

Haiti and Sustainability

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There is an understandable and entirely appropriate preoccupation at present with providing food, water and healthcare to the people of Haiti, whose already fragile lives and prospects have been destroyed by the recent earthquake. But we need also to ask how – once the immediate crisis has passed – the people of Haiti can begin a process of recovery that is sustainable economically, socially and environmentally.

For many of us, images of Haiti come from Graham Greene's novel *The Comedians*, where Voodoo and Papa Doc Duvalier's omnipresent enforcers, the Tontons Macoute, created an atmosphere of mystery and exotic dread, but not much insight as to why it was as it was.

We can find some insights from the relative performance of the Dominican Republic, the country with which Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola. Although sharing the same space, the Dominican Republic has been much more successful than Haiti economically, environmentally and socially. We can assess economic performance from GDP per capita, which measures the output of goods and services and is a measure of the flow of output. The contrast is striking, with GDP for Haiti and the Dominican Republic being \$1,300 and \$8,200 respectively, on a purchasing power parity basis.

The gap is even more striking when we examine the stock of capital per capita. The World Bank produces estimates of the value of this stock, which it categorises as produced (equipment, roads, factories, power stations, housing, etc.), natural (minerals, forests, etc.) and intangible (mainly education embedded in people). It can be seen that the Dominican Republic has almost 11 times the per capita capital stock of Haiti (the data for Ireland are shown to illustrate the gap with the developed world).

Table 1: Capital stock, selected countries in \$ per capita

Category of Capital	Haiti	Dominican Republic	Ireland
Produced capital	601	16,160	46,542
Natural capital	793	4,681	10,534
Intangible capital (education, etc)	6,840	69,369	273,414
Total wealth	8,235	90,210	330,490

(For details on the system and the data for 120 countries, see: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/ENVIRONMENT/EXTDATASTA/0,,contentMDK:21062062~menuPK:2935516~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:2875751,00.html>.)

Why this difference in performance, and what lessons are there for the people of Haiti as they move beyond the current catastrophe?

In his book *Collapse – How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (Penguin Books, 2005), Jared Diamond tries to explain the divergence. Some performance indicators drawn from his work and from other sources are shown in the appendix to this commentary.

In addition to a shared geography, Haiti and the Dominican Republic share many other characteristics, including a history of colonial exploitation. At the time of Christopher Columbus' arrival in 1492, the indigenous population on the island was about 500,000; by 1519, this was reduced to about 3,000 by

disease, as the smallpox introduced by the Spaniards as their gift to the New World wreaked its familiar devastation.

With the discovery of the suitability of the land for sugar production, slaves were imported from Africa to work the plantations. This process was initiated by Spaniards, but accelerated by the French, who had established themselves in the west of the island, in what is now Haiti. By 1785, they had 700,000 slaves. Spain continued to control the east of the island (now the Dominican Republic), but the economy had relatively few slaves (30,000) and focused initially on cattle.

Both countries also share histories of extreme political instability, interrupted by long stretches of violent dictatorship, epitomised by Trujillo and Balaguer in the Dominican Republic, and the Duvalier father and son in Haiti. They also share the fact of interference in their affairs by the US. This latter symmetry knocks on the head a favoured view of some of the commentariat, namely that Haiti's economic and social adversities are mainly a product of such interference.

However, there are significant differences between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which go some way towards explaining their different trajectories and to providing some possible insights as to the best way forward. And there are also some insights from the Irish experience, which are relevant:

- Firstly, natives of Haiti and the Dominican Republic speak different languages: Creole in Haiti (an evolution of French) and Spanish in the Dominican Republic. This is thought to give the Dominican Republic more access to international expertise and markets. Similarly, our facility in Ireland with the English language is an important advantage.
- Haiti gained independence in 1804 as a result of a slave rebellion, but there were very few slaves in the Dominican Republic, and this meant that there was a separation of history, culture, and ethnic composition, with Haiti having a much higher proportion of its population of African origin. Haiti invaded and annexed the Dominican Republic in 1821, but was expelled in 1844.
- Nature favours the Dominican Republic, which has more rain and rivers that flow into the sea and provide a basis for hydro power; deeper soils; much more forest cover (28 per cent vs. 1 per cent); more national parks and nature reserves (32 per cent vs. negligible area in Haiti). The sugar plantations in the 18th Century in Haiti depleted the soil, while the break-up of the estates in the 19th Century resulted in the extirpation of the remaining forest cover. This also was the experience in Ireland, where the breakup of the estates and distribution of land to the former tenants resulted in widespread clearance of the remaining woodland. There is substantial incursion of Haitians across the Dominican Republic border seeking wood for fuel and employment.
- The Dominican Republic has an export orientation, with 200,000 employed in the industrial export zones, and substantial farm-based exports, including being the third-largest exporter of avocados in the world. Haiti is three times as dependent on (subsistence) agriculture, with a very small export sector.
- In its founding Constitution, Haiti forbade foreigners to own land or to control means of production through investments, while the Dominican Republic was welcoming of both inward human migration and investment. In Ireland, for 15 years after the Second World War, while the rest of the developed world was opening up, we followed the 'ourselves alone' Haitian model of economic development, and suffered the consequences: mass emigration, high unemployment and inability to adequately fund education, infrastructure and health services.
- The political leadership in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic has been corrupt, vicious and venal, but with different purposes that have affected outcomes. The dictators in the Dominican Republic wanted to achieve economic development and Balaguer, in particular, was particularly committed to conservation of forests and nature, motivated in part by the need to protect watersheds from erosion so that hydro-electric dams would not silt up. He transferred responsibility for control of forest protection to the army; made sure that they had the resources (including planes and weapons) and the mandate

to do so, and enforcement was ruthless, with many illegal loggers dying as a result of army activity. He imported propane for natural gas; distributed for free propane stoves and cylinders, and made sure that it 'underpriced' charcoal, so that the pressure to destroy the forest for fuel would be reduced. The Duvalier father and son had no interest in economic development, and concentrated on retaining power and capturing whatever wealth was to be secured from farmers.

- Haiti and the Dominican Republic have about the same population numbers (8 to 9 million in each), but Haiti is about half the size of the Dominican Republic and the population growth rate in Haiti (2.26 per cent per annum) is almost twice that of the Dominican Republic (1.29 per cent). The rapid population growth in Haiti is a product mainly of very low income and education levels.

What Does This Imply for Haiti's Future?

To ensure sustainable recovery for Haiti, priority should be given to building up its capital stock, primarily of human capital. Attracting back some of the Diaspora would be an important first step (their remittances home account for about one fifth of Haiti's GDP). But a step change in the quality of education of the residents of the island is a prerequisite for progress. The Dominican Republic's rate of adult literacy (90 per cent for females) could be the target for Haiti. Universal ability in a world language should be a product of this investment, with Spanish and English being particularly valuable, given the likely trading partners in an emergent Haiti. Of course, the renewal of what was already a tiny built capital stock must also be undertaken, but this will prove fruitless unless education is radically improved. Japan is the place to look for advice on the design and construction of structures that will better adapt to the next earthquakes.

Encouraging foreign direct investment and inward migration from a variety of continents and backgrounds will also be essential. Some progress has been made via export zones, but unless the path already paved by the Dominican Republic – which has welcomed and offered citizenship to foreigners, including Curaçao Jews, Canary Islanders, Lebanese, Palestinians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Germans, Italians, Austrian Jews, Japanese, Spaniards – is followed, Haiti is likely to remain an impoverished backwater.

The re-creation of some of the natural capital and, in particular, the lost forest cover would help stabilise soils and improve water supply. But this will be self-defeating unless the necessity to harvest wood for fuel is dramatically altered; the Dominican Republic precedent of subsidising propane is worth serious consideration.

Developing strands of the economy in addition to agriculture is also essential. Tourism, drawing in particular on the coastal endowments and the quality of water recreation (friends have said the scuba diving is the best in the world) seems to have huge potential. And there are precedents: Graham Greene recalls a time when tourists were plentiful¹: 'My first two visits to Haiti in the fifties had been happy enough. That was the time of President Magloire, there was extreme poverty, but there were many tourists, and some of the money they brought was allowed to trickle down the social scale'.

And industrial development along the lines of the Dominican Republic also has potential.

These steps require a determination on the part of the leadership of Haiti to learn from their rivals and former adversaries – the Dominican Republic – and work towards a sustainable future for the island they share. If this is not forthcoming, then there is little the rest of us can do to convert disaster into opportunity.

¹ See: <http://greeneland.tripod.com/comedians.htm>

Appendix – Some Performance Indicators, Haiti and Dominican Republic

Indicator	Haiti	Dominican Republic	Comments
GDP per Capita	\$1,300 (2008 est.) agriculture: 30% industry: 20% services: 50%	\$8,200 (2008 est.) agriculture: 10.7% industry: 31.5% services: 57.8%	
Area Sq Km	Total 27,750	Total: 48,730	
Population (million)	8.1	8.9	
Population Growth Rate	2.26% (2005 est.)	1.29% (2005 est.)	
% Forest cover	1	28	After independence, ownership in Haiti accrued to former slaves, who farmed small holdings on a subsistence basis. And forest was cleared for farming.
Nature Reserves	Negligible – four very small parks	32% of land area; 74 parks or reserves	Strong indigenous conservation movement with many non-governmental organisations In the Dominican Republic.
Export economy (employment)	20,000	200,000	
Relative Natural Endowments	Drier (prevailing rain from East blocked by mountains); soils thinner; limited amount of flat land; slower capacity for recovery.	More rain; better plant growth; more hydro power; thicker soils, and broad valleys and plateaus.	
Agricultural Exports	Small volume of coffee	Coffee, cacao, tobacco, cigars, fresh flowers, avocados (the world's third largest exporter)	The poor Haiti performance is a product of poorer land and the prevalence of small-scale subsistence farming
Emigrant remittances as % of GDP	20	Not available	
Slaves (1785)	700,000	30,000	
Political control	Francois Duvalier (1957-1971); Jean-Claude Duvalier (1972-1986)	Dictators :Trujillo (1930-1961; Balaguer (1966-1978; 1986-1996)	
Economic openness	Constitution forbade foreigners to own land or to control means of production through investments.	Welcomed and offered citizenship to foreigners, including Curacao Jews, Canary Islanders, Lebanese, Palestinians, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Germans, Italians,	

		Austrian Jews, Japanese, Spaniards.	
Direct US control	1915-1934	1916-1924; 1965-1966	

(Sources: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2004.html>;
<http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcdominican.htm>; <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blchaiti.htm>; Diamond, Jared, 2005.
Collapse – How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed, Penguin Books, 2005.)