HAITI'S IDP CAMP POLICY: THE MANAGEMENT OF VULNERABILITY

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Abstract

The January 12, 2010, earthquake that hit Haiti was one of the largest humanitarian disasters in history. In addition to lives lost and people left disabled, the infrastructure of Port-au-Prince was destroyed. Over a year later, 1.3 million people are living under tents and tarps in camps run by international aid organizations. This paper explores the policy solutions being attempted within the camp system in the efforts to deal with the humanitarian crisis. In particular it critiques relocation, shelter improvement, and cash-for-work programs (CFW). It explores the policies, the role of elite donors, NGOs, and foreign governments that together "manage" and, at times, exploit a vulnerable population.

The January 12, 2010, earthquake that hit Haiti decimated the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Already suffering the problems of a high population density and extreme poverty, the city and surrounding areas became the site of one of the largest humanitarian aid interventions in recent history. At the center of the interventions are the many Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps (Institute 2010), which face similar problems to other camps worldwide: insecurity, lack of adequate sanitation and protection from the elements, and increased dependence on the humanitarian system. A year later, these camps are still in place, with approximately 1.3 million people living in tents or under tarps.

IDP camps are responses to acute crises in habitation caused by war, genocide, or natural disasters. These camps are by no means uniform, with varying levels of sanitation, security, aid distribution, and proximity to resources outside the camp. This prompted a select group of non-governmental organizations, along with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, to create the Sphere project and generate fundamental standards for humanitarian assistance (Sphere 2010). Ideally, when meeting Sphere

standards, camps can provide a space to conserve life and organize relief efforts. But when camps are in place for extended periods of time, are poorly managed or resourced, or are not backed by supports like health and employment services, they can end up violating the fundamental human rights of their inhabitants.

This is the case in Haiti, where conditions one year following the earthquake highlight the lack of effective policy regarding IDP camp management and possibilities for transition to a more stable and long-term solution. In a recent report released by the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti (IJDH), follow-up surveys with families showed that conditions have worsened for those still living in camps. At the time of the survey, 9% of families stated they had received drinking water aid in the last 30 days, 21% said they lived in tents (which meant 79% were under tarps or worse), and three out of four respondents said someone in their family had to go an entire day without eating in the prior week (Institute 2010). These conditions show a clear failure to meet the Sphere standards for disaster management.

To mitigate some of the negative effects of camp life, cash-for-work (CFW) programs have been used to bolster the economic stability of families and ostensibly allow them to prioritize their most pressing needs. In addition to these short-term labor strategies for IDP camps, residents have also been encouraged to work in Haiti's resurgent apparel sector. Two policies have been implemented in recent months to try to solve the IDP problem: resettlement into other camps outside the capital, and the construction of transitional shelter units, or "T-shelters."

RESETTLEMENT POLICY

An example of relocation can be seen in the camp run by the American actor Sean Penn and his organization, Jenkins/Penn Haitian Relief Organization (J/P HRO). The camp is on the grounds of the Petion-Ville Golf Club, perched on a hill overlooking Port-au-Prince. It has over 60,000 residents, making it one of the largest in the country. In June of 2010, impending rains and the threat of mudslides lead J/P HRO to relocate some camp residents. J/P HRO staff and volunteers counseled residents about available options and what services would be provided at the new site. Those willing to relocate were provided with a tent and assistance moving to the new location, called Corail.

Corail is located about 30 minutes outside of Port-au-Prince by car. I visited as an inspector in 2010 and saw that it stands against a hillside, without trees for shelter from the hot sun, potable water, and many other necessary resources. The night before my visit a rainstorm had destroyed

tents and injured children. The location's lack of infrastructure meant various NGOs were in charge of providing all basic necessities. The NGOs involved included Oxfam and Save the Children, which are very large with good reputations, both with the ability to mobilize extensive resources. At that time, Catholic Charities and Oxfam provided water, a nurse's station, latrines, and there was also a school being built. The United Nations provided a security detail that included many female peacekeeping soldiers. Digicel, the largest cellular phone service provider in Haiti, was installing two solar charging stations for residents and a cash-for-work program (CFW) had residents digging long ditches intended to protect their tents from the kinds of rainstorms that damaged the tents and injured the children.

Resettlement practices can be more or less coercive, and in J/P HRO's case, only those willing to resettle were moved. But while Corail offered many services for the new residents, problems exist with it as a model for long-term development. For example, its CFW program demonstrates the need for substantive work, something far beyond digging ditches to divert flood rains. Not only were there simple construction projects, from concrete foundations and water cisterns, that would have better responded to residents' concerns about water entering the tents, additional work around the camp could have included tree planting for shade, agriculture work, the prevention of soil erosion, and even the building of a local water infrastructure. Furthermore, pay for such jobs needs to be consistent and reliable. When I visited the camp in August, Corail's residents told me they had finished work on the drainage system a month before, but had still not received compensation. But a fully functioning CFW program seemed less of a priority than working with the cell-phone company Digicel, which did provide a service free of charge, but also seemed intent on cultivating a client-base for the future use of their product.

THE USE OF TRANSITIONAL SHELTERS

A handful of international organizations have installed thousands of transitional shelter units (T-shelters) in Haiti since the earthquake. The Open Architecture Network, an online open-source community started by Architecture for Humanity, wrote a report with in-depth case studies of each T-shelter model implemented thus far and with recommendations for how units could be improved. As of September 12, 2010, eight months following the quake, approximately 35,000 units had been constructed, primarily in Leogane and Papette, two areas just outside the capital and close to the quake's epicenter (Saltzman et al. 2010). Less than 5,000 shelters had been constructed in Port-au-Prince

itself. Many T-shelters use tarpaulins as siding, along with either wood or light gauge steel for framing. Furthermore, about half of constructed units have a concrete slab for flooring instead of bare dirt.

The Architecture for Humanity study determined that T-shelters have projected life spans of anywhere between one and eight years, with various upgrades capable of extending this potential (Saltzman et al. 2010). An obvious strength of transitional shelters is that they provide an immediate and tangible improvement over simple tents and tarps. For example, Cordaid, a Dutch international development organization, provided a 216 sq. ft. unit equipped with three doors, four windows, a concrete slab floor, various siding options and a minimum lifespan of eight years (Saltzman et al. 2010).

Nevertheless, the T-Shelters are in need of higher quality standards. Many of the models use tarps for siding, and recipients cited concerns with security, because prospective intruders can easily cut through the walls. Other concerns were the lack of hurricane straps to attach roofs and the need for adequate ventilation. Moreover, inhabitants also had a desire for more than one door and requested covered outdoor spaces to be included in future plans. Of the ten models surveyed, only one had an integrated latrine, another had a water catchment system, and none were provided with power (Saltzman et al. 2010). All models would be vastly improved with even minimal solar power capacity as well as individual or paired water catchment systems and composting toilets, such as those provided by Sustainable Integrated Organic Livelihoods (SOIL), would prevent the spread of disease and have the opportunity of offering fertilizer for small plots.

For families living in the towns of Leogane and Papette, the T-shelters do provide superior shelter to simple tents, but the key is that there is now a greater ratio of better shelters in relation to the population. Port-au-Prince is another story. As a percentage, there have been fewer T-shelters built because in the capital, space is at a premium and camp authorities are getting only month-to-month, informal agreements with landowners (Maloney 2010). Beyond the form and function of T-shelters, 40,000 units cannot house the 1.3 million people currently without sanctuary.

VULNERABILITY AND LABOR

Haiti's earthquake was smaller than the one that struck Chile a month and a half later, but it caused more damage and a much higher death toll. In addition to the abject poverty and the poor architectural standards that made many Haitians more vulnerable, a variety of factors created urban hyper-centralization in modern Port-au-Prince. Over the past couple decades, economic reforms and agricultural

initiatives have crippled Haiti's domestic food production and driven people to the capital in search of wage labor or domestic servitude.

In April of 2010, in the wake of the earthquake, the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) was established. According to United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the IHRC is comprised of Haitian and foreign government representatives, NGOs, and private companies considered top donors to the redevelopment effort who desired control over this process (USAID 2010). Haiti's reconstruction thereby fell under increasing control by outside actors (Delva, 2010). For example, the Haiti Apparel Center (HAC) is a joint project of (USAID) and the CHF International, a nonprofit development organization, to train Haitians for future work in the garment industry. The goals are to increase the marketability of Haitian wage laborers by providing sophisticated stitching skills as sewing machine operators, training 2000 workers per year (Stavropoulos 2010).

The ultimate objective is to entice apparel companies to the country. Thus, a U.S. government-funded project implemented by a U.S.-based NGO is laying the groundwork for the sweatshop industry to expand its frontier. For historical and cross-national comparison, in 1914 Henry Ford introduced his five-dollar, eight-hour day to factory workers in Dearborn, Michigan (Harvey 1989). Almost one hundred years later, a textile worker in Haiti makes the equivalent of three-dollars to work a twelve-hour day. The IDP camp inhabitants and their neighbors are lured into these jobs by the 60% unemployment rate and other coercive circumstances and yet cannot, on such wages, support their families or extricate themselves from their harsh living conditions.

Options for the camp residents remain bleak. President Préval discouraged continued aid being sent to IDP camps months ago so that camp dwellers would be less dependant on handouts from NGOs (Institute 2010). He advocates CFW programs instead. Common tasks for CFW workers are rubble removal, street sweeping, and clearing garbage from drainage canals. One year after the quake struck, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reported employing over 240,000 unskilled workers in these activities, and plans to expand the program with vocational and technical training, much like the partnership between IHRC and CHF International (United Nations 2011). In March 2010, CFW participants were paid $100 to work 24 days a month, six hours per day (United Nations 2010). In sum, these CFW programs create temporary and contingent labor in Haiti while meeting the demands of international aid donors and capital investors. The dialectical nature between IDP camp policy and labor management strategy highlights the primary importance of these factors to Haiti's future development.

CONCLUSION

In considering the proposed solutions to IDP camps, we have seen tentative successes in moving residents from the most vulnerable areas of the country, constructing more stable forms of shelter, and providing provisional work for the unemployed. However, we have also seen that there are fundamental issues that have not been addressed by the policies implemented. Rather than persuade people to leave the camps by cutting off aid, policies should instead use aid money to decentralize the country and decrease the burden on the capital, Port-au-Prince. The resettlement and transitional shelter strategies need to be accompanied with investment in hard infrastructure (water, roads, schools, jobs) in other regions outside the capital. Regarding land tenure and property rights, the Haitian judiciary will need to be bolstered so that it can make the tough decisions necessary to foster responsible development.

Even if the policies themselves were ideal, they have not been implemented consistently or with the required funding. As of August 2010, only 20% of the $5.3 billion promised to Haiti had been disbursed, and 23% of those funds had been committed (Institute, 2010). Haitian citizens have no recourse to hold global capital, and its gatekeepers in the IHRC, accountable for their actions, or for that matter, their inaction. In the meantime, the most vulnerable Haitians, those living in IDP camps, will need to be protected from predatory policies that might take economic advantage of a vast, dislocated population.

Camp residents are providing powerful counter narratives of Haiti after the earthquake. They question the validity and legitimacy of the presidential elections being conducted while they live under tents and tarps in the center of the capital. They also implicitly indict the regimes of global capital that come in many guises, usurping, they say, their dignity on a daily basis. What is at stake in the formation and implementation of humanitarian and redevelopment policies is not merely the right to adequate shelter, but also recognition of Haiti's sovereignty.

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