

Can we do anything really BIG for Haiti?

What has happened?

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The unthinkable happened. The earth shuddered. The ground around Port-au-Prince trembled with such a force that it was felt 1'000 km away in Miami. Once the dust clouds dissipated, Haiti resembled a battlefield. Within seconds the densely populated region around the Haitian capital was devastated by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake. The natural catastrophe hit the poorest country in the Americas without mercy. Shock waves went around the world, followed immediately by waves of sympathy and offers for emergency aid. The situation was so chaotic that the casualties at first were largely underestimated. The full dimension of the catastrophe became only visible the following days as the death toll continued to mount. The numbers of personal heart-stricken tragedies made the world weep. At these moments one could sense one of the innate human moral capabilities: empathy.

For weeks and months Haiti, the poverty house of the Western hemisphere stayed in the headlines. Huge amounts of money were pledged for the reconstruction of Haiti, donor conferences were organised and prominent people were personally engaged in channeling aid to Haiti. Haiti got overwhelmed by helpers and aid organisations, much more than the torn infrastructure could cope with. Progress was slow and barely visible, this still holds today.

There is no doubt that emergency aid must be given and organised without losing too much time. Nevertheless many questions remain open, and some had the "privilege" to come to the forefront.

Why did this earthquake lead to such a terrible catastrophe? Depending on the sources, between 1% and 3% of the population died, between 3% and 5% were injured and up to 10 % of the population is homeless. Take these figures for example to California, million people would have died and nearly 4 million people were made homeless. A much stronger

earthquake in Chile 6 weeks later lead "only" to a fractional death toll. In Japan the death toll would have been even much smaller.

What makes Haiti such an example of mislead development policies. Since at least 4 decades, supra-national and government aid agencies, together with numerous NGOs are present in Haiti, enormous amounts of money were spend into all kinds of programs. The result is pretty meager. And the outlook continues to be grim. The majority of Haitians would flee the country if only they could. All the helpers, despite how good their intentions are, are caught in this deadlock of corruption, a lack of co-ordination, repeated natural catastrophes, and even competition amongst themselves. One of the most pertinent acknowledgements of previous wrong-doings came from former U.S. president Bill Clinton, who while in office pressed Haiti to cut tariffs on food imports, a policy that destroyed Haiti's rice production. At the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on March 10, 2010, Bill Clinton said "It may have been good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it has not worked. It was a mistake."

From Übermensch to Unmensch

Is this the leitmotiv of Haiti's woes? All actions and policies are made with the sole intent of making profits, private profits for those who are in charge and, of course, the shorter the better. Poor housing, poor infrastructure, poor schooling, poor health system, weak and under-funded government, the tragic of the commons could not be better depicted. And nobody is around that has the power to intervene correctively. Haiti is an example of what happens to an economy if it is left alone to pure free market economy without barely any governmental intervention. Free market economists must rejoice, struggle for life at its best, only the fittest will survive. The trouble in this dogmatic system is that the basic needs that every human being has can only be fulfilled if the people have an income. In a highly competitive world not everyone will receive an income; furthermore a pure free market economy inevitably brings forth a highly unequal and unfair society. Have you ever seen a monopoly game

Some people succeed, the majority fails and who wins has much more to do with luck than merit. Take for example a randomly selected group of 100 people, one will be the best singer, another one the best dancer, best runner, best carpenter, best tailor, best entrepreneur and ultimately there will be one collecting the most money. Do we really want to build society that much on luck or alternatively that the highly talented individual is born in the right place of the earth? Do we really want to continue to waste

The success of the few takes all the attention of the public, they become "supermen". Unfortunately, and Albert Schweitzer has formulated this in 1954 very pertinently that the supermen "have not risen to the level of superhuman reason ... It must shake our conscience that we become all the more inhuman the more we grow into supermen." In short the distance from the *Übermensch* to the *Unmensch* is very narrow. This run for profit is unfortunately the leitmotiv for the entire world and hinders us to look beyond.

Most of us use so far only a fraction of our cerebral capability, and the trouble is when we have success with one method we pass easily into a "tunnel" mode. And we become blind for the tragedies our success does to others. For the sake of the next generations, we should overcome the dominant economic principle that purports the winner should take it all. Because, before he grasps that something is foul with this principle, it is already too late, and he, the winner, stands alone.

Higher level of consciousness

Given the numerous bone-crushing arguments why the traditional policies have failed and continue to disappoint in the long run, a new approach or better a new consciousness is needed to tackle the burning issue of rebuilding Haiti and give a perspective to the Haitians. For this to happen everyone, but most importantly the people in charge must change their mind set. Currently there are too many well educated people who tell the poor and deprived what they have to do or should do. These well-minded helpers too often have no clue at all what it means being poor, hungry and excluded from society. The only people who know this

best are the poor themselves. Thus it would be only rational to give the money directly to the people in need instead of pouring billions in programs that try to help with indirect measures. By doing this we are saving plenty of money by reducing bureaucracy, avoiding most corruption and cutting costs for controls and the salaries that go with this. On top of that by giving the excluded their dignity back coupled with a guarantee that their biological and physiological needs are satisfied entails amongst the people a tremendous bounce of creativity and activity. This is not theoretical knowledge as the results can be observed in the Namibian town of Otjivero.

If we really want to tackle the issue of poverty than no way leads past an unconditional basic income, just like Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. claimed back then in 1967 "I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective -- the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income."

Evolving in a dynamic and complex environment

At this stage of evolution, we, humans, cruelly need an upgrade of our operating system. We need to change the way we organise our companies, our communities, our countries and our society. Here a closer look at the structure of our human body, one of the most complex living organisms may be very helpful and should inspire us how it manages to live without too many fatal catastrophes.

It is an incredible success story, 50 trillion cells and no boss! Of course not all cells are equal. Nevertheless it works usually quite well, because they are organised around one simple aim: to live, not one cell alone, but all together. Here really nobody can be left behind. Or could you imagine the heart or the brain cells would hoard all the energy, i.e. money only for them and let starve the rest of the body, just simply because they are not noble enough? Of course not, for the body to survive each cell must receive his share of oxygen, water, food, etc. Life follows quite basic principles; there is no sign that each single cell follows a highly detailed 5-year master plan. If 50 trillion cells manage to get along without a planning bureau why then do 7 billion humans think everything needs to

be planned, the more detailed, the better.

What do we wait to implement a more transparent, more cooperative, more fair society? Why do we collectively close our eyes and refuse to learn from the best and highly complex organism?

Ex ante – ex post

All development aid so far deals only with the symptoms after that they have occurred. We look after the hungry, the wounded, the sick, the orphans, the deprived, etc only when these people find themselves in this deplorable situation. We get active only ex post, i.e. we are only reactive and we dictate the conditions how the aid will be applied. As long as we continue this ex post approach, the result of all the development aid will only prolong the suffering.

What we terribly miss is an ex ante approach, to build a society where nobody is left alone, hungry, sick and deprived, in sum where every human being is part of a community. An ex ante approach commands a new mind set. And the real tragedy is that we possess all the necessary ingredients to overcome the survival mode operating system, this makes the fury of Jean Ziegler understandable that each of 25'000 human beings dying from hunger or poverty is killed. Our technical capabilities allow us to produce enough food and enough goods for every human being. Nevertheless we continue to stick to a system that leaves the majority of the world population in a deplorable situation and what's even worse we blame them for being in that situation.

What may happen?

First the idea of a BIG must be brought to the Haitians. The initiative to get active should preferably come from the local people, this holds true for the lead of the project.

Look for donors

Logistics

Phased implementation, by regions or by age

Figures on current VAT proceeds and other taxes

Estimation/projection of VAT increase

what about paying BIG in a non-hoardable money?

More comparisons between the monthly BIG expenditure and very familiar items, e.g. salaries of aid personnel in Haiti

This text is not meant for explaining why an unconditional basic income should be granted to every Haitian, many papers explain that much better. This text is only a call for action, an invitation to join forces, to help look for allies and to promote the idea of channeling aid money directly to the people in need through an unconditional basic income.