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Scarcity of Funds Poses Risk for Haiti's Post-quake Humanitarian Operations and for Sudden Disaster Response

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Two years and four months after the magnitude 7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti’s capital and other sectors (NotiCen, Jan. 21, 2010), killing more than 200,000, displacing another 600,000, leaving 1.5 million homeless, and collapsing more than 80,000 buildings, insufficient funds funneled to Haiti pose a risk to keeping up humanitarian operations.

It also means a threat to preparedness for eventual sudden disasters and the ability to assist the massive, most vulnerable population affected by the January 2010 event in this impoverished country of 9.7 million people in the French-speaking Caribbean, where 78% try to make ends meet on less than US$2 dollars a day.

Meanwhile, international economists are advising Haitian authorities on how to attract investment to be able to reconstruct infrastructure and promote economic development.

UN agency warns of problems

Underfunding is a source of concern not only for President Michel Martelly’s administration but also for supporting humanitarian organizations. In a statement on March 27 on behalf of Nigel Fisher, its humanitarian coordinator in Haiti, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned of the poor financial situation.

"This scarcity of resources is curtailing their [the government and its supporting partners’] ability to fully provide frontline services to the most vulnerable population affected by a series of shocks, including the 12 January 2010 earthquake, the ongoing cholera epidemic, food insecurity, and predictable rainy season damage and losses," OCHA stated. "Although the camp population has declined dramatically since 2010, almost half a million people still live in camps, exposed to cholera outbreaks and risks of flooding that will be exacerbated by the…rainy and hurricane season from May to November."

OCHA referred to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) still living in camps set up after the 2010 event. "The nationwide cholera epidemic (NotiCen, Nov. 18, 2010), officially diagnosed on 20 October 2010, has already killed more than 7,000 people and sickened some 500,000 Haitians," it said.

Within this context, "The US$382 million funding request made in 2011 by the humanitarian community through the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) only received 55% of funding required," OCHA said. This has resulted in "the progressive—and continuing—withdrawal of many partners providing critical services in camps and cholera-affected areas...Today, the 2012 CAP of US $231 million is funded at 8.5%." 

The humanitarian community in Haiti put the country’s 2012 CAP in motion with a two-day workshop in Port-au-Prince, attended by more than 130 representatives of Haitian ministries, UN agencies, and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).
The workshop agenda covered such vital issues as improving sanitation and drinking-water supply, increasing management capacity in cholera-treatment centers, strengthening preparedness for risk management and emergency response—in the face of the yearly June-November hurricane season—as well as food security.

Regarding the last point, concerns run high, with some 4.5 million countrywide—about half the population—at risk, soaring food prices, entire households rendered jobless by the quake, and a -5.0% economic growth for 2010-2011.

**Emergency relief slated**

OCHA said, "Due to this funding shortfall, Haiti was selected to receive an emergency allocation of US$8 million dollars through the United Nations Central Emergency Fund (CERF) window for underfunded crises. This grant will enable partners to address urgent priority needs, but it will not be sufficient to match the many challenges faced by humanitarian actors in 2012."

CERF describes itself as a humanitarian fund set up in December 2005 by the UN in an effort to provide timely and reliable humanitarian assistance to populations hit by both armed conflict and destructive natural events. CERF's aims include promoting early action and response to reduce loss of life, enhancing response to time-critical requirements, and strengthening core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises.

OCHA pointed out that the urgently requested US$53.9 million for the three-month period through June are aimed at allowing the government, UN agencies, and humanitarian partners to guarantee services for those IDP’s who were unable to move out of camps before the start of the rainy season—May though November. Those funds also seek to "protect camps vulnerable to flooding and respond to damage caused by climatic hazards" and "protect the most vulnerable from sexual abuse and violence perpetrated in camps."

The funds are to also "coordinate and respond to cholera outbreaks and provide potable water, solid-waste management, and hygiene-promotion activities in targeted isolated camps where the displaced are not able to access water, hygiene, and sanitation services from nearby neighborhoods," OCHA further said. And to "increase the pace of return and relocation initiatives for camp residents via the construction of transitional shelters and the provision of rental subsidies."

The organization warned, in this regard, "Underfunding threatens to stunt growing relocation initiatives to safe housing that already benefited hundreds of thousands of IDPs (NotiCen, Oct. 20, 2011). It threatens to reverse gains achieved in the fight against cholera through the promotion of sanitary and hygiene practices. It threatens the very existence of hundreds of thousands of IDPs still living in camps."

**IMF provides assistance**

As the critical financial situation persists, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided some relief in the form of US$15.1 million approved on March 22 by its executive board, upon finishing the second and third reviews of the country’s performance under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) agreement approved last year, along with full relief of Haiti’s US$274 million debt to the financial institution.
On the Fund’s decision, IMF Deputy Managing Director Naoyuki Shinohara said, "The reconstruction and the pace of implementation of structural reforms [in Haiti] have generally been slower than anticipated, reflecting predominantly…the country's limited administrative and absorptive capacity."

"Significant challenges remain. Most Haitians live below the poverty line, and, two years after the earthquake, more than half a million people are still living in temporary shelters. Health and sanitary conditions remain poor," added Sinohara. "Pursuit of appropriate macroeconomic policies, acceleration of the reconstruction, and a steady implementation of structural reforms, as well as continuous engagement from the international community, will help support the recovery and lay the foundations for long-term sustainable development."

While the generally somber scenario keeps developing, the Martelly administration is receiving tips from international economic experts on how to attract investments that will provide funding for infrastructure rebuilding and economic development.

To reach this goal, UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) specialists meeting with top local officials in Port-au-Prince in March advised the government to reform institutions and legislation dealing with investment. "Governments implementing the recommendations of previous investment policy reviews have often managed to attract higher levels of foreign direct investment," the UNCTAD said in a communiqué issued after the talks.

Addressing the meeting, Martelly underlined that "it is time to stop looking for excuses and start working."

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