Beyond Relief, Beyond Belief

As they quaffed champagne in their Port-au-Prince headquarters on Harry Truman Boulevard, the staff of the secretariat of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC) finally seemed to have something to celebrate: their own demise.

On the afternoon of Friday October 21, the IHRC’s 18-month mandate, part of emergency legislation which saw all control of reconstruction spending removed from parliamentary scrutiny, was up. Despite the joint appeals of both the President, Michel Martelly and his newly-ratified Prime Minister, Gary Conille, for a one-year extension of the IHRC’s mandate, parliament was in no mood to even debate the proposal until it had answers to the most basic questions about the IHRC – its people, its processes and its product.

For once, Haitian MPs and senators seemed to be in sync with public opinion on the still rubble-strewn streets. The IHRC was widely seen as a foreign-donor dominated body, implementing a foreign-designed agenda, with a foreign staff, using foreign finance, much of which had been pledged but not delivered. “Flawed in design, dysfunctional in execution, dire in results,” concluded one former civil servant.

It is a sentiment echoed by many who had worked within it: it’s just that the “all necessary transparency and accountability” clause written into the IHRC’s mandate does not apply when talking about it. Ex-staff are adamant they are not identified.

“Look, you have to realize the IHRC was not intended to work as a structure or entity for Haiti or Haitians. It was simply designed as a vehicle for donors to funnel multi-nationals’ and NGOs’ project contracts,” says one IHRC consultant.

“The idea that dysfunctional design and a not-fit-for purpose structure of the sole reconstruction authority in Haiti post-earthquake was actually deliberate, is a shocking illustration of what is now a well-established phenomenon, ‘disaster capitalism’.

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“Project plans were initiated by the institutions that have always run Haiti, the IDB, the World Bank, the UN, USAID and individual donor countries that had pledged enough to secure a seat on the IHRC board. That meant there could, by definition, be no effective realisation of the IHRC’s declared main aim of assessing reconstruction needs and responding to them in a systematic, co-ordinated manner.”

The IHRC had a nominal blueprint, the PARDN [the Action Plan for National Recovery and Development]. A glossy, 55-page, reconstruction wish-list, designed for presentation stakeholders as to what they needed. Outreach, although nominally an IHRC requirement, was minimal at best and, even if done, had no bearing on the design of any project with which I was involved,” says our anonymous source.

Blueprint: Disaster for Disaster

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T his June 2011, the UN Office of the Special Envoy (OSE) to Haiti published a detailed report called Aid Ineffectiveness Means Development Failure. Has it Changed? Has it Banked on Better? What is the same thing, getting the same result. Donors are failing to better their own prescriptions for improvement.

The June 2011 report builds on the first one that was published two years earlier (in June 2009) and it is one of the most important documents on this subject (excluding the 2010 Haiti Earthquake report). The OSE is an independent office within the UN system that was created by the Secretary-General following the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake to provide better coordination and accountability for the international response. The OSE, led by a Special Envoy, now in its third year, is an important and influential institution in its field. The report was issued by a high-level commission formed by the Haitian government, the UN and the International Human Rights Council (IHRC), to review the post-earthquake response in Haiti.

The report, which was undertaken by a team of experts from a range of disciplines, including economics, disaster management, governance, and social development, highlights the many challenges faced by the international community in its efforts to support Haiti's recovery. The report focuses on the failure of aid to achieve its intended goals and provides recommendations for improving the effectiveness of aid in the future.

The report identifies several key issues and challenges that need to be addressed:

1. **Aid Ineffectiveness:** The report finds that aid has not been effective in supporting Haiti's recovery. This is due to a lack of coordination and coherence among donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
2. **Lack of Accountability:** The report highlights the lack of accountability and transparency in the allocation and use of aid funds.
3. **Focus on Projects:** The report criticizes the focus on projects and short-term solutions, rather than on long-term development strategies.
4. **Lack of Ownership:** The report notes the lack of ownership and accountability of the Haitian government in the decision-making process.
5. **Corruption:** The report acknowledges the issue of corruption in the aid sector and its impact on the effectiveness of aid.

The report calls for a more inclusive and participatory approach to aid in Haiti, as well as for a stronger focus on long-term development strategies. It also recommends the establishment of better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that aid is being used effectively.

The report concludes that the international community must do more to ensure that its aid efforts are effective and accountable. It calls for a more coordinated and transparent approach to aid in Haiti, as well as for a stronger focus on long-term development strategies. It also recommends the establishment of better monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that aid is being used effectively.

The report is an important contribution to the debate on aid effectiveness and accountability in Haiti, and it provides a valuable guide for policymakers and practitioners in the aid sector.
MARTELY: Beyond Repair?

By now, Michel Martelly had emerged as the donors’ choice as President of Haiti, if not his people’s. Even before his inauguration he had appointed a key adviser, sociologist Michèle Oriol to take a close look at the IHRC. Scathing in private, she was a little more diplomatic in public. “The IHRC itself has become this extra entity outside of government. That is what we need to fix,” she noted after a few meetings.

Trying to save whatever was left of its image, the IHRC tried a relaunch and mea culpa. In December it had published a Strategic Plan for the Remainder of the IHRC’s Mandate, which did at least lay out plans, without projects, for rubble-removal, housing, and sanitation. It was followed, at the April 2011 IHRC meeting, by the announcement of a whole new project approval process with an extraordinary admission by Projects Director Aurélie Boukobza.

The IHRC, she said, had put in place “certain tools” that “super-impose, duplicate those of the government.” There had, as a result, been a “disconnection with regard to certain government mechanisms.” In a paper issued simultaneously, the IHRC reiterated: “...the need to align the current process of project review with existing government practices.”

The only pretence that remained was that the bypassing of the government and the marginalization of any effort to get it off its knees post-earthquake was by accident, rather than design, or that the change in approach noted being announced was voluntary. With a new parliament, donors over the definition and extent of the PAO’s remit had actually been a key reason it had only become nominally operational in April 2011, ten months after the IHRC itself began work.

In the process, yet another IHRC row broke out over the award of the contract to run the PAO office to Price, Waterhouse and Coopers (PwC), who, in a blatant conflict of interest, had written the specifications for the call to tender. Several IHRC representatives representing the countries of the five companies on the shortlist who had missed out, were furious.

What none of them noted in their outrage was the irony: the process of the appointment of the watchdog had, in itself, broken all contracting rules. That raised an obvious question: what equally egregious violations might have taken place in the year when there was no such monitoring because the watchdog did not exist?

When asked about this in his interview with HSG in March, Gabriel Verret admitted the IHRC’s vulnerability to criticism – if not corruption and fraud – on this issue but insisted that his sector leads “were monitoring personally, below the radar.” Given that nothing that was visible at the IHRC inspired even minimal confidence, invisible, unaccountable, transparent “monitoring,” seemed unlikely to be any antidote.

The Haiti Support Group (HSG) seeks to amplify the voice of progressive civil society organisations in Haiti to politicians, the press and the public in Europe and North America.