders,
- Elected officials, political parties, or state bureaucrats.

The types of groups examined should include but not be limited to:

- Small rotating labour and credit groups
- Religious and devotional groups
- Burial societies
- Secret societies
- Cooperatives and pre-cooperatives
- Community organisations
- Rights advocacy committees
- Scouts and other youth groups or cultural clubs (e.g., theatre groups)
- Investment groups
- Agricultural labour unions (*sendika travaye*)
- Urban pressure groups and neighbourhood organisations (*organizasyon popile*)
- CASECs, ASECs, mairies
- School committees
- Professional or trade associations (e.g., animators, coffee buyers, laborers, property owners)
- Water user associations or water distribution committees.

²⁰ Adapted from G. Smucker & J. Thomson (1999). Social Capital and Development in Haiti. Report produced for Winrock International, p. 45.



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