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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Sunday, January 31, 2010 3:32 PM
To: H
Subject: FW: To rebuild Haiti, start with its young people

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To rebuild Haiti, start with its young people A 700,000-strong national civic service corps would harness untapped labor rapidly and instill national pride and confidence.

By Robert Muggah and Robert Maguire

January 31, 2010

Haiti will need big ideas to recover and rebuild in the aftermath of the devastating magnitude 7.0 earthquake this month. The reported death toll has topped 150,000, and the reconstruction needs are incalculable. How about starting with a 700,000-strong national civic service corps made up of Haitian youth? There are many reasons why such an entity makes a lot of sense.

Haiti is a young country. An estimated 70% of the population is under 30; the 15-to-29 segment alone makes up 50% of the population.

Demographers have long cautioned how excessively youthful populations can potentially exacerbate underdevelopment and accentuate political instability.

Although Haiti registers among the lowest levels of education in the Western Hemisphere, Haitian youth are a wellspring of creativity, talent and potential. You don't need to be a community-development specialist to know that they are stifled by a lack of meaningful opportunities.

Fortunately, Haiti has an enabling environment to set up a civic service corps. Article 52 of the Haitian Constitution commits citizens to national service, though it has never been activated. What is more, there are many Haitian and international organizations mobilized and ready to help the government get this going.

A civic service corps would get the young and able out of the tent cities in and around Port-au-Prince and into work. They could start with the once-iconic center of the capital, but also could begin planting trees, working the fields and providing services in Haiti's countryside.

At a minimum, this would reverse generations of unfair stigmatizing of the youth there.

This plan would also harness untapped labor rapidly. Before the Jan. 12 earthquake, 50% of youth in their 20s were out of work. Putting them in service toward rebuilding the capital and outlying areas would be a first step to restoring their and their country's pride and dignity.

A civic service corps would also multiply international efforts to promote recovery after the world moves on to the next crisis. Hundreds of humanitarian agencies, donor governments and nongovernmental organizations are facing monumental challenges in coordinating relief assistance. Although everyone involved is committed to rapid disbursement, transaction costs are monumental. A civic service corps would allow for a more rapid form of transferring capital.

Direct support to such a corps would inject serious liquidity into the Haitian economy and stimulate recovery from the bottom up. Rather than food-for-work schemes, international best practice recommends proposals that promote direct monetary transfers to beneficiaries. Haitian youth and their families have urgent needs and don't need paternalistic programs that curb their choices. With proper oversight and financial safeguards, a civic service corps would circumvent unnecessary administrative costs.

Further, a civic service corps would restore national pride and confidence in Haitian public institutions. During past decades, the state provided relatively few services to Haitians, particularly outside the capital. In some cases, state entities were downright predatory. As a result, nonstate providers, including gangs and shady middlemen, filled the gap. A civic service corps -- wearing the Haitian colors and acting as first responders or organizations demonstrating the government's presence on the ground -- would show that the government is serious about supporting citizens. It would be a symbolic first step toward renewing the social contract with the people.

A civic service corps also makes sense for long-term risk and emergency planning. Haiti is situated in the path of hurricanes and on a fault line, and can expect more disasters. Training 700,000 young people -- especially young women -- in the basics of first aid, emergency response, community policing and other skills would greatly mitigate the consequences of future calamities. With disciplined training and management, the corps could provide more intensive training in specialized areas -- engineering, telecommunications and public health.

An initial step to getting Haiti's youth to work could include the preparation of a road map for future meetings on Haiti, including the U.N. donor conference scheduled for March. Any final plan would need to draw on the invaluable experiences of ongoing efforts to mobilize youth in Haiti. These include the work of the Brazilian nongovernmental organization Viva Rio and its supporters. Before the earthquake, Viva Rio and Brazilian peacekeepers had recruited and trained hundreds of Haitian youth, including former gang members, to provide relief services in Haiti's slums. This program could be reactivated and scaled up quickly.

A civic service corps could draw on the lessons from such groups to target and recruit youths for, say, up to two years. The Haitian government would, of course, need to be the one to manage the undertaking, with direct oversight from the president's office and the Interior Ministry.

And there are many countries that could provide advice and support.

Nongovernmental groups and private donors could also play a key role in mobilizing support and transferring essential skills.

Haiti's youth are the future of the nation, and they are central to Haiti's recovery. A civic service corps is a large-scale way to quickly mobilize them to act as catalyst for long-term, progressive changes.

Robert Muggah, based at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, is a principal of the SecDev Group and is currently advising multilateral and bilateral organizations on Haiti's recovery. Robert Maguire is on the faculty of Trinity Washington University and chairs the Haiti Working Group of the United States Institute of Peace in Washington.

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 31, 2010 10:38 AM
To: Mills, Cheryl D; [REDACTED]
Subject: To rebuild Haiti, start with its young people

B6

This story was sent to you by: Bob Maguire

Here's my LA Times civic service op-ed. I am testifying in the Senate on Thursday.

To rebuild Haiti, start with its young people

A 700,000-strong national civic service corps would harness untapped labor rapidly and instill national pride and confidence.

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The complete article can be viewed at:

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