

## Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Seven conclusions emerge from this assessment:

**1. Economic sanctions.** *Economic sanctions can cause or exacerbate a humanitarian crisis, requiring short-term emergency assistance and constraining long-term economic development.*

Unlike in many other countries, ethnic hostility or civil war was not the basis of Haiti's complex emergency. The economic embargo imposed by the international community in response to the 1991 coup d'état created the urgent need for humanitarian assistance.

**2. Saving lives.** *USAID and U.S. NGOs have the response and implementation capacity to deliver sufficient, appropriately targeted emergency assistance to help ensure the survival of a country's vulnerable poor.*

One half million to 1.3 million Haitians (as many as one in seven) were receiving food aid during 1991–96. In addition, USAID-funded NGOs were providing three fourths of the health care in the country. These actions helped control malnutrition, and although health conditions worsened, epidemics did not break out. Nutritional assessments indicate that children's nutritional status dipped during 1994 and 1995, but by 1996 malnutrition rates were nearly comparable to those of 1992. In the absence of emergency assistance, more Haitians would have fled Haiti, risking boat passage to seek refuge in the United States or swelling the refugee camp at Guantanamo Bay.

**3. Political and social unrest.** *Emergency assistance can help maintain social calm and mitigate political instability.*

The international community provided massive quantities of emergency assistance to Haiti (especially food aid). This helped offset the drop in incomes, increase in food prices, and temporary closure of donor-funded development activities caused by the embargo. The food aid acted as a steam valve during a period of political and economic stress: it reduced the probability of food riots and arguably had a dampening effect on political tensions. It was especially helpful in Port-au-Prince, where the urban poor who lost their jobs had few economic options.

However, emergency assistance may have had the unintended negative effect of reducing pressure on the repressive military regime, thereby working against the purpose of the embargo. It also may have delayed the external military intervention that finally took place in October 1994.

**4. Distribution considerations.** *Distribution of emergency food aid requires organization and control in order to prevent theft, guard against political manipulation, and protect beneficiaries.*

The large quantity of food aid injected into Haiti was conspicuous and highly valued. It became a source of violent competition—both for its direct value for consumption and as a source of political power for those controlling access. Violent elements hijacked food supplies in some areas. Urban homes and community buildings used to stockpile food supplies were looted. Some local authorities such as mayors used food to favor different

political factions or for their personal aggrandizement. Fighting among beneficiaries sometimes erupted when food was delivered in urban neighborhoods for volunteers to distribute. The NGOs addressed these problems by stocking and distributing food aid in more neutral settings (schools, factory yards), using ration cards to track the receipt of food aid, and having police or agency personnel present to control beneficiaries. These measures limited the diversion of food and reduced violence.

**5. Relief to development.** *During complex humanitarian emergencies, short-term relief programs understandably take precedence over long-term development activities*

Employment in Haiti dropped dramatically because of the embargo. In response, USAID initiated the Jobs Creation project. It had two objectives: first, to create immediate employment for the poor, and second, to rehabilitate productive infrastructure (roads, irrigation). Some 500,000 person-months of short-term jobs were created during the 34-month project, and up to 20,000 people (including at least 20 percent women) were employed. The project was highly successful in providing short-term relief through job creation. It was less successful in promoting long-term development, because the infrastructure often did not meet technical standards or was not adequately maintained.

**6. Development link: agriculture.** *Emergency assistance that supplies agricultural production in-puts contributes to long-term economic development if it enables rural households to reduce farm decapitalization and dependency on food aid.*

Some farmers in Haiti had been forced to sell their agricultural assets in order to survive. Accordingly, some NGOs provided seeds and tools (investment resources) as well as food commodities (consumption resources) as part of their emergency assistance. The agricultural inputs helped beneficiaries resume or maintain agricultural production and decrease their dependence on food relief.

**7. Development link: capacity building.** *Effective transition from emergency relief to economic recovery is hampered by inadequate planning for essential governance activities during the emergency.*

Haiti's crisis and the urgency of the moment relegated forward planning (and other activities) to the back burner. Thus, no efforts were made to train a core of technocratic managers (in public administration and economics, for example) in anticipation of post-conflict governance needs. Although USAID funded more than 1,900 microprojects to support democratic processes and reinforce local governmental structures, Haiti's public sector and institutional infrastructure still lacked the capacity, even in 1998, to manage the country's development.