Delivering After the 2010 Earthquake: the Haiti Infrastructure and Institutions Emergency Recovery Project

Introduction

On January 12, 2010, Haiti was struck by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake, the most devastating natural disaster in the country’s recent history. With an epicenter located only 17 kilometers from the capital, Port-au-Prince, the earthquake killed an estimated 230,000 people, injured 300,000 more, and resulted in the displacement of 1.5 million people due to the collapse of buildings and infrastructure. Damage and losses were evaluated at US$7.8 billion, or 120 percent of Haiti’s annual GDP, and reconstruction needs reached US$11.3 billion (Government of the Republic of Haiti 2010).

Following the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance, donors stepped in to support the recovery process. On January 19, a World Bank mission traveled to Haiti to identify priorities to be supported by the Infrastructure and Institutions Emergency Recovery Project. On March 18, the Bank approved the US$65 million project. This project combined early relief and recovery actions with long-term reconstruction planning to rebuild key Haitian institutions and infrastructure. The Bank implemented the project on behalf of the Haitian government through designated project implementation units (PIUs).

This case study focuses on the period from January to November 2010, when the project implemented most of its relief and early recovery activities. These activities were carried out despite challenging implementation conditions. The project faced an urgent need for action, but the application of business-as-usual processes and requirements for project preparation could have slowed the implementation of project activities needed to meet the immediate needs of
Haiti after the earthquake. Moreover, in the aftermath of the earthquake, local capacity had effectively collapsed.

**Delivery Challenges**

There were three key delivery challenges that hindered the implementation of the project.

**Project Design: Time Allocation or Task Sequencing**

Urgent action and immediate results were needed to cope with the scale of needs arising from the emergency. However, the project effectiveness date (when predetermined and agreed conditions to begin disbursement are met), was not projected to start before the end of April (three months after the disaster), which could have delayed the implementation of priority recovery activities.

**Human Resource and Organizational Capacity: Organizational Capacity**

The local capacity to effectively and efficiently implement the project was severely weakened by the earthquake. In addition to the loss of critical staff, the event had seen the partial or total collapse of several key government buildings, including the National Palace (the official residence of the president), the national penitentiary, the parliament, and the main ministries. Government agencies that were still active were already at work in disaster response, and project implementation units had been selected among existing units familiar with World Bank policies and procedures. The government and the World Bank, however, anticipated that these agencies would be quickly overstretched given the scale and timeline of activities. Moreover, preliminary World Bank missions in January and February of 2010 found that the private sector had also been hard hit by the earthquake. This combination of factors raised concerns about the local human and material capacity to handle the additional workload that the project would bring.

**Disasters and Emergency Response: Natural Disasters (Complying with safeguards in a post-disaster context)**

Weakened capacity and the need for rapid action and results put compliance with environmental and social safeguard requirements at risk. Among the issues requiring close attention was a tremendous amount of rubble that would need to be removed from canals and roads, which posed risks of hazardous waste. On the social side, an area of particular concern was the earthquake’s displacement of the local population. There was also a need to move quickly, which could potentially undermine proper participation of or consultation with affected communities.

**Addressing Delivery Challenges**

A three-pronged approach was used to address these challenges.

**Project Preparation Advance and Synergies with Pre-Existing Projects**

In fewer than eight weeks, the Haitian government prepared the project with World Bank support and the Bank approved the project. The government and the Bank triggered a project preparation advance (PPA, an advance provided to finance urgent recovery and project preparation activity) to ensure flexibility for activity selection, quick response to the emergency, and rapid results. On January 19, 2010, the World Bank authorized a US$15 million PPA to kickstart project preparation activities before project approval.

The PPA was innovative in three distinct ways. First, the amount represented close to a quarter of the overall project budget, far more than what is usually authorized for a PPA in World Bank operations. Second, the project was executed by the Bank on behalf of the government to account for its weak absorption capacity in the aftermath of the earthquake. Third, the PPA was designed to be flexible and finance priority needs as they arose over time, in a context where little was known about recovery and reconstruction needs.

The PPA played a key role in the achievement of results in the first months of the project. By April 2010, more than one third of the PPA had been disbursed, and more than two thirds committed. In the span of three months, the PPA had already delivered key activities, including the procurement and distribution of 50,000 solar-powered lanterns. The project had almost fulfilled its goal of distributing food to 50,000 children under five
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and 16,000 pregnant women. By September 2010, the rest of the activities of the PPA, including preparatory studies for reconstruction works to come, were mostly completed, with 85 percent of the PPA disbursed.

In addition to the PPA, the project benefitted from synergies with pre-existing Bank-funded projects, such as the Emergency Bridge Reconstruction and Vulnerability Reduction Project1, to finance complementary activities and provide resources to the PIUs. This enabled the PIUs to fast-track the realization of results on the ground before project effectiveness (when the conditions for disbursement were met).

**Capacity Building and Alternative Implementation Arrangements**

While Bank execution of the PPA was necessary to provide immediate assistance in the aftermath of the earthquake, the project implementation strategy was centered on extensive early support to strengthen and complement government capacity. This addressed the significant capacity gaps caused by the earthquake's disruption of government structures.

**Strengthening project implementation units**

The project implementation units received a comprehensive technical assistance package. While the units remained responsible for overall project implementation, fiduciary management was placed under the responsibility of a fiduciary agent (in this case, an international firm) during the first two years, until the World Bank assessed the capacity of the units as adequate to take over this responsibility. On the safeguards side, preparation and implementation of frameworks and instruments was closely advised and supported by experts recruited as part of the PPA.

**Strengthening implementing partners**

Where the capacity of implementing partners was existing but insufficient, the project focused on improving their capacity to implement key activities. Supervision and technical assistance by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) supported the Service d'Entretien des Equipements Urbains (SEEUR), a Haitian government agency, in cleaning five canals in Port-au-Prince. The project also relied on UNOPS to develop a building assessment methodology and provide training to the newly created Bureau Technique d'Evaluation des Bâtiments (BTEB, French for Technical Office for the Evaluation of Buildings), a government agency, in order to increase the number and quality of engineers and technicians capable of carrying out building assessments.

**Alternative execution arrangements**

Where no other alternative was apparent, the project called upon external actors for execution. The Haitian government contracted UNOPS to carry out urgent road works on 17 kilometers of National Road 4 to maintain accessibility and safeguard infrastructure along this essential road connecting the district of Léogâne, located southwest of Port-au-Prince, to Jacmel, the chief town of the Southeast Department. Recourse to a UN agency allowed the use of construction machinery made available by the Korean battalion of the United Nations Mission for Stabilization in Haiti (MINUSTAH).2 Moreover, in neighborhoods where security conditions did not allow the government or external actors to intervene, the project relied extensively on locally established non-governmental organizations to extend its reach. Building assessments, for example, benefitted from the additional capacity of hundreds of evaluators from NGOs working alongside communities to execute assessments under the technical leadership of the BTEB. The project fostered the participation of local labor in civil works, which enhanced local engagement and improved delivery (this methodology was known as “labor-intensive works”).

**Results**

The implementation strategy allowed the project to speed up results on the ground. By May 2010, four out of five canals, as well as two thirds of the remaining canal, were cleaned. On the assessment side, the BTEB had rapidly increased its capacity to 150 engineers divided into 10 field units, performing 1,500 to 2,000 daily assessments, and resulting in a total of 92,000 buildings assessed. Moreover, 23,000 cubic meters of debris had been removed from National Road 4, and access had been restored along the

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1 The Emergency Bridge Reconstruction and Vulnerability Reduction Project (EBRVRP) predated the earthquake. Its objectives were to: i) restore access on selected critical point of the Haitian transportation system; and ii) support vulnerability reduction by strengthening the Haitian national disaster risk management system.

2 MINUSTAH was a United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti that operated from 2004 to 2017.
By November 2010, 110,000 cubic meters of canals had been cleaned, 350,000 buildings were assessed, and emergency repairs and maintenance on National Road 4 generated 36,000 days of work.

Management of Environmental and Social Safeguards in an Emergency Context

These activities not only yielded rapid results, they also had to be implemented in compliance with the World Bank's environmental and social safeguard requirements. To enable quick rollout of activities while safeguarding against adverse environmental and social impact, consultants recruited as part of the PPA elaborated a simplified Environmental and Social Management Framework in March 2010. The framework immediately triggered the preparation of safeguard instruments for priority activities.

While safeguard instruments helped mitigate environmental and health risks associated with canal cleaning and road works, their timely elaboration was especially crucial for building the debris management facility that would process the 5,000 cubic meters of rubble evacuated daily. A phased approach was adopted to ensure both quick action and safeguard compliance. A temporary pilot at the Truitier landfill was identified and prepared with required environmental and social instruments that allowed quick implementation. By September 2010, the pilot site was already operational and processed about 1,000 cubic meters of rubble per day.

Lessons Learned

In this case, early donor intervention immediately after a disaster increased the relevance and quality of design of the emergency project. The World Bank's initial emergency response team arrived in Port-au-Prince within five days of the earthquake and participated directly in the initial assessment and response, providing comprehensive technical and financial support to the government. This unprecedented way of working with the government and proximity to the unfolding disaster provided firsthand exposure to the government's priorities and needs, resulting in the development of a project that was both relevant and responsively designed.

The World Bank's proactive participation in the initial crisis committee positively impacted the quality of the collective response to the emergency, in particular for the identification of early priorities and the coordination of actions.

A donor-executed PPA on behalf of the government, combined with incremental responsibility taken by implementing agencies and technical entities, led to a quick and sustainable response to the emergency. Although executed by the World Bank, the PPA was done on behalf of and in consultation with government counterparts, thus allowing for cost-effectiveness.

The World Bank especially focused on increasing the government's capacity and ownership over recovery and reconstruction activities during the first months of the project. This resulted, for instance, in the strengthening of the Ministry of Public Works, Transport, and Communications and its technical units such as the SEEUR and BTEB, which progressively assumed critical roles in the organization and execution of the structural assessments of buildings in socially sensitive environments. This technical empowerment was accompanied by incremental fiduciary empowerment of project implementation units and extensive external support to the management of safeguards instruments.

In parallel to strengthening local capacity, the use of an alternative execution arrangement can lead to fast results in times of crisis, especially in difficult environments where other actors (e.g., UN agencies and locally-established NGOs) are able to provide valuable inputs and deliver efficiently.

Finally, rapid elaboration and strengthened management of safeguards frameworks and instruments may allow a better balance between the need for urgent actions and the protection of environmental and social conditions in an emergency.
References