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Disasters, Diasporas and Host Communities: Insights in the Aftermath of the Haiti Earthquake

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The need exists to build knowledge toward addressing issues related to international disaster migrants into the United States, a phenomenon that the United Nations perceives as increasingly imminent in the next few decades due to potential refugees fleeing climate change-related events. There is a gap however in scholarly work on the role of diaspora groups and host communities in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. The Haitian diaspora in the United States will be a lifeline as Haiti recovers and rebuilds from the devastating earthquake disaster of January 12th 2010. This article reports on observations and findings from our research to understand the specific roles of the Haitian diaspora associations based in South Florida, as well as the role of host communities, nongovernmental organizations and government agencies that assisted earthquake survivors and displacees in the South Florida region. The findings are based on twenty-six interviews conducted within the time-frame of June 2010 to December 2010. Half of these interviewees represented the diaspora associations based in South Florida. Findings indicate that these organizations and host communities played a vital role in disaster relief and response processes.

Keywords: Haiti, disasters, diaspora, displacement, earthquake, migration, recovery, remittances, organizations

1. Background

The catastrophic magnitude 7 earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12, 2010 impacted over 1.5 million people directly (EERI, 2010) and devastated a country that ranks 145 (out of a total of 169 nations) on the United Nations index of human development (UNDP, 2010)¹. The slow pace of recovery to date highlights the systemic societal vulnerabilities and the inherent but understudied complexities of disaster recovery. The devastation, death toll, and internal mass displacement of Haitians is worth noting as many people decided to stay in the impacted zone

1. The neighboring country, the Dominican Republic, ranks 88th on UNDP's Index of Human Development.

in make-shift camps and tents, some teetering on road medians. This recovery was further complicated by political instability, and an outbreak of cholera that added to the vulnerability of the population. Haitians (including expatriates in the country at the time of the earthquake) who had the ability to leave have sought refuge in other countries, including the United States. According to the EERI (2010), approximately 150,000 Haitians left the country.

Familial social networks play a critical role in disaster crises and post-disaster recovery (Unger and Powell, 1980; Peacock and Ragsdale, 1997; Morrow, 1999; Adger et al., 2005). While such networks have typically been studied at the site of disasters themselves, it is important to look at the role these networks play in other countries and communities with high concentrations of diaspora². In February of 2010, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) put out a call for Rapid Response Research (RAPID) Proposals related to the Haiti earthquake. We sought and received funding for one year with the explicit goal of contributing to this pre-identified knowledge gap, and specifically understanding: (i) how the Haitian community in South Florida will likely participate in the rebuilding efforts in Haiti; (ii) how they served as a bridge in the supply chain of aid and expertise to various affected areas and communities in Haiti; and (iii) the support systems they have and continue to provide in enabling Haitian displacees to recover, adjust, and adapt to their new home in South Florida.

While the Haitian diaspora is a critical "lifeline," we cannot ignore host/receiving countries, communities, and non-diaspora organizations (e.g. government agencies, school districts and hospitals) that assisted Haitians displaced by the earthquake. This scenario of hosting international displacees presents a new type of challenge for the communities and for the survivors. Prior research on policy-making has shown that the perception of problems and target groups, along with their characterization or image, i.e., the manner in which they are socially constructed by policy-makers and other groups in society, are critical to understanding problem

definition and policy design (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Schneider and Ingram

2. The term “diaspora” in this context refers to Haitian emigrants who have settled in the United in the last decades. More details follow in Section 2.

1993; Cobb and Elder, 1983; Donovan 1993, 2001; Stone 2001). When applied to the Haiti earthquake crisis, how displacees coming to South Florida are viewed at various stages in the post-disaster period is likely to greatly affect their initial reception into the receiving communities and the kinds of policies that might be changed or designed to deal with them.

This article reports on findings from this NSF funded research and is organized as five sections. Following is a brief overview of the Haitian diaspora and their various roles in their country of Haiti and in their settlement countries, with a focus on the United States. This provides context for understanding their specific roles during the postearthquake period. Details on the study region (South Florida) is provided in Section 3, as well as a discussion about the enclaves of Haitian immigrants. Section 3 also provides information on the study design and interviewee profiles, as a precursor for presenting findings and observations which are organized as three broad themes in Section 4. The final section provides conclusions with the takeaway message that more attention needs to be paid to the role of diasporas, along with host communities and their activities in the post-disaster recovery and reconstruction period.

2. The Haitian Diaspora: an Overview

Diasporas are not defined by the status or length of time their members have spent in a host country, as much as by their commitment and action (Fagen et al. 2009, 9). Scholars also consider people who have not lived in their countries of origin but recognize their linkages to it and to co-nationals in other countries as part of diasporas, and while diasporas often maintain cultural legacies and other forms of identity with their country of origin, these national identities tend to weaken over time and across generations (Fagen et al. 2009, 7). With regard to the Haitian diaspora, Haitian migration to the United States began even prior to their independence (Laguerre 1998). However, the main growth in this diaspora increased with major waves of immigration in the last fifty years that began with those fleeing the first Duvalier regime in the sixties, or the “Boeing” people as they were termed because they had the resources to arrive by air, unlike those who came later by boat (Fagen et al. 2009, 8). The Haitian diaspora in the U.S. continued to grow through the next decades, fuelled by those fleeing repression and poverty. During the second Duvalier regime, there was another wave of immigration, primarily to the South Florida region, followed by another wave in the nineties, following Aristide’s ouster. While migration from Haiti

slowed down following Aristide’s return and stricter U.S. immigration policies, it grew again once the initial euphoria faded and political turmoil and chaos engulfed Haitian politics in the late 1990s and into the new millennium (Laguerre 2006). This group, which can be labeled as the pre-existing “expatriate diaspora community” has members that are in the US both legally and illegally. Some are political refugees from Haiti, whereas others are from the ruling elite; and some migrate back and forth, in effect being residents of both countries. Others who identify themselves as members of the diaspora are second generation immigrants, born in the US, and therefore US citizens. This complex mix of diaspora members translate into the many diaspora organizations that are based in South Florida and in the United States.

The actual number of Haitian diaspora varies from report to report. However, both Orozco (2006) and Spugnul (2010) report an estimated two million Haitian diaspora living primarily in the United States and the Dominican Republic. According to Terrazas (2010)³ of the Migration Policy Institute, the largest influx to the United States was recorded in the twenty year period between 1980 and 2000, when the Haitian-born population more than quadrupled from 92,000 to 419,000. The Haitian diaspora work in traditional sectors of the economy, such as trade, construction, manufacturing and service industries. Some own businesses such as bakeries, music shops, travel ticket agencies, restaurants, and remittance companies particularly in communities with a high concentration of Haitians, while the most educated are executives in major corporations, high schools, and some serve as university professors, administrators and government officials.

The majority of all Haitian immigrants reside in three states, New York, Florida and Massachusetts (Terrazas, 2010; Fagen et al., 2009), and there are presently about 400,000 Haitians in the New York area; and an estimated 350,000 to 400,000 in the South Florida area (Fagen et al., 2009). These are also places where most Haitian diaspora organizations and groups are based.

2.1. Haitian Diaspora Organizations

Diaspora organizations are increasingly vocal and influential in their countries of origin and settlement (Newland, 2010)⁴. Haitian diaspora organizations are distinguished and distinguish themselves by class, educational level and political loyalties (Fagen et al., 2009, p.10), and organizations are not unified or in full agreement on a range of issues. Some of the discordance stem from issues of political disputes and “class” disparities from the country of origin or disagreement on the priorities for advocacy in the country of settlement. In a newspaper report by East and Fleshler (2010), Alex Stepick, director of Immigration and Ethnicity Institute of Florida International University makes reference to the lack of interaction between Haitians of different classes,

and is quoted as saying “Haitians of different social classes live separate lives in the United States.”

3. Terrazas (2010) used data from the US Census Bureau’s 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) and 2000 Decennial Census, and the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) for 2008.
4. A full range of organization types and advocacy activities are well captured by Newland (2010) in the report “Voice after Exit: Diaspora Advocacy.” The report by Fagen et al. (2009) provides a comprehensive and comparative assessment of the various diaspora organizations (Home Town Associations; Professional Associations; Faith based organizations & Umbrella organizations in New York, South Florida, Boston, Montreal/Quebec).

Overall, the organizations are diverse and tackle a range of advocacy issues such as immigration rights (in country of settlement), and human rights, humanitarian relief, and (re)development policy (in country of origin). A case in point is the Haitian-American Grassroots Coalition (HAGC), an ethnic community-based organization formed in 1998, with a very large network of about 15 local organizations, most of which are based in Miami. Their efforts resulted in the landmark legislation known as the Haitian Refugee Immigrant Fairness Act (HRIFA) of 1998. This legislation granted to 50,000 Haitian Refugees who were already present in the United States the right to adjust their immigration status (HAGC website⁵).

The Haitian expatriate community has been viewed somewhat critically by successive Haitian administrations (Dewan, 2010). Haiti created the first diaspora “ministry” in the Americas. In 1994 President Bertrand Aristide created a new cabinet post, commonly called the Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad (MHAVE), or the “Tenth Department,” and charged it with facilitating diaspora investments, contributions and visits, and improving relations with diaspora organizations (Fagen et al., 2009, 42; Spagnul, 2010). Despite the existence of this Ministry, it was not until the 2010 Haiti earthquake that once shunned Haitian emigrants began to feel that their services and contributions were needed (Dewan 2010), validating to some extent, the critical role that the diaspora played in the aftermath of this disaster. We turn to this issue next.

2.2. The Haitian Diaspora and Disasters

The Haitian diaspora in the United States has played critical roles in assisting Haiti with relief and recovery efforts following past flood and hurricane disasters. Professional associations (comprised of Haitian doctors, nurses, engineers, business entrepreneurs and politicians) have mobilized and helped provide service in times of disasters. Haiti is known as a majority Christian country with the majority of Haitians practicing Catholicism. However, the Protestant faith is also vibrant and includes a wide range of denominations such as Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seven Day Adventists. These faith based organizations that are based in the U.S. are extremely important for carrying out relief and medical

missions and are a major convener and organizer for volunteers in times of disaster. Some have also been actively involved in the rebuilding and reconstruction of schools and churches during the post-disaster periods in Haiti.

March of 2010 marked an important month for the Haitian diaspora with two key events that provided opportunities for their input. These two events include: (i) the Haitian Diaspora Forum held at the OAS Headquarters in March 21-23, 2010; and (ii) the Haiti Donors Conference held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on March 31, 2010. The OAS Forum focused on a strategic plan for reconstruction and development in Haiti and specifically how the Haitian Diaspora will engage in capacity and nation building (OAS, 2010). The Forum was

5. See <http://hagcoalition.freehosting.net/> for more details.

co-organized by the OAS and Haitian Diaspora organizations (several based in South Florida), and the outcome and results were presented to the Haiti government at the March 31st donors conference in New York. According to one member of the diaspora, “this was the first time in the annals of the diaspora, that the diaspora had been considered as an institution versus a separate entity of one to one” (source: Interviewee code 007).

In addition to their humanitarian contributions, Haitian diaspora groups have been playing a critical role in the political aspects of recovery. Their importance has been evident in the campaigning that occurred prior to the Haitian elections in November 2010 when a number of the Haitian candidates campaigned not only in Haiti, but also in Miami, Boston, and New York (Zezima 2010). We also see the Haitian diaspora influencing crucial capacity building at the higher education level. For example, the Metropolitan College of New York (MCNY) in partnership with New York Councilmember Mathieu Eugene (the first Haitian-born official elected to the New York City Council), have awarded full tuition scholarships to six students from Haiti (Haitian citizens) to earn a Master’s degree in Emergency and Disaster Management with the intent of providing them with the necessary skills to help Haiti in the long-term recovery and reconstruction process.⁶

The most critical way in which the Haitian diaspora helps and has been helping for many years is through remittances. These remittances became even more crucial as a lifeline for Haitians and the Haitian economy after the earthquake.

2.3. Remittances

Haitians have an especially deep commitment to giving back to their country of origin, and the issue of remittances⁷ is especially important for the Haitian diaspora. Citing a World Bank report, Fagen et al. (2009)

noted that Haiti is estimated to be the world's most remittance-dependent country as measured by remittances' share of household income and of GDP (p.15). The actual amount in remittances also varies from report to report. Orozco (2006) reported an annual remittance amount of \$1 billion, while there are reports from the World Bank⁸ of an estimated range of \$1.4 billion to \$2 billion for 2008. These remittances are sent through licensed money transfer operators such as CAM, Western Union and Unitransfer (Orozco, 2006).

In a Miami Herald newspaper article that focused on Haitians in the U.S., Martin (2010) interviewed one of

6. <http://www.mcny.edu/news/pressrelease/2010/09/16/first-haitianscholarship-recipients-to-enter-emergency-disaster-managementgraduate-program-at-metropolitan-college-of-new-york/>

7. Remittances are defined as the transfer of money or goods, sent by migrants and received by individuals who, generally, are family members of these migrants. The senders are motivated by objectives beginning with the wish to meet basic family needs including health and education, and hopes that the funds can be invested productively to generate continuing income (Fagen et al., (p.7)).

8. See (<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22582923~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html>).

several Haitian Americans named Labrousse who reported that she had been sending money back to her family since she was 18 years old. Her account best captures the commitment mentioned above: "when she [Labrousse's mother] died I became my mother ... sending money back was as important to me as paying my own rent ... that's not heroic. That's what happens in a typical immigrant household" (Martin 2010).

The importance of diaspora remittances in disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction was acknowledged recently by the World Bank. Given this importance, Dilip Ratha, a lead economist and remittances expert at the World Bank, proposed that Haiti issue reconstruction diaspora bonds⁹ to tap the wealth of the diaspora more formally, allowing for money to be lent at cheaper rates for socially relevant projects and potentially sparking interest from other charitable organizations.¹⁰

In the wake of the Haiti earthquake, the impact is especially felt in South Florida for reasons presented in the following section.

3. Study Region and Methodology

We focused on the South Florida region of the United States, which includes Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties (Fig. 1) for the following four main reasons. First, South Florida already serves as a gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America and is home to many immigrants from Haiti, both legal and illegal. The region is home to more than 250,000 Haitians, many of whom have family in Haiti. Population estimates based on a 2008 census survey are 110,549 in Miami Dade county, 98,512 in Broward County, and 58,900 in Palm Beach county (East and Fleshler, 2010). According to Fagen et

al (2009, 24), Haitians make up 4.2 percent of the population of Miami-Dade County, which now has the largest concentration of Haitians in the U.S.¹¹. Thirty percent of the residents of the City of North Miami are Haitian (Fig. 2, Table 1), and this is evident in the high number of Haitian-born politicians in that city. Second, Florida is also the nation's largest refugee¹² resettlement state. While a majority of the refugees who resettle in Florida live in Miami Dade county, there are significant refugee populations in Broward, Palm Beach, and other counties (Florida Department of Children and Families). Third, South Florida is home to several Haitian-American organizations (with some whose mission has broadened since

9. In the past diaspora bonds have been used by Israel and India to raise over \$35 billion in development financing. Several countries including Ethiopia, Nepal, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka are considering (or have issued) diaspora bonds recently to bridge financing gaps.

10. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22582923~pagePK:64257043~piPK:437376~theSitePK:4607,00.html>.

11. The second largest concentration of Haitians is King's County (Brooklyn) and the third largest is in Broward County, immediately to the North of Miami-Dade.

12. Refugee Services is a program within Florida's Department of Children and Families (DCF). That agency defines a refugee as "someone who has fled his/her country because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion, and has been granted refugee status in a country of asylum." See http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/contact/contact_Refugee.shtml

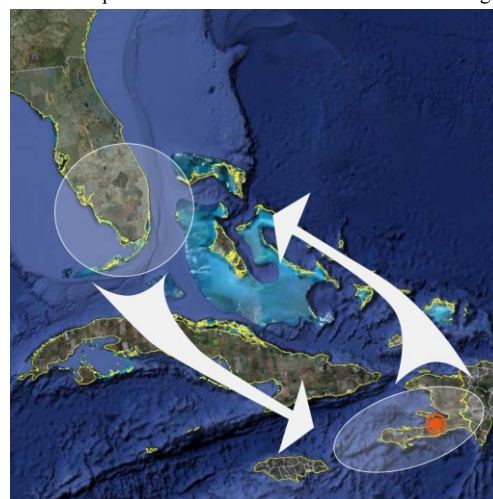


Fig. 1. Geographic location of South Florida and Haiti.

the earthquake crisis), and home to activists who have for decades been fighting causes of immigration equality for people of Haitian descent (Burch and Brecher, 2010). Fourth, the South Florida region immediately served as a receiving area for school-aged displacees and for severely injured earthquake survivors (Bushouse and Freeman, 2010; Baker and Berger, 2010). Several schools absorbed these children, including Toussaint L'Ouverture High School for Arts and Social Justice which is a charter high school in Palm Beach county. The Chief Operating Officer and co-founder, Major Joseph Bernadel¹³, is the

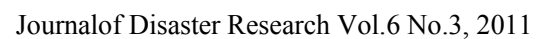
first person of Haitian ancestry to have opened a public school in the United States.

The diaspora population is highly diverse and is divided by class, wealth, education and several other factors. For example, one member of the diaspora described five types of groups and settlement patterns in South Florida (source. Interviewee Code 20):

A large population that lives in Kendall, many of whom were part of the establishment of Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc) who ruled Haiti from 1971-1986, and re-entered the spotlight after arriving in Haiti on January 26th 2011 after 25 years in exile in France. He noted that Kendall was at times referred to as “Duvalierville.”

The second group is the poor people from northern part of Haiti (from Port de Paix). For the most part, they came on small boats and they live in Little Haiti (with a full range of transfer services to send money back home). In Little Haiti, Haitians and Haitian Americans have maintained their cultural heritage through art, dance, food and culture. Many families view Little Haiti (a neighborhood in the City of Miami) as a transitional place, moving to the City of North Miami once they are able to (Fig. 2, Table 1). Our own investigation shows that the City of Miami’s Planning Department’s website

13. Major Bernadel is also the diaspora representative on the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission.



U.S. Census Variable	City of North Miami	Miami Dade County	U.S.
Total population	57,822	2,457,044	301,461,533
% white	31.40%	72.70%	74.50%
% black or African American	59.40%	19.60%	12.40%
Median Household income	36,597	42,969	51,425
Per capita income	17,605	22,619	27,041
Families below poverty level	16.50%	13.50%	9.90%
In labor force	68.60%	62.30%	65%
High school graduate or higher	74.60%	76.50%	84.60%

Owner occupied housing units	53.30%	58.30%	66.90%
Speak a language other than English at home	67.50%	70.30%	19.60%

lists a median household income of \$18,887 for the Little Haiti neighborhood. This can be compared to median household incomes of \$36,597, \$42,969 and \$51,425 for the City of North Miami, Miami Dade County and the U.S. respectively (Table 1).

The third group is Haitians that have relocated from other states such as New York, Massachusetts and Chicago, several of them yearning for a more tropical climate. This group is described as very dispersed, living in neighborhoods proximate to jobs. That group came to the U.S. with a profession and with fluency in English.

The fourth group was described as a new group of professionals (such as physicians) who have the financial backing.

The fifth group was described as the “old rich,” which includes people who enjoyed the status of being very powerful and rich in Haiti, and who prefer to be left alone as they have settled in South Florida to retire.

Methodology:

Interviews were conducted with representatives from Haitian organizations and professional coalitions, other non-profits (e.g. the United Way), faith-based organizations, government agencies, school districts, school principals, media, immigration officials and advocates, Florida Department of Children and Families Refugee Services, hospitals and health care administrators, Haitian diplomats and other Haitian American representatives on special task forces and commissions. The findings presented herein are based on twenty-six interviews (lasting an average of 45 minutes) conducted within the timeframe of June 2010 to December 2010, prior to the one year anniversary of the earthquake. Half of the interviewees represented diaspora associations. A snowballing technique was used to gather names and contact information of potential interviewees. The research design blended survey questionnaires with in-depth, semistructured interviews. All but one of the interviews was conducted in person, the one exception being interviewed by telephone. Some interviewees received draft questionnaires upon request. All interviewees were provided with a short description of the project and a consent form and to date, all of the recorded interviews have been fully transcribed and returned to the interviewees for clarifications and edits.

4. Observations and Findings from Our Interviews

The following is a discussion and analysis of our key observations and findings organized as three broad themes related to the Haitian diaspora that reside in South Florida, and the role of South Florida agencies and organizations in assisting Haitians displaced by the earthquake. The three themes detailed below include: (i) The South Florida Haitian- Diaspora: Disaster Relief and Response; ii) The Needs of the Displaced: Hosting Communities, Agencies and Organizations; and (iii) Prospects and Perspectives for Long-Term Recovery: Voices from the Diaspora.

4.1. The South Florida Haitian Diaspora: Disaster Relief and Response

The immediate response by the Haitian diaspora was swift and vital in the relief process following the earthquake. As noted before, this is not new as they have played critical roles in assisting Haiti with relief and recovery following past flood and hurricane disasters. The roles of Haitian-born nurses, legal professionals and media are presented as examples of the diaspora’s contributions.

The Role of Nurses

The Haitian nurses based in South Florida participate in a number of professional diaspora organizations and coalitions, and continue to make substantial contributions in Haiti. Some have logged multiple trips to Haiti as volunteers representing their diaspora organizations (such as Haitian American Nurses Association), with private health companies, and with teams organized by Project Medishare.¹⁴ Some have even taught at the School of Nursing at the University of Leogane at the request of the Dean, and there are ongoing efforts toward making these teaching opportunities more permanent. Among other things, the nurses reiterated the importance of addressing high levels of depression and anxiety which they see increasingly manifested in very high blood pressures of the Haitian people. They also noted the need to focus on the subset of the population who has now found themselves bound to wheelchairs or dependent on crutches. That subset is prone to multiple health effects escalated by the cultural taboo of being “handicapped.” The mental and emotional fatigue on health care providers was also noted as a suppressed condition. According to one of our interviewees, “when I came back I didn’t realize that I was suffering from post-traumatic stress ... I tell you every strong professional has a human side and after living what we saw and heard in Haiti, we couldn’t sleep and we could hear the voice of the people screaming and the agony – it is very difficult” (Source: Interviewee

Code 14). A radio program by nurse practitioners provided timely advice on how to deal with stress and depression, and was touted by South Florida nursing professionals as an invaluable service to the Haitian people and community.

Immigration Issues with focus on Temporary Protective Status

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is a temporary immigration benefit that allows qualified individuals from

14. Project Medishare was founded in 1993. Since its founding, the work of the organization has been primarily devoted to health and health related issues, has been rooted in Haiti, has worked with largely Haitian staff, has trained Haitian medical personnel and has been committed to collaborating with government ministries (Fagen et al., 2009).

designated countries (or parts of those countries) who are in the United States to continue to legally reside here for a limited time period (DHS, 2010). Temporary Protective Status (TPS) has long been sought by the Haitian community, and was granted to allow immigrants already in the United States to continue living and working in the country for 18 months following the earthquake. The application period for TPS registration expired on January 18th 2011, and Semple (2011) has reported that 53,000 individuals ultimately applied. This number is much lower than the 100,000 ballpark number estimated by the United States Citizen and Immigration Services back in early 2010 (Forry, 2010).

Overall, we heard from various members of the diaspora (i.e. beyond lawyers and immigration advocates) that the low numbers can be attributed to the fees, fear of discovery and of future immigration possibilities, lack of knowledge of the process, lack of necessary and available documents, and uncertainty about the extension of application deadlines. The Haitian Consulate played a critical role with documentation such as passports and birth certificates that were damaged/lost in the earthquake. Some Haitian organizations that helped TPS applicants received little or no funding despite major efforts, and unfortunately fraudulent organizations and individuals took advantage and offered expensive services despite free clinics for TPS applications. Haitian diaspora organizations, such as the Haitian Lawyers Association, hosted a radio program called 'KOZE Legal,' a legal talk show in Creole, which was one of several media avenues through which the community was educated on TPS issues.

An Expanded View of the Media

Hurricane Katrina from 2005, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake are two disasters in which the media has played an important role in showing real-time damage/destruction along with suffering and vulnerability, as well as gaps in various response and recovery efforts. Citizen reporters have emerged with louder voices as they provide raw footage of events and

catastrophes, the type that is oftentimes filtered by popular media based on their views of what is judged to be newsworthy. In the context of our research, it is important to focus on Haitian and Haitian-American journalists, who had very demanding roles after the earthquake: educating people, helping families to reunite; connecting the two communities (i.e. Haiti and South Florida); providing information on where to go for help; getting people out of harm's way; letting them know where the help is coming from (health; food; water); and even assisting humanitarian agencies with coordination and logistics. The media was indeed a "lifeline" for many Haitians in Haiti and in South Florida. It is also important to note that many Haitians (in Haiti and in the U.S.) listen to radios as the primary means of receiving news and information. One Haitian-owned radio station in Miami¹⁵ also found themselves as care-takers (counselors;

15. WSRF 1580 is a radio station based in Miami for Creole and French speakers, and is the first and only Haitian owned radio station in the U.S.) (<http://www.wsrfl.com/>).

psychologists; and consolers) as they needed to portray positivity to help people (in South Florida) cope with their grief and shock.

4.2. The Needs of the Displaced: Hosting Communities, Agencies, and Organizations

Earthquake relief efforts by the diaspora and nongovernmental organizations were evident not only in Haiti, but also in South Florida. Initially, there were fears about a mass exodus of immigrants coming to South Florida (Hsu, 2010), engendering ambivalent policy responses at federal state and local levels (i.e. immigration, medical coverage, schools, social services etc.). For example, the media reported on how South Florida counties such as Miami-Dade were refining their contingency plans¹⁶ to accommodate thousands of Haitian refugees (Fausset, 2010). Hsu (2010) reported that South Florida counties were preparing contingency plans, immigration authorities clearing space in a 600-bed detention center in Miami, and preparation of detention centers to turn away and repatriate illegal immigrants who might attempt crossing the "Miami river" (Hsu, 2010). However, the mass exodus did not materialize. There were fewer displaced than expected which was a surprise to us and some of our interviewees, particularly those from the school districts.

Families and friends in our study area have been the main source of support for displaced. Churches and religious institutions are the second source of support in both South Florida and Haiti. Their activities are both short term (i.e. organizing container shipments of food and medical supplies; organizing medical missions; helping with the placement of kids at Catholic schools) as well as long-term (e.g. fund-raising for eventual reconstruction of places of worship,¹⁷ and establishment

of medical establishments). The Notre Dame d'Haiti Catholic Church, based in Little Haiti (Fig. 2) is especially noteworthy in that regard. Franco and Siembieda (2010) noted a similar role played by the Catholic Church "in providing medical, material, social and psychological assistance" after Chile's 2010 M8.8 earthquake. The third source of support has been community-based diaspora organizations such as SantLa and FANM that provide an array of social services, family counseling, crisis intervention, unemployment services, and financial literacy programs. Such agencies are playing a key role in helping the relatives or the hosts of the survivors as they became overwhelmed and limited by their own lack of resources. According to one community organizer,

16. This contingency plan is referred to as "Operation Vigilant Sentry" which was developed in 2003 by Homeland Security Task Force Southeast (HSTF-SE) under the premise that ... "a mass migration has the potential to overwhelm independent agency action, and threaten the safety and security of the United States. Since no single agency has the capability or resources to respond effectively to this contingency, an organizational plan and structure that can rapidly and effectively combine DHS forces with those of other federal, state and local agencies is necessary" (DHS, 2007).
17. For example, the US Episcopal Conference has earmarked funding (\$32 million) for construction work.

"Some families in our community are loaded with children from other families where they just sent their kids because they don't know what else to do. Now these people have 5 or 6 kids from different families and there is not enough food in the house. I know a lady with 6 kids in her care and only one is a citizen ... so the food that she gets for that one child is helping feed the whole family ... and there are many cases of this" (Source: Interviewee Code 11)

The fourth source of support is the various task forces that emerged or re-emerged (e.g. the Broward County Haiti Relief Taskforce) with wide representation and participation from diaspora and non-diaspora individuals and entities. The task force was co-chaired by representatives from the Minority Development and Empowerment Inc. and Children Services Council of Broward County. Fifth, Florida state government agencies such as Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) were tasked with ensuring the swift repatriation of more than twenty thousand people living in Haiti. Accounts from the DCF website, news media and our own interviews show that they staffed the airports in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Homestead and Sanford for immediate assistance of wounded and ill unaccompanied children. According to DCF, 26,671 total individuals arrived in Florida through the emergency repatriation program in a one month period from January 15-February 20, 2010. About 77% were U.S. citizens.¹⁸ Specifically, DCF reported on an extremely low utilization of the public services,¹⁹ and noted that this was not a surprise to them since Haitians are probably the lowest users of services within the refugee program. As expected, schools and

health care facilities were the other non-diaspora organizations most directly impacted. We provide some details below.

Schools

As already stated, the number of school-aged displacees was fewer than expected. The students generally came in two waves, with the first wave comprising those from a higher socioeconomic class and/or permanent resident status. Several of them went to schools in more affluent South Florida neighborhoods. That first wave was described by one interviewee as "the lucky ones" since in many cases they had lived in America before. The second wave of students had much higher stress levels because many of them were in the United States for the first time. School psychologists and bilingual/bicultural guidance counselors (who are sensitive to the cultural background of the students) were applauded widely by the diaspora for their role in helping these students to adjust. According to one interviewee,

"The challenge was in receiving the students that

18. Others included U.S. citizens and qualified non-citizens, as well as Haitian parolees who were eligible for various benefits, such as monthly cash assistance.
19. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid were available to eligible citizens and qualified non-citizens, including Haitian parolees. Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance were available only to newly arrived refugees (including Haitian parolees) for the first 8 months after entry to the U.S. who do NOT qualify for TANF.

were emotionally affected. In Haiti we do not take care of the emotional side very well – so students, when they come here, will not open up and talk about what is hurting them even when they have deep emotional trauma. This is why we have students in bad situations that will not open up so we had to provide professionals that were culturally competent enough to work with these students. Personally, I have been involved in sessions with some of these students and we try to encourage the students to open up so that they can get help" (Source: Interviewee Code 08).

As of June 2010, the number of kids in grades Kindergarten to 12th grade (K-12) were as follows: ~1147 in Miami-Dade county; ~1200 in Broward county; and ~654 in Palm Beach county. Funding and reimbursement to the school districts that absorbed these school-age displacees was clearly a looming concern in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. One of the school districts specifically reported that they had developed a code in anticipation of this problem so that they could identify the students that were displaced by the earthquake. Based on the federal guidelines, 90% of the displacees (in the Broward County school district) were actually classified as "homeless." The United Way organizations were also instrumental partners in helping to raise funds to channel to displaced kids and their

families in the form of gift cards to help meet the basic needs of food, school supplies, uniforms etc. According to Olmeda and Freeman (2010), United States Congresswoman Wasserman-Shultz announced in July of 2010 that “the U.S. House of Representatives had approved an emergency spending measure that among other things, repaid Florida school districts approximately \$12 million for taking in 3700 students for half a year without asking for money upfront.”

It is widely known that the Haitian population is not very trusting of government. KONBIT²⁰ socials became a key mechanism used by the various school districts to reach out to families that needed to access services. These KONBIT socials were organized with a cultural flavor that included Haitian music and food. Haitian speaking social workers and psychologists were also available to work with the families who attended, and explain to them what was available and how to get it. One important service was immunizations and related records provided by hospitals.

Hospitals and Health Care

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the emergency rooms of the not for profit tax assisted hospitals, like Broward Health, Jackson, Memorial system, and the Trauma Centers in Palm Beach, became quickly inundated with survivors with urgent medical needs. Health care provision was complicated by issues of tracking, positive identification of survivors, coordination, immigration issues, lack of records (which are kept by the patients in Haiti), and a high number of head and spinal cord

20. *Konbit* is a word in Haitian Kreyol for gathering, collaborating and cooperation for the greater good

injuries. The uncertainties in the number of patients to expect stemmed partly from the fact that the majority of the first wave (within the first four days) arrived by private flight. One of our interviewees also noted that some of the private organizations that were already providing health and medical care in Haiti randomly used their corporate connections to send people back to the U.S. The process of discharging patients who were of Haitian nationality was another complication. The hospitals found themselves for the first time having to work closely with the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services once patients who were of Haitian nationality had to be discharged. One health care provider revealed the complexity with balancing immigration rules on one hand and safe discharge on the other hand.

The biggest dilemma however, was that of funding and assistance from the federal government. The National Disaster Medical System (NDMS), a federally coordinated system that augments the Nation’s medical response capability²¹ was not activated until four weeks after the earthquake. Furthermore, NDMS only covers acute care and no rehabilitation. The dilemma for

hospitals in Florida is best summarized by one of our interviewees:

“The reality of it is that this was a federal response that left international coordination burdened at the local level and they never supported the local level. The locals had to step up to the plate first and the feds followed our leads because they had no template of what to do. The pyramid switched completely around where local needed to take the lead of an international event. Even after three weeks, we did not have federal support or any guarantee of reimbursement. It doesn’t fall under domestic incident component. It is an international incident that had domestic consequences” (Source: Interviewee Code 18).

Overall, the one common concern voiced by schools and hospitals was the lack of a systematic approach to tracking. From the school’s perspective, they expressed the value of knowing the potential numbers of students to expect. The importance of tracking for hospitals allows them to prepare adequately for the medical needs of survivors. Other social service agencies that help with unmet needs of survivors also raised this issue. They expressed the need for a universal initial disaster intake form to get basic information from survivors wherever they are seen, and the Palm Beach County Disaster Recovery Coalition advocated for a system such as CAN (Coordinated Assistance Network) which is web-based nationwide case management system. They noted a Haiti portal was opened up, which was unusual given that CAN is typically used for local disasters.

While we did not interview displaced directly, we can conclude that their needs in the first six months after the

21. The mission is to temporarily supplement Federal, Tribal, State and Local capabilities by funding, organizing, training, equipping, deploying and sustaining a specialized and focused range of public health and medical capabilities. However, funds are available only from the date of activation of the NDMS.

earthquake were adequately managed and met. The members of the Haitian diaspora had a major impact on this positive outcome here in South Florida. Many of our interviewees had made several trips to Haiti to deal with family issues, and so Haiti’s long-term recovery and reconstruction weighs heavily on their minds. The following section summarizes some of their perspectives.

4.3. Prospects and Perspectives for Long-Term

Recovery: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora

Our research has revealed a complex web of organizations in South Florida alone. Haitian organizations are many and varied, from some that address grassroots issues or are focused on specific demographics such as women and children, to professional coalitions and umbrella organizations. The diaspora sees obstacles to getting involved in Haiti but want to make a contribution

and participate in Haitian politics (right to vote, dual citizenship, etc.). Overall, “diaspora members feel that they deserve political representation in part because their remittances are so important to their countries of origin, often keeping the national accounts afloat” (Newland 2010, p.15). We received this message as well as is evident in the following accounts by some of our interviewees:

“We are not the diaspora as an academic concept, we are real people and human beings with flesh and blood and everything ... our mortgage and our car payment causes us not to be able to go home. ... Because we cannot go home, we contribute financially in remittances. The Haitian diaspora worldwide contributes \$2.3 billion to Haiti. So, by large, we are the biggest donor in Haiti. Haiti would collapse, if not for the \$50 or \$100 that I send and that she sends” (Source: Interviewee Code 07).

“God only knows where that country would be. The families are surviving just on the diaspora. It is hard to find a family that doesn’t have some connection and if they don’t have it they try to make it. It is their lifeline. That’s the reality and then there is the politics that complicates everything” (Source: Interviewee Code 19).

“... About housing, the Haitian government has not figured how to do this. They have not made a statement. Will government buy and donate land to the people? Will people buy? If people are to buy, is there is a demand? Do people have the resources? Most of the people down in Haiti ... they will wait for us to send money to them. Most of us will not be able to send money home in this economic and unemployment crisis ... 10% in the State of Florida and 30-40% unemployment in our backyards” (Source: Interviewee Code 09).

The Haitian diaspora and their interaction with the government in Haiti will also be important. Several of our interviewees acknowledged that they are viewed sometimes as being arrogant and over-demanding by those within Haiti. However, many voiced optimism for new relations given the need for a unified front in the post-earthquake period. According to one interviewee, it was time to move away from “*TWO Haitis: the HERE (Haitian diaspora outside Haiti) and the THERE (Haitian society within Haiti)*.” However, much of this optimism was short-lived. As the months turned into the one-year anniversary of the earthquake, the tone, for those who chose to respond to our question about the relationship between the diaspora and the Haiti government, was overwhelmingly one of frustration. The various levels of frustration and optimism are evident in the following interview excerpts:

“We have asked the Haitian government to send a strong signal to the Haitian diaspora that post

earthquake Haiti is different ... and this is something that we have done publicly” (Source: Interviewee Code 03).

“We are included in every conversation but when action is being taken we are not called upon and this is very frustrating” (Source: Interviewee Code 11).

“I am frustrated but I am not going to give up. There has always been a love-hate relationship between the Haitians in country and outside of country. It is almost – ‘stay there where you are, make the money, send it to us.’ Don’t come here and take the little we have but keep the money coming. I think that it is a product of not having enough to go around. So the little bit that is there, they want to protect it. They feel that if you didn’t stay to endure and if you got out and got a good education and come back- you are going to get whatever’s left. I understand it but most people do not” (Source: Interviewee Code 19).

Some of that frustration also stemmed from having their hopes dashed by the make-up (i.e. one member instead of two requested by the diaspora at the March 2010 meetings previously discussed) and the lack of voting power of the diaspora representative on the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC). This commission is co-chaired by Haiti’s Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and President Bill Clinton. The IHRC, according to Bellerive and Clinton (2010) is structured similarly to the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency, or B.R.R., which was set up in Indonesia after the 2004 South Asia tsunami. According to the U.S. Committee on Foreign Relations (2010), the IHRC “represents an opportunity to change the way of doing business in Haiti – an expertise-based approach that builds political consensus – and it is essential that it operate with focus, discipline and decisiveness” (p.3). The success of the IHRC is yet to be seen. According to one of our interviewees:

“I think we were discouraged when the interim reconstruction commission decided they would have a representative from the diaspora but that person would not have a vote ... personally I think it’s a slap in the face. Their explanation is that everyone that has a vote has contributed financially but the diaspora contributed 1/3 the GDP of Haiti- through remittances. So, I think that’s very telling of how they feel about the diaspora” (Source: Interviewee Code 10).

Another interviewee applauded the formation of the IHRC but voiced concern and caution that this need to indeed remain an “interim” versus “permanent” commission.

“It is a good thing on a short term basis- because that gives the umbrella for the international community to feel safe to invest ... more or less. In the long term I am not sure if this is the way to go forward. I do not think that you can formulate any kind of good policies when the outside world is paying the bills for you” (Source: Interviewee Code 09).

When asked about some of the long-term challenges in Haiti, the following issues were brought up by interviewees: decentralization, including support and funding to local governments; political uncertainty; housing reconstruction; education and illiteracy; governance and the legal system; lack of urban planning and land allocation; health care; basic services for all the people of Haiti ... not just in Port au Prince; conditions for external funding and business investment; dependence on aid and implications for local production and revival of the local economy. Three of our interviewees emphasized the importance of attending to the spiritual and human souls of Haitians, captured in the following two quotes:

“In order to build or rebuild Haiti, we have to pay attention to the physical Haiti as well as reconditioning our way of being. ... the reconstruction of Haiti should not focus only on the physical” (Source: Interviewee, Code 03).

“Shelter is important but if your mind is broken and spirit and soul is not there, then you have nothing” (Source: Interviewee, Code 15).

These voices from the Haitian diaspora in South Florida capture sentiments that are important to include in ongoing efforts toward a sustainable reconstructed Haiti- both physical and spiritual.

5. Conclusion

Overall, very little attention has been paid to the role of diaspora groups and host communities in the postdisaster period. Yet, in an increasingly globalized world and with the continued migration of affected populations, the international dimensions of disaster response and recovery and the significant policy role played by these groups and communities can be critical. The Haitian diaspora served as an invaluable post-earthquake conduit for Creole-speaking doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, advisers, and reconstruction planners. From a policy perspective, these efforts formed a complex web of assistance programs, that were transnational in nature, explicating the complex ways in which the U.S. and Haiti are intertwined which go beyond traditional means of foreign aid and aid for refugees. Haitian-Americans will continue to be vital in long-term recovery and rebuilding in Haiti through remittances, sharing human and financial resources, lobbying governments, international organizations, and corporations for disaster-relief and redevelopment funding, supplies, and eased travel restrictions. While

several members of the diaspora (individuals, organizations and coalitions) that we interviewed expressed frustration and skepticism about the pace of the recovery process, this should not be mistaken for their deep commitment to their home country and their family in Haiti. Some frustration is also rooted in the fine line between gratitude for international assistance and skepticism, what one of our interviewees characterized as “people collecting in the name of Haiti but not for Haitians. Haitians have become an industry for many people” (source: Interviewee Code 24).

This research also sheds light on the “disaster-induced displacement” phenomenon (Oliver-Smith, 2009) from the perspective of host/receiving communities and the implications for school planning, health care, and homeland security. In this case, the disaster impacted zone and the receiving zone is in different countries. This presents a unique opportunity to build knowledge and develop policies addressing issues related to international disaster migrants into the United States, a phenomenon that the United Nations perceives as increasingly imminent in the next few decades due to potential refugees fleeing climate change-related events. Policies and institutions (including NGOs) will need to evolve to meet needs of long-term displacees. While some preexisting plans are being used, other policies may need to be created or revised to deal with several lingering institutional and governance questions in the United States (Mitchell et al., 2011; Sapat et al., 2011; Welsh and Esnard, 2009) such as: what are the responsibilities of receiving areas to which displaced persons relocate in large numbers? How are the provision of services for the displacees being facilitated and managed? Are multi-actor and multi-organizational approaches being used to solve the problem and to what extent are they effective? What are the implications for international incidents that can overwhelm a locality’s medical capacity and lead to the activation of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) even when the disaster did not impact the U.S. mainland? Our ongoing and future research continues to explore some of these issues and the role of diaspora groups and their policy advocacy in the recovery and reconstruction process in Haiti (Sapat and Esnard 2011a, 2011b); how all of these questions are answered and addressed by policies will have implications for diasporas and their evolving roles during post-disaster periods.

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