



**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Hearing
on
Human Rights in Haiti: Next Steps Forward**

**March 4th, 2020 - 02:00 p.m.
Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2255**

**Statement of Paloma Adams-Allen
President and CEO
Inter-American Foundation**

Distinguished co-chairs and committee members, thank you for calling this timely hearing and for the opportunity to testify today. I am honored to share the Inter-American Foundation's work in Haiti and have submitted full written testimony to be placed in the record.

We at the IAF have witnessed a rise in interpersonal violence and resurgent political instability in Haiti—compounding the country's chronic and extreme poverty—that has resulted in the tragic deaths of so many, including an IAF grantee partner and a former local staff member.

And yet, we remain hopeful. We have also seen firsthand how our Haitian grantee partners have continued to deliver on the promise of peace, prosperity, inclusion, and democratic governance. By organizing their communities and including them in efforts to strengthen civil society, bolster economic and environmental resilience, and promote social inclusion, grassroots groups are laying the groundwork for a system in which they can effectively advocate for themselves and defend and embody their rights as citizens.

Chairman McGovern remarked at the 2014 hearing of this commission on *Aid Delivery in Haiti: Development Needs, Capacity Building, and Challenges*, "No one can better inform the donors about what is needed in a community than the community affected." Chairman McGovern also signaled that it is crucial for Haitians to have the opportunity to participate and become invested in the outcomes of development projects, through a participatory process that prioritizes "the needs and wishes of the people." These insights are fundamental to the Inter-American Foundation's development model.

IAF Model in Haiti

Visionaries in Congress founded the Inter-American Foundation in 1969 to propel the self-help efforts of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the past 50 years, we have honed a model of bottom-up development, directly engaging local leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs in underserved areas to create more prosperous, peaceful, and democratic communities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Today, the IAF's active portfolio includes over 300 community-led projects in 24 countries. We advance U.S. strategic interests and complement the work of other U.S. government agencies by putting local communities in the driver's seat to promote human dignity and project sustainability. Our unique, bottom-up development model has proven effective in Haiti, despite the complex development terrain where too often resources do not reach their intended populations.

We have learned over the decades that nothing we do will be sustainable if the people whose lives we seek to improve do not value and ultimately own that effort. Thus, the IAF's approach in Haiti starts with listening to the people and communities most impacted by extreme poverty, violence, disease, and natural disasters—the people who also have the least access to traditional donors and little or no say in externally-designed development solutions. We respond to their priorities for addressing these issues, taking small risks on big ideas to promote innovation in community development, providing modest amounts of financial and technical support to catalyze their ideas for tackling corruption, expanding economic opportunity, building resilience, and promoting inclusion. We then support proven concepts with additional funding over a longer term than many funders. Our average grant in Haiti is just \$291,000 per grant over four years.

We believe that organized communities are the strongest check on weak governance and award small grants exclusively to Haitian civil society organizations and community-based groups that are representative of and accountable to their members. We see their potential as leaders and changemakers and trust that they know best the local opportunities and challenges. This allows the agency to work effectively in areas where centralized state governance is weak or failing, fostering inclusive, participatory development processes that empower participants and build stakeholders at the local level.

To make sure that communities seeking our assistance receive the maximum benefit, we fund and engage local Haitian organizations directly, avoiding arms-length programming. The IAF is frequently the first U.S. government agency to interact with these grassroots organizations, which are often too small, underdeveloped, or remote to access or absorb funding from larger donors. We provide an accessible source of funding with institutional strengthening built into the lifecycle of our grants, setting incipient organizations up for success not only with the IAF, but other funders as well. We accept project proposals in Haitian Creole on a rolling basis throughout the year, via a low-tech and easy-to-use proposal template. We visit all organizations before we fund them and work with applicants to refine projects that show potential. And, while we are rigorous in tracking progress and auditing all of our grants, we invest time, training, and funding in helping grantee partners prepare.

We have learned that, to see true self-reliance, we have to trust in communities' knowledge and abilities and hold them accountable for results, but also be flexible in our approach. We build

flexibility into our grants, allowing us and our grantees to respond and adjust to foreseeable unforeseen challenges such as natural disasters. For example, when drought hit in 2014, we worked with Fanm Deside (“Women Decide”), a local women’s organization, to reprogram funds intended to set up grain storage and transplant seedlings to another activity—chick incubation—that was more suitable to the climate.

IAF investments in Haiti are not charity. Our grantee partners are required to match our investment by mobilizing their own cash and in-kind resources. Our \$5 million in active grants is matched by \$3.7 million in counterpart commitments mobilized by Haitian grantee partners. Our model ensures the maximum efficiency and return on investment for U.S. taxpayers, underscoring local ownership and ensuring that IAF-supported projects are sustainable beyond IAF funding.

Because the demand for IAF support far exceeds available funding, we work with grantees to achieve scale and long-term sustainability through partnerships with local governments, the local private sector, and the Haitian diaspora. We also invest in growing a local, Haitian-led philanthropic ecosystem, supporting Haitian community foundations like the Haitian Community Foundation-ESPWA (“Hope”), which provide organizational strengthening to community-based organizations and seed funding to communities seeking to address their own development needs.

The agency prioritizes projects that build civic engagement among Haiti’s most underserved communities—including women, youth, and people with disabilities—that are the most susceptible to the negative impacts of crime, violence, extreme poverty, disease, and natural disasters, yet have the least access to traditional funders. The IAF believes that empowered communities are the foundation of government accountability on human rights issues and beyond. So, despite the current instability and the losses we have experienced in our own IAF family, we are inspired by our grantee partners’ resilience and their continued commitment to building communities where they can enjoy and defend their full rights as citizens.

IAF Haiti Portfolio & Strategy

Investing in the leadership and homegrown solutions of the people navigating chronic poverty and instability is crucial to building their productive capacity. Since our first grant in 1975, the IAF has awarded 179 grants valued at \$24 million directly to local, grassroots civil society organizations in Haiti. Over the past 30 years, our projects have impacted more than 700,000 Haitians. We aim to deliver aid where it is most needed, with a current portfolio that includes 17 projects in seven of Haiti’s ten departments, of which 94 percent are in rural areas. Thanks to the agency’s increased congressional appropriation for Fiscal Year 2020, the IAF will be able to reach further into our \$13.3 million pipeline of proposals from Haitian organizations and fund approximately \$1.25 million in pending projects—a 25 percent increase over last Fiscal Year.

In Haiti, the IAF and local grantees have strengthened communities’ resilience to the challenges we are discussing today by employing several time-tested approaches. We would like to share the following five takeaways based on our on-the-ground learning in Haiti: 1) *Pursue Holistic Approaches*, 2) *Address Basic Needs*, 3) *Promote Financial Inclusion*, 4) *Cultivate Disaster Resilience*, and 5) *Build Alliances*.

1) *Pursue Holistic Approaches*

A theme throughout our grantmaking across Latin America and the Caribbean, exemplified in Haiti, is our grantee partners' holistic approach to community development that takes into account the multidimensional nature of poverty and absence of accessible state services, particularly in many rural areas. For instance, IAF grantee partner Organisation des Paysans de Labiche ("Farmers' Organization of Labiche"), a farmer association in the Cote de Fer district of Haiti's South-East department, is increasing incomes, mitigating food insecurity, and promoting environmental conservation from several angles, by building infrastructure, training veterinary service providers, fronting agricultural costs, and supporting subsistence gardening.

2) *Address Basic Needs*

Our grantee partners recognize the need to address Haitians' basic needs before tackling larger societal concerns. IAF grantee Fanm Deside ("Women Decide"), in Jacmel in the South-East department, addresses gender-based violence by providing vulnerable women access to jobs and income needed to quickly escape their abusive situations and helping them secure shelter, food, and education for their children. The group then proceeds to build awareness among women and men about gender equality and approaches to violence prevention. Project participants' reporting of physical, sexual, and other violence has increased by 90 percent, indicating that women are more aware of their rights.

Given this triage approach to fulfilling Haitians' human rights, improving livelihoods is a crucial component of *all* IAF-funded projects in Haiti, even those that are primarily rights-focused. For example, IAF grantee partner Light of Life Foundation in southeastern Haiti is strengthening the capacity of 12 community-based organizations to end the practice of *restavek*, in which children are sent to work as domestic servants for other families. To alleviate the economic pressure that drives parents to make this tough decision, Light of Life Foundation provides them with technical assistance in raising goats as a source of nutrition and income.

Another grantee partner based in Port-au-Prince, Kouraj ("Courage"), helps the LGBTQI population navigate the social exclusion that has historically plagued this group, making them vulnerable to violence, unemployment, and poverty. To ensure that they have a path out of poverty and are not pushed into illicit livelihoods, the organization provides entrepreneurship training and access to credit. Knowledge exchanges among local IAF grantees have promoted a significant increase in various grantee partners' reported knowledge of human rights and LGBTQI issues.

Similarly, a former grantee partner in Cap-Haïtien, Association d'Aide des Techniciens pour les Personnes Handicapées ("Association of Support Technicians for People with Disabilities"), collaborated with teachers and medical professionals to increase public awareness of the rights and potential of this population. Recognizing the need for people with disabilities to earn income and the financial pressure on families caring for them, our grantee partner included a credit component to facilitate the start-up or expansion of microenterprises by people with disabilities and their family members.

3) *Promote Financial Inclusion*

Recognizing that Haitians living in extreme poverty are often unbanked, IAF grantees have found it impactful to build financial inclusion mechanisms into projects. In fact, 71 percent of IAF-supported projects in Haiti contain financial inclusion components. For instance, a grassroots women's group from Camp Louise in the Northern department runs a successful cassava bakery, which has increased participants' individual incomes. To support the business aspirations of other women in the community, participants have set up a savings and loan association in which they are pooling their savings and providing microloans to hundreds of other women. The IAF, in turn, works with aspiring savings and loans associations to ensure that they include and apply appropriate credit regulations. In total, IAF-supported projects are providing 1,520 Haitians increased access to capital, more than three-quarters of whom are women. Setting these community members up to fulfill their own basic needs and access resources can reduce violence and insecurity within families and communities and position them to exercise their human rights.

4) *Cultivate Disaster Resilience*

Because of the catastrophic impact that natural disasters can have on already fragile communities, we look for local organizations whose work incorporates environmental and disaster resilience elements. And the majority of our Haitian grantee partners do. For example, in Haiti's Artibonite department, IAF grantee partner Platfòm Inite Òganizasyon Dezam ("Coalition for United Organizations in Dezam," PLAIOD) is engaging smallholder farmers and residents in conservation, reforestation, and erosion control to improve and protect the health of the local watershed on which their livelihoods depend. The visibly positive results of PLAIOD's work have had a ripple effect, gaining additional financing for reforestation and convincing other farmers around the watershed to voluntarily replicate the project.

Another grantee partner that operates nationally out of Port-Au-Prince promoting Haitian culture and dance, Sant Pon Ayiti ("Haiti Bridge Center"), has made building environmental resilience a cross-cutting theme in all its activities, including public awareness campaigns on community radio stations.

These kinds of sustained investments in environmental resilience help communities respond and bounce back from natural disasters, which is crucial given that 96 percent of Haitians are vulnerable to natural disasters and centralized relief efforts often fail to reach isolated rural communities.¹ For example, following Hurricane Matthew in 2016, IAF grantees located in hard-hit and hard-to-reach communities recognized that residents could not wait for the arrival of external humanitarian assistance. So they stepped up and worked with the IAF to repurpose existing funds and mobilize additional resources, which they used to repair homes and community infrastructure, supply potable water, replace lost livestock, and provide food and an array of services ranging from trauma counseling to technical assistance in replanting farms and restarting family enterprises.

5) *Build Alliances*

¹ World Bank Accessed 02/05/20. Available from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview#1>

The IAF encourages our grantee partners to work with, not around, their local governments and the private sector. In our experience, engaged communities and effective organizations are some of the strongest accountability mechanisms on corruption, impunity, and weak governance. Grantee partners like Sant pou la Kilti ak Devlopman Karis (“Karis Center for Culture and Development”) in Northeast Haiti are directly engaging their local officials and opening new spaces for dialogue about needs between governments and citizens.

The local business sector’s expertise and financial resources are particularly valuable to organizations engaged in workforce development and job training. IAF grantee partner Lakou Lape (“Peace Yard”) works with youth in one of Port-au-Prince’s most dangerous neighborhoods to deter gang involvement. The organization trains youth in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, as well as engages the business community to provide mentorship, training, and job opportunities. One young participant credited the program with saving his life and giving him a sense of purpose, the tools to channel anger into a constructive dialogue, and the ability to model this behavior for other youth.

Conclusion

Taken together, the work of IAF’s diverse local partners has created a network of effective and resilient grassroots organizations necessarily focused on rights-based community development.

The IAF’s longest current partner in Haiti, Mouvement Paysan de l’Acul du Nord (“Farmers’ Movement of Acul du Nord,” MPA), demonstrates the multiplier effect of investing in people’s ideas. MPA provides technical assistance, microloans, and management training to women entrepreneurs and farmers in Haiti’s North Department. Road blockades have increased the price of basic necessities and cut off some needed raw materials for MPA’s bakery. Despite these challenges, the program has achieved impressive results, including 1) providing technical assistance to farmers in the region to increase crop varieties and yields; 2) furnishing microloans to hundreds of women to start successful businesses; 3) creating jobs and increasing women’s incomes; 4) establishing a cookie business and expanding two cassava bakeries; and 5) mobilizing the community to plant 7,730 trees to mitigate soil erosion. Our partnership with MPA has shown the transformative impact a small amount of funding can have when Haitians are harnessing it for their own development.

In closing, with this testimony, we do not mean to diminish the complexity of the challenges facing Haitians, but to suggest a way forward. The IAF’s work over the past 50 years has demonstrated that it is possible to deliver lean, effective assistance, even in a context as beset by external and internal threats as Haiti. By supporting Haitians’ self-help efforts, improving their economic and social wellbeing, and developing their leadership skills, we reinforce their agency, dignity, and self-conception as the bearers of human rights.

I would like to thank Congress for its vision in establishing the IAF 50 years ago and for its ongoing support of our work in Haiti. Thank you, as well, for your focus on learning what works, because the people of Haiti deserve our very best. We appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today.