

An Alternative Proposal for Showing Regional Solidarity with Haiti

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I shall begin by explaining the reason why I do not support the idea of a petition demanding France to repay the indemnity (\$21 billion at current prices) it extorted from Haiti in the 19th century as the price of French recognition of Haitian independence. Firstly, such a petition is not at all new. Indeed, an identical petition (still in circulation), was launched in New York in May 2004, by the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network (<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/restitution4haiti/?e>).

When Norman Girvan posted the petition on his website in December 2008 and called for signatories from other Caricom countries as a demonstration of support for Haiti, I engaged in an extended exchange with him in which I expressed serious misgivings about the usefulness of such a petition. From my knowledge of France, French political history, French political culture, national character, and worldview, I was convinced that such a petition did not have the slightest chance of success. The French have a deep-rooted cultural aversion to admitting any error or fault - an aversion that is reflected at both the individual and the national level. Repaying the indemnity would be an admission that its extortion was blameworthy which is something, I am quite convinced, that France is culturally incapable of doing.

Mention has been made of such a petition shaming France into repaying the indemnity. I don't think that it is possible to shame France into doing anything that goes against its perceived national interest. France and the U.S. are perhaps the two Western countries which most single-mindedly pursue their national interests, overriding all other interests in doing so. However, there is one essential difference between them. The US both wants (and feels a need) to be liked by the rest of the world and to be considered a "moral" authority, which makes it susceptible to being influenced by world opinion. France feels no such need. It wants to exercise influence in the world and to be admired for its technological achievements (its high speed trains, its Airbus, its space rockets etc.), its culture and its quality of life, which it has effortlessly succeeded in achieving despite its Realpolitik. France, for example, continued to supply arms to South Africa's apartheid régime long after all other Western countries had ceased to do so. World public opinion had not the slightest effect on that policy.

Moreover, without making any overt efforts to be liked, France still remains the country most visited (and, perhaps, the most admired and liked) by tourists. Congress might "punish" France by re-naming "French fries" "freedom fries", in a childish display of national pique at France's open and active opposition to America's invasion of Iraq, but Americans still admire France and they flock there in great numbers. The British, who claim to like France but not the French (the anomaly

appears to escape them), go in droves to live (and to retire) there among the French, whom they profess not to like, because of its attractive life style and its quality of life.

I also argued that such a petition would not only serve to divert the attention of Haitians and Caribbean supporters from focusing on finding a way forward but that it would also tend to reinforce or validate any feelings of dependency which might exist among the Haitian population. I suggested that we devote our energies, instead, to identifying concrete ways in which we could help the Haitian people.

As the following list of petition signatories show, the first signature dates from May 2, 2004 (<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/restitution4haiti/signatures?page=1>). By the time Norman posted it on his website in December 2008, the Petition had gathered a total of 332 signatures. Norman was the 333th signatory on 28 December 2008 (see page 7). Despite my own serious reservations, I finally signed the petition out of a feeling of solidarity, as I informed Norman at the time. I was the 345th signatory (8 Jan 2009).

By last Saturday (February 13) the petition had obtained a grand total of 505 signatures - a number that is hardly likely to impress France. A total of 505 signatures, garnered over a period of 5 years and 9 months (of which less than two dozen were from the Caribbean), is eloquent testimony of the immense scepticism, on the part of Caribbeans and North Americans sympathetic to the Haitian cause, that the petition had the slightest chance of success - a scepticism I expressed at the time and which I still share. Petitions are surely subject to the Law of diminishing returns. A second indemnity petition (as now proposed) which runs concurrently with the first, will almost certainly fall victim to that inexorable law.

If a group of residents in Port of Spain or Kingston were to address a petition to the city's Mayor, in protest at a particular municipal policy, and it was able to garner only 505 signatures it would most likely be ignored. The petition protesting the EU-CARIFORUM Agreement (EPA), which was circulated in late 2007/early 2008, obtained only 177 signatures. Not surprisingly, it was ignored by Caricom authorities. Is it likely that a petition of 75 signatures (the number so far gathered by the present petition/initiative) would move Caricom authorities to act? I very much doubt it. More importantly, I fear that such petitions might unduly raise Haitian hopes of receiving a large indemnity sum, which might discourage them from self-help and co-operative action to redress their own situation and to try to create a viable future by, and for, themselves.

I suggest that Caricom citizens, citizen groups, and NGOs, who desire to really help Haiti surmount the present disaster should identify concrete ways in which to do so, ways that would respond to the expressed needs of Haitians. In that very respect, the AlJazeera YouTube video (Fault Line Haiti: The Politics of Rebuilding) circulated in the discussion, and now posted on Norman's website (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuUt12usDVs>) is most enlightening. It is, by far, the most balanced, the most objective, the most informative, and the most broad-based (in terms of the

range of issues and opinions) reporting I have yet seen on post-earthquake Haiti. It effectively debunks American hype about the biased, partial reporting of AlJazeera. Moreover, it is the only video I have seen which gives a voice to Haitians at all levels of the society, providing them with an opportunity to express their needs, their opinions on how to overcome their present predicament, and their views on the actions of the international community. We should heed those voices. Let's see what they say:

One urban Haitian stated pointedly, *"The first thing we need to do is to spend money on agriculture. The people need food now, not aid. We are talking about money so that we can work the land better."* Shifting the focus from the capital city, the video transports the viewer to Haiti's plateau central plateau which, the narrator tells us, is *"a fertile land of lakes, mountains and family farms, the Haiti you never see on TV."* A female peasant farmer interviewed there, declared: *"There is no money. There is land, but no money to farm it. If you have money you could get good harvests."* The president of the federation hosting a summit meeting of peasant organizations to discuss ways of dealing with the post-earthquake situation, stated: *"Farmers are now in a situation where they need to produce much more because of the flood of people returning to the countryside."*

The agronomist in charge of a Pilot project, designed to help Haitians develop farming skills, was interviewed at the peasant organizations' meeting. He emphasized that Haiti is a rural, essentially agricultural country: *"we have six months of rain a year with which we can perform miracles, Haiti could do miracles; and also we have water which is being wasted; we have land lying vacant. If we exploited all of that, Haiti would be among the wealthiest countries in the world. and we have farm labour with water going to waste."* He added that such a (agricultural) model of development is much better for Haiti than the export model based on an economy of factory work in crowded cities, and that reducing poverty in Haiti is necessarily linked to food production. His comment linking poverty reduction to food production is now the official view of both FAO and the World Bank.

We learn from the video that, thirty years ago, Haiti grew almost all the rice it could eat but a change in trade policy destroyed that way of life; farming was no longer economically viable for the majority and farmers left the land *en masse*; that the country's agriculture was destroyed by a national development policy that was based on urban factories, and which led to mass rural-urban emigration; that since the earthquake, there has been a re-migration to the countryside. We learn from the video's commentator that bottom-up plans are not high on the reconstruction/development agenda, which is based on a classic development formula of tourism and manufacturing garments for export. That statement appears to be borne out by a clip in which we see Hilary Clinton advocating garment manufacturing for Haiti. That is complemented by another clip with interviews of Haitian garment workers (and of Camille Chalmers, head of PPDA, reporting on his own discussions with garment workers) complaining of maltreatment and physical abuse on the part of ruthless factory owners, low wages, and long hours, exploitation of women, destruction of family life, as a result of which they decided to stop working at the factory.

It is quite obvious that that export model of development, which appears to be favoured by foreign governments, international agencies, and international financial institutions, does not have the approval of Haitian professionals, farmers, or urban workers. It does not appear, either, to have the full support of the Haitian government. Interviewed on the video, Prime Minister Bellerive stated that foreign governments and NGOs *"are having trouble getting it: "We are going to keep trying to explain to them that if you want have some success, you have to work with Haitians at every level."* It suggests that the government is reluctantly going along with policies decided elsewhere, in which they have had little say. Another comment made in the video is that foreign organizations and governments are bringing their own priorities and interests to the job of helping Haitians.

One Haitian interviewed (I do not remember who it was) declared: *"There must be another model of industrialization. Another model of investment, serving the domestic market and the needs of the people."* That other/alternative model, which is, necessarily, agriculture-driven, reflects the views of Haitians that were expressed in the video and it also seems to have broad-based support in the population. That is the area where, I would suggest, Caricom citizens, citizen groups and NGO's could show their solidarity by trying to identify ways of helping Haitians meet the needs, which they themselves identified and expressed in the video. Not a single one of the Haitians interviewed on in the video - Prime Minister Bellerive, presidential adviser Patrick Elie, Camille Calmers, the agronomist, the president of the federation of peasants, urban workers, peasant farmers, rural women - mentioned the need to claim repayment of the indemnity France had extorted from Haiti. It does not appear to figure on their list of priorities.

Yet, since the indemnity petition was launched by the Haitian Leadership Network in New York, several, if not all, of the interviewees must surely have got to know about it. Haitians on the ground evidently realize that it is a non-starter and would only divert attention from their real needs. If we continue to focus our energies on pursuing that objective, we will be just as guilty of *"bringing [our] own priorities and interests to the job of helping Haitians"*, as foreign governments and organizations have been accused of doing. We would also run a real risk of being seen by Haitians as *"having trouble getting it"*.

The final section of my Critique on the Port of Spain Declaration on sustainable development (adopted at the Fifth Summit of the Americas) was devoted to Haiti. It was posted on 30th May, 2009 and addressed the problems of food scarcity and diminished agricultural productivity/production. It contained detailed, practical proposals which, I think, could help meet some of the needs Haitians expressed in the video (see pages 58-64).

<http://www.normangirvan.info/port-of-spain-declaration-a-critical-analysis-mervyn-claxton/>

According to a FAO study published year before last, 42.6% of Haiti's total land area is degraded, thereby gravely affecting fertility, agricultural productivity, and even agricultural viability. Moreover, there is a direct correlation between the degree of land degradation in Haiti (42.6% of total land are) and the extent of the destruction caused by mudslides and floods which, in turn further reduces soil fertility by the removal of top soil. The proposals in my paper also addressed that

problem. I suggest that those proposals could be a starting point for considering measures which Caricom citizens and citizen groups, who decide to help Haitians meet the needs they identified in the video, might wish to adopt.

To that effect, I reproduce below selected passages from the section on Haiti. I began with an analysis of the situation, as it was then, and a brief account of the needs and the demands expressed by Haitian peasant groups:

"Haiti's current dire plight has, quite justifiably, aroused considerable concern among the population of other Caricom countries, which has stimulated much discussion on the internet.....There are ways in which citizen groups in other Caricom countries can help Haitians to take control of their lives, ways that would respond to their expressed needs and not the needs that have been identified by more or less well-meaning aid organizations from the North.....Such a contribution could begin with helping Haitians satisfy their most urgent needs."

"What do Haitians consider to be their most urgent needs? It is combating hunger and undernutrition by increasing national food production....Last year's steep rise in food prices provoked food riots in the country, and the four storms that destroyed much of the Haiti's productive agricultural capacity later in the year further aggravated Haiti's already desperate situation. Thousands of peasant farmers demonstrated in Port-au-Prince, in mid-December last year, calling on the government to take action to revive national agricultural production. The demonstration was called by an alliance of 10 peasant organisations, including the national movements, Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan and the Mouvman Peyizan Nasyonal Kongre Papay (MPNKP), as well as regional groups from the departments of the Grand'Anse, Nippes, the Central Plateau, and the South-East. Peasant farmer groups have held meetings and demonstrated all over the country in a campaign to reduce the country's dependence on food imports, end the marginalisation of the rural population, and rehabilitate the country's neglected agricultural sector."

"Haitian civil society organisations have joined the national campaign for food sovereignty. The Haiti Support Group is putting pressure on international organisations to change their strategy providing relief – responding to widespread malnutrition, hunger, and famine by distributing imported food – to doing more to help Haitian farmers grow more and cheaper

food for domestic consumption. The Haiti Peasant organisers consider the issues of environmental degradation and lack of national and international support for the agricultural sector as closely linked. The two primary aims of the mid-December demonstration were to get the government to give priority to environmental protection as part of a national development plan, and to compel it to take effective measures to re-launch national agricultural production. Despite greatly increased rural-urban migration in recent decades, two-thirds of Haiti's population still depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Thus, apart from issues of hunger and undernutrition, agricultural development is also essential to reducing/eradicating poverty, especially rural poverty, increasing rural employment, and promoting rural development. Yet, no Haitian government has seen fit to accord

any priority or significant funding to rehabilitating the agricultural sector or to restoring the environment."

"In the light of the inertia and the utter lack of interest, on the part of the Haitian government and international organizations, to revive Haiti's agricultural sector and increase national food production, Haiti's peasant farmers, its rural communities and its civil society organizations must rely on their own efforts. An essential pre-condition for increasing agricultural production is to restore soil fertility by rehabilitating degraded lands (43% of the total land area) and by improving the physical environment.

I then suggested ways Caricom citizen groups could help Haiti:

"Caricom civil society groups could assist Haitians, in that respect, by identifying and selecting appropriate agroecological techniques and best practices in the LAC region, which have proven their effectiveness in areas relevant to Haitian needs, and acting as a conduit for the transfer of that knowledge to Haitian peasant organizations and the civil society groups supporting them. Several of those techniques and practices are described in this paper but there are many others." (See [pages 18-24](#) of my Critique for details of those techniques and practices).

"Caricom civil society groups could collect similar information of relevance to Haiti's situation that exists in UNDP's SANE programme and the data banks of networks of local/indigenous knowledge in other regions, which are willing to make such knowledge available to Haiti. Much of that knowledge is available online in various publications and in international and regional data banks, several of which were described earlier in this paper. The South Centre could perhaps assist in identifying other similar networks and establishing a liaison between them and Caricom groups. The expertise and knowledge of Caricom agronomists, environmentalists, food scientists, nutritionists, ecologists, forestry and fishery experts, among others, could also be tapped for that endeavour." (See [pages 25-26](#)).

I then described possible ways in which Caricom civil society organizations could help promote rapid re-afforestation, restore soil fertility and increase agricultural production and productivity in Haiti:

"The neem tree plant, which was discussed above for its pesticide qualities [see [pages 35-36](#)], has many other remarkable qualities, certain of which are of ecological importance, that would be very useful to Haitians in restoring/protecting the environment, rehabilitating degraded lands, and reviving agricultural production. The excessive deforestation, which is largely responsible for the frequent severe flooding and landslides in the past decades is one of Haiti's most serious environmental problems. Apart from the loss of life and the physical destruction such flooding and landslides cause, they also have a negative effect on agricultural production because of reduced fertility due to the washing away of topsoil. Neem is used in the Sahelian countries of Africa to halt the spread of the Saharan desert, as well as a source of fuelwood, which is one of the reasons for Haiti's deforestation."

"The relatively hard and heavy wood of the neem tree is not only durable, but also termite resistant. Neem is very good as a building material. In many countries of the South the wood is used in house construction, building posts, poles, and fences, and for making furniture. Neem is also useful as a fertilizer. Indian farmers have traditionally used neem cake as a fertilizer for their fields. Indeed, the dual activity of neem as fertilizer and pest repellent, has made it a favoured low-cost input in sustainable Indian agriculture. Neem leaves have also been used to enrich the soil. Together, they are widely used in India to fertilize cash crops. When neem cake is ploughed into the soil it also protects plant roots from nematodes and white ants. Farmers in southern parts of India mix neem leaves into flooded rice fields before they transplant the rice seedlings."

"Neem is a hardy plant which can grow on almost all types of soils including clay, saline and alkaline soils. It thrives well on dry, stony, shallow soils and it actually improves the fertility of soils and their water-holding capacity, a quality that would be very useful to Haiti. A neem tree has a productive life span of between 150 and 200 years, which makes it a worthwhile long-term investment. The neem tree plant and its many derivatives can make an enormous contribution to sustainable agricultural development. It is a valuable renewable resource of organic agro-chemicals and nutrients which are bio-degradable and non-toxic. The one drawback is that the neem plant grows slowly during the first year of planting and begins to bear fruit between 3 and 5 years of planting."

*"The jojoba (*Simmondsia chinensis*) is another plant that can be very useful to Haitian peasant farmers. It grows wild in Northern Mexico and in the South-Western United States, and is being promoted as a food plant in the northern part of Mexico because of its recognised nutritional value. Like neem, the jojoba can also grow in marginal, degraded land, so much so that it is considered to be a plant with the capacity to stop the spread of the Sahara because of its long tap root, which grows 2.5 centimetres a day during the first month after planting, and can reach as long as thirty meters, the jojoba plant can thrive in marginal soils, with as little as 7.5 cm of annual rainfall, and apart from its first year of growth, it does not need irrigation. The jojoba would be very useful in Haiti both for its nutritional and its environmental qualities."*

I pointed out that Caricom citizen groups would not need any government (regional or national) assistance which would be one of the great benefits of the approach proposed. Governments tend to have their own agendas which might hinder rather than promote the interests of the people:

"No government help would be needed to undertake such action. Knowledge of useful, appropriate sustainable agro-ecological techniques and practices could be transmitted between Caricom countries and Haiti via local citizen groups and NGO's. In that way, development in Haiti would be bottom-up rather than top-down, Haitians at the grassroots level would be empowered, their dependence on food aid would decline and food security gradually built-up, rural development would be fostered, rural-urban migration reduced or halted, and Haitian confidence in their capacity to deal with their own problems would increase as soon as they see their efforts being successful."

My Critique provoked a number of comments, which I addressed in a global response posted on 26 June, 2009. I reproduce below the two paragraphs concerning Haiti:

"The discussion/debate in Caricom civil society on how best to help Haiti is centered on signing petitions addressed to Northern authorities (re reparations), sending food and other assistance to the Haitian people, collecting funds for them, and even sending missions (like the recent trade union one) to see and report on the situation. Apart from the last one cited, the usefulness of which escapes me, such endeavours are a healthy sign of our concern for the Haitian people but they are only short term measures. I, myself, would much prefer to concentrate not merely on helping the Haitian people cope with the present situation (though that is necessary) but rather on helping them to help themselves – to empower them, which is not only the only way to wean them off such aid but also the only way to foster sustainable development."

"In view of the high degree of environmental degradation in Haiti, it would seem to me that one of the most effective ways to help Haitians help themselves is to finance a representative group of Haitian farmers to enable them to visit Oaxaca state to acquaint themselves with the milpa system and how it has successfully restored fertility to the most degraded land area in Mexico, re-started highly productive food production with methods that are protective of the environment and which need no expensive, environmentally destructive inputs such as chemical pesticides and fertilizer, and which provide a livelihood for the region's farmers. If any, most, or all of the features of that system are transferable, which the similarity of physical conditions would suggest is likely, the Haitian farmers could not only apply that system on their return to Haiti but also demonstrate to other Haitian farmers how to do so. Some other highly effective land regeneration and food productive systems, which I described in the paper, could also be copied/transferred to Haiti, if possible. That is the way to promote "grassroots" development, which almost everyone agrees is the most effective form of development and self-empowerment. I, for one, will be willing to make a financial contribution to such an endeavour if it is seriously undertaken."

The only resource which the agro-ecological techniques and practices require is human labour, of which Haiti has plenty. Moreover, they were designed by agrarian peoples to fit in with, and take advantage of, their values of community, solidarity, togetherness, and mutual aid - values which Haitians fully share, as Camille Chambers revealed in the video interview: *"In the camps, people are talking a lot about fraternity solidarity, and mutual aid. They're thinking about what economies built on solidarity look like, about how people who don't know each other can live together and organize and resolve basic problems, starting from an exceptional situation that has allowed people to discover that we are all Haitians, that we share elements of the same culture. And on that basis, we can recreate life and take new paths."*

Because such techniques mentioned above would be ideally suited to the community values of Haitian farmers, they would be likely to stimulate their creative abilities, enabling peasant farmers to adapt, innovate, reinvent, re-interpret, and further develop them in ways that would meet the requirements of local climatic and soil conditions. Success in doing so would increase the self-confidence of peasant farmers and further empower them to *"recreate life and take new paths."*

The video's narrator tells us that international agencies look at the 450 self-organized refugee communities in camps in Port-au Prince and see them only as constituting huge challenges for providing food, sanitation, and shelter. But the narrator saw them in quite another light - as an opportunity rather than a problem. He suggested that those communities, born of desperation as they are, could be a source of collective wisdom, a place to hear the voices of people who want a say in rebuilding their country. Patrick Elie, a Presidential adviser interviewed on the video, saw the values of community, fraternity, and solidarity, that Haitians displayed in the camps, and their demonstrated capacity for self-organization and resolving basic problems, as possibly constituting a model for other countries : *"Haiti should not be pitied; it should be helped, not pitied, not looked down upon but probably looked at for new lessons in solidarity, in discipline, in resilience."*

Other Caricom peoples who decide to show their solidarity with the Haitian people in their present crisis by helping them implement the alternative model of development - an agricultural-driven model, based on meeting local needs - would not be acting purely altruistically. The manner in which ordinary Haitians are approaching their problems, drawing upon their ancestral African values of community, has valuable lessons for other Caricom peoples. *"The concept of community was at the heart of the life of the traditional [African] community. Life was organized not around the individual, but within an effective community."* (Toyin Falola (ed), Tradition and Change in Africa: The Essays of J. F. Ade Ajayi, 2000. The African age-grade system, a basic social institution of many, if not most, African cultures, promoted solidarity and social cohesion in the community, constituting a structure that allowed individuals of the same age group to participate in joint endeavours at the village level. It also played an important political role, serving, for example, as the basis of the unique democratic system of the East African Oromo people, known by the term Gada, which was considered by several 19th-century European visitors to the region as the best democratic system in the world. (Paul T. W. Baxter & Uri Almogor (eds), Age, Generation and Times: Some Features of East African Age Organizations, 1978).

Those community values are also an integral part of our own ancestral heritage, and we can learn from Haitian experience how best to utilize them in a modern context in order to solve problems which require a degree of national solidarity that modern methods, inspired by Western individualistic values, find intractable.

Community values are also deep-rooted in our two other ancestral cultures - Indo-Pakistani and Chinese. Indian society is founded on communal values, which are generally expressed in loyalty to the primary group – family, kin, or caste. The immediate kin-group is a vital source of affection, support, and social interaction as well as an economic unit. In India, *"the person is meaningless except so far as he belongs to a mutually-support agglomeration or agglomerations..."* (J. D. M. Derrett, Tradition and Law in India in R. J. Moore (ed), Tradition and Politics in South Asia, 1979). Consequently, it is the caste group (*jati*), not the individual, that is the basic unit of social action in India, *"Whenever and wherever groups materialize.....their form and efficacy are being determined by the extent to which they can be made to be productive of the same kinds of solidarities, securities, rewards, obligations, ties etc. that socialization in one's jati causes one to*

expect from group membership." (Harold A. Gould, Caste Adaptation in Modernizing Indian Society, 1988).

We find a similar emphasis on community values in Chinese culture. When Western notions of liberalism and individualism first reached China in the 19th century they had no precise equivalent in the Chinese language, as a result of which neologisms had to be invented. Such neologisms, and the ideas they represented, were completely at odds with Chinese social and political realities. The term, *ko-jen chu-i*, for example, the Chinese neologism devised for "individualism", emphasized the discrete or isolated individual. It contrasts starkly with the Confucian concept of the person as a member of the larger human body who is never abstracted from society and who lives in a dynamic relationship with others. (William Theodore de Bary, The Liberal Tradition in China, 1983).

Francis Fukuyama has argued that the most effective civic organizations are based on communities of shared ethics and values, which do not require extensive regulation of their relations because prior moral consensus has already given members of the group a basis for mutual trust. Interpersonal trust is normally established when a community shares a set of moral values that can create expectations of regular and honest behaviour. The particular character or quality of those values is, to some extent, less important than the fact that they are shared, which means that the group as a whole must adopt common norms before trust can prevail among its members: *"The social capital needed to create this kind of moral community can not be acquired, as in the case of other forms of human capital, through a rational investment decision...In other words, social capital cannot be acquired simply by individuals acting on their own. It is based on the prevalence of social rather than individual virtues."* (Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity, 1995).

Ernest Gellner has made the same point. While noting that the "*Mayflower model*" (where a group of migrants actually discuss and draw up the social contract for a community they are about to establish) is quite unusual, he suggested that when it does occur it is precisely because *moral consensus* between the members of the community already exists. (Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals, 1994). Robert Putnam describes social capital as consisting of features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, which can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions. He states that social trust in modern settings arise from two related sources - norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement.

There appears to be an essential link between social capital, on the one hand, and the norms, values, and traditions of a society, on the other hand, which, together, exercise an important influence on both economic development and democratic governance. On the basis of research he conducted into the relationship between democracy, development, and the civic community, Putnam concluded that features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.

Putnam considers that the recovery of the traditional social capital of developing societies is an urgent task: “[F]or social capital is one key to both effective, responsive government and economic growth. Researchers and policymakers concerned about democracy and economic growth in developing societies must now be about the task of unearthing ancient shards of social capital that might be reassembled, as well as the task of nourishing new shoots of civic engagement.” (Democracy, Development and the Civic Community: Evidence from an Italian Experiment), in Ismail Serageldin & June Taboroff (eds), Culture and Development in Africa, 1994).

Moreover, social capital has been described as a “moral resource”. Hirschman argues that such moral resources tend to increase rather than decrease through use and thus risk being depleted if not utilized. (A. O. Hirschman, Against Parsimony: Three Easy Ways of Complicating Some Categories of Economic Discourse, **American Economic Review**, Vol.74, 1984).

Existing models of development and democratic governance in both Haiti and other Caricom countries have been developed on the basis of (Northern) individualistic values rather than on the social (group) values that are an integral part of our ancestral cultural heritage. It is probably the reason for the serious deficit of social capital and interpersonal trust that is so very apparent in most Caricom countries. As Fukuyama (and Gellner) points out, “social capital cannot be acquired simply by individuals acting on their own. It is based on the prevalence of social rather than individual virtues.” Because of the individualistic values which underpin those models, the latter accord little or no importance to sharing, solidarity, or mutual aid. It is not surprising therefore that such models have resulted in inequalitarian development and insensitive governance practices, methods, and attitudes which deprive citizens of any real say in how they are governed.

In the light of the above opinions, the crucial importance of the fundamentally different social experiment that Haitians have embarked upon, becomes quite evident. A number of Haitians from all classes seemingly agree that an alternative form of governance and development - one based on solidarity, mutual aid, fraternity and self-help - is the solution to their problems. Haitians are drawing upon the values of their ancestral cultural heritage to do so. They have “set about the task of unearthing ancient shards of social capital that might be reassembled, as well as the task of nourishing new shoots of civic engagement.” They are making full use of the social capital constituted by their “norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement”, thus ensuring that that very valuable “moral resource” is not only **not** depleted but is “increased” instead.

Haitians, gathered in camps in Port-au-Prince, have demonstrated a capacity for self-organization and resolving basic problems, in a way that is seen by presidential adviser, Patrick Elie, as possibly constituting a model for other countries. They were probably able to do so “because moral consensus between the members of the community already exists.” Haitians are busy demonstrating that “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.” Perhaps, without being consciously aware of it, Haitians are also proving that “the most effective civic organizations are based on communities of shared ethics and values.”

The summit meeting of peasant farmer organizations, which was convened to find ways of dealing with the crisis, will almost certainly favour a community-based approach in developing an alternative, agriculture-driven development model, as suggested by the agronomist attending the meeting, who was interviewed on the video. The highly successful indigenous *milpa* and *chinampas* systems in Mexico, with their low-input agroecological practices, should be ideal for the situation of Haitian farmers - lack of financial resources, plenty of land, plenty of labour, and a crying need for greatly increased food production.

The ethnic, religious, and class divides in our multicultural Caricom societies are not only a worrying source of recurrent tensions but they are also an impediment to building the interpersonal trust and social capital that are crucially important for successful development and democratic governance. We could learn much from Haitian experience on how to make profitable use of the values of community and solidarity inherent in our three ancestral cultures, to bridge those divides.

I concluded my recent article on the importance of Haitian culture as a development resource (<http://www.normangirvan.info/claxton-haitian-culture-development-resource/>) with the statement that Haiti is faced with the choice of following India's example of utilizing its culture in its development efforts or that of Africa in not doing so. I suggested that the choice Haiti makes will have a determining influence on the country's future. Similarly, Caricom countries have the choice of showing regional solidarity with Haiti by assisting the country in meeting the needs expressed by the Haitian people, themselves, or by meeting the needs we, ourselves, perceive, as theirs. The choice we make will largely determine how, in the future, Haitians will view the way in which we demonstrated our solidarity, in their hour of greatest need.

Mervyn Claxton

February 20, 2010.