SHELTER RECOVERY IN URBAN HAITI AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE: The Dual Role of Social Capital

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Shelter recovery in urban Haiti after the earthquake: the dual role of social capital

Guitele J. Rahill, N. Emel Ganapati, J. Calixte Clérismé and Anuradha Mukherji

This paper documents the culture-specific understanding of social capital among Haitians and examines its benefits and downsides in post-disaster shelter recovery following the 12 January 2010 earthquake. The case study of shelter recovery processes in three socioeconomically diverse communities (Pétion-Ville, Delmas and Canapé Vert) in Port-au-Prince suggests that social capital plays dual roles in post-disaster shelter recovery of the displaced population in Haiti. On the one hand, it provides enhanced access to shelter-related resources for those with connections. On the other hand, it accentuates pre-existing inequalities or creates new inequalities among displaced Haitians. In some cases, such inequalities lead to tensions between the have and have-nots and instigate violence among the displaced.

Keywords: disasters; displaced populations; Haiti; Haiti earthquake; housing recovery; inequalities; shelter recovery; social capital; temporary shelter

Introduction

Social capital, although not a new notion (Portes, 1998), is a multidimensional concept that has received a great deal of attention across several disciplines in the past decades, especially following the work of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988; 1990), and Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1993). Social capital is an asset that allows people to meet individual or collective ends through formal and informal civic networks. Although most of the social capital literature highlights its benefits, downsides exist as well, as studies on organised crime such as mafia families and gangs have shown (Gambetta, 1993; Pih et al., 2008).

The growing literature in the field with respect to disasters acknowledges that social capital is not always a public good. Lacking from that literature, however, is an in-depth examination of the specific role of social capital during post-disaster shelter recovery. This article addresses that gap in the literature through a case study of social capital and shelter recovery processes in three socioeconomically diverse communities in Port-au-Prince, Haiti—Pétion-Ville, Delmas and Canapé Vert—following the 12 January 2010 earthquake.

Haiti, the first black republic in the western hemisphere, is a small Caribbean nation of 10 million people (World Bank, 2011; see Figure 1). With a gross national income per capita of $650, Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas and one of the poorest in the world; an estimated 78% of its population survives on less than $2 per day (World Bank, 2011). Approximately half of Haiti’s population lacks access to health care and more than 80% has no clean drinking water (Verner and Heinemann,
Haiti relies heavily on foreign donors with respect to running its operations (Zanotti, 2010). The earthquake that hit the island on 12 January 2010, hereafter referred to as the Haiti earthquake, was not the first disaster the country has had to face. Indeed, Haiti’s geographical location subjects it to continuous seasonal hazards such as hurricanes and tropical storms. Nonetheless, the impact of the Haiti earthquake was unprecedented. Measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale, it killed an estimated 222,570 people and affected another 3.7 million people in the country (CRED, n.d.). It caused damage estimated at around $7.8 billion (World Bank, 2011).

This article’s focus on the post-earthquake context in Haiti has a twofold purpose: documenting the culture-specific understanding of social capital among Haitians,

**Figure 1. Map of Haiti and selected communities**

from the perspective of those who are directly affected by the disaster, and examining the benefits and drawbacks of social capital in shelter recovery.

This research is significant for several reasons. First, to the authors’ knowledge, it is the first study to shed light on the culturally specific definition of social capital among Haitians, a historically understudied population. Second, the study contributes to extant knowledge on post-disaster recovery, a long understudied phase of disasters, as noted by several scholars (Mileti, Drabek and Haas, 1975; Drabek, 1986; Ganapati and Ganapati, 2009). Third, the Haitian earthquake provides a unique context for the study of social capital and post-disaster recovery, as the capacity of the Haitian government to provide post-disaster shelter is insufficient. Indeed, international aid agencies have met only a small proportion of the post-disaster shelter requirements in Haiti, underscoring the urgent need for a better understanding of the community’s capacities to house themselves—in terms of social capital.

Two main findings have emerged from this study. First, there is a need to develop a contextual understanding of social capital. Haitians define social capital in a culturally specific manner using terms such as rekonnèt, konfyans, moun pa and pati pri, as discussed below. This terminology explains how social capital is created and maintained, how it is embedded in relationships and how it enhances access to resources through favours. The second finding concerns the dual roles that social capital has played in post-disaster shelter recovery of the displaced population in Haiti. On the one hand, it provides enhanced access to shelter-related resources for those with connections; on the other, it accentuates pre-existing inequalities and instigates tensions and violence among displaced Haitians.

The next section provides a literature review, highlighting the need for a contextual and a more balanced approach to social capital. The following section describes the research methods. Next, the article presents the contextual understanding of social capital in Haiti and examines its benefits and downsides for shelter recovery in post-disaster Haiti, using illustrative quotes from study participants. It concludes with a summary and discussion of directions for future research and details the implications of this study for research and policy regarding post-disaster contexts.

Social capital: the need for a contextual and more balanced understanding

Hanifan, a school teacher in West Virginia, was the first person to use the term ‘social capital’ in his discussion of the sort of collaboration that needs to occur among community members in order to maximise their ability to achieve goals (Hanifan, 1916; 1920; Putnam, 2000). In that context, Hanifan conceptualised social capital as ‘goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit’, such as a rural community (Hanifan, 1916, p. 130). He added that social capital may offer benefits for the individual as well as for the community when there is cooperation between individuals and their communities.
Although the term ‘social capital’ fell into disuse for many years, it re-emerged in the writings of Seeley and colleagues as well as Jacobs, Loury and Schlicht (Putnam, 2002). Yet while the term was soon popularised through the work of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, their definitions as to what constitutes social capital diverge. Bourdieu defines social capital as an ‘actual or potential’ resource to which individuals have access by becoming members of networks of ‘mutual acquaintance and recognition’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 251). Explaining the value of social capital in the formation of human capital, Coleman defines it by its function, viewing social capital as a resource that facilitates action within the structure (Coleman, 1988, p. S98). Putnam defines social capital as the ‘features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives’ (Putnam, 1996, p. 34).

The definitions offered by Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam suggest that social capital as an asset has different components. Following Hooghe and Stolle (2003), the authors of this study suggest that social capital has both structural and attitudinal components. The structural components refer to networks of a formal nature—such as community-based organisations—as well as networks of an informal nature, such as family. One study that highlights this structural aspect defines social capital as ‘resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilised in purposive actions’ (Lin, Cook and Burt, 2001, p. 12). The attitudinal components of social capital include the norms, values and understandings that enable interpersonal collaboration within these networks. One example of the attitudinal component of social capital is trust, which is built through repeated face-to-face interaction or verification (Fukuyama, 1995; Burke and Stets, 1999).

This article addresses two main shortcomings of the mainstream social capital literature. The first pertains to what appears to be a frequent assumption that social capital means the same thing in different contexts. Yet some scholars call for a contextual understanding of social capital. For instance, Weller highlights the need for ‘a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to the analysis of social capital’ (Weller, 2009, p. 873). Similarly, Shah (2007) highlights the need for contextualising the impact of social capital in different social milieus. These scholars add to our understanding of context as important to social capital, but they refer to studying social capital in different contexts without questioning its meaning in those contexts. Since the term ‘social capital’ is more complex than is often presented in the literature, it remains to be understood how social capital itself is defined and perceived in different contexts. To address this gap in the literature, this study examines the meaning of social capital in the Haitian context.

While not always using the term ‘social capital’ specifically, studies conducted in Haiti and in the United States indicate the importance of support networks in the lives of Haitians. These studies discuss concepts such as the Haitian lakou and a relationship called rekonnèt, which can be explained as follows.

**Lakou:** Traditionally, the lakou ‘refers to clusters of homes in which Haitian families reside, as well as to the extended and multiple-generation family form that is
prominent in Haitian culture’ (Edmond, Randolph and Richard, 2007, p. 19). It includes not only the biological but also fictive kin—such as godparents and others who share close social ties. It constitutes an important informal safety net against hardship and daily stressors in Haitian culture since the members of the lakou collaborate to accomplish tasks and provide financial and other forms of support to each other; for example, they may care for each other’s children, socialising them to adhere to community norms (LaRose, 1975; Edmond, Randolph and Richard, 2007; Rahill, Jean-Gilles and Thomlison, 2012).

**Rekonnèt:** Recognising and trusting someone based on the personal experience of interacting with that individual in the Haitian lakou is referred to as rekonnèt. Rahill and Rice (2010) touch on the issues of social capital in their public health research on a hidden population of Haitian immigrant picuristes (lay injectionists) and their clients in the United States—without specifically calling it ‘social capital’. In particular, they highlight the importance of rekonnèt in facilitating Haitians’ access to picuristes’ injections. They also document that the trust associated with rekonnèt begins among the blood relatives and is extended by proxy to neighbours and friends who have demonstrated a history of reciprocal trust.

In addition to the aforementioned research on the lakou and rekonnèt, studies conducted in Haiti point to a rather complex relationship between social capital and the state. They imply that social capital among Haitians arises both as a communal effort to maximise scarce resources and as a reaction to a centralised Haitian government that has repeatedly been oppressive (Fatton, 2002). These studies also suggest that Haitians in rural areas possess a vibrant stock of social capital, because their isolation from the capital—the seat of the government and its arms—may in fact strengthen their trust in and solidarity with those who share their lakou and those with whom they share rekonnèt relationships (White and Smucker, 1998; World Bank, 1998; Smith, 2001). In their work on social resilience and state fragility in Haiti, Verner and Heinemann summarise the relationship between social capital between rural residents and the state as follows: ‘Haiti is a resilient society whose rural communities in particular have developed coping mechanisms in response to a long history of underdevelopment and poor governance’ (Verner and Heinemann, 2006, p.1).

While they make valuable contributions to our understanding of social capital in Haiti and among Haitians in the United States, none of the aforementioned studies defines social capital in a comprehensive way from the Haitian perspective. To bridge that gap, this article documents contextual notions of social capital among Haitians following the Haiti earthquake, identifying attitudinal and structural components of social capital and the relationships among them.

The second shortcoming of the mainstream social capital literature is that much of the literature highlights the benefits of social capital. This is also true for the emerging literature on the linkage between social capital and disasters, which focuses mostly on the benefits of social capital for preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation phases—except for a few studies that examine how social capital forms and changes over time following disasters (Ganapati, 2009; Gill, Picou and Ritchie, 2012). The
disasters literature typically mentions benefits of social capital, such as successful evacuation in the preparedness phase (Kiefer and Montjoy, 2006; Hawkins and Maurer, 2010); rescue and life-saving efforts in the response phase (Hawkins and Maurer, 2010); population recovery as well as successful and speedy rebuilding in the post-disaster recovery phase (Nakagawa and Shaw, 2004; Brouwer and Nhassengo, 2006; Hawkins and Maurer, 2010; Aldrich, 2011); and reduction of risk and vulnerability in megacities for mitigation purposes (Wisner, 2003).

A few studies in the disaster literature adopt a more critical approach to the concept of social capital. For instance, Buckland and Rahman (1999) find that communities with higher levels of social capital were better prepared for and responded more effectively to the 1997 Red River Flood in Manitoba, Canada, as they were able to effectively mobilise people through existing networks. At the same time, these communities experienced blocking or delaying of urgent evacuation decisions due to their social capital.

Aldrich and Crook (2008) argue that social capital was like a ‘double-edged sword’ following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Even though it brought disaster survivors together, it also made it possible for them to mobilise against projects that could have expedited the recovery process, such as establishing trailer parks to temporarily accommodate disaster survivors.

Lastly, Ganapati (2012a; 2013) notes that social capital had both benefits and downsides for women affected by the 17 August 1999 earthquake in Turkey. On the one hand, it helped women leave behind the psychological scars linked to the earthquake, empowered them and helped them attain civic consciousness and avoid the stigma of charity while recovering from the earthquake (Ganapati, 2012a). On the other hand, social capital helped perpetuate gender-based assumptions and put women at odds with the state authorities (Ganapati, 2013).

This article builds on the abovementioned critical literature and examines the downsides as well as the benefits of social capital during post-disaster shelter recovery in Haiti. The research questions were:

- How is social capital defined in post-earthquake Haiti?
- What is the role of social capital in enabling or hindering access to shelter and shelter-related resources following the Haiti earthquake?

Specifically, this study investigates the role of social capital among those affected by the Haiti earthquake in the process of obtaining access to temporary shelter. Temporary sheltering is one of the four phases of post-disaster sheltering and housing identified by Quarantelli (1982): ‘emergency sheltering’ (housing disaster victims temporarily, as in stadiums); ‘temporary sheltering’ (as in tents); ‘temporary housing’ (as in trailers); and ‘permanent housing’ (as in new housing units built after a disaster).

This article focuses on temporary shelter not only because it provides rapid relief to those affected by disasters in general, but also because, almost three years after the 2010 earthquake, it continued to be important in post-earthquake Haiti. A recent report indicates that 369,000 people resided in tent or tent-like structures in sites
for internally displaced persons across the earthquake-affected areas in Haiti as of August 2012 (IOM and IASC, 2012). The number of people residing in such structures was even higher—1.5 million—when the authors began conducting the study in July 2010 (IOM and IASC, 2012).

**Research methods**

The authors obtained approval from the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at the participating universities and from the National Ethics Committee of Haiti, Haiti’s country-level IRB. The type of funding, provided by a National Science Foundation Rapid Response Research grant, the nature of the inquiry, and the authors’ local connections in Haiti informed the choice of research methods.

Seeking an in-depth understanding of social capital and post-disaster shelter recovery processes in Haiti, the authors conducted case studies in the Pétion-Ville, Delmas and Canapé Vert communities of Port-au-Prince after the Haiti earthquake (see Figure 1). Pétion-Ville, a suburb of Port-au-Prince, has traditionally been home primarily to wealthy Haitians and diplomats. In the decades prior to the earthquake, with the peasants’ exodus to Port-au-Prince, the area became home to many working-class families. After the earthquake, it received an influx of residents fleeing from more damaged areas in Port-au-Prince. Delmas has long been divided into Haut Delmas (High Delmas), a middle-income area, and Bas Delmas (Lower Delmas), which has a lower socioeconomic contingency. Canapé Vert includes squatter areas among its hillsides. Historically, it was a high-income area, where the ex-president of Haiti René Préval resided. The authors selected these three adjacent, yet socioeconomically diverse communities in Port-au-Prince since each had lower-income areas that were devastated by the earthquake and because displaced populations from those areas relied in part on social capital to house themselves.

The research activities in the selected communities were structured around the following three phases:

1. baseline data collection and analysis (May–September 2010);
2. follow-up data collection and analysis (October 2010–May 2011); and
3. assessment (validation/participant verification) research (June 2011).

During the first and second research phases, the data collection methods included focus groups, in-depth interviews, participatory site observation and a review of secondary sources.

**Focus groups**

To collect baseline data during the first phase, the authors facilitated six focus groups with a total of 47 residents in Pétion-Ville, Delmas and Canapé Vert; two focus groups were established in each community—one comprised exclusively of women, the other exclusively of men. During the second phase, the authors conducted six
follow-up focus groups in the same communities, equally divided across the communities and by sex (n=45). Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the focus group participants from the first phase participated in the second phase.

In total, there were 63 focus groups participants (34 men: 29 women), distributed across Pétion-Ville (n=22; 12 men: 10 women), Delmas (n=15; 9 men: 6 women) and Canapé Vert (n=26; 13 men: 13 women). Within the sample, 83% had high school education or less; 75% of the participants were under 35. The high proportion of young adults may reflect the fact that structural destruction caused by the earthquake led to the closing of secondary schools, universities and businesses; as a result, many young adults were available to participate in the focus groups.

The focus groups were held in Haitian Kreyòl in all three communities, in venues that participants identified as convenient. These sites included the Haitian Institute of Community Health (Institut Haitien de Santé Communautaire, or INHSAC), local churches and a tent school. The focus group guide was semi-structured and included questions on the attitudinal and structural components of social capital and the shelter recovery process. Focus group participants were also asked closed-ended questions that yielded demographic data and data concerning attitudinal components of social capital (such as on trust and solidarity).

**In-depth interviews**

During the first and second phases, the authors conducted 54 in-depth interviews with community leaders (n=38; 32 men: 6 women) and policy-makers—Haitian government officials at the local and national levels, such as mayors and ministers, as well as international aid agency representatives (n=16; 13 men: 3 women). About two-thirds of the community leaders had some college education and above. As with the focus group participants, the majority of the community leaders (53%) were under 35. The policy-makers’ views are not included in this paper since it focuses on the perspectives of the community members on the role of social capital in shelter recovery.

The interviews with community leaders were conducted in Haitian Kreyòl or French depending on the participant’s stated preference. Interviews took place at INHSAC, at the Hotel Villa Créole in Pétion-Ville and in churches in Delmas and Canapé Vert. The study instrument was semi-structured. It included questions on the pre- and post-earthquake states of the communities, shelter recovery, attitudinal and structural components of social capital and demographic characteristics.

The authors employed targeted purposive sampling methods to recruit participants for interviews and focus groups. J. Calixte Clérismé, the Haiti-based author, was primarily responsible for initiating recruitment, with the support of community leaders from across the three neighbourhoods. Subsequently, participants referred others to the study via word of mouth (snowball sampling).

Since data analysis in qualitative research is often undertaken concurrently with data collection (Patton, 2002), the authors agreed on the final sample size for the study after conducting enough interviews to determine theoretical saturation both
within and among interviews (Agar, 1980; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). They determined saturation in sampling of community leaders after interviewing 38 participants in the selected communities.

The authors audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews and the focus groups with the informed consent of participants. To save time and resources, translation and transcription were undertaken simultaneously (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005).

**Participant observation**

Participant observation reinforced the trust of our study participants, which had been cultivated through referrals by members of their social network. The process permitted the authors to see events in context—and to understand the daily routines and experiences of community members and policy-makers; indeed, it highlighted nuances that might otherwise have gone unnoticed in the focus groups and interviews. As part of participant observation, the authors went to where the action was—for example, camps of displaced persons, church meetings, spontaneous community protests, voodoo ceremonies, and cluster meetings—and simply watched and listened to the people. They recorded observations and interpretations of these observations through field notes, which they compiled and discussed with each other daily.

**Review of secondary sources**

The authors reviewed secondary sources for the study, including post-disaster recovery plans, news sources, laws and regulations and other documents published by the Haitian government and international aid agencies.

Upon collecting all the data in its various formats, the authors categorised it into themes and formulated mini-theories. They reformulated these theories until saturation, that is, until new data no longer added to the developing theory and until saturation in coding occurred, that is, until ‘discrepent cases’ stopped appearing (Patton, 2002; Padgett, 1998, p. 79). They used ATLAS.ti (6.0)®, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, as a framework to analyse the data. To analyse the closed-ended quantitative data—such as demographic data from the focus groups and interviews—they used SPSS®, which allowed for univariate and bivariate analysis.

During the last research phase—assessment (validation/participant verification)—the authors facilitated two town hall meetings at INHSAC in Pétion-Ville. As was the case with the focus groups, separate meetings were held for women and men so that women could express their views more freely; however, participants were mixed in terms of the communities. Each town hall meeting was attended by 25–30 people and served several purposes. First, they allowed the authors to present, discuss and corroborate or modify their findings from the previous phases with the study participants, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. Second, they allowed the authors to tell residents of the selected communities about lessons on shelter recovery from other places around the globe that have been affected by disasters—including Turkey (and the Marmara earthquake of 1999) and the United States (and
Guitele J. Rahill, N. Emel Ganapati, J. Calixte Clérismé and Anuradha Mukherji

Hurricane Katrina of 2005). Third, the town hall meetings gave the project participants the opportunity to hear what members of other communities had experienced, to explore others’ perceptions on the impact of the earthquake on members of other communities and to begin networking across communities.

There are some limitations to the present study. To recruit the study participants, the authors used non-probability sampling methods, which limit the extent to which the findings can be generalised. The findings reported here are based on the perceptions of a small group of Haitian survivors of the 2010 earthquake on social capital and shelter recovery. Their perspectives do not constitute a statistically representative sample of all survivors of the Haitian earthquake. Moreover, the authors were not able to interview community leaders who were from the elite social class in Haiti, and thus this work does not include their perceptions.

The study has several methodological strengths, however. First, it employs multiple methods of data gathering (triangulation), which is important in terms of establishing validity (Padgett, 1998). Second, the authors conducted all focus groups and interviews with community members and leaders as co-ethnic researchers; these researchers were not only fluent in Haitian Kreyòl and French, but also familiar with the political, economic and cultural context of Haiti. Third, the trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through member checking in the two town hall meetings.

Findings

The authors sought to conduct an in-depth examination of the specific role of social capital during post-disaster shelter recovery following the Haiti earthquake, from the perspectives of those who were directly affected by the disaster. To understand the role of social capital in that context, they needed to know how survivors of the Haiti earthquake defined social capital during post-disaster shelter recovery and, specifically, its benefits and downsides. The findings suggest that Haitians define social capital in a culturally specific manner that is consistent with and expands on what was previously described as rekonnèt. In addition, the findings imply that there were both benefits and downsides to that culturally defined social capital in relation to accessing shelter and shelter-related resources—such as tarps—following the Haiti earthquake.

The Haitian definition of social capital

The study participants defined social capital through its various components. These components help us understand not only how social capital is created and maintained through relationships in Haitian society, but also how it enhances a person’s access to resources. In the Haitian context, social capital has four related components: rekonnèt, konfyans, moun pa and pati pri.

As mentioned earlier, rekonnèt, in its most literal form, means to recognise someone. In the Haitian context, social capital starts developing when one person recognises
another through previous interaction as valued blood relatives, neighbours or close friends (the two *rekonnèt*). When there is no *rekonnèt*, there is no *konfyans*, which means trust (an attitudinal component of social capital). *Konfyans* develops based on the previous positive interaction between individuals. To illustrate the link between *rekonnèt* and *konfyans*, a male community leader from Delmas stated:

> People who are *rekonnèt* [. . .] the masses have trust in them that they don’t abuse people; they serve [politically or officially] as they are supposed to serve [. . .]. They know that such and such a person is a good person.

A female community leader from Pétion-Ville confirmed: ‘You have to *rekonnèt* the person to trust them.’

Once there is a history of mutually beneficial interaction grounded in trust between two people, they become members of each other’s inner circle. In the Haitian context, that means a person becomes *moun pa*, which literally means ‘person of mine’. Becoming part of someone’s inner circle offers benefits. A *moun pa* will take sides with the person in whose inner circle he or she is—rather than with someone who is not in that inner circle. Taking sides may occur during conflict situations or in a context of need, as may pertain to the provision of access to a resource. The inner circle and *moun pa* are not limited to individuals from the *lakou*, described earlier; in fact, individuals who are embraced as *moun pa* are often outside of the *lakou*, as they possess and can provide resources to individual members of a *lakou* that the *lakou* as a group does not have.

Having a *moun pa* relationship facilitates what Haitians in this study defined as *pati pri*, which literally means ‘part taken’, and figuratively ‘taking sides’. *Pati pri* is the end result of *rekonnèt* among those who share a *moun pa* relationship. *Pati pri* indicates that individuals take sides, such as by facilitating access to resources for their *moun pa*, while blocking it for others.

A man from Delmas asserted that Haitian society employs *rekonnèt* and *moun pa* as aspects of social capital and that these concepts truly permeate Haiti, including the school system and the job market. Female community members from the same neighbourhood confirmed this view:

> To even find a spot at a high school or university, it is a question of *moun pa* [. . .] a godfather or godmother who works there. They give you [empty] words, you give the money and don’t get the spot [. . .]. Even to find a job in this country, you must have a big contact, a powerful person that you *rekonnèt*, a *moun pa*.

A participant of the Pétion-Ville men’s focus group suggested that the history of corruption and the historical absence of government officials in providing support have led *moun pa* and *pati pri* to become the normal state of affairs. He maintained—and others concurred—that some government officials in Haiti had distributed
Guitele J. Rahill, N. Emel Ganapati, J. Calixte Clérismé and Anuradha Mukherji

the donations they collected on behalf of disaster survivors to their moun pa who resided in other communities:

_The Haitian government doesn’t seek to know the problems of our zone. I hear of government projects, but I know nothing [. . .]. They save the money that was donated so they can give it to their moun pa who are running in the presidential elections._

A male Delmas community leader assented, adding that the government only gives to those who give back—in other words, in exchange for political support and favours:

_They say ‘give to give’. We have become a whoring people! (Nou tounen yon pèp bouzen!) [. . .] The campaigners put pictures of candidates on rice that was donated back in February, so that they can campaign. Meanwhile, the price of rice has increased a whole lot._

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between different components of social capital in the Haitian context following the earthquake (rekonnèt, konfyans, moun pa and pati pri).

### Social capital and post-disaster shelter recovery: benefits and downsides

According to study participants, the role of social capital in Haiti is twofold, as it both facilitates and hinders access to shelter and shelter-related resources, such as tents and tarps. Since the earthquake, such resources are mainly distributed through programmes of international aid agencies such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which typically target certain camps of displaced populations, neighbourhoods or vulnerable populations, such as disabled people. Social capital provides enhanced access to those with connections to shelter and shelter-related resources in the post-earthquake context by focusing the attention of aid agencies on certain places or populations. The study participants indicated that having a moun pa plays an instrumental role in terms of enabling the initial connection between the aid agencies and the targeted camps, neighbourhoods and populations.
As noted by Sontag (2012a), those with the least resources are neglected in post-earthquake Haiti unless they happen to belong to one of the camps, neighbourhoods or populations covered by the shelter programmes of one of the aid agencies. Social capital in Haiti provides enhanced access to those with the least resources only if they have connections with the aid agencies. Enhanced access of some comes at the cost of exclusion of others in need but without connections, or moun pa liaisons.

A male focus group participant from Pétion-Ville illustrated how the residents of the more affluent Argentine section in Pétion-Ville had greater access to shelter-related resources by virtue of their social capital:

*The zones that have moun pa in the non-governmental organisations [someone in their inner circle working for these organisations], they find benefits. The prelas (tarps) in Argentine are prelas that were purchased. We don’t want to go get involved in pushing and shoving nor in fighting [for tarps]. If your name had been written down in a notebook, you stand in a line, you should find the thing you are looking for; but they come back and tell you everything has run out [. . .]. You find they have given your portion to their moun pa.*

A young man from a focus group in Delmas highlighted that in Haitian society, those from the higher social classes, gender notwithstanding, have more social capital, confirming that those in the higher-class neighbourhoods had their moun pa at higher levels. As a result, these men had access to shelter-related resources through pati pri and shared them with those they rekonnèt, while others without moun pa continued to suffer. As he pointed out:

*My aunt in Canapé Vert found so much pati pri with non-governmental and international aid organisations that had food, tents and prelas that she sent some to us. She has moun pa in [the United States Agency for International Development] and the international organisations. Those who don’t have contacts keep on suffering (Sak pa gen kontak ret soufri).*

The same young man also noted that he had received a surplus of rice and other foods from his aunt, who had procured them through her moun pa relationships and the accompanying pati pri:

*The earthquake helped a lot of people to share and to get water, milk and rice. It was worse and harder to get those things before the earthquake [. . .]. I tell you as much as I’ve eaten since the earthquake, if I could be fat, I would be fat. There is also the story of an old lady who was found with 26 sacks of rice at her house!*}

As a beneficiary of moun pa and pati pri through an aunt that he rekonnèt, this young man did not seem in a hurry to see things change. However, he was promptly rebuked by another focus group member, as others assented verbally:

*The negative side of that is that 350,000 people died to nourish more than seven million people. It’s the flesh of those people we have eaten, their blood we are drinking, you know*
Negatives don’t occur without positives. I would say there are more negatives than positives from this earthquake. Some still need and can’t find.

One of the consequences of social capital—as defined by the Haitian participants in this study—is that it accentuates inequalities that already existed before the earthquake, creating new inequalities among the displaced and among the most socioeconomically vulnerable. As an illustration, participants of the Pétion-Ville women’s focus group indicated that while people who had connections had access to new tents, conditions were awful in their weather-beaten tents and makeshift tent-like shelter composed of long sticks, sheets, cardboard and plastic tarp covering known as anba prelas. As one woman noted:

*We cannot last long [...]. The big winds that hit the country recently lifted the tents that weren’t deeply secured. It’s as if we are in a morgue, waiting to be buried* (Se kòm si nou nan mòg, ap tann antere).

A male participant from the Pétion-Ville men’s focus group agreed that the conditions in tents were deplorable:

*We have this situation of sitting in the sun without shelter—ah! There is no provisional shelter. When it rains, the water pours through the covering of my tent. One night, I sat up for hours waiting for a heavy rain to pass so I could sleep. When I couldn’t take it anymore, finally, I had to just lie down in the running water. We had thought the government was thinking for us and acting on our behalf. Things have remained at the level of promises from the government. In time, we will see if the true victims will benefit from the resources that have been gathered.*

As noted by a woman from Delmas, all she could do given her lack of moun pa was to watch as aid agencies distributed resources to those with connections:

*If there is organising to get food or tents, it is [...] not with us. The other day, there were cards, vouchers that were given out among family members and friends; we could only sit back and watch as they passed by us with sacks of rice and prelas. This has been done several times. If you don’t have a friend in a committee somewhere, you’re tangled up (mele).*

In some cases, inequalities created or enforced between those who have the connections and those who do not lead to acts of violence and retaliation. Those who do not have tents and are forced to live in makeshift tents (anba prelas) sometimes react to the perceived injustices of the resource distribution process among the displaced populations by vandalising the tents of their own camp neighbours or of those who live in neighbouring camps. Figures 3 and 4 show the differences between the tents and anba prelas.

A male community leader from Delmas spoke of violence and retaliatory acts carried out by people who do not have access to needed resources against those who do:
Figure 3. Tents in Delmas, Port-au-Prince

Source: N. Emel Ganapati.

Figure 4. Anba prelas in Delmas, Port-au-Prince

Source: N. Emel Ganapati.
People enter the camps and use knives and razor blades to slice your tent open out of selfishness. People have thrown dirty oil from their automobiles on my tent, just because I had one and they didn’t.

Conclusion
This study sheds light on the Haitian understanding of social capital as well as its positive and negative consequences. Perhaps more importantly, it airs Haitian survivors’ views on the role of social capital in post-disaster shelter recovery.

This research highlights two aspects with respect to social capital. First, there is a need to develop a contextual understanding of social capital. In the Haitian context, social capital is defined through rekonèt, konfyans, moun pa and pati pri. Without developing such contextual understanding, one cannot fully understand how social capital is created and maintained or what its benefits and downsides are for those who have social capital versus those who do not in a society. Second, social capital is not always a public good. Although it may offer benefits, especially for those who are part of formal and informal networks, it also has its downsides. In the post-earthquake context of Haiti, social capital facilitated access to shelter and shelter-related resources such as tarps for some, yet it hindered access to such resources for others. A consequence of such perceived injustice among displaced Haitians is the perpetration of acts of violence and retaliation against those who obtained better shelter facilities via their connections.

Three unique findings regarding the Haitian conceptualisation of social capital can be drawn from this research. First, it underscores that the English-language nomenclature ‘social capital’ may have several other terms associated with it in different contexts, cultures and languages; researchers focusing on social capital need to be aware of these. Second, the Haitian conceptualisation of social capital is more nuanced since it captures the connections between the structural (moun pa) and attitudinal (konfyans) components of social capital in that context. This approach stands in contrast to the definition put forward by Putnam (1996), which combines the structural and attitudinal components of social capital. Third, the Haitian conceptualisation acknowledges that individuals engage in pati pri—meaning that they take sides with people with whom they associate, thereby potentially hindering others from obtaining needed resources. In this view, social capital is thus recognised as having potential negative consequences; this contrasts with the mainstream literature in this field, which casts social capital mainly as a public good.

Based on these findings, the authors offer the following suggestions for future research. In general, the contextual understanding of social capital among different ethnic and racial groups in different countries should be investigated. Given that social capital means different things to different people, studies that focus on such contextual understanding will greatly enrich the social capital debate.

Another topic for future research is the downside of social capital, as studies on this topic are rare. There is a need for a more critical understanding of social capital in
general, and specifically in the context of disasters, so that corrective policies may be introduced to eliminate or reduce the negative consequences of social capital.

The study’s findings have implications for both researchers and policy-makers. With respect to researchers, this study not only highlights the importance of the language of social capital, as mentioned earlier, but also of rekonnèt among Haitians. Researchers can facilitate their entrée into targeted Haitian communities if they can nurture such relationships with their potential interlocutors (Rahill, De La Rosa and Edwards, 2012). Based on the authors’ experience in post-disaster Haiti, this means that the researchers need to be involved in the long term and engage in activities that have clearly beneficial outcomes for the targeted population so as to nurture the konfyans associated with the rekonnèt relationship. To accomplish those objectives, researchers should demonstrate transparency in their interactions with Haitians and specify upfront what their expectations are from the targeted communities and what the research processes and outcomes will be.

With respect to policy-makers (representatives of international aid organisations and Haitian government officials), this study offers several lessons on temporary shelter provision in Haiti:

• First, there is a need to identify, register and track those who were displaced by the earthquake and assess their shelter needs, among others, on a continuing basis, ideally using a comprehensive, shared database. The authors recognise that it would have been difficult to carry out such assessments following the earthquake because of the scale of the disaster, the huge number of the displaced people, lost identity cards for many Haitians and ongoing population movements in and out of Port-au-Prince. However, a comprehensive database of displaced persons would have helped aid agencies better identify and reach out to those in need of shelter.

• Second, closer collaboration among the bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, nongovernmental agencies and the Haitian government is needed for shelter provision. In Haiti, the task of achieving such collaboration was the responsibility of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Shelter/Non Food Items cluster. Although the Standing Committee has been active in the country since the 2008 Gonaïves floods, coordination among actors that have post-earthquake shelter programmes has been limited. Bringing the Haitian organisations on board has been a challenge as well, especially because cluster meetings are conducted in English. Moreover, as asserted by Nigel Fisher, humanitarian coordinator for the United Nations: ‘In the initial confusion and loss of life after the earthquake, the clusters effectively excluded their Haitian counterparts. Little by little, we brought them in’ (Sontag, 2012b).

• Third, aid agencies must avoid creating new inequalities or furthering existing ones through their post-disaster shelter programmes. To this end, aid agencies could incorporate issues of equity as a measure of success of post-disaster shelter and housing recovery programmes from the beginning, reducing the emphasis on the number of units produced when it comes to such recovery, and promoting equity among those affected by the disaster (Ganapati, 2012b).
• Fourth, there is a need for better shelter distribution mechanisms in areas affected by disasters. In the eyes of Haiti’s displaced, *moun pa* relationships, which favour one group of people over another, were instrumental in the distribution of shelter and shelter-related resources. Alternatively, such resources could have been distributed based on a random selection of individuals’ names. Such a process could have helped to avoid the perception of unfair treatment among displaced people and prevent the society from becoming more polarised. It could also have injected transparency into the distribution system, thereby helping to cultivate trust between displaced persons and distributors of aid.

• Fifth, policy-makers could utilise the positive aspects of social capital among the displaced populations during post-disaster shelter recovery. Those affected by disasters are not ‘helpless’ and ‘passive victims’, but have the capacity to help themselves during the recovery process. Social capital constitutes one such capacity. Therefore, agencies involved in shelter recovery could try to document the capacities of diverse community-based groups and the resources that existed in those communities prior to the disaster, as well as the impact of the disaster in affected communities. They could also involve them in decision-making processes, so as to ensure that the shelter programmes take into account the needs and the priorities of the community affected by the disaster.

Researchers and policy-makers need to be aware of both the downsides and benefits of social capital in post-disaster shelter recovery processes. Such awareness could help them mitigate the negative impact and maximise the positive aspects of social capital in a transparent manner that yields community-driven, long-term recovery.

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Shelter recovery in urban Haiti after the earthquake: the dual role of social capital

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See, for example, Ferguson and Mindel (2007); Ganapati (2012a); and Knack and Keefer (1997).

See, for example, Aldrich and Crook (2008); Buckland and Rahman (1999); and Ganapati (2013).

The notion of the cultural ‘embeddedness’ of social capital was introduced in the seminal work by Granovetter (1985), in which he suggests that economic life is embedded in social networks. See Small, Harding and Lamont (2010) for a recent discussion on the concept of culture.

For a historical perspective on this issue, see World Bank (1998).

With respect to the understanding of social capital, this study does not reveal any differences between leaders and regular residents, nor between men and women. Future studies should assess potential class and gender differences by obtaining larger samples and by including members of the elite. A woman from a wealthier class, for instance, benefits differently from social capital than her less fortunate counterpart and may thus have a different perspective on social capital.

See, for example, Putnam (1996).

See, for example, Gambetta (1993); Ganapati (2013); Pih et al. (2008).

For an example from Turkey, see Ganapati and Ganapati (2009).

References


