

# **Reconstruction and the environment in the Metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince:**

## **Canaan - a neighbourhood built from scratch**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, “Canaan – a neighbourhood built from scratch” is part of a wider study on Reconstruction and the Environment in the Metropolitan Region of Port-au-Prince, which includes three case studies: Bristout-Bobin, Canaan and Morne L’Hôpital. The aim is to study the effects of the national reconstruction strategy on the environment. The choice of this subject was motivated principally by post-earthquake analysis of the underlying causes of the disaster of 12 January 2010: the country’s environmental vulnerabilities, weak institutional management of the city, the lack of territorial planning and the domination of the informal sector in urban development. The slogan proclaimed like a leitmotiv at the time by the Haitian government and International Organisations was ‘**Building Back Better**’. However, more than two years after the earthquake, the main focus of the Housing, Habitat and Urban Development Policy document drawn up by the *Unité de Construction de Logements et de Bâtiments Publics* (UCLBP) was on self-building, having seemingly embraced the principle of reality rather than the precautionary principle: “*the building of houses is the responsibility of families*”. Considering what has happened in the past and notably the informal occupation of urban space for a number of decades, a strategy based on “*the capacity of Haitians to build their own houses*” is not without risk.

Indeed, the capacity of the vast majority of Haitian households to invest is limited, and even with the government’s measures to make credit more accessible, it is unlikely that earthquake and cyclone-proofing norms will be applied to these buildings. Another constraint, this time physical, is likely to compromise the effects of such a policy in the long term. The land area of the Metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince is limited geographically by the sea and by the mornes. Yet, favouring self-building can only lead to the extensive development of the city and, as a consequence, the occupation of ‘at risk’ areas.

The case of Canaan, a vast camp/neighbourhood located on the periphery of the city, is symptomatic in a number of ways. First of all, it is located in Croix-des-Bouquets, which is probably one of the communes in the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince which has suffered the greatest upheaval indirectly following the earthquake of 12 January 2012 in the form of mass migration. Secondly, Canaan is unusual in that it is not really an IDP camp and it is not yet a neighbourhood. And yet, due to the speed with which it has grown (tens of thousands of inhabitants) and its emergence from nothing, the development of Canaan is similar to that of numerous informal neighbourhoods in the city. In a way it is the physical result of the national reconstruction strategy based on self-building.

Another aspect which makes Canaan an extremely interesting case during the reconstruction phase is the fact that its future is very unclear: will the national authorities consider it to be a new neighbourhood and thus give de facto legitimacy to the occupation of the land? Or will the denial of reality which prevails in the majority of poor neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince lead to acceptance in the long term without any commitment from public institutions? Or will it simply be “shut down” like the camps situated in the town centre?

It is a recognised fact that a partial and late response will only create perverse effects, increase the human and financial cost of the response and increase the population’s exposure to the risks which have clearly been identified. The question at hand is therefore whether there is a difference between taking action yesterday, today or tomorrow?

# (Extracts)

## 4. The establishment of Canaan and the Haitian government's reconstruction strategy

### 4.1. Canaan – victim of a dilemma

Since the Presidential Decree of 22 March 2010, which declared the area including, amongst others, the Corail-Cesseless *habitation*, to be a public utility zone, the issue of Canaan has been a stumbling block for Haiti's political decision-makers.

The Haitian state has had to deal with two problems: on the one hand, concern about the legitimisation of those occupying the land, because the issue of compensation has not been resolved with those who claim to be the owners<sup>1</sup> and; secondly, it does not have the financial capacity to launch the large-scale projects that it has announced. Via the declaration of public utility, the Haitian government probably hoped it could take advantage of the post-earthquake momentum and the numerous promises of international aid to launch an innovative urban project in this area as tangible evidence of the orderly extension of Port-au-Prince. Three years on, it is still difficult to know what to expect in terms of governmental projects for this vast area and how this public utility land will be used. And yet, the declaration of public interest is a sovereign act by the State which has committed itself to using a given area for public interest. In other words, the declaration should be followed up by a development project. But, until now, the *Unité de Construction de Logements et de Bâtiments Publics* (UCLBP), the government agency in charge of the reconstruction, has not yet made any official announcements about the area. An urban development plan drawn up in 2012 by the *Société d'Aménagement et de Développement* (SODADE), which has not been made public, estimated that 50 million dollars would be needed to develop the site. Those in charge of the commissioning authority told us that they were looking at half of the area of Corail-Cesseless *habitation*, which represents around 500 hectares, and the plan included all the necessary aspects of a decent and modern urban environment, including industrial zones. But though prospects do exist, no projects have yet been launched, due, amongst other things, to lack of funding, while the reality on the ground is evolving so fast that it seems irreversible in several regards.

### 4.2. Canaan: the secondary role of local and regional authorities in the response and the reconstruction.

The municipal authority of Croix-des-Bouquets, for its part, which is currently responsible for Corail camp, hesitated before becoming involved in Canaan as it did not want its involvement to legitimise what the population was doing. It asked central government to intervene. Since 2010, it has watched helplessly as the land in Canaan has been taken over and a vast neighbourhood has emerged anarchically, without any urban development measures being taken. But the passive position of the municipal authority can be explained in terms of the secondary role it has been given in the response and the reconstruction. The commune's situation has been made all the more difficult due to two issues which have emerged since the

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<sup>1</sup> Decree of 15 April 2010: "Within fifteen days, from the date of the publication of the present Decree, the landowners and leaseholders from the aforementioned area will present their ownership titles and all ownership rights documents to the provisional premises of the Direction Générale des Impôts at 62 Avenue Christophe". [Article 5]

earthquake: the first is that it has been the object of large-scale migration and the second is the structural weakness of local and regional authorities in Haiti.

Indeed, the commune of Croix-des-Bouquets is the biggest commune in Haiti, and it is the most likely to be involved in the extension of the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince, due to the vast plain that it includes. According to a former member of the Municipal Council, its population more than doubled following the earthquake of 12 January 2010, growing from 350 000 to more than 800 000 inhabitants, based on estimations made by the Croix-des-Bouquets municipal council in 2011 rather than on a physical census. The Corail-Cesseless *habitation*, including Canaan, and the entire neighbouring area have attracted a very large number of displaced people. This has created a major challenge in terms of management and administration for the local authority, whose budget and structure has not increased in proportion to the increase in needs.

The failure of city authorities is a constant feature of the last few decades in Haiti. Local and regional authorities are unable to fulfil their roles. As the main local governance bodies, municipal authorities should normally apply public policy in terms of urban development. But they are currently limited to a functional role. This failure is apparent in their inability to meet the needs of the city. After the earthquake, municipal authorities only played the part of extras, whereas they should have been playing a central role in any project carried out in the communes for the citizens. They therefore do not appear to be able to draw lessons from the disaster to build their capacity or develop specialist areas in terms of crisis response. The municipal authority of Croix-des-Bouquets is an example of this, with reduced personnel, a very small budget, a concentrated structure which can not cover or manage the territory properly, minimal services (not taking into account all the aspects of territorial and urban management) and extremely insufficient facilities.

The creation of Agents Techniques Locaux (ATLs)<sup>2</sup>, financed by the United Nations is aimed at strengthening the technical capacities of local administrations at this stage of the reconstruction. However, there are some doubts about what these ATLs will achieve. Is it realistic to expect that there will be the necessary synergy within municipal authorities for them to play their role appropriately? Is this reinforcement of municipal authorities really part of the government's strategy? If the government was not able to mobilize resources and establish a way to manage Canaan, how is the municipal authority of Croix-des-Bouquets, with its weaknesses, going to rise to the challenge, even if it has an ATL? What is more, how is this going to happen when the neighbourhood of Canaan is not yet "officially" recognized by the public authorities?

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<sup>2</sup> The ATLs are part of a vast Neighbourhood Support project. UNHabitat promoted a neighbourhood return approach which consisted of re-integrating displaced people into their original neighbourhoods, via their re-development. The Haitian Government even presented vast projects to transform certain poor neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince, which were to herald the advent of the new post-earthquake Port-au-Prince. A major reconstruction plan for the neighbourhood of Fort-National, located in the heart of the Capital, in the *quartier* of Bélair, was presented to the public. But the whole project was abandoned or postponed to an unspecified date. The neighbourhood return approach was retained, but without being on a large enough scale to effectively solve the current housing problem.

### ***4.3. Canaan and decision-makers' lack of forward planning***

It is quite obvious that there was no plan for responding to a major crisis in Haiti before 12 January 2010. The Haitian state had not taken into account the consequences of a possible earthquake, which had nevertheless been predicted in the metropolitan region of Port-au-Prince<sup>3</sup>. It therefore was not in a position to solve the population's immediate problems, such as housing. The upheaval caused by the earthquake, the reflections that followed about the fundamental reasons for the disaster and the massive presence of international organizations should nevertheless have made it possible to organize or at least limit the arrival of displaced people in Canaan. And yet, the same mechanisms which have been prevalent in Haitian urbanization for decades became established here: *laissez-faire* and denial. The same arguments were pronounced by the public authorities and international organisations (United Nations, donors and the majority of NGOs): Canaan did not exist, because Canaan was not supposed to exist. This denial is very similar to the attitude of certain municipal authorities from the metropolitan region who still refuse to admit that certain informal neighbourhoods exist despite the fact that they have been there for decades. Rather than attacking its root, this problem has been ignored and there is now a vast urban stain, which is getting more difficult to control each day and which feeds fantasies<sup>4</sup>. A partial and late response will only cause perverse effects and increase the human and financial cost of the response. It also suggests that the response strategy was not thought through globally, allowing the rapid development of a neighbourhood which has as many inhabitants as the population of an average Haitian town. In any case, Canaan perfectly illustrates the failings of the earthquake response strategy, from emergency relief to reconstruction.

### ***4.4. Canaan: the consequence of inadequate timing in the reconstruction strategy***

“One of the major challenges of the reconstruction phase is linked to how timescales are managed, considering that reconstruction policy refers to a period of around ten years (and probably much longer) whereas in the very short term there is the problem of the people who have settled – or are settling – in high-risk areas or still living in IDP camps” (Caroline Broudic, July 2012). The lack of transparency regarding the urban development plan adds to the population's concerns about decision-makers' real capacity to establish an ambitious reconstruction project. This defiance vis-à-vis the public authorities and international organizations results in the multiplication of individual solutions, via self-building for example, and Canaan is the perfect illustration of this.

### ***4.5. Canaan, while there is still time***

The future of Canaan is very unclear. As indicated before, the budget for the urbanization of the site is estimated to be more than 50 million US dollars, according to an urban development plan by SODADE.

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<sup>3</sup> Several major earthquakes have caused a lot of damage in Haiti's history. Two earthquakes took place in Port-au-Prince in 1751 and in 1770, which completely destroyed the city. Before 12 January 2010, the Haitian state had not invested in seismological research, but certain researchers and other informed people had been sounding the alarm that a large scale earthquake was imminent in the city (Claude Preptit: *Tremblements de terre en Haïti : mythe ou réalité*), Laboratoire national des Bâtiments publics and *Aléa et risque sismique en Haïti*. Bureau des mines et de l'Énergie). <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~ecalais/haiti/documents/preptit.pdf>. Calais E., (2002). L'aléa sismique en Haïti, cadre géographique et temporel.

<sup>4</sup> In *Le Nouvelliste*, Haiti's biggest daily newspaper, and *Alterpresse*, a major (critical) online media publication, Canaan is described as a pocket of poverty where tens of thousands of people live in dire poverty. The case of Canaan is judged by all to be regrettable (see, for example : *Les braves de Canaan II*. Published in *Le Nouvelliste*, 2012-04-09 ; *Corail Canaan (Haïti). Un nouveau bidonville ou un nouveau pôle urbain aux limites de Port au Prince?* by Paul Bodson, at a Conference organised by Quisqueya University and the UQUAM, in April 2012; *Haïti-séisme 2 ans : « Le Camp Canaan », terre promise ou misère dans un désert ?*, Thursday 12 January 2012 by *Alterpresse*).

These plans have not yet been made public, but there is serious doubt about how much the population was involved in their development. The fact that the land is no longer empty will need to be integrated into any future plans and development will have to be conducted with the population. It is important to note that certain leaders on the site have a genuine vision for the future of their neighbourhood. There is no doubt that the state – or any other external actor – could and should count on the potential of the inhabitants who have already taken numerous initiatives: planting of trees, road repairs, the setting up of organizations in almost every field, attempts to plan the space and especially the gradual improvement of temporary shelters (from tents to masonry houses) and the construction of new houses. The people have therefore gone to extraordinary lengths to make this area liveable in and viable. Nevertheless, self-development without support has its limits, notably for all questions linked to the collective interest or technical aspects of construction. Support from the state and local and regional authorities is therefore necessary in this critical period of continually increasing population density as is promulgated in the Housing, Habitat and Urban Development Policy document (UCLBP). The population of Canaan wants the state to be present, both for infrastructure and basic services (roads, water, electricity, schools, etc.) and for environmental protection (sanitation and agro-forestry).

In addition, at an individual level, support for self-building is inscribed in national policy: “The housing construction process in Haiti is primarily informal, and the majority of decisions are made by builders and households. Strategies which aim to improve the security and quality of housing should take this context into account and focus on building the capacity of these actors so that they adopt better practices. The promotion of norms and safer housing solutions will be based on gradual improvements, based on families’ trends and preferences, and the existing skills in the housing sector. The post-earthquake reconstruction provides unique opportunities to introduce and promote key improvements in the housing sector by responding to the collective desire to build safer homes in areas which are less exposed to natural risks. The activities linked to the reconstruction should also aim for the long-term adoption of practices to improve the security and the quality of housing throughout the country”.

The process of self-building is well underway in Canaan. Tents are gradually being replaced with masonry houses, with small patios, vegetation, kitchen gardens, etc. Nevertheless, technical support or access to credit would help to reduce physical and social risks for the future. Providing state services (EDH for electricity, the Ministry of Public Works and the Centre National des Equipements for road infrastructure, the Direction Nationale de l’Eau potable et de l’Assainissement, etc.) would already make it possible to resolve some of the major problems facing the population.

The controlled but concerted development of the site could also help to increase the number of houses for rent in the metropolitan region. The area is not yet completely saturated and it could attract private investment (some of the houses which are currently being built show that Canaan is not limited to social outcasts).

# Recommendations

Results of the study	Recommendations	Priority	Actors
1. For the moment, community-based organisations are the only bodies looking at environmental management initiatives. They are therefore alone in being able to play an important role in terms of the consolidation and preservation of the environment in the immediate future. <i>Report sections: 1.3 and 2.2.2</i>	Build the capacity of community-based organisations through training:	*	NGOs working in this area/ local organisations such as OSE-Assez/ government authorities (Environment Ministry, DPC, Croix-des-Bouquets municipal authority)
1.1. The inability to estimate and evaluate all environmental risks	1.1 Build the capacity of community-based organisations to estimate and evaluate different risk factors in terms of environmental degradation and their negative consequences for the population;	*	NGOs working in this area/ local organisations such as OSE-Assez/ government authorities (Environment Ministry, DPC, Croix-des-Bouquets municipal authority)
1.2. The major role that the population should play in consolidating and building a safer environment	1.2 Build the capacity of community-based organisations to raise awareness amongst the population about the care needed for individual actions (which may increase environmental risks) and the negative effects of an environment which has been degraded either individually or collectively in terms of health, social issues and disaster prevention.	*	NGOs working in this area/ local organisations such as OSE-Assez/ government authorities (Environment Ministry, DPC, Croix-des-Bouquets municipal authority)
1.3. The need for a strong organisation in charge of environmental issues which is representative, legitimate and is firmly based in the territory.	1.3 Reinforce, structure and extend organisations which are specialised in the environment		Local organisations/NGOs
2. Risk of the neighbourhood expanding into at risk areas which could affect the inhabitants' environment and safety. <i>Report sections: 1.2 and 3.1</i>	2. Map areas for construction and at-risk areas	*	Municipal authority, Local Organisations, Environment Ministry, Agriculture Ministry, MTPTC, MPCE, CIAT
		*	
3. Major initiatives have been launched for the protection of the environment. <i>Report sections: 1.3 and 2.3</i>	2. Consolidate, support and improve local environmental protection initiatives		NGOs working in this area/ local organisations such as OSE-Assez/ government authorities (Environment Ministry), DPC, Croix-des-Bouquets municipal authority

Results of the study	Recommendations	Priority	Actors
3.1. The need to support reforestation projects already underway with the involvement of a forestry officer.	<b>2.1.</b> Provide training in reforestation techniques, and provide technical expertise and resources.		NGOs working in this area/local organizations such as OSE-Assez/government authorities (Environment Ministry, Agriculture Ministry)
3.2. The need for a waste management system	<b>2.2.</b> Support and extend waste management projects underway, based on the responsibility of households Provide appropriate incinerators.	*	NGOs working in this area/ local organisations such as OSE-Assez/Croix-des-Bouquets municipal authority/ SMCRS/
3.3 The need for a sustainable sanitation system at the household level... (toilets, emptying, maintenance...)	<b>2.3.</b> Implement participatory ecological sanitation pilot projects (with re-use of waste for tree-growing initially) based on the expertise developed by the NGO, Our SOIL		DINEPA/local organisations/ NGOs/ Donors
4. The difficulty for households to get water. <i>Report sections: 2.3.1</i>	4. Establish a water supply system based on the assets available	*	DINEPA/local organisations/NGOs/donors
4.1. Water resources are not being used optimally	Improve the management of water for crops by means of techniques such as semi-circular bunds, pockets around bushes and stone lines. In addition to reducing erosion, this will allow the water table to recharge itself. Training in these techniques + demonstration site + monitoring of water table		Local organisations such as OSE-Assez/ the Agriculture Ministry/ Agricultural Engineering University/ NGOs
5. Lack of urban planning or development	5. Establish an urban development plan which will serve as a reference framework for future actions based on the present situation and the participation of the inhabitants.	*	Haitian government/NGOs/Donors
6. Lack of rules and constraints in the construction sector <i>Report section: 2.1</i>	6. Establish standards for houses to be built and implement “obligatory and restrictive” rules for construction, including housing	*	Croix-des-Bouquets Municipal Authority/ local organisations/ MTPTC/ NGOs/UCLBP/ATL
6.1. The inability of poorer people to build decent houses	6.1. Implement a programme of loans for housing construction which takes each family’s assets into account.	*	Croix-des-Bouquets municipal authority/ local organisations/ TPTC/ NGOs/ UCLBP/ ATL