

# **Reconstruction in Haiti: A Land Rights Infrastructure to Support Its Sustainable Development**

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**Keywords:** Land management; Risk management; Security of tenure;

## **SUMMARY**

In less than a minute, the earthquake in Haiti killed more than 200,000 and wrought such devastation that it will take ten years to rebuild much of the country. The reconstruction effort is enormous. In a number of regions, everything will have to be rebuilt at a cost of billions of dollars. As the country looks to rebuild after a natural disaster, respecting land rights is fundamental and must be taken into account right from the get-go, not only to keep the peace, but also to bring about sustainable development in Haiti, the poorest country in the Americas. Fortunately, the international community is getting behind Haiti in its moment of need. Less than two weeks after the earthquake, 14 countries members of a group called “friends of Haiti,” and four international organizations have met in Montréal to plan Haiti’s reconstruction or, as Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive prefers to call it, the country’s “revival.” Participating countries have set three strategic objectives: bolster democratic governance in Haiti; bring about economic development aimed at reducing poverty; and restore the legal system, public safety, and the rule of law. However, these objectives cannot be met unless a system to protect land rights is put in place. In 2008 the Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor—cochaired by former American secretary of state Madeleine Albright and Hernando de Soto, an economist and president of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy ([www.ILD.org.pe](http://www.ILD.org.pe))—reached the very same conclusions in their final report. They identified property rights and access to justice and the rule of law as two main pillars to be used to legally empower the poor. “To be fully productive, assets need to be formally recognized by a system that includes both individual and collective property rights.” A land rights infrastructure is essential to sustainable development. Information set out in the cadastre and the land registry allows municipalities to plan and control their development, establish their own property tax systems, and collect the taxes they need to provide quality public utilities. Financial institutions with loans guaranteed by an immovable clearly featured on the cadastral plan and published in an official public land register can grant loans at affordable interest rates, allowing people to become homeowners. This official and public system also gives properties a value that will grow over the years, thereby contributing to the owner’s personal wealth as well as state coffers. Plus, it greatly reduces susceptibility to damage from natural disasters and facilitates reconstruction efforts when they do occur. At the end of the Montréal conference on January 25th 2010, Haiti’s Prime Minister, Jean-Max Bellerive, ended what he called the “workshop” with the following statement: “We need to rebuild, but differently. We need to convince private investors to come to our country. At the moment, business people are afraid to build industries or plants in Haiti. We need to help them understand that investing with us in the future isn’t a high-risk undertaking.” Prime Minister Bellerive’s vision will not come about without official, reliable, and transparent land rights infrastructure. With the support of : Pierre Paradis, International Geomatics Project Coordinator, Cégep Limoilou Pierre Tessier, President, Ordre des arpenteurs-géomètres du Québec (Quebec

Order of Land Surveyors) Jean Lambert, President, Chambre des notaires du Québec (Quebec Chamber of Notaries)

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