

# Offering the diagnosis, but lacking the medicine

## UN local peacebuilding-peacekeeping nexus in Haiti

John Karlsrud and Diana Felix da Costa

### Summary

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) stands out from other UN peacekeeping missions, which have focused on responding to situations of violent conflict. In Haiti there is no violent conflict as such: the problems are lack of political confluence, lack of respect for agreements, and an inability to compromise. In contrast to the loud national-level narrative extremely critical of MINUSTAH, at local levels the UN mission has often been the only available link to the national government and international organizations present in remote areas.

While the UN and its Civil Affairs (CA) section are doing an important job in Haiti, it is important to leverage the presence of the UN throughout Haiti to realize substantial and tangible peacebuilding and development dividends that can benefit local populations, and to engage more strongly with non-state actors and NGOs. A key challenge is to give local populations the possibility to participate in local and national politics.

The research team also noted that politics was seen as business as usual, and 'the mission was seen to be protecting a power set and not facilitating a national dialogue'.<sup>1</sup> In part, this was due to lack of responsiveness on the part of the mission and other international actors as to the role they might be able to play in enabling non-state actors outside the capital to have a voice. That should be a focus area for the UN and other actors when they start on the transition process of phasing out the mission.

This policy brief is based on a recent NUPI report that has looked at how the UN is undertaking local-level early peacebuilding, focusing on the efforts of the UN DPKO Civil Affairs section in Haiti.<sup>2</sup> The rationale for making the connection between Civil Affairs and local-level peacebuilding is grounded in the evolving understanding that 'peacekeepers are peacebuilders'<sup>3</sup> and should implement early peacebuilding tasks.<sup>4</sup> In peacekeeping missions, the Civil Affairs section is most frequently deployed throughout the host country, providing the UN with a presence on the local level.

MINUSTAH has over 100 Civil Affairs officers (CAOs) deployed across Haiti's ten departments, working on a daily basis with national, departmental and local-level officials. Through the Civil Affairs section, MINUSTAH has a reach throughout Haiti impossible to match by any UN agency or NGO. In the words of one CAO, it 'can feel the temperature on the ground'.<sup>5</sup> This proximity has led to privileged relations and trust with local authorities, enabling civil affairs to voice the needs and concerns of local officials to central authori-

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Civil Affairs Officer (CAO).

<sup>2</sup> Diana Felix da Costa and John Karlsrud (2012). 'UN and local peacebuilding and transition in Haiti'. *Security in Practice* 4, 2012. Oslo, NUPI.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations 2012. *Peace: Keep it. Build it. The Contribution of United Nations Peacekeeping to Early Peacebuilding: Strategy*. UN DPKO and DFS, New York: p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> As defined by the Secretary-General in his opening remarks of the *Security Council discussion on peacebuilding, 13 October 2010* (UN 2010), where he stressed that peacekeeping missions should be enabled 'to have an impact as "early peacebuilders"'. The meeting in the Security Council was held to discuss the latest *Progress Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict* (UN 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Interview with CAO.

ties. Local authorities we spoke with – from all levels – were aware of the role of Civil Affairs, and could distinguish between different MINUSTAH sections and identify their CA focal points.

There are obvious advantages in the fact that over 90% of the senior CA staff have over five years with MINUSTAH, thereby providing the mission with considerable contextual knowledge and institutional memory. On the other hand, this also results in a static staffing structure, with the danger of settling into routines rather than responding to changing needs and demands on the ground. Although Civil Affairs have successful experiences in bringing together non-state actors, as through the ‘town hall meetings’ during Haitian presidential elections, the section recognized that its support had focused mainly on local authorities, and that it was necessary to extend this support to the various non-state actors so important to the social fabric of the country. State coverage is minimal, with most of Haiti’s governance and rule of law institutions either totally absent or inefficient, leaving the responsibility for public service delivery largely to non-state actors, INGOs and businesses.<sup>6</sup> In the future, these non-state actors must be taken more seriously by MINUSTAH in the institutional building framework.

With the extensive presence that MINUSTAH has established in Haiti, there also follows a promise of leaving something tangible behind. MINUSTAH has been undertaking a large number of quick impact projects (QIPs) – refurbishing and building offices for municipality officers, courts, marketplaces and so forth. Technical assistance to implement QIPs has become a central element in the work of CAOs in Haiti, due to the time-consuming element and visibility of such projects. When we spoke with CAOs, they counted their achievements in terms of buildings, infrastructure, establishing archives or even organigrammes almost as frequently as did the local authorities.

While these results of QIPs are important prerequisites for the effective functioning of local authorities, they do not indicate how the local authorities are actually performing in their key role: of responding to the needs of their communities, including basic service delivery. The focus on material support through QIPs may be only a bias from the limited number of respondents or due to the limited time that the research team spent on the ground, but it should still give some pause for thought. In the aftermath of the crippling earthquake, MINUSTAH has focused on QIPs as a means to provide tangible support, expanding the budget for QIPs from about \$3 million to the current \$7.5 million per year for QIPs. In addition, the mission has other resources that can be used for support – in total around \$3 million, as well as various mission

assets that to some degree can be used for mutually beneficial purposes, like repairing roads that are critical for the mission.

CAOs often underscored that their presence throughout the country enables them to feel the pulse of the country. While this is true, we also think that they may underestimate the expectations that their presence may raise among local populations. The breadth of the UN presence is impressive, but the scope and depth of their activities is less so. The focus on QIPs absorbs much valuable staff time with limited returns. It is understandable that officers want to leave some tangible structures behind, but these should be coupled with more long-term activities that could ensure a sustainable approach that couples tangible structures with capacity development.


In general, CA tended to engage with local authority counterparts more than with non-state actors. Good collaboration with local authorities often hinged on the presence of a mayor who would have a plan for development for his or her region.<sup>7</sup> It was acknowledged that, in many cases, involvement with local actors did not run deep enough – CA would relay the challenges that the local authorities had encountered, and ‘not the main challenges to the communities as such’.<sup>8</sup> Among CSOs there was also a similar problem of representation. Civil society organizations would claim to be representative of the local communities and various causes, but were often perceived by Civil Affairs as having been set up merely to respond to the availability of QIPs and other funding. A mapping in one region indicated that there were many such community-based organizations, but these were very small and recently established. Organizations in rural areas were seen as less supply-driven than those in urban areas. Churches were also seen as heading initiatives perceived as enjoying greater legitimacy among the population.<sup>9</sup> Some of our CA interlocutors also felt it more important to engage with political parties on the local level than with CSOs. The challenges facing CA when engaging with civil society and other local actors are many and complex. Common problems are the pervasive lack of capacity, supply-driven orientation of activities, lack of broad engagement with non-state actors, and lack of community ownership of local CSOs and their activities. Civil Affairs must do better in channelling local voices into national policy processes. We acknowledge that this is a tall order, but as CA are the ones who are present across Haiti, and with a mandate for enabling local voices to be heard in the national processes, this should be a key item on the agenda forward. This will necessitate a broader and more systematic engagement with civil society, the

6 See e.g. World Bank (2006), *Haiti Social Resilience and State Fragility in Haiti: A Country Social Analysis*, 27 April 2006.

7 Interview with CAO.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.



churches and other local actors. Greater effort should also be put into strengthening the capacity of local actors to contribute to policy-making processes on the local and national levels.

The UN is working diligently to improve the lives of Haitians, but these efforts have encountered significant challenges as regards coordination and cooperation with the rest of the UN system and other development actors. The UN mission has moved the CA section from the political to the development pillar, to ensure that the work of civil affairs and the commensurate outputs are in line with the longer-term peacebuilding and development objectives of Haiti. As yet, however, this administrative reshuffling has not had tangible results in terms of improved cooperation between civil affairs and other UN funds, programmes and agencies. This is a challenge not only of coordination, but also of leveraging the presence of CA and UN mission assets throughout Haiti to realize substantial and tangible peacebuilding and development dividends that can benefit local populations. MINUSTAH has met significant challenges in this area that must be overcome if it is to continue to prove relevant to Haitian stakeholders, on the national as well as the local levels.

## Recommendations

### 1. Institutional support and supporting participation in national policy processes

- Member states, MINUSTAH and other actors should continue to press for legal reforms for establishing a viable framework for support to decentralization and local government, institutionalizing and securing the progress made so far;
- Notwithstanding the absence of a legal framework, MINUSTAH and the rest of the UN system should continue their important work in capacity development for local government officials along the lines of the training offered to municipal accountants;
- Future legal reform will need to tackle, inter alia, the difficult issue of possible duplicative structures on local levels.

### 2. QIPs and programme activities

- MINUSTAH should, with reference to the policy directive on QIPs and the UN Secretary-General's report on civilian capacities,<sup>10</sup> consider using more funds for capacity development activities for local officials, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Territorial Collectivities, civil society, UNDP and other relevant stakeholders;
- QIPs are very time-consuming, so there should be a focus on pooling similar QIPs in order to lower the transaction costs;

<sup>10</sup> UNSG (2011). *Civilian Capacity in the aftermath of Conflict, S/2011/527* (19 August 2011).

- Staff should be trained in development programming, and a closer partnership with UNDP and other development agencies should be fostered, especially since these actors are currently co-located in the capital.

### 3. Local ownership and engaging with non-state actors

- While Civil Affairs is recognized by local authorities as the 'best in class' in terms of listening to local needs, it is important to strengthen the participatory approach further, e.g. through town hall meetings to ensuring that other voices also are heard and able to participate in national decision-making processes;
- Having a core mandate of feeding local voices into national policy processes, Civil Affairs should make a more sustained effort in engaging with and strengthening the capacity of a broader representation of local actors, including various civil society organizations and churches;
- Recalling the g7+ declaration,<sup>11</sup> there is a need to pay more attention to national planning frameworks and needs, on the national, departmental and local levels, for instance by supporting the *table de concertation* and the rule-of-law clusters as decision-making forums for all peacebuilding and development actors.

### 4. The UN and local level peacebuilding

- The Civil Affairs' workload should be trimmed, e.g. through limiting the use of QIPs;
- The UN should consider the model of South Sudan— of including posts with responsibility for programme activities and opening the field presences for other peacebuilding and development actors;
- Strengthen planning for early peacebuilding among relevant staff in MINUSTAH, including CA through a joint planning exercise with the UN country team;
- Operationalize existing integration in planning frameworks such as the Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF) into programme activities executed on the local level;
- Consider a 24-month transition window in the handover of programme activities from MINUSTAH to the UN country team;
- Pool resources for programme activities by focusing QIPs on essential tasks and transferring funds to capacity-development initiatives that can be initiated with reference to the SG guidance on civilian capacities;
- Devise a strategy together with UN DPKO New York on how to achieve staff mobility on senior levels.

<sup>11</sup> g7+ (2010) *The Dili Declaration: A New Vision for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding*. Paris, International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, OECD. The g7+ is an open group of countries and regions experiencing conflict and fragility, now consisting of 19 countries.

### About the project

The project which this policy brief is part of looks at how Civil Affairs in several missions operationalize and implement their mandates, through field research in Haiti, Liberia and South Sudan. It also studies how the UN peacekeeping more broadly is organizing its work on the local level and working together with local authorities, other UN agencies and development actors. When initiating this study, the research team chose the Civil Affairs (CA) section of UN peacekeeping operations as an entry point, as this section is usually deployed wherever the peacekeeping mission has established presences, and is tasked with, inter alia, acting as the intermediary with local authorities and populations, as well as the rest of the UN peacekeeping mission and other UN actors. The report is the result of one month of fieldwork in Haiti in August and September 2011. It forms part of the project *Contextualizing peacebuilding activities to local circumstances*, supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Norwegian Institute of International Affairs  
P.O. Box 8159 Dep, N-0033 Oslo, Norway  
[www.nupi.no](http://www.nupi.no)

Established in 1959, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs [NUPI] is a leading independent research institute on international politics and areas of relevance to Norwegian foreign policy. Formally under the Ministry of Education and Research, NUPI nevertheless operates as an independent, non-political instance in all its professional activities. Research undertaken at NUPI ranges from short-term applied research to more long-term basic research.

NUPI's Issue Briefs and Policy Briefs are published by the Department of Security and Conflict Management at NUPI. The Department of Security and Conflict Management undertakes applied research, policy analysis, concept development and assistance on multinational and multidimensional peace support and stability operations and related themes, and seeks to address most aspects of peace support operations from intervention to long term peace building and security sector reform. Geographical foci include Africa, the Balkans, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### About the authors

**John Karlsrud** is a Research Fellow at NUPI working on peacekeeping, peacebuilding and humanitarian issues. He is also a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Warwick, UK. He has previously served as Special Assistant to the UN Special Representative to Chad and also acted as a Strategic Planning Officer for the mission.

**Diana Felix da Costa** is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, UK, working on issues of international responses to local-level peacebuilding, including the role of brokers in these processes. She holds an MA in humanitarian action and peacebuilding jointly from the University of Groningen and University of Uppsala.