

Local government reconstruction and effective service delivery in Haiti

After the earthquake of 12 January 2010 in Haiti, solidarity movements of civil society and municipalities arose, amongst other countries, in Canada, France and the Netherlands, focusing on the re-development of effective governance and the delivery of basic services of local governments.

This case study describes how local government associations from Canada, France and the Netherlands work together in collaboration with the Haitian Ministry of Interior and Local Government on strengthening the capacity of a series of Haitian local governments, as well as two local government associations. This case study will pay special attention to issues of (local) ownership, alignment and cooperation between the implementing partners

Management and ownership of the programmes

In 2010, the Haitian Ministry of Interior and Local Government, a number of mayors and other representatives of cities affected by the earthquake put forth a request to France, Canada and the Netherlands to support a series of communes in *Les Palmes*, located in south west Haiti. This call for assistance was honoured by *Cités Unies France* (CUF), the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the *Union des Municipalités du Québec* (UMQ), the City of Montreal, and VNG International (the international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities):

- The three Canadian partners, FCM, the City of Montreal and UMQ have formed a consortium and receive funding from the Canadian International Development Agency for the implementation of the Haiti-Canada Municipal Cooperation Programme (PCM). Besides that, the PCM also provides assistance to the city of Port-au-Prince (provided by the City of Montreal);
- CUF has set up a solidarity fund of “Aid for reconstruction of Haiti”, to which French local and regional authorities have contributed. The *Fondation de France* has also made funds available for the implementation of the reconstruction programme;
- VNG International has received funding from over fifty members of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) and from the Netherlands Foundation of Cooperating Aid Organizations (SHO).

The fact that the request for cooperation came from the Haitian authorities themselves indicates that this local government capacity development programme is demand-driven. Furthermore, in the implementation of their projects the partners pay close attention to the specific needs of the local governments and try to coordinate their support in such a way as to respond to as many demands of the local governments as possible.

CUF, the PCM and VNG International are working along the agreed binding principles of transparency, participation, equality and anti-corruption. Their projects work in a direct and practical way on restoring the functioning of the governance system, building channels of communication between the local governments and their citizens, and reconstructing municipal capacity to function as permanent institutions in the political and administrative landscape of Haiti.

Results for local development

The specific objectives of the programmes are to re-establish the institutional and technical capacities of four municipalities in the *Les Palmes* region, notably Leogane, Gressier, Petit Goave and Grand Goave, to provide key urban services related to education, land use planning, project management, financial management, human resources and communication, water and waste management. By doing so the Haitian municipalities are supported in regaining their capacity to manage relations with the central government and NGOs active in their area.

Strengthening the capacity of local governments will have a direct impact on the environment, the economy and the health and functionality of these coastal cities and thereby the foundation is being laid for future (local) economic development. Besides, the strengthening of local governments aims to contribute to more accountable, transparent and participatory political systems.

CUF, the PCM and VNG International are modelling professional, results-oriented development cooperation in a post-disaster situation. The programmes also support two local government associations, as well as the Haitian Ministry of Interior and Local Government to play a stronger role in the reconstruction and decentralization process of the country.

Amongst other things, the following has been achieved in the past half year:

- Core staff has been rehired in each of the four partner municipalities of Les Palmes and equipment has been delivered to help them provide basic services to their population;
- The Inter-municipal Technical Agency (ATIP), which has been created by the PCM and VNG International to strengthen local urban planning and land management capacity, has developed planning schemes for each of the four municipalities. Besides that, the ATIP is now able to make recommendations to the four communes and host frequent meetings with the local stakeholders;
- Construction has started on small projects aimed at rebuilding public infrastructure in Les Palmes;
- The National Federation of Haitian Mayors (FENAMH) and the National Federation of Local Government Councils (FENACAH) have been capacitated to rehire core staff.

Alignment with national priorities

A few months after the earthquake, the Haitian government created a plan for national reconstruction. This policy document has served as the starting point for the cooperating partners in designing the local government programmes and in their efforts to optimise alignment between the broad objectives of the national reconstruction policy and the local government's demands.

Due to the severity of the human and physical damage caused by the earthquake, the scope of the national reconstruction plan is so broad that alignment with local demands has been relatively easy. On top of that, the government and the main stakeholders in the municipal sector have seen the reconstruction as an opportunity to reposition local governments as key actors of the country's redevelopment and to further support decentralization. The cooperating partners have also made use of an action plan drafted by the Ministry of Interior and Local Government that stipulates in which specific areas local governments need to be strengthened.

The cooperating partners work with the local governments while keeping the Ministry closely involved, so that the central government can learn from what happens locally and use best practices to better define their national policy and include some of the lessons learned in the programmes in official regulations.

Division of labour and avoiding overlap

At the start of the programme CUF, the three Canadian partners and VNG International discussed what specific issues each could work on. The division of responsibilities has been made on basis of expertise. In Les Palmes CUF is working on education and governance, VNG International on water and waste management and the partners represented in the PCM on issues related to land use, project management, financial management, human resources and communication.

The peer-to-peer approach of the programmes is reinforced by the cooperation between *Cités Unies France* (CUF), the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the *Union des Municipalités du Québec* (UMQ), the City of Montreal, and VNG International:

- VNG International and the PCM work together in support of the two federations of local governments in representing the individual members, as well as strengthening their capacity to function as an effective partner of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC), the national government and international agencies active in the reconstruction process; they also offer support to the Ministry of Interior and Local Government.
- As part of the PCM the city of Montreal works together with the City of Paris, the City of Barcelona and a number of UN agencies and other international NGOs to coordinate its support to the City of Port-au-Prince.

The partners try to minimise overlap of programmes by investing in mechanisms of coordination and communication, so that each partner is well aware of what is being done by all the different actors.

On top of that, the PCM and VNG International try to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of their programmes by sharing the costs of a range of activities and services, including the rental of premises, the purchase of office equipment for both local government associations and the four communes; organising activities (seminars, meetings, assemblies, etc.); hiring or rehiring of the three staff members for each of the federations.

Furthermore, the implementing partners have developed several tools to optimise the exchange of information between the different stakeholders. These include:

- Monthly conference calls between the implementing partners to provide updates about the different missions and the creation of a calendar in which the partners put their activities;
- The PCM and VNG International are sharing templates of contracts, salary scales etc;
- CUF, the PCM and VNG International are all co-signatories to the same MoU with the Haitian partners, which means that all parties have agreed on the same set of binding principles and responsibilities;
- A coordinating committee, in which the mayors of the Haitian partner municipalities are represented, meets on a 4 to 6 week basis and enables representatives from CUF, the PCM and VNG International to discuss with one voice activities to come, challenges encountered etc.

Challenges in harmonization

Even though the partners aim to ensure the programmes are being implemented as much as possible along the guidelines of the aid effectiveness principles, various challenges hinder this process. These include practical issues such as planning missions and coordinating activities, both of which can be very time-consuming, as well as managing the different requirements of donors, such as varying budgets and timeframes.

On top of that, the implementing partners have been facing the following challenges:

- Even before the earthquake struck Haiti, the country was already characterized by low levels of capacity at local government level, as well as a highly centralized government. The earthquake has wiped out the little capacity that was in place. This means that the programmes are dealing with very basic issues of governance and capacity building, ranging from clarifying the responsibilities for elected officials and improving the capacity of local governments' administration to supplying basic equipment to run programmes.
- Due to the high number of (inter)national organisations active in the reconstruction of Haiti both the implementing partners, as well as the Haitian local governments, have difficulties understanding what projects are being developed and implemented in their area, especially since many NGOs active in Haiti have not sought contact with local authorities to inform them about their projects.

The main lesson learned by the cooperating partners is that while close cooperation is a necessity for successful implementation of their programmes, it is a very time consuming process and requires continuous monitoring.

Concluding remarks

In sum, what makes this case unique is that from the very start of the programme the French, Canadian and Dutch partners have cooperated closely with Haitian central and local government institutions, thereby assuring the projects are demand-driven.

Additionally, by investing in continuous exchange of information and coordination between all the stakeholders the implementing partners have been able to maximise the use of donor money and prevent duplication of activities.

The Haiti case illustrates how local government development cooperation has an important role to play in both the (re)development of a country and the delivery of effective aid.