



CASE STUDY: WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE AID EFFECTIVENESS

The support platform experience in the Les Palmes region of Haiti

On January 12, 2010, Haiti was hit by a violent earthquake, which killed more than 200,000 people and caused significant damage to the country's infrastructure. Countries around the world mobilized to provide emergency relief for the Haitian people and to help them rebuild. This aid was delivered to the people of Haiti by bilateral and multilateral development agencies and non-governmental organizations. With infrastructure destroyed and communications and transportation systems limited, the Haitian government, already weak before the earthquake, was unable to coordinate the efforts of the thousands of organizations operating within its borders.

Three of these organizations — the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the International Cooperation Agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG International), and Cités Unies France (CUF) — are committed to providing support to local governance in the Les Palmes region. In the spirit of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), they decided to harmonize their activities to provide greater collective efficiency. This case study outlines the findings of a study conducted in May 2013, which aimed to gain a better understanding of the strengths and challenges of this collaboration, and to find out what value was added in terms of results achieved. The study was conducted by an independent consultant

and included a literature review and 13 individual interviews with representatives of Haitian and international partners (held either in Haiti or at the headquarters of the various organizations). The results of the interviews were validated with those contacted.

At the global level, the documentation of this experience will provide a concrete example for United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) to use when demonstrating

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- Ministry of the Interior and Territorial Communities (MICT)
- Communauté des municipalités de la région des Palmes (CMRP)
- Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)
- Cités Unies France (CUF)
- Communauté d'agglomération de Cergy-Pontoise (CACP)
- Communauté d'agglomération du Centre de la Martinique (CACEM)
- Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ)
- City of Montréal

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the key role played by local and regional governments to improve the efficiency of development aid.

UCLG takes part in high-level discussions through international forums on aid effectiveness, such as the one held in Busan in 2011. UCLG also serves its members through its Working Group on Capacity and Institution Building, which enables members to exchange information about their cooperation programs in order to improve results, in particular through better coordination on the ground. Initiated before the January 2010 earthquake, these UCLG-member discussions created an institutional environment that was conducive to collaboration in Haiti.

A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIP TO SET UP AN INTER-COMMUNE STRUCTURE

In the Les Palmes region of Haiti, the communes¹ (or municipalities) of Léogane, Petit Goâve, Grand Goâve and Gressier were particularly affected by the earthquake. Following the disaster, the four communes, comprising some 450,000 inhabitants, joined forces to create an inter-commune management structure, the Communauté des municipalités de la région des Palmes (CMRP). In March 2010, at the International Conference of World Cities and Regions for Haiti, held in Fort-de-France, Martinique, three international partners agreed to coordinate their efforts to help set up CMRP, at the request of the then Haitian Minister of the Interior and Territorial Communities (MICT).

This multi-stakeholder partnership included:

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), involved in setting up a municipal cooperation program in partnership with the City of Montréal and the Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ).
- VNG International, the international cooperation agency of the Association of Netherlands Municipalities; and
- Cités Unies France (CUF), a federation of French local authorities involved in international cooperation. It should be noted that two of the French territorial communities belonging to CUF — the Communauté d'agglomération de Cergy-Pontoise (CACP) and the Communauté d'agglomération du Centre de la Martinique (CACEM) — worked mostly with CUF within this program.

The main driving force behind the involvement of these organizations was the solidarity and generosity of their respective members. It was also rooted in the various relationships that linked them to the people of Haiti: these included the presence of significant expatriate

Haitian communities, the desire to use their expertise to help Haitian local governments, some of which had been long-term partners; and to promote exchanges on issues of common interest between elected officials and staff.

The three associations and their Haitian partners — MICT and the administrations of the four communes in the Les Palmes region — committed to working together on a project to strengthen commune and inter-commune structures in the region. To do this, they adopted a collaborative approach that brought them together in what has come to be called the “platform”.

Pooling resources to start the project on time

During the first few months of the platform, the partners faced various issues. VNG had managed to put in place the necessary financial resources but was experiencing delays in mobilizing staff. FCM, on the other hand, was having the opposite problem: it had the staff it needed in place, but was experiencing delays in obtaining funding. By working together, the partners were able to get the program off the ground in a timely manner – using VNG funds to purchase equipment and Canadian experts to provide technical assistance.

HOW THE PARTNERSHIP WORKED

The common goal of the platform partners was to strengthen the capacity of the communes in the Les Palmes region so they could provide basic services to their citizens in areas such as education, land use, water management and solid waste management. The partners also helped to strengthen the institutional capacity of CMRP and of its inter-commune management structure, the Direction administrative et technique de l'Intercommunalité des Palmes (DATIP). CMRP mainly uses DATIP to provide technical support to the communes, to coordinate the activities of the various local and international organizations in the region, and to undertake project management for activities such as



¹Equivalent to a municipality, a commune is a third-level division in Haiti, and has administrative and financial autonomy.

the rehabilitation of public spaces (for example, markets and squares).

The partners voluntarily agreed to the principle of collaboration and framed their efforts by signing a protocol linking the four communes of the Les Palmes region, MICT and the three main international partners. The protocol laid out their responsibilities, as well as their specific areas of intervention:

- **VNG:** Strengthening the technical capacities of the four communes to provide basic services in the areas of waste, water and sanitation management, and to support DATIP capacity building in these areas. VNG also carried out small reconstruction and rehabilitation projects in the communes.
- **FCM:** Helping restore basic administrative services in the four communes and strengthening DATIP capacities in the following areas: planning and land management, general management, human resources management, taxation, financial management, and relations with citizens.
- **CUF:** Helping set up inter-commune governance (including decision-making bodies and processes, and regional projects) adapted to the development of the Les Palmes region, and participating in the reconstruction of two public schools in Gressier and Petit-Goâve.

In addition, a service agreement between FCM and VNG specified the conditions for the joint funding of equipment, various activities, operational support for the communes and CMRP, salary support for some staff and CMRP members, and costs related to sharing a field office.

The partners also introduced a system of monthly tele-conference meetings, during which they exchanged information on progress made and discussed common



issues. Holding these conference calls on a regular basis was a challenge for all parties, mainly because of busy schedules and different time zones. The platform also met semi-annually in Port-au-Prince. These meetings took place over a period of two days, and gave participants an opportunity to have more in-depth exchanges. Other informal communication mechanisms were used by the partners: these included visits targeted to a specific partner, ongoing exchanges in shared premises (FCM and VNG), and various missions in Haiti. Involvement in global networks of local governments (such as UCLG) provided platform members with additional opportunities to meet and exchange face-to-face, especially at international conferences. These different coordination mechanisms enabled partners to coordinate their activities more effectively; they also provided opportunities to harmonize approaches and to ensure that these approaches were adapted to the local context.

Beyond sharing an office

VNG and FCM shared an office in Port-au-Prince. This provided their representatives with the opportunity to exchange information in real time, in particular about the progress they were making in their respective work, how they might better coordinate activities, and their communications with Haitian authorities.

RESULTS: WHEN THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

Two years after work started in the Les Palmes region of Haiti, significant progress has been made at the commune and inter-commune levels. CMRP is now operational and has been able to maintain its pace of work, despite most of the commune mayors having been replaced in 2012. For its part, DATIP has increased its volume of activities and maintained its ability to provide



services to Les Palmes communes in those areas supported by platform members. This is due to the partners organizing several training activities, personalized support for elected officials and CMRP employees, as well as technical, logistical and financial assistance to cover a portion of CMRP salaries, operation costs and equipment purchases.

Harmonizing efforts every day

The VNG program provided for the hiring of eight commune technicians in the areas of water management and waste management. Their integration into the commune service delivery structure — the strengthening of which was the focal point of FCM's programming — has been made much easier because of the close collaboration between the two organizations. This was particularly effective when creating a uniform planning and monitoring system within the communes.

For the Haitian partners, the added value of the multi-stakeholder collaboration has been demonstrated by the increased effectiveness of activities on the ground. According to one Haitian representative, "aligning the various approaches in advance of the activities" has prevented "confusion and inefficiency in the field", as well as implementation errors that can be difficult or impossible to correct. As activities were planned from a long-term perspective, there was a greater chance of the results being more sustainable, since the approach to development was more in tune with the Haitian context.

As a result of their close collaboration, the international partners believe they were able to achieve results that went beyond their initial expectations. As a VNG representative said, "we could never have achieved these

results if we had not been part of the platform." This sentiment was shared by all participants in this study.

The sharing of information, knowledge and resources was at the very heart of the way the partners worked together and, as a result, the partners were able to use them much more efficiently. Thus, the preliminary work, undertaken before the start of activities, enabled the partners to anticipate the potential consequences of one component upon another; this led, in turn, to a better alignment of all activities towards the common goal. This also meant there was no duplication of effort: the result was a more efficient use of resources. Sharing knowledge also made it easier for everyone to learn and respond more quickly — and in a more focused way. For example, a representative of one of the international partners told how talking to a colleague who had worked in Haiti for a long time had helped him see the situation from a new perspective, and thus had prevented certain mistakes.

The partners also felt that being part of a group gave them more weight with the Haitian authorities and other donor agencies. They believed that working together gave each of their individual initiatives greater credibility. The partners took advantage of the semi-annual meetings in Port-au-Prince to hold high-level meetings with Haitian authorities, including the Minister of the Interior and Local Authorities. Working together as a group helped open some doors. At these meetings, platform members would brief the minister and his staff about progress in their respective programs, and ask his opinion about various problems of a highly practical nature they had encountered. Collaborative work was also a source of mutual support and encouragement. According to one French participant, working together helped to "ease the burden."



International and Haitian partners are increasingly interested in implementing these collaborative approaches to support inter-commune cooperation in other regions of the country. The Ministry of the Interior and Local Authorities has already agreed to partially replicate the model in thirteen communes, including ten located in the metropolitan area of the nation's capital. Representatives of the Haitian government have again expressed their desire to see more collaboration between international partners and Haitian authorities in other areas of intervention. For them, this experience has been a source of inspiration to improve development assistance sustainability in Haiti.

An environment conducive to collaboration

The work of the platform partners created an environment that was conducive to the development of other collaborative experiences:

- UMQ and VNG have been working together for more than two years to provide support to national federations of elected officials; this has taken the form of sharing the costs of some activities, salaries and operational support, as well as of purchasing equipment. More recently, the two organizations have been collaborating on establishing a training program for Haitian elected commune officials for which they are on track to obtain financial support from other multilateral and bilateral development agencies.
- USAID, UN-Habitat and GIZ (formerly GTZ) also work with platform members on various issues (such as taxation, regional development planning and property registration).
- The City of Montréal, working with UMQ and FCM in Haiti, collaborates closely with UN-Habitat and UNDP in the areas of planning and land management, and with the City of Paris to finance small infrastructure projects.

The international partners are currently thinking about how an approach of this type might guide the development of new programs or improve existing programs in other countries, particularly in Mali.

THE ADDED VALUE OF COLLABORATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ABLE TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

In this type of collaboration, partners act interdependently — i.e. one partner's activities may have an impact on those of the other partner — but are independent in their management style and accountability. This requires experiences, knowledge and perspectives to be continually shared so that a common understanding of priorities can be built. This type of collaboration therefore goes beyond the simple coordination of activities.

The study shows that the partners have successfully met two types of challenges inherent to the chosen

method of collaboration. First, for this type of model — i.e. in which each of the partners maintains its independence — to function well, there has to be good will from all parties. There is therefore little leverage if one or more of the partners does not respect the commitments made. It can also be difficult to maintain the initial convergence of partners' objectives over time. Along the way, implementation requirements can create obstacles that partners must learn to overcome. Having a good memorandum of understanding (MOU) is not enough: it must be accompanied by ongoing dialogue as it is implemented.

Second, while all participants in this study consider the collaboration between organizations with such diverse backgrounds as a source of great wealth, these differences also come with their share of challenges. Since the partners' actions were rooted in a variety of international cooperation policies, they obviously differed in their implementation strategies. For example, some preferred to provide technical experts for specific missions, while others organized exchanges between elected officials and staff in their respective countries; others still supported the development of local infrastructure by hiring Haitian staff. Their respective programs had different start and end dates, and the various donor agencies also had different requirements, particularly in terms of reporting: this could have created significant challenges and uncertainty, since the partners were working so closely together. In addition, the resources available to each partner (both human and financial) were not the same. For example, when it came to aid for the Les Palmes region, some budgets were up to six times greater than others. CUF delegated the implementation of its activities to a Haitian organization — the Centre de Recherche et de Formation Économique et Sociale pour le Développement (CRESFED) — while FCM and VNG had international offices and Haitian staff. These differences in resources and strategies led some partners to play a more important



role in the coordination of activities and the exchange of information. The participants in this study believed it was natural for the organizations with more funding to assume a greater share of the costs associated with these activities, which were essential for the platform to achieve its goals. The success of this sharing of responsibilities lay in what one VNG representative described as “reaching some sort of fairness” in members’ contributions: this means that everyone has to have the impression that each partner is contributing as much as it can, whether that be a little or a lot.

Learning to improve: future perspectives

The picture provided in 2013 through this case study looks very different from 2010. Haitian institutions and their international partners have learned to work together. They have reaped the benefits of collaboration and they have overcome some of the challenges inherent in the collaborative model they adopted.

Two Haitian officials said they had seen how their country’s institutions had been strengthened, and now wanted them to play a more central role in coordinating the efforts of platform members. One pointed out that



the platform’s last semi-annual meeting (Port-au-Prince, Spring 2013), had been successfully organized by the Haitian partners.

Several participants in the study also felt the “model could be pushed further” – arguing that improvements could be made to the work done together while still maintaining a structure based on voluntary collaboration of participating organizations. They also identified concrete actions to help such improvements come about:

- Greater centralization of decision making – especially at the design and planning stage. As a representative of a French organization said, this would “get the coordinating done ahead of the major issues such as regional development.”
- Frame collaboration better by adopting a mutual accountability framework. A framework of this type would complement the MOU by clarifying the decision-making process, the sharing of responsibilities in terms of communications and coordination, and solutions to difficult situations such as one or more partners not respecting their commitments.
- Sharing coordination and communication responsibilities among platform members, taking into account – in a spirit of fairness – differences in resources. It is important to make more room for Haitian partners in this new sharing of responsibilities. Explicitly engaging in skills and knowledge sharing through more targeted sharing activities, which could include document distribution, discussions on common topics, joint missions and various types of South-South, North-South and North-North exchanges.
- Integrating reflection activities at platform meetings to get feedback on *modi operandi* and discuss each partner’s barriers, perceptions and conceptions: one French representative said it was important to “take the time to get to the bottom of things.”
- A Haitian representative suggested exploring the possibility of including other organizations operating in the same area of intervention, as well as a wider range of Haitian ministries to facilitate a link to national governance structures.

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