

Combined Civilian and Military Disaster Response: A Critical Analysis of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake Relief Effort

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Abstract : Introduction: Over ten years after the 7.0 magnitude Earthquake struck the capital of Haiti, impacting over three million people and leading to the deaths of over two hundred thousand, the multinational humanitarian response remains the largest disaster relief effort to date. This study critically evaluates the multi-sector and multinational disaster response to the Earthquake, looking at how the lessons learned from this analysis can be applied to future disaster response efforts. We put particular emphasis on assessing the interaction between civilian and military sectors during this humanitarian relief effort, with the hopes of highlighting how concrete guidelines are essential to improve future responses. Methods: An extensive scoping review of the relevant literature was conducted - where library scientists conducted reproducible, verified systematic searches of multiple databases. Grey literature and hand searches were utilised to identify additional unclassified military documents, for inclusion in the study. More than 100 documents were included for data extraction and analysis. Key domains were identified, these included: Humanitarian and Military Response, Communication, Coordination, Resources, Needs Assessment and Pre-Existing Policy. Corresponding information and lessons-learned pertaining to these domains was then extracted - detailing the barriers and facilitators to an effective response. Results: Multiple themes were noted which stratified all identified domains - including the lack of adequate pre-existing policy, as well as extensive ambiguity of actors' roles. This ambiguity was continually influenced by the complex role the United States military played in the disaster response. At a deeper level, the effects of neo-colonialism and concern about infringements on Haitian sovereignty played a substantial role at all levels: setting the pre-existing conditions and determining the redevelopment efforts that followed. Furthermore, external factors significantly impacted the response, particularly the loss of life within the political and security sectors. This was compounded by the destruction of important infrastructure systems - particularly electricity supplies and telecommunication networks, as well as air and seaport capabilities. Conclusions: This study stands as one of the first and most comprehensive evaluations, systematically analysing the civilian and military response - including their collaborative efforts. This study offers vital information for improving future combined responses and provides a significant opportunity for advancing knowledge in disaster relief efforts - which remains a more pressing issue than ever. The categories and domains formulated serve to highlight interdependent factors that should be applied in future disaster responses, with significant potential to aid the effective performance of humanitarian actors. Further studies will be grounded in these findings, particularly the need for greater inclusion of the Haitian perspective in the literature, through additional qualitative research studies.

Keywords : civilian and military collaboration, combined response, disaster, disaster response, earthquake, Haiti, humanitarian response

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