The Dominican Response to the Haiti Earthquake
A NEIGHBOR’S JOURNEY

Authors
Johanna Mendelson Forman
Stacey White

November 2011
The Dominican Response to the Haiti Earthquake
A NEIGHBOR’S JOURNEY

Authors
Johanna Mendelson Forman
Stacey White

November 2011
About CSIS

At a time of new global opportunities and challenges, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) provides strategic insights and bipartisan policy solutions to decisionmakers in government, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society. A bipartisan, nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C., CSIS conducts research and analysis and develops policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke at the height of the Cold War, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways for America to sustain its prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world.

Since 1962, CSIS has grown to become one of the world’s preeminent international policy institutions, with more than 220 full-time staff and a large network of affiliated scholars focused on defense and security, regional stability, and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global development and economic integration.

Former U.S. senator Sam Nunn became chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees in 1999, and John J. Hamre has led CSIS as its president and chief executive officer since 2000.

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

Cover: The Haiti Relief Fund distributed supplies to people in Haiti on March 17, 2010, with the assistance of Haiti Relief Fund staff/volunteers, Haiti police, and the governments of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Photo by Hansy Thomas. © Haiti Relief Fund.

© 2011 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.

# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster Risk in the Dominican Republic</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Haiti Disaster: What Has It Taught Us?</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: List of Interviewees</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Authors</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Support for this project came from the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development and its sister institution, Fundación Global Democracia y Desarrollo (FUNGLODE), in the Dominican Republic. We are grateful to the foundation’s president, Natasha Despotovic, and its Washington director, Asunción Sanz, for their continuous encouragement and access to key leaders in the Dominican Republic. FUNGLODE also hosted a conference in the Dominican Republic in September 2011 to discuss the findings of the report with experts from government and civil society organizations.

We are grateful for assistance from CSIS Americas Program associate Caitlin Watson and program coordinator Michael Graybeal for their help with research and fact-checking. Stephen Johnson, director of the Americas Program and senior fellow, helped in many ways make this report a better product. Of course, the views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone.

Special thanks are due our colleagues Andrés Calderón of the Stephenson Disaster Management Institute of the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, and Colonel Norberto Cintron, chief engineer, U.S. Southern Command, for their generosity of time and spirit in participating in this project and providing us with valuable insights along the way.
THE DOMINICAN RESPONSE TO THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE
A NEIGHBOR’S JOURNEY

Johanna Mendelson Forman and Stacey White

Introduction

Some 18 months since the earthquake in Haiti, there remain many untold stories. One involves Haiti’s closest neighbor, the Dominican Republic. In the immediate aftermath of the quake, the Dominican Republic launched a massive cross-border emergency assistance mission to Haiti, providing critical medical assistance, logistics support, and humanitarian aid. In so doing, the Dominicans served as vital first responders to the crisis, reaching earthquake victims well before the arrival of any other international actors.

While the international community has generally applauded the Dominican response, it is not clear that people living outside this small Caribbean island truly understand its profound implications. Not only has the Dominican response to the Haiti earthquake had an impact on relations between the two countries, it has helped awaken the Dominican Republic to the risks posed by natural hazards. In particular, it underscored the need to think holistically about disasters and to minimize social vulnerabilities. It has also demonstrated the importance of self-help capabilities in a mega-crisis and highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of the country’s procedures for managing national disasters.

While the story of the Dominican Republic’s response to the earthquake is important to the island of Hispaniola, it also transcends it. Dominican action in Haiti suggests a new model of international disaster assistance in which a neighbor acting as a first responder precedes other international actors with differing motivations and capabilities. The Dominican story is that of a lower-income country1 with little experience in international response but with extensive know-how in managing its own, mostly weather-related, disasters. When the earthquake struck, the Dominican Republic possessed the perfect combination of geographic proximity, ground knowledge, and will to help, capabilities that proved indispensable to Haitians in the hours and days following the quake.

1. The Dominican Republic has a GDP of approximately US$50 billion and a per capita income one-tenth that of the United States. Some 40 percent of the population is said to live in poverty. See U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), World Factbook, Dominican Republic (Washington, D.C.), as available August 2011 at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/dr.html.
The Dominican response is instructive because it demonstrates the interdependence of risk in the modern era. Despite the many differences between the Dominican Republic and Haiti and the tensions that have existed between them, they depend on one another for survival. The Haiti earthquake revealed the environmental connections of these two countries as perhaps no other event in history. In a climate-fragile world with increasingly scarce resources, lessons from this experience can serve to

- Promote strategic thinking about the country’s disaster management agenda;
- Consolidate improved bilateral relations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti around disaster prevention and mitigation; and
- Flag potential opportunities for enhanced Dominican engagement in this area, regionally and internationally.

This report does not attempt to document the Dominican response to the earthquake in Haiti, an exercise that has already been initiated by the Dominican Civil Defense in collaboration with the UN Development Program (UNDP) in its publication *Misión Ayuda Humanitaria: Lecciones Aprendidas*. Instead, it seeks to examine the Dominican response as a starting point for discussion among Dominicans about long-term strategic goals of disaster management in the country.

The methodology for this report includes a brief literature review as well as interviews with 25 key informants. Interviewees represented a range of experts from government and nongovernment organizations (NGOs), both Dominican and international (see appendix list). In many instances, hard institutional data on Dominican disaster management actions were not available. Therefore, this report relies heavily on the personal impressions and perspectives of key disaster management actors, many of whom worked the Haiti disaster firsthand.

**Disaster Risk in the Dominican Republic**

Before analyzing the Dominican response to the Haiti earthquake, it is useful to study the disaster context before the 2010 earthquake and its aftermath (see figure 1). The Dominican Republic was not a country that considered itself immune to disaster risk before the Haiti earthquake. On the contrary, the Dominican Republic has long withstood the risk of earthquakes, seasonal hurricanes, flooding, storms, and heavy rains and is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the region.

---


3. Note that the researchers for this paper did not travel to the Dominican Republic to interview a larger sample of disaster management experts in the country, something that would have been useful in cross-checking information coming out of the interviews.
Physical Hazards

According to the Belgium-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) EM-DAT, the Dominican Republic has sustained 47 disasters over the last 30 years. Two of the more recent major disasters include Hurricane Gilbert of 1988 affecting nearly 2 million people and Hurricane Georges in 1998 affecting about a million people (see table 1).  

As far as disaster type, flooding is said to affect the majority of Dominicans followed by heavy storms (55.6 percent and 44.2 percent, respectively). Note that flooding is not always caused by hurricanes. Low-pressure systems, like that affecting the country in 2004, can bring exceptionally heavy showers and thunderstorms without the presence of a tropical cyclone.

---

5. Ibid.
Table 1. Hurricanes on Record That Have Hit the Dominican Republic, by category and areas affected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of hurricane</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Regions affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lili</td>
<td>21 September 1894</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Santo Domingo, southwestern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Zenon</td>
<td>3 September 1930</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Santo Domingo, south central coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>16 October 1955</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Barahona on western coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith</td>
<td>26-27 September 1963</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>La Romana on southeastern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inez</td>
<td>29 September 1966</td>
<td>4–3</td>
<td>Barahona on western coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beulah</td>
<td>10–11 September 1967</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Barahona on western coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloise</td>
<td>13 September 1975</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Northeast coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>31 August 1979</td>
<td>5–4</td>
<td>Santo Domingo, south central coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>22 September 1987</td>
<td>4–2</td>
<td>Southwestern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert</td>
<td>11 September 1988</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Southwestern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hortense</td>
<td>10 September 1996</td>
<td>3–1</td>
<td>East coast from Punta Cana to Samana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georges</td>
<td>22 September 1998</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Santo Domingo, La Romana, southeastern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne</td>
<td>16 September 2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>East coast, Samana, Puerto Plata</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel</td>
<td>October 2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Northeastern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga</td>
<td>December 2007</td>
<td>Tropical storm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustav</td>
<td>August 2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>South central coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>August–September 2008</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>North central coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ike</td>
<td>September 2008</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>North central coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Northeast coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomas</td>
<td>November 2010</td>
<td>2–1</td>
<td>North central coast</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: See http://dr1.com/articles/hurricanes/html and http://www.csc.noaa.gov/hurricanes/.#.

Epidemic disease is also a major hazard for Dominicans, and its risk is increased by tropical storms and flooding and by its shared border with Haiti. In 2009, 29 people died during the H1N1
epidemic in the region. More recently, the country is struggling to fight a cholera epidemic. As of early July 2011, 174 Dominicans had already died of the disease, and there were another 10,760 suspected cases.\footnote{Experts believe that the latest epidemic has been met with exceptional preparedness by the Dominican health community and perhaps would have been worse had they not managed it so well. Interview, August 2011. For more details on the epidemic, see “Dominican Republic: Possible Cholera Outbreak Pits Public Health, Doctors’ Guild,” H5N1, 12 May 2011, http://crofsblogs.typepad.com/h5n1/2011/05/dominican-republic-possible-cholera-outbreak-pits-public-health-doctors-guild.html.}

All in all, flooding, storms, and infectious disease have killed some 860 people in the Dominican Republic since 2000. While these crude numbers may seem small when compared to the major natural disasters of this century, it is important to remember that the Dominican Republic has only 10 million people. Given the country’s modest size, even so-called small disasters, particularly when recurrent, can adversely impact the life and livelihoods of the national society.

**Exposure to Risk**

What is important about risk reduction is that disaster risk is not just about the presence of physical hazards themselves. Rather, it is about exposure to these hazards, in terms of both human and economic assets.

Exposure to physical hazards is on the rise for two reasons. One has to do with massive population growth, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. The other reason has to do with rapid urbanization, not just in big cities, but also in middle-sized cities that are growing faster than the ability of governments to develop infrastructure and social services to absorb the new numbers of dwellers.

Interestingly, the most recent United Nations *Global Assessment Report* notes that the frequency of cyclones, flooding, and major storms has actually not changed significantly since the 1970s. However, exposure to these physical hazards has grown as populations and fixed assets have increased. This, in turn, has led to a rise both in disaster-affected people and economic damages. The report states that between 1970 and 2010, the average number of people exposed to flooding every year increased by 114 percent (from 32.5 to 69.4 million annually).\footnote{United Nations (UN), 2011 *Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Revealing Risk, Redefining Development* (New York: UN, 2011), Chapter 2, http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/2011/en/home/download.html.} At the same time, global physical exposure to tropical cyclones almost tripled (increasing by 192 percent).\footnote{Ibid.}

Such trend analysis is suitable for the Dominican Republic. The country’s population has grown threefold since the early 1970s. At the same time, it has urbanized rapidly over the last decades. The three largest cities, Santo Domingo, Santiago de los Caballeros (Santiago), and La Romana, have experienced significant expansion in the last 30 years and today represent some 4.5 million people or approximately 45 percent of the national population.\footnote{The CIA *World Factbook* notes that 69 percent of the country is urbanized.}
to keep up with the growth of these centers, and there is little control in their sprawling development.

In modern Santo Domingo, the trend in urban development has been to “build up.” Many observers fear that the taller high-rise buildings are not earthquake resistant due to a haphazard enforcement of building codes. As for the northern city of Santiago, experts are concerned about the risk of a compound disaster in the city that could be brought about by an earthquake. Santiago is built on a fault line and is situated near a dam that could overflow in the event of intense seismic activity.

Compounding the risks of urbanization is migration to coastal areas. Many cities—most notably Santo Domingo and La Romana—are on the coast where the rise of sea levels as a result of climate change is adversely impacting disaster risk. When municipalities expand without proper urban planning, there is an increased threat to residents living in flood plains and other insecure areas near the coast.

Besides population increases, there is a rise in the risk exposure of economic assets in the country. While the latest research shows that mortality risk to flooding has actually decreased globally since the 1990s, economic loss risk associated with floods and tropical cyclones has risen in all regions of the world. The most marked increases are occurring in larger Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economies, but the risk is rising in Latin America and the Caribbean as well. In the 1970s, average annual GDP exposed to floods stood at about 2.5 percent in the region. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, that number has risen to well over 5 percent. Low- and middle-income countries like the Dominican Republic have less capacity to absorb and recover from flood-inflicted losses because they are not as geographically and economically diverse, an important point for a small country.

Disaster Risk Governance

It is now widely accepted that good governance and strong national institutions are critical to the reduction of disaster risk. In a highly competitive globalized society, disaster risk can be minimized only through proactive decisions and political trade-offs that consider the direct causality as well as indirect feedback loops between economic development and long-term resilience.

In the current economic climate, many low- and middle-income countries are struggling with the governance of disaster risk and, in particular, with the management of prospective disaster risk. Prospective disaster risk management encompasses those actions that ensure that economic development does not add new risks to the accumulation of risk-prone economic assets. In other words, it represents actions that make certain that a country is not borrowing on its future resilience in order to do business today. Key activities include land-use planning that considers

11. UN, 2011 Global Assessment, Chapter 2.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
high-risk areas, improved and enforced building codes, water management, and environmental conservation efforts that seek to mitigate hazards through forestry, coastal, and agricultural soil protection.\textsuperscript{15}

The Dominican Republic is among the many countries challenged by the governance of disaster risk. It participates in the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation and was part of a regional diagnostic exercise conducted in 2009. The results noted that the Dominican Republic needed to expand its capacity to respond.\textsuperscript{16} While the country is also a signatory to the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (and has submitted two implementation progress reports, one for the period 2007–2009 and another more recent report for the period 2009–2011), many observers note that disaster risk management in the country is “heavy on words, light on action.”\textsuperscript{17} While some very good disaster-management legislation has been passed over the last decade, its implementation has been hampered by lack of financing, lack of institutional coordination, and lack of political will.

As an indication of where the Dominican Republic stands vis-à-vis its peers, the UN’s \textit{2011 Global Assessment Report} gave the Dominican Republic a <3 score on its progress in all priority areas of the Hyogo Framework, the lowest mark a country can receive for a submitted report.\textsuperscript{18} At the same time, the DARA Risk Reduction Index recently rated the Dominican Republic with a five out of ten on its index, trailing behind Costa Rica, Trinidad, Panama, Jamaica, and Cuba.\textsuperscript{19} The DARA index describes the main disaster risk governance troubles in the country as corruption, high levels of bureaucracy, lack of coordination among different levels of government, centralization in decisionmaking, and lack of institutional capacity.\textsuperscript{20}

In its defense, the Dominican Republic has been in a poor position to make large investments in the management of prospective disaster risk. As a small, lower-income country heavily dependent on tourism and remittances from abroad, the country’s growth assets depend highly on the global economic situation, one that has fluctuated wildly over the last five years.

At the same time, government investment in prevention troubles all countries. Generally, countries are able to craft legislation; they simply have a more difficult time applying it. This is

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., Introduction.
\textsuperscript{16} Interview, August 2011. (See the annex for a list of individuals interviewed. They are cited as informants, rather than by name, by agreement for these interviews.)
\textsuperscript{17} Interview, July–August 2011.
\textsuperscript{18} UN, \textit{2011 Global Assessment}, Chapter 4. The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) Monitor ranks countries on a list of core indicators toward reducing the risk of disaster losses. Indicators are scored from 1, “minor” achievement, to 5, “comprehensive” achievement.
\textsuperscript{19} And in front of El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Haiti (Haiti scored the lowest in the region at 2.2). See DARA, \textit{Risk Reduction Index: Analysis of the Capacities and Conditions for Disaster Risk Reduction—Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic}, Madrid, January 2011.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{21} Dominican Republic ranks 166 out of 227 countries in GDP per capita according to CIA, \textit{World Factbook}, 2011.
true even for large, industrial powers like the United States, as was demonstrated during Hurricane Katrina.

The Haiti Disaster: What Has It Taught Us?

Impact on the National Disaster Management Agenda: A Call to Urgency

In light of the disaster in Haiti, a major attitude shift has occurred among Dominicans. People no longer feel that they can hesitate to act. Instead, Dominicans stress that the country will have to move beyond rhetoric on disaster risk management to hands-on implementation if communities will be able to adequately resist disasters to come. While political will now exists to invest in disaster management because of the Haiti earthquake, action continues to be hampered by a lack of urgency and a lack of national ownership.

In terms of the country’s current disaster management capabilities, the Dominican Republic has an admirable reputation for disaster preparedness and response. The operation of Dominican Civil Defense, headed by a military officer and incorporating tens of thousands of volunteers, is an example of a whole-of-government approach coordinated through the country’s national regulations on risk mitigation and disaster management. The engagement of civil society in disaster response is also well organized. The Dominican Disaster Mitigation Association (ADMD) is dedicated to vulnerability reduction in communities, organizations, and businesses prone to natural hazards. Since the mid-1990s, with the support of the Organization of American States, ADMD has trained more than 150,000 beneficiaries around the country, organizing workshops and providing technical support to communities.

During the latest tropical storm, Emily, experts agreed that the government, through its Center of Emergency Operations, handled the situation competently. Public alerts were well-coordinated, and evacuation planning seemed satisfactory. Intergovernmental roles and responsibilities in these areas were clearly identified and followed. Perhaps there could have been a greater professionalization given that Dominican Civil Defense is still largely made up of volunteers, but the government seemed to be harnessing the power of these young volunteers in a positive manner, gradually building their technical skills for improved performance.

Where the country needs to make headway is in prevention and risk reduction. Many observers interviewed for this report feel that the government is taking too great a risk by not investing more consistently in prevention and planning on the basis of past disasters rather than on the

24. Dominican Civil Defense depends highly on a network of national volunteers. There are approximately 40,000 of them, but their degree of training varies greatly. During the response to Haiti, 500 young volunteers participated at the border in Operación Mano a Mano, experience useful for training more volunteers in other parts of the country. Ibid.
anticipated intensity and probable location of disasters of the future. Moreover, funding for prevention still comes almost exclusively through loans and grants from the international community,25 with little national ownership of the issue.

The private sector must also engage more consistently on this issue. The economic exposure of capital investments in industries such as tourism and agriculture among others requires that businesses become more seriously involved in disaster prevention. Many interviewees for this study felt an urgent need to bring business leaders into prevention efforts to help implement new regulations, particularly as relates to the enforcement of building codes. The impressive growth of the Dominican Republic over the last decades could easily be wiped out if key infrastructure were damaged or destroyed by natural hazards. Attention to prevention measures requires coordination not only with relevant government agencies, but also with commercial institutions influencing planning and development in the country.

When asked whether the country’s historical reputation of environmental conservation is helpful to the agenda of reducing disaster risk, interviewees explained that there seemed to be little focus on the importance of conserving environmental resources in the country as a tool in reducing disaster risk. While the grassroots NGO environmental movement in the country is a positive force, there is greater need to educate average citizens about the connections between environmental conservation and natural disasters.

These ongoing challenges notwithstanding, the government should be applauded for a number of its disaster management efforts. Some such accomplishments include the following:

- In January 2011, the Dominican Congress issued an important set of regulations to implement the 2002 Law 147-02 on disaster risk management. They address disaster prevention, mitigation, and emergency management and outline a clear system of cooperation within government in the event of a disaster. They also call for the creation of several technical committees to handle different aspects of disaster management.26 Finally, they outline rules about what government can do when the president declares a disaster and clarify issues such as eminent domain—the right to seize property—for emergencies and chain of command.27

---

25. Main funders in this area include the European Commission (through the European Development Fund), the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations, and the Spanish government. U.S. support to the government has been focused on disaster response and preparedness through USAID.

26. Among the technical committees under the National Committee on Emergencies are (1) Comité Técnico de Prevención y Mitigación, (2) Centro de Operaciones de Emergencia (COE), and (3) Equipo Consultivo. There are also several sub-directorates also involved in the national chain of command on disaster management. See Government of the Dominican Republic, Ley No. 147-02 Sobre Gestión de Riesgos y Su Reglamento de Aplicación, El Congreso Nacional de la Republica Dominicana, Santo Domingo, January 2011.

27. The new regulations organized the country into more concise territorial regions for managing disasters. There are now nine separate designated regions rather than more simplistic designations of north, south, east, and west. These new designations are associated with major municipal centers in the country.
The regulations demonstrate a unified and coordinated government approach. They also call for an administrative body to manage resources for disasters—the Fondo Nacional de Prevencion, Mitigacion y Repuesta ante Disastres. This body has a threefold mandate: (1) prevention of risk, (2) emergency support to affected populations, and (3) reconstruction. While the government of Spain reportedly allocated €4 million to the fund for the period 2008–2012, the fund is still much a work in progress and does not yet operate. Still, it is a first step toward a serious disaster management strategy.

- The government has also collaborated with the Inter-American Development Bank to establish a Natural Disaster Insurance Facility that offers a multiyear insurance scheme for individual emergency response needs in the case of a large disaster. The Dominican Congress is currently reviewing this scheme, one made possible through a $24 million loan.28

- Besides insurance, the government has also issued a new executive order (24 March 2011) guiding minimum standards of structural safety for building construction. The executive order addresses non-enforcement of building codes, stressing the need to observe standards on all buildings constructed since 1979 through the cooperation of urban planners, engineers, building developers, and architects.29

- The Dominican Republic has recently produced its first-ever development strategy, a document that includes disaster risk reduction as an integral aspect of development planning. The document is a 20-year plan (2010–2030) to be approved by the Dominican congress in September–October 2011.30

- In addition, there is an ongoing pilot project to enhance risk management in five municipalities with money from the Inter-American Development Bank. The program is coordinated at the federal level by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. It comprises a budget of $5 million and is scheduled to run from 2009 to 2013.31

- The government recently completed, in collaboration with UNDP, a large preparedness program engaging 12 government institutions. The program was focused on information management, preparedness, and prevention and is said to have been critical to the training of Civil Defense volunteers active in the Haiti response. The program ran from 2006 to 2010 on a $9 million budget funded by the European Development Fund.32

In addition to actions of the government, the smaller activities of a strong civil society cannot be understated. The World Bank, whose “Haiti Support Program” received $181,000 from the Bank’s Civil Society Fund, benefited 13 groups. As a World Bank representative noted about the work of the Dominican organizations, “when it comes to work in the defense of the most needy, civil

30. Interview, July–August 2011.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
society doesn’t know borders.” The Dominican Republic has a competent cadre of nongovernmental organizations essential to an integrated approach to national disaster management. As noted above, the Dominican Association on Disaster Management, an umbrella group that brings together all domestic organizations, holds regular trainings for both national and municipal groups to build disaster preparedness capacity.

**Impact on Bilateral Relations: A Defining Moment**

> No one, and I mean no one, expected anything from Dominicans after the quake; yet look at what happened: Dominican rescue workers were the first to enter Haiti. They arrived within hours of the quake, and in the crucial first days of the crisis, while the international community was getting its act together, Dominicans shifted into Haiti vital resources that were the difference between life and death for thousands of victims. —Junot Diaz

Living adjacent to a chronically fragile and poverty-stricken country cannot be easy for Dominicans, particularly when their country is also struggling to contend with an increasingly competitive globalized world. Haiti’s annual GDP before the earthquake never rose above US$6 billion; the Dominican Republic’s is well over US$50 billion. Haiti places 115 out of 137 on the Millennium Development Goals Progress Index; in contrast, the Dominican Republic ranks 34. A startling 80 percent of Haitians live in poverty compared to only 40 percent of Dominicans. With a relatively stable regional economy, the Dominican Republic has a promising future. Less optimism can be expressed about Haiti. Although Haitian businessmen aspire to have a growth rate comparable to the Dominican Republic in 15 years, this will be difficult to attain, and the two countries will likely continue to exist in stark contrast with one another for some time.

Jared Diamond notes in his book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* that the Dominican Republic is affected by Haiti more than any other country, given the countries’ shared environmental ecosystem and porous border. Still, the countries have not had an easy past. With everything from occupations, massacres, heritages, and inter-island competition to strained bilateral relations over the decades, citizens of the two countries have been understandably distrustful of one another.

Most of that seemed to change with the earthquake. Despite years of mutual suspicion, the catastrophe resulted in a near-instantaneous outpouring of Dominican support to earthquake-affected Haitians. Search and rescue as well as medical teams went to the border immediately. Authorities made ambulances and helicopters available within hours. Santo Domingo became an international logistics center with cargo planes flying in from all over the world. The border with Haiti at Jimani opened without restriction and stayed that way for months, creating another critical humanitarian corridor for the delivery of international assistance into devastated Port-au-

---

Prince. And in the midst of all this, life-saving food and water were being trucked over by
government agencies, by private companies, and by ordinary Dominican citizens.36

While there are reports that some Haitians were distrustful of Dominican assistance, most
Haitians seemed grateful for Dominican help.37 And the good will has gone well beyond the
immediate relief phase. For example, the current cholera epidemic and tax levy disputes at the
border threatened to reverse the rapprochement between the two countries. Still, most observers
believe that the handling of these recent challenges demonstrates just how much better bilateral
relations are and assert that despite the inevitable problems ahead, relations between Haiti and
the Dominican Republic will remain significantly improved.

Since President Leonel Fernández took office in 2006, Dominican support to Haiti has been a
central aspect of his foreign policy. With the earthquake response, Fernández has been able to
expand his policy. He reaffirmed Dominican solidarity with the Haitian people at a global summit
in Punta Cana. He declared his desire to have his country be a "partner in creating a better future
in Haiti."38 According to experts interviewed for this study, the Dominican people not only feel
closer to Haitians since the earthquake, they are increasingly aware that its own future survival is
inextricably linked to its less fortunate neighbor. Dominicans initially witnessed the disaster in
Haiti as something that would never happen to them because of their country’s more advanced
development. However, they came to realize that the economic damages of a similar event would
actually be worse in the Dominican Republic because of its greater level of infrastructure and asset
exposure. There are shared dependencies as well, associated with both countries’ access to the
productive bases of society. Food security, energy production, and water management are all
central to the survival of both countries.

Despite the many reasons for the two countries to come together, extensive challenges remain.
For one, it may be difficult for the Dominican Republic to engage with a state with few
functioning institutions.39 The fragility of the Haitian state has plagued the country for years, and
the inability of Michel Martelly’s government to form a cabinet after his first 100 days in office
does not bode well for future bilateral cooperation. Second, there remains an ongoing and real
distrust of Dominicans among Haitians who have felt exploited in the Dominican Republic or
were forcibly returned.40

36. International humanitarian experts say they have never experienced government cooperation such as
that offered by the Dominicans in the initial hours of the response. Interviews, July–August 2011.
37. Interview, July–August 2011.
38. Government of the Dominican Republic, *Cumbre Mundial por el Futuro de Haití: Solidaridad Mas
39. An interviewee for this study explained that during a joint training with the Haitian National Police,
the capacity of Haitian partners was limited.
40. Trenton Daniel and Jacqueline Charles, "Dominican Guards Tighten the Border," *Miami Herald*, 30
October 2010.
Additionally, the trafficking of both people and drugs at the countries’ common border continues to cause tensions. A bane well before the earthquake, border security has deteriorated further.\(^{41}\) The Dominican Republic has to be open to trade and movement but also constantly vigilant that there is not an overspill of political instability from Haiti. Improved common protocols on the enforcement of border security will be required to ensure that social vulnerabilities do not render both countries more susceptible to physical hazards.

Still, collaboration between health ministries and other medical professionals around the cholera epidemic that began in October 2010 continues to this day. While the two countries could have held back information about the epidemic or used it for “finger-pointing,” international health officials indicate that the situation could have been more dire had transnational medical networks and cooperation between health systems been less strong than they currently are.\(^{42}\)

Also, the Haiti earthquake has resulted in renewed political energy around the Comisión Mixta de Relaciones Binacional (Binational Mixed Commission), a bilateral organization that had largely been defunct since 2000. Over the last 18 months, however, the commission has met three times. Furthermore, President Fernández and former president René Préval signed a joint agreement on 31 July 2010 establishing a secretariat for the commission in Santo Domingo as a means to make the arrangement more operational. For his part, President Fernández has expressed his desire to create a “strategic alliance between his country and Haiti,” and hopefully the improved goodwill between Fernández and Préval will continue with the Martelly administration.\(^{43}\)

Finally, Dominicans have pledged $50 million in support of Haiti reconstruction. Most of that amount will be used to build a university in Haiti at Limonade, Cap Haitian. This initiative was announced at the United Nations’ International Donor’s Conference in March 2010. Construction of the university is reportedly under way, scheduled to open in January 2012.\(^{44}\) This new institution of higher learning could provide a strong foundation for addressing issues of concern to both countries. For example, the school could consider a program to educate both Haitians and Dominicans on disaster management. Such training would facilitate strong individual relationships as well as professional networks between peoples of shared disaster risk.

---

\(^{41}\) For more on human trafficking at the Dominican-Haitian border, see Jairon Severino, “Reglamento Sísmico ya Esta en Vigor: Establece los Requerimientos Mínimos Que se deben Cumplir en el Analysis Sísmico de Todas las Estructuras en el País” in El Diario, 4 August 2011. Also important to note is that the Dominican Republic is a tier-two country with “watch list” status. This reflects the increase in trafficking at the border since 2010. See U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 2011, Washington, D.C., 2011, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/164454.pdf.

\(^{42}\) Interview, July–August 2011.

\(^{43}\) Martelly has vowed to defend the interests of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, while also calming Dominican concerns over the flow of Haitian migrants. See Lawrence Allan, “Haitian President-elect Martelly Discusses Bilateral Concerns with Dominican Counterpart Fernandez” in Global Insight, 6 May 2011.

\(^{44}\) “Dominican Leader Unveils Planned $30M University,” Dominican Today, 13 January 2011.
Impact on Regional Outlook: Potential for Leadership in Disaster Management

The response of the Dominican Republic to the Haiti earthquake has awakened the country to its potential strength and capacity in this area of international relations. Previously limiting its disaster focus to events of a national scale, the country’s earthquake response demonstrated that it has real capabilities in this area and much to offer its regional neighbors.

The Dominican response also revealed that international disaster management is a central aspect of modern statehood. It can be used to build societal resilience. It can also be employed to enhance diplomatic relations and to encourage foreign investment. The Dominican Republic, while not a large country, can now demonstrate through a continued commitment to national disaster management that small countries are both willing and able to develop competent self-help capabilities and progressive priorities for disaster risk reduction. Given its profile, the Dominican Republic could elaborate its agenda for disaster management, expand its collaborative networks, and show itself as a regional leader in this area.

The earthquake response also revealed to Dominicans that there is good reason to engage with countries of all sorts across the Caribbean. Their traditional reliance on cultural ties with Spanish-speaking Latin America is no longer enough. The Dominican Republic should now engage more consistently with English-speaking Caribbean countries, many of which share similar disaster risk profiles. Seismic risks across the region require that these countries interact with each other to mitigate the potential consequences of a large earthquake to the greatest extent possible. While the Haiti quake seemed to come out of nowhere, seismologists have since pointed out that the area is highly prone to earthquakes that could result in tsunamis and other devastating consequences across a number of countries at once. Seismic activity in urban centers will be discussed among regional leaders. Although Port-au-Prince was the most recent example of what can happen, an 8.0 earthquake and tsunami did hit Santo Domingo as recently as 1946.45

There are a number of ways that the Dominican Republic could engage in the Caribbean. Although it is not a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), it is part of the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM). CARIFORUM is a cooperative arrangement between CARICOM countries and the Dominican Republic. In the past, the Dominican Republic did not have a great interest in the smaller economies of CARICOM. However, since the earthquake there has been more movement in CARIFORUM to build improved networks and more interest on the part of both sides to collaborate across a range of issues, some of which could include aspects of disaster risk management. CARICOM has a strong disaster management facility, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), with which the Dominican Republic currently has no strong relationship. It could be useful for the Dominican Republic to find a way to partner with CDEMA even if it is not to become a formal member of CARICOM.

Whatever it chooses to do, the Dominican Republic will wish to expand its collaborative networks across the region. The recent experience in Haiti gives it a lot of experience to share with regional neighbors.

**Conclusion**

The Dominican response to the Haiti earthquake stands as a transformational event. It put the nation on the international stage as first responder, as good neighbor, and as a humanitarian assistance hub and corridor. According to the report of the summit held in Puerta Plata in June 2011, the leadership of President Leonel Fernández and his cabinet, his armed forces, and civilian defense officials was extraordinary. Citizens also responded with demonstrations of volunteerism and charity. In the face of a massive disaster, the Dominican nation stood with the world community as an equal in saving lives.

The disaster offers many opportunities for change and great challenges as well. Hopefully, the earthquake in Haiti will serve as a catalyst to developing a true agenda for disaster management in the country. Specifically, the Dominican Republic can capitalize on its recent experience in three areas:

- It can work harder to implement the new Dominican regulations on disaster risk management by funding of building code enforcement, adequate training of civil defense volunteers, and investments in disaster risk reduction. Also, more work is needed in the area of seismic preparedness.

- The Dominican Republic can expand its collaborative networks for disaster risk management in the Caribbean region beyond its traditional political and cultural ties to reach out to neighboring small island countries and to engage with them as an established leader in disaster preparedness and response and as a good regional citizen.

- Finally, as a small state sharing an island with Haiti, it can use this disaster as a point of departure for serious bilateral discussions that move beyond the issue of disaster-induced migration to encompass larger social and political problems of the two countries, problems exacerbated by a shared and porous border.

During President Fernández’ visit to the White House in July 2010, President Obama remarked:

> I think that the Dominican Republic’s role, President Fernandez’s role in particular, in helping facilitate a rapid response was extraordinarily important. It saved lives and it continues as we look at how we can reconstruct and rebuild in Haiti a way that is good not only for the people of Haiti but also good for the region as a whole.\(^{47}\)

---


A year has passed since President Obama made those remarks. Since then President Fernández and his government have watched patiently as Haiti’s new government comes to terms with its multiple responsibilities. Fernández recently met with President Michel Martelly and reiterated his desire to work on a common agenda beneficial to both countries and to include such issues as migration, reconstruction, and regional development.

The earthquake has helped to build trust and solidarity. But trust, to be sustained, will require the hard work of both Dominicans and Haitians starting with a commitment to reduce disaster risks. Trust will also require that Dominicans work with Haitian authorities to develop a more realistic immigration policy that reflects the Dominican Republic’s economic need for labor, but also creates safe passage for Haitian migrants. Human trafficking of women and children and slavery are real problems. Only when both countries acknowledge the gravity of these crimes can they act jointly to prevent them.

The Binational Mixed Commission should develop a work agenda that addresses some of the most pressing bilateral issues. The international community, for its part, must also remain engaged in helping to reinforce the leadership role that President Fernández has managed so well. Ultimately, the survival of *Quisqueya*, the native name for Hispaniola, must be the prize to which both nations aspire. While Haiti has a steeper hill to climb, it is gratifying to hear Haitian business leaders talk hopefully of their country achieving the development levels of the Dominican Republic as a goal in the coming decade.48


While Dominican society realizes that it dodged a bullet with the Haiti earthquake, it may not be so lucky in the future, particularly given the constant movement of the Enriquillo-Plaintain Garden fault. Not only is this great fault moving under the island of Hispaniola, but also under the greater Eastern Caribbean. If the Dominican Republic can now stay the course to strengthen its national disaster capabilities and encourage regional networks across the Caribbean, the Haiti disaster can stand as something more than just a senseless tragedy. It can serve as a teaching experience for the peoples of both countries.
APPENDIX

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

1. Sergio Abreu; Director, Dominican Republic; World Vision
2. Caroline Rose Avila; Director, Haiti; World Vision
3. Joelle Bastein; Office of Haiti Special Coordinator; U.S. State Department
4. Tim Callaghan; Regional Director, Latin America; USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Costa Rica
5. Norberto Cintron; Chief Engineer; U.S. Southern Command
6. Eduardo Gamarra; Professor and Adviser to the President; Florida International University
7. Alvaro Garcia Negro; Project Team Leader, Dominican Republic; Inter-American Development Bank
8. Rosalia Gitau; Liaison Officer; International Organization for Migration (IOM) Haiti
9. Steve Hansch; Haiti Research Team; Development Assistance Research Associate (DARA)
10. Valerie Julliand; Resident Coordinator and United Nations Resident Representative, Development Programme; Dominican Republic
11. Auriana Koutnik; Information Specialist; USAID/OFDA, Costa Rica
12. Gustavo Lara; Director; Red Cross, Dominican Republic
13. David Luther; Executive Director; Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral
14. Gustavo More; Architect; Independent
15. Edmond Mulet; Former Special Representative; UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)
16. Gregory Nasser; Haiti Desk Officer/Senior Analyst; U.S. Southern Command
17. Ivan Ogando; Director General; CARIFORUM
18. Edward Olivares; Director of Operations; Centro de Emergencia
19. Liz Parra; Epidemiologist; Pan American Health Organization
20. Luis Luna Paulino; Executive Director; Defensa Civil
21. Gil Ramirez; Former Chief Brigade, General; Border Patrol
22. Jorge Requeni; Deputy Representative, Dominican Republic; Inter-American Development Bank

23. Ugo Solinas; Haiti Desk Officer/Senior Analyst; United Nations Peacekeeping Office

24. Rosalia Trejo; Deputy Director; Section on Disaster Mitigation, Organization of American States (OAS)

25. Marc Van Wynsberghe; Project Manager, Dominican Republic; United Nations Development Programme
APPENDIX
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

1. Sergio Abreu; Director, Dominican Republic; World Vision
2. Caroline Rose Avila; Director, Haiti; World Vision
3. Joelle Bastein; Office of Haiti Special Coordinator; U.S. State Department
4. Tim Callaghan; Regional Director, Latin America; USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Costa Rica
5. Norberto Cintron; Chief Engineer; U.S. Southern Command
6. Eduardo Gamarra; Professor and Adviser to the President; Florida International University
7. Alvaro Garcia Negro; Project Team Leader, Dominican Republic; Inter-American Development Bank
8. Rosalia Gitau; Liaison Officer; International Organization for Migration (IOM) Haiti
9. Steve Hansch; Haiti Research Team; Development Assistance Research Associate (DARA)
10. Valerie Julliand; Resident Coordinator and United Nations Resident Representative, Development Programme; Dominican Republic
11. Auriana Koutnik; Information Specialist; USAID/OFDA, Costa Rica
12. Gustavo Lara; Director; Red Cross, Dominican Republic
13. David Luther; Executive Director; Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral
14. Gustavo More; Architect; Independent
15. Edmond Mulet; Former Special Representative; UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH)
16. Gregory Nasser; Haiti Desk Officer/Senior Analyst; U.S. Southern Command
17. Ivan Ogando; Director General; CARIFORUM
18. Edward Olivares; Director of Operations; Centro de Emergencia
19. Liz Parra; Epidemiologist; Pan American Health Organization
20. Luis Luna Paulino; Executive Director; Defensa Civil
21. Gil Ramirez; Former Chief Brigade, General; Border Patrol
22. Jorge Requeni; Deputy Representative, Dominican Republic; Inter-American Development Bank

23. Ugo Solinas; Haiti Desk Officer/Senior Analyst; United Nations Peacekeeping Office

24. Rosalia Trejo; Deputy Director; Section on Disaster Mitigation, Organization of American States (OAS)

25. Marc Van Wynsberghe; Project Manager, Dominican Republic; United Nations Development Programme
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allan, Laurence. “Haitian President-elect Martelly Discusses Bilateral Concerns with Dominican Counterpart Fernandez.” In Global Insight, 6 May 2011.


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Johanna Mendelson Forman is a senior associate with the Americas Program at CSIS and with the William E. Simon Chair in political economy, where she works on renewable energy, the Americas, civil-military relations, and post-conflict reconstruction. A former codirector of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project, she has written extensively on security-sector reform in conflict states, economic development in postwar societies, the role of the United Nations in peace operations, and energy security. In 2003, she participated in a review of the post-conflict reconstruction effort of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq as part of a CSIS team.

Mendelson Forman also brings experience in the world of philanthropy, having served as the director of peace, security, and human rights at the UN Foundation. She has held senior positions in the U.S. government at the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Bureau for Humanitarian Response, and the Office of Transition Initiatives, as well as at the World Bank’s Post-Conflict Unit. She has been a senior fellow with the Association of the United States Army and a guest scholar at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Most recently, she served as a senior adviser to the UN’s special representative to Haiti in 2005–2006.

An experienced educator, Mendelson Forman has had extensive experience in the education world. She directed the Democracy Project at American University for many years and also managed the Washington Semester’s Foreign Policy Program at the same university. She taught the introductory area studies courses at the Foreign Service Institute’s program on Latin America. She is a frequent lecturer at the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and the Army War College and is currently on the adjunct faculty of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies. She also holds a research faculty appointment at the American University in Washington, D.C. Most recently, she served as an adviser on civil-military relations to USAID and as a senior adviser to the UN Mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH.

Mendelson Forman is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She also serves on the advisory board of Latin American Security Network, RESDAL. In 2005 she founded the Latin American and Caribbean Council on Renewable Energy, LAC-CORE. She holds a JD from Washington College of Law at American University, a PhD in Latin American history from Washington University, St. Louis, and a master’s of international affairs, with a certificate of Latin America studies, from Columbia University in New York. She is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese.

Stacey White is a senior research consultant with the CSIS Program on Crisis, Conflict, and Cooperation (C3), where she focuses on the intersections between natural disaster risk
management and governance. In particular, she considers the effects of disaster risk on intra- and inter-state governance dynamics and in creating broader social, economic, and political change. She is currently studying the influence of natural disasters on decentralization processes across a number of crisis settings. She also recently completed projects on the impact of the Pakistani floods on subnational governance in the country and on the role of disaster risk management in promoting regionalism in Asia.

Prior to her work at CSIS, White served as a senior researcher for the Humanitarian Futures Programme (HFP) at King’s College London, where she concentrated on the future of humanitarianism, crisis driver identification, and organizational strategic development for the future. Over the course of her career, she has worked with a number of different UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations in the area of humanitarian action with a focus on coordination, knowledge management, and sector-wide learning. First-hand humanitarian experience includes time in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Burundi, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan. She received an LLM in international human rights law from the University of Essex, an MA in international relations from the University of Chicago, and a BA from the University of California at Berkeley.
The Dominican Response to the Haiti Earthquake

A NEIGHBOR’S JOURNEY

Authors
Johanna Mendelson Forman
Stacey White

November 2011