Foreword

The earthquake that struck Haiti last January 12 left utter devastation in its wake. More than 200,000 Haitians perished, while countless thousands of others were injured or maimed – a public health catastrophe that will continue to tax the country’s meager health resources for years to come. More than a million were made homeless and face an uncertain future in displaced persons camps. And all Haitians face the daunting challenge of having to build much of their country essentially from scratch, a burden that they will be hard pressed to carry out without significant outside material support.

The January 12 tragedy and its aftermath have given rise to many questions about the country and its prospects. Why was the damage so vast? Clearly, much already did not work well in Haiti before January 12. Rather than try to rebuild on old foundations – physical, institutional, economic, social – might Haitians be better off striking a new course? If so, what vision should inform their plans for the future Haiti? And how might Haitians get ‘there’ from here?

To consider some of these seminal questions, The Center for Latin American issues on April 29 convened a group of experts to a roundtable discussion at The George Washington University. The gathering had several purposes. Foremost was to contribute to the growing dialogue on how Haitians might build a more robust society where growth and development can be sustained, and on how they might prepare their nation to deal more effectively with future adversities. Another was to help maintain the policy dialogue on Haiti at a heightened tempo lest, with the passage of time, this most important issue drop below policy-makers’ radars.

The pages that follow provide a synopsis of the April 29 discussion; we hope our readers find it useful. We hope as well that the dialogue at GW will help illuminate a path toward sustainable development for Haiti.

-- The Center for Latin American Issues
Haiti can emerge with a more effective political system, a more dynamic economy and better services for its citizens—but only if the country is rebuilt with a long-term outlook in mind, according to experts assembled at The George Washington University for a half-day discussion of post-earthquake progress and challenges in the Caribbean nation.

Panelists at the event, “Rethinking Haiti: Illuminating a Path Toward Sustainable Growth and Development,” said the international community will need to provide critical resources to the country for as long as 15 years, but the Haitian government itself must set priorities and execute the reconstruction.

“We should look at the opportunities that Haiti provides, rather than the things that are going bad. Whatever we do as regard to Haiti... we always have to keep in mind that the process should be left to Haitians themselves,” said Albert Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) and its chief coordinator on Haitian issues. “For too long, it has been directed from outside.”

Ramdin provided an overview on Haiti at the gathering sponsored by The Center for Latin American Issues (CLAI) at The George Washington University School of Business. The event drew more than 110 representatives from international development agencies, the U.S. government, nongovernmental organizations and businesses, as well as students and GW faculty. Panelists included diplomats from countries that have pledged funds to rebuild the nation, multilateral organizations, the Haitian immigrant community in the United States and an umbrella organization of nonprofits operating in the country.

Susan M. Phillips, Dean of the School of Business, opened the discussion by underscoring it as an opportunity for public and private sector players “to keep the momentum and dialogue on Haiti alive.”

She said the University is working closely with alumna Elisabeth Delatour Préval, Haiti’s first lady, to strengthen the education system in the struggling country. Haitian President René Préval told a United Nations meeting in March that, prior to the earthquake, 38 percent of Haitians older than 15 were illiterate and 25 percent of children were not enrolled in school. CLAI panelists repeatedly stressed the importance of an improved educational system in Haiti.

In addition to education, the wide-ranging discussion detailed the value of trade and greater integration in the Caribbean; the importance of holding elections every five years, despite the estimated $50 million price tag; the serious shortfalls facing Haiti’s health care system; and the need for constitutional reform, transparency and stronger state institutions. Job creation and dual citizenship, not currently permitted in Haiti, were also touched upon.

* This synopsis was prepared by Mary A. Dempsey, GW School of Business
Panelists repeatedly said Haiti must retain and build on the positive changes it had posted prior to the earthquake. Those included its relative political stability since the 2006 presidential elections and the less contentious relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. Before the earthquake, the government had drafted a development plan, instituted a formal system of accounting, passed a new procurement law and required public employees to declare their incomes.

“We have also seen much more civil engagement in Haiti than every before,” said Ramdin. “We may not see the value of that today, but in the future we will see that it is important to mobilize ... all stakeholders in society, in Haiti and outside of Haiti, and to look in the same direction.”

**Governance Issues**

During a discussion of governance issues, Cristina Barrios Almazor, the Ambassador At Large for the Reconstruction of Haiti within Spain’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, said Haiti’s post-disaster assessment, nearly complete, establishes a base for the strengthening of democratic institutions. She called for strong constitutional reforms by the end of the year.

The end of the year is when Canada would like to see elections in Haiti, said Guy Saint-Jacques, Deputy Head of Mission at the Canadian Embassy in Washington. The United Nations, the OAS and other organizations are working with the Haitian government to develop a constitutional framework to ensure that presidential, legislative and municipal elections are held. Panelists repeatedly stated that regularly scheduled elections were necessary to preserve political stability.

Ramdin noted that a civil registry initiative begun by the OAS – to provide Haitians with identification cards that, among other things, may be used for voter registration – had been set back by the loss of public records, the flood of unrecorded deaths and the relocations of people. However, he said work on the registry continues and its management could be turned over to the Haitian government by 2013.

Geraldine Dufort, Development Counselor to the European Community's Washington, D.C., delegation, noted that Haiti’s massive death toll include many government officials. She said rebuilding of the government will be critical. Reconstruction money will not be spent effectively or in a coordinated fashion unless the government is functioning properly, she said.

“It’s necessary to have elections, but you need to also focus on making the institutions work for the elections to be a success over time,” Dufort said. “My organization, alongside the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, has identified this as an important area—to make sure that we have a government that is working, working even better, and soon.”

For Philip Michael Gary, Senior Foreign Service Officer at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Chief of Staff for the Haiti Task Team, one of the top priorities is helping Haiti meet the needs of its population. “As donors, we need to get the government to a point where it can serve its people efficiently,” he said.
François Rivasseau, Deputy Chief of Mission at the French Embassy in the United States, concurred. He said more money than expected has been raised for the fragile nation, but “if they cannot meet the needs of the population, the basic needs, it will be for nothing.”

Rivasseau ticked off a laundry list of those needs, including professionally trained police officers and earthquake- and hurricane-proof housing. He called for Haiti to earmark a greater percentage of its GDP for education and health care. And he discussed how the United Nations' Stabilization Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH, might be deployed to work toward these goals.

Joseph Baptiste, Chairman of the National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians, underscored that good government—with social justice and respect for civil liberties—will be critical if the country is to flourish beyond reconstruction. Baptiste, whose organization represents Haitians living outside their home country, called upon the government to tap the talent of the Diaspora community.

Haiti’s economy is heavily dependent upon the nearly $2 billion in annual remittances from Haitian immigrants in the United States. Baptiste said Haitians away from their homeland are willing to expand their commitment beyond remittances.

“As Haitians, we can use our experience, language and know-how to go back to Haiti and do something to help,” he said.

The government’s capacity to bring all facets of Haitian society together to participate in the country’s future was addressed by Samuel Worthington, President and CEO of InterAction, an alliance of relief and nongovernmental development organizations.

“We have not dealt with an urban disaster of this scale since World War II,” he said. “The relief is under the U.N., the reconstruction has to be under the government of Haiti. [But] the challenge here is one of fear—fear that the civil society will not be included.”

Worthington said nongovernmental organizations need a clearly defined partnership role in shaping policies related to health, education and other areas of development. He said he believed the government wants to have a dialogue with civil society but added that there is a perception that the Haitian people are currently observers, rather than participants, in the country’s reconstruction.

**Promoting Sustainable Economic Development**

When asked to identify issues key to Haiti’s economic development, the panelists found common ground. Sustainable agriculture was mentioned repeatedly, with an emphasis on the need to link Haitian farmers to bigger markets. Microfinance and improved infrastructure, including roads, ports and water treatment facilities, were cited. Discussion participants also said the country must decentralize so that Port-au-Prince is not the sole beneficiary of economic growth.

Economist Eugenio Diaz-Bonilla, the Inter-American Development Bank’s Executive Director for Haiti and moderator of the CLAI discussion, talked about proposals to employ green technology in
rebuilding Haiti. He said there have been suggestions of turning the Caribbean country into a model of sustainability, driven by hydro, solar and wind power.

USAID's Gary said job creation and investment in education leading to a more prepared workforce were vital. The European Union’s Dufort, meanwhile, pointed to the value of greater regional trade integration, particularly within the Caribbean Community, Caricom.

But trade obstacles are not the only ones that must be addressed, according to the panelists. Without an effective land tenure system or clarity on land ownership, Worthington said, housing projects and other investment will be stymied. At the same time, the lack of access to capital will hinder business growth and block people from moving into the formal economy.

“Haitians are good business people. Haitians may not know how to read or write but they know how to manage a business,” Baptiste said. “If you can provide them with access to capital, you’re going to see long-term development.”

**Promoting Sustainable Social Development**

The rights of women, children and people with disabilities received extended attention when panelists addressed social development issues. Large-scale job creation was discussed, as was the need to bolster the economy and services in rural areas.

Dufort said women’s participation was “absolutely essential,” calling it an important policy focus that needed to be supported by the international community. “At the moment, [women] are the weakest link,” she said.

In discussing initiatives aimed at children, Baptiste suggested revamping the country’s adoption laws and recommended that NGOs working with children be required to register with the government. He also called for a massive expansion of the health care system, particularly in light of the widespread and crippling injuries that resulted from the earthquake.

“Medical care needs have tripled. There is health care in Haiti, but it is in crisis,” Baptiste said. “Professionals in health care are leaving the country, hospitals are closing because there is no money to support them.

“If you're not healthy, you're not going to be able to work,” he said.

France is opening its schools and universities in the West Indies to Haitians seeking medical training. The European country supports reconstruction of the Port-au-Prince General Hospital with three satellite facilities elsewhere in the country, and it is looking into ways to bolster HIV-AIDS care and improve maternal-infant health programs. The Canadian International Development Agency is also involved in Haiti’s health care sector, with work on HIV-AIDs, vaccination programs and maternal health initiatives.
“Maternal health will be one of the focal issues we will pursue at the G8 Summit in June,” Saint-Jacques said.

Gary, meanwhile, called for widespread work programs to “get as many people engaged in the economy as possible.” He singled out agriculture—with microfinance supports—as an employment driver, describing how farming could evolve into agro-businesses with export-import capacity.

There was universal agreement about the pressing need to improve Haiti’s schools. Worthington, saying the government of Haiti cannot afford a completely public school system, encouraged policy discussion focused on a new model of private-public collaboration with clear standards for private education.

“The education system is primarily funded by non-state actors,” Worthington said. “For the NGO community to work from the bottom up, you need a state and a system that is providing a policy framework. Without that framework, what you get is a lot of NGOs helping people to stay in school.”

**External Assistance**

While saying that reconstruction assistance for the country must be coordinated, the panelists acknowledged it will be no easy task.

“At the moment, there is no single window where you can go and see who does what,” said Dufort. “There is an initiative to get donors to modify their reporting systems and their information systems in order to have an information system that is easier to use.”

Saint-Jacques said Canada, committed to giving nearly $1 billion to Haiti over the next five years, wanted to see greater harmonization. Canadian-funded initiatives include the rebuilding of the Gonaives hospital, erection of temporary government offices and police training.

Some panelists suggested that technology could be used map and track projects and funding. “The American Red Cross website is showing where money is going,” said Worthington. “The challenge is linking all these multiple websites together with the U.N. and, ultimately, getting to the point where you can click on one place and see where all the money is and where it is going.”

Participants at the CLAI event underscored their continued commitment to Haiti, but cautioned against unrealistic expectations, especially as support shifts from emergency assistance to development aid.

“There are institutional, political, social, and economic [developments] happening at one time,” Ramdin said. “So if you expect things to happen overnight, to happen in a couple of years, they will not. We have to keep ourselves motivated to keep supporting Haiti.”
A video of the April 29 Haiti Roundtable at GW is available at:

http://www.gwu.edu/~clai/recent_events/2010/Rethinking_Haiti/Rethinking_Haiti_2010.htm