

HAITI

PROGRAM PROFILE



History of Partnership

The House Democracy Assistance Commission approved a legislative strengthening partnership with the Haitian National Assembly in September 2006. The program has provided technical assistance on committee operations, including the importance of public hearings and oversight of the executive branch. The Commission has also provided expertise on the development of ethics rules and appropriate enforcement mechanisms.

Following the devastating earthquake in Port-au-Prince in January 2010, providing disaster recovery assistance became a key focus of the partnership. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the Commission connected the USAID-funded Parliamentary Support Project with the U.S. Embassy in Haiti, leading to the deployment of members of the 82nd Airborne Division of the U.S. Army to protect the parliament buildings from looters and to ensure that critical legislative records were preserved.

In October 2010, the Commission facilitated a meeting between the Secretary-General of the Chamber of Deputies and senior USAID officials to discuss U.S. assistance to the parliament. With Commission encouragement, USAID constructed an interim parliament facility in Port-au-Prince that was inaugurated in November 2011.

Since 2006, the Commission has encouraged parliamentary development through Congressional and Congressional staff visits to Haiti, along with a number of training seminars in Washington for members of the National Assembly and their staff.

Accomplishments

- Coordinated communication between parliamentary leadership, USAID and U.S. Embassy Port-au-Prince to ensure that parliament continued to meet after the January 2010 earthquake that destroyed both houses of parliament.
- Consulted with Senate leadership to help ensure continued legislative oversight of the executive branch following the end of the Chamber of Deputies' mandate.
- Coordinated with parliamentary senior staff and USAID to provide continuity in legislative assistance between the earthquake and 2011 parliamentary inauguration.
- Developed plans for a Parliamentary Resource Center to be developed in the interim parliament building that opened in November 2011.
- Successfully encouraged the Department of State to turn over the shuttered former U.S. embassy building to the Haitian government.
- Donated surplus House computers to the Haitian parliament to support continued operations after the earthquake.

Background

Haiti has a semi-presidential republic with a directly elected President and Prime Minister who jointly administer the government, a judicial branch headed by a Supreme Court, and a bicameral legislature consisting of a 99-member Chamber of Deputies and 30-member Senate.

A devastating earthquake in January 2010 destroyed the infrastructure of the Haitian government, including the complete collapse of the national parliament buildings.

Congressional Delegations

A ten-member delegation of the U.S. House of Representatives traveled to Port-au-Prince in October 2011. The delegation, led by House Democracy Partnership Chairman David Dreier, was HDP's fourth delegation to Haiti since 2007. The delegation was the first since elections that had taken place in November 2010 and March 2011 to select all 99 members of the Chamber of Deputies and 11 of the 30 Senators. The delegation met with about 20 MPs to discuss key aspects of a legislator's work, including constituent relations, committee operations, and budget oversight. Chairman Dreier led a meeting of the delegation with newly-elected president Michel Martelly, and the delegation was keenly interested in the progress of earthquake recovery efforts. The delegation also visited the site of the interim parliament complex that USAID was constructing.

The Commission organized a congressional delegation of nine Members of Congress, led by Representative David Price, to Haiti in May 2010. The visit focused on assessing the legislature's needs after the devastating January earthquake. After U.S. government briefings on the earthquake's impact on ongoing democracy and governance work in Haiti, the delegation met with Chamber and Senate leadership to discuss the ramifications of the disaster on their work and country. The delegation donated more than 30 laptop computers to the parliament to facilitate its operations, replacing equipment lost in the earthquake. The delegation ended the trip with a visit to the Tabarre Issa displaced persons camp, where they discussed recovery efforts with leadership of the Haitian military.

In March 2010, three members of the Commission (Representative David Price, Representative David Dreier, and Representative Donald Payne) joined a congressional delegation headed by Representative Zoe Lofgren to Haiti. While in Port-au-Prince, the Commission members met with the President of the Haitian Senate to express the solidarity of the U.S. Congress with the Haitian parliament.

Prior to the earthquake, in May 2009, the Commission arranged for another Congressional visit to Haiti. Led by Representative Mazie Hirono, the delegation of five Members met with parliamentary leadership of both the Chamber and the Senate, along with a wide array of political and party leaders. The delegation also met with President René Préval and Prime Minister Michele Pierre Louis. The centerpiece of the visit was a May 11 legislative conference, where the Members exchanged views with Haitian MPs and staff on the importance of timely, nonpartisan research as well as the importance of the role of legislative rules of procedure.

In February 2007, Representative Price led a delegation of three Members of Congress to Port-au-Prince to meet with Chamber and Senate leadership, as well as President Préval. The delegation conducted additional sessions with Haitian MPs focused on parliamentary administration and structure, committee operations, constituent and media relations, parliamentary ethics, and the role of parties. Concurrently, Congressional staff worked with their Haitian counterparts on improving committee operations and provided advice on the organization of public hearings.

Staff Delegations

In October 2009, a delegation of retired staff from the Congressional Research Service traveled to Haiti on the Commission's behalf. The delegation's purpose was to support the USAID-funded parliamentary strengthening program, which has sought to create an effective research service for the Haitian parliament. The delegation also conducted a training program to strengthen Haitian researchers' ability to provide quality legislative research products to the parliament. In addition, meetings were held with MPs and parliamentary staff on issues facing legislators and the ways in which a central research unit could support MPs and committees in developing and amending legislation, assessing the economic and other impacts of proposed legislation, and conducting oversight of the executive branch.

In May 2008, the Commission organized a delegation of staff from the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer to travel to Haiti to assist administrators of the Haitian parliament. Representatives of the Advanced Business Solutions office, the Payroll and Benefits office, and an Internet system specialist, worked with their counterparts in Port-au-Prince on technology and personnel issues.

In June 2007, a senior counsel on the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, traveled to Haiti on behalf of the Commission to conduct a seminar on parliamentary ethics.

In November 2007, the Commission sent a delegation of staff from the Budget and from the Ways and Means Committee to train Haitian staff on budget analysis. The November delegation included two former staff from the Congressional Research Service, who conducted an assessment of the possibility of a legislative resource center that would combine library, archives, and research capability to serve the parliament.

MP Seminars

In October 2011, October 2009 and September 2008, the Commission organized seminars for visiting Haitian Members of Parliament. The week-long programs began with an overview of the Congress and its committee structure by the Congressional Research Service. Committee staff and former Members of Congress spoke to participants about various aspects of committee operations, including the role of staff and how to organize public hearings. A number of U.S. Members of Congress spoke to participants in each seminar, offering personal experiences in using committees to advance their own legislative and oversight priorities. Participants were briefed on the organization and conduct of committee hearings and observed a hearing firsthand.

Staff Seminars

In June 2010, two staff members of the Haitian parliament traveled to Warsaw, Poland, to attend the 20th anniversary of the Frost-Solomon Commission, which was the predecessor to the House Democracy Assistance Commission. They were joined by 22 staff members from 11 partnership countries, along with MPs and research staff from former partners of the Frost-Solomon Commission. While they were in Warsaw, current and former staff of the Congressional Research Service worked with the Haitian staff to help them further develop their parliamentary research service through workshops, peer-to-peer discussions, and open forums. Speakers underlined the importance of reliable, impartial, timely, and accurate research to the work of democratic legislatures. They also shared tips on how to engage legislators and help them see the value of research, which was a concern shared by a number of participants.

In October 2012, two staff members from the Haitian National Assembly participated in a staff institute to strengthen legislative budget analysis. Twenty-three staff from twelve partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Budget, Appropriations, Agriculture, and Ways and Means Committees. Participants also met with representatives from the Government Accountability Office, the World Bank Institute and the International Budget Partnership.

In January 2012, two staff members participated in a training seminar on legislative research and analysis. They were joined by colleagues from 12 other HDP partner countries. The parliamentary staff institute included presentations and discussions with Members of Congress and top officials from the Congressional Research Service (CRS). Current and former CRS staff provided the participants an overview of basic legislative research and analysis techniques including identifying sources of information, basic policy analysis, developing alternatives for the legislature, and conducting impact analysis.

In December 2010, Haitian staff took part in a staff institute focused on committee operations, where they held meetings with the Congressional Research Service, staff from several House committees, and the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Commission. In addition, committee staff from the Republic of Macedonia shared their experience in developing procedures to begin using oversight hearings as an element of the work of their parliamentary committees.

In October 2010, staff from the Haitian parliament partook in a staff institute which focused on strengthening legislative budget analysis capacity. Twenty-one staff from 11 partner countries participated in the program, which included meetings with or presentations by officials from the Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and staff from the House Committees on Budget and on Appropriations, and the Joint Committee on Taxation. Additionally, budget analysts from the Kenyan National Assembly shared their experience in establishing and developing a parliamentary budget office.

The fifth staff institute was held in December 2009 and was organized in conjunction with the Congressional Research Service (CRS). The Institute hosted 27 participants from 12 partner countries, including Haiti, who were mostly officials and analysts of their respective parliament's research services. The program focused on the role of a research service in providing independent information and analysis to members of parliament and their staff.

In November 2009, Haitian parliamentary staff participated in a staff institute centered on the third annual World E-Parliament Conference, which specifically addressed the manner in which information and communications technology can help improve legislative representation, transparency, accountability, openness, and effectiveness.

Haitian parliamentary staff joined 28 parliamentary staffers from 10 partnership countries in Washington in December 2008 for a staff institute focused on strengthening committee operations. Participants gained an understanding of committee operations in the U.S. Congress and explored topics such as staff roles and responsibilities, legislative analysis, drafting and research, legislative-executive relations, and media relations.

A staff institute in October 2008 that addressed congressional oversight and budgeting included staff from the Haitian parliament. Participants were given an overview of the budget process in the U.S. and the structure, organization, and services provided by the Congressional Budget Office. The program

dealt with transparency, revenue estimation, and key budgetary policy issues such as health, defense, agriculture, infrastructure, and education.

Haitian parliamentary staff were present for the inaugural staff institute in December 2007. The Institute offered a two-track program, one for senior parliamentary administrators and the other on research and analysis services for the legislature. The program included a three-day overview of the U.S. Congress, a one-day visit to the Maryland Legislature to learn about state and local government, and a five-day series of meetings and workshops with current and retired Congressional research and administrative staff.

Material Assistance

Prior to the January 2010 earthquake that destroyed the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the Commission had pledged \$200,000 for the development of a Parliamentary Services Center for the Haitian parliament. The project has been postponed until an interim parliament building is constructed. In addition to the financial assistance, the Commission also plans to provide technical assistance and training so that the center can provide independent research and analysis.