Haitian Conflict Resolution Program

Objective: To create a summary and balanced portrayal of the Haitian Conflict Resolution Project to better understand its effectiveness and inadequacies.

Haiti: A Brief Recent History

In 1990, democratically elected President Aristide was ousted from power by the military regime directed by Joseph Nerette who became the new president. Aristide was reinstated as the president of the democratically elected government in late 1994. In 1995, elections were held and Rene Preval of Aristide’s Lavalas party was elected to a constitutionally limited five-year term of president. During the Aristide and Preval terms the government had to be rebuilt in every administrative sector. The most prominent focus of reforms was the judicial and police systems. Reforms spurred by Haitian President Aristide have provided an opportunity for the exchange of information to assist the Haitians in their judicial reform endeavors. Broad corruption and violence within the judicial system has made reform difficult and halting. The population of Haiti is very ethnically, politically, and economically diverse making consensus difficult to achieve. (U.S. Dept of State, 1996) This endemic problem of the Haitian judicial system incited USAID to fund the Center for Governmental Responsibility’s conflict resolution program. (CGR, 1995)

Goals of the Conflict Resolution Program

The nature of the project was to take a small team of conflict resolution experts into Haiti to make contact with influential educators and policy makers and to give them the tools to make more inclusive satisfactory agreements in their work.
The hope is that through educating key members in the Haitian government and education system this information will be disseminated and more readily accepted by the governmental elite and the local population. Because of the small scale and limited funding, the program was not expected to have widespread social structural change. Rather, its design intends the program to reach a small group of people and to give them a through understanding of alternative method of conflict resolution to violence and demonstrations of power and to have these techniques be used in local conflict resolution scenarios.

**Program Staff**

*The following is a summary of the program staff as presented in the program proposal paper generated by the Center for Governmental Responsibility.*

The Center for Governmental Responsibility was the organization behind the structure of the project. They have worked on several international undertakings that promoted mediation and conflict resolution in the host nation.

**JoAnn Klein** is the CGR’s Assistant Director and was the Co-Principal Investigator on the project.

**Jon Mills** is the CGR’s Director and went as a liaison on the first trip to Haiti. He also served as the Principal Investigator on this program and to the Brazil and Poland USIA programs. A ten-year veteran of the Florida House of Representatives and a former Speaker of the House, he now teaches Florida Constitutionals Law, International Environmental Law and Legislative Drafting for the UF College of Law.
Robert Moberly was a trainer and helped modify the curriculum of the project. He is a Professor of Law at UF’s College of Law and serves and is a member of multiple committees’ advising the state and national government on rules and qualification for mediators. Some of these committees include the Standing Committee on Mediation and Arbitration Rules for the Florida Supreme Court and Alternative Dispute Resolution Section of the American Association of Law Schools.

Terry McCoy works for the UF Latin American Studies Department and helped to direct the Florida’s team orientation.

Michael J. Lenaghan worked with the 15 Haitian in the multi-cultural orientation program hosted at Miami-Dade Community College, where he is chairperson of the History/Political Science Department.

Ertha Pascal-Trouillot is one the first female Haitian judges as well as the founder of a NGO called FONDEPT and author of multiple books on the Haitian judicial system.

Sharon Press is a Florida Supreme Court county and family mediator. She teaches mediation at FSU, is an arbitrator at the Better Business Bureau, and is the Director of the Florida Dispute Resolution Center. She was one of the three member team of trainers sent on the first visit to Haiti and went back on most of the subsequent trips for additional training.

William Primus helped to develop the Haitian program and he is the Knight Foundation Teaching Chair of Political Science at Miami-Dade Community College, North Campus.
Kely Tabuteau works as a consultant to Cheechi Company and Consulting, Inc. She works on the Administration of Justice Project in Haiti and worked as the director for the pro bono Legal Assistance Program for Amicale des Juristes as a lawyer.

Thomas Taylor is the Assistant Director of the Florida Conflict Consortium and was key in developing the Haiti program. He has organized many workshops and trainings on conflict resolution and organizational communications and has prior experience in this region by conducting “negotiations training sessions for a group of Haitian educators” through FSU. Dr. Taylor was one of the three trainers on the initial trip to Haiti. (CGR, 1995)

Program Participants

Program Attendees were selected by the CGR from a variety of backgrounds representing government, schools, women’s groups, universities, legal profession, and multiple NGO’s. The participants of the group were selected based on the professional specification listed above and some specific criteria based on the evaluation of each individual participant.

The Criteria were:

- “People engaged in formal or informal conflict resolution process,”
- “People working in an institution or organization…identified as potential clearinghouse for conflict resolution,”
- “People committed to returning to Haiti to establish a conflict resolution program,”
- “People of diverse backgrounds representing the different regions in Haiti,”
- “People who are open minded to new information,
- “People (real or perceived) position in community,”
- And “people who are engaged in non-criminal conflict resolution.”

(CGR Workshop Participant Selection, 1997)
The program ended in 1999 having trained 517 people in basic alternative conflict resolution at a cost of $612.44 according to the project summary created by the CGR. Fifteen Haitians came to Florida to observe conflict resolution programs in action. (CGR Project Summary, 1999)

The Program
*Material in this section was gathered from the impressions of Sharon Press and Tom Taylor, two of the original three instructors in the first workshop. A timeline and examples of the course material from the first workshop can be found at the end of the case study.

Over the course of four years and five workshops the program began to develop and became more streamline and contained more culturally significant material. This evolutionary process began with the three initial instructors on the first workshop trip in December of 1996. Tom Taylor and Sharon Press, who were interviewed for the purposes of this case study, both felt that the first workshop was an overall success. However, both stipulated that modification to the curriculum were necessary as a reaction to the experience of the first workshop. The primary criticism was the desire for more culturally sensitive coursework to be used in the classroom. Other criticisms by the instructors were the time constraints of the workshops and the ineffectiveness of having three instructors teaching, and a local staffing problem. The staffing conflict was worked out on subsequent trips and was simple a matter of increased contacts in the matter of local hiring.
Coursework

The material that was used in the first workshop was designed to be generic as possible. Because most of the instructors had limited knowledge of Haiti, it was impossible to shape coursework from a Haitian worldview. The course material was translated into Creole and the program was taught in Creole with translators assisting the instructors. Haiti has two official languages and the choice of Creole over French had great social implications. French is the language of the Haitian elite and there was great reaction to the choice of language. According to Ms. Press and Dr. Taylor, this choice was intentional on the part of the staff to make the material clear because most participants spoke Creole the best and because of the democratic statement that choosing Creole made.

According to Sharon Press, the material used developed over time and became much more in tune with the Haitian culture. She talked about how role-play exercises utilized everyday situation of the Haitian and had less of an American perspective. One example of a new role-play was a cab fare negotiation scenario, which apparently is a very common source of conflict in Haitian society. The materials became more sophisticated as the workshops continued. They CGR also made an alternative conflict resolution video.
Time Constraints

This problem could not be resolved because of the limited funding available to the program. However, Sharon Press and Tom Taylor talked about how they encouraged participants to make contacts to continue discussion on conflict resolution and put their new skills to work for their communities. Sharon Press also discussed her work with a secondary school in Gonaives, where the teacher she worked with set up a conflict resolution program for students. Despite the time constraints, the conflict resolution information continues to be disseminated to the younger generation of Haitians. Unfortunately, the problem of the length of the workshops was never resolved and continued to be a persistent issue throughout the duration of the project.

Instructors

During the first workshop, there had been no set curriculum; subsequently, there was a nightly debate over the particulars of the next day’s class. The instructional staff was reduced on subsequent trips to Haiti to one or two instructors. The curriculum that was hashed out in the first workshop was modified, but stayed relatively intact. On future projects, it was the decision of the CGR to have a smaller number of instructors.

U.S. Site Visits

The site visits were an important aspect of the program. A small number of participants came to the U.S. to see examples of local conflict resolution programs in action. Some of the sites that they visited were neighborhood justice centers and school-age peer conflict resolution programs.
These visits were an integral part of the program because they gave the groups of participants that got to go to the U.S. the opportunity to see conflict resolution processes in action.

**Reactions of Participants**

The overall reactions of the participants seemed to be very positive. Sharon Press and Tom Taylor talk about the difficult conditions the classes were held under. Stifling hot classrooms and cramped spaces were common. However, the participants were energetic and interested in the material during the instructors' presentations. The evaluation figures from 1996 and 1999 indicate the affirmative response to the program. On a scale of one to five, five being the highest, 50%-90% of the participants gave the program a 5 on every item. Items included the instructors ability to provided a basic understanding of the material and improve mediation skills. Participants used the one and two rating less than 5% of time when criticizing the program. (CGR, Evaluation, 1999) However, Sharon Press pointed out that the figures might not tell the entire story. In Haitian culture there is a great respect for educators. She feels that the students would not be inclined to give negative ratings. Both instructors said that they got a very warm response and that the participants were exceptional people who seemed to have a very real interest in conflict resolution work. Sharon Press talked about how the Haitian participants stayed longer on the last day of the first workshop to discuss implementation strategies. These accounts of personal interaction seem to suggest a positive response on behalf of the Haitian to the material and instructors.
Implementation process

It seems that the implementation process has had great success in the communities where the workshop were held. According to the CGR’s grant proposal to USAID for continued funding, three community centers with conflict resolution missions were established by the participants of the program in Gonaives, Mirebalais, and Port-au-Prince. The CGR expects that the “number of conflicts resolved by mediation in those communities with established mediation centers, through the UF program will increase by 10% annually, beginning with the second year.” (CGR USAID proposal, 1999) It is interesting to note that these community centers are community-sufficient and do not receive aid through any foreign aid organizations. The school training program in Gonaives is still in place and continues expose the students of that city to the possibilities of peaceful democratic alternatives in conflict. It is impossible to fully know the effects of the program as many participants listed in their implementation plans to use this information in personal and work related conflicts. The materials created by the CGR, including the videotape, were given to the participants to disseminate and alter at their discretion. The potential audience for these materials is extremely large. Unfortunately, the grant for the continuation of the project in Haiti was denied, but the mark on the communities that participated in the program has been indelible.
Conclusions

The program seemed to be a success on many levels. The staff was relatively harmonious with very little inter-personal conflict. The participants seem to have adopted the new information to their communities through the school programs and conflict resolution centers. Although funding was limited, it was used in a productive manner. Small groups of people were trained so that they could then teach others when the program ended. It is unfortunate that the program funding was cut because it was a program that empowered the local population with new information to make their communities become more efficient and more democratic.