

HAITIAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION
Willingness, Know-How, Resources

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"FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA"
From Charity to Development



Restoring Trust in Haiti: An Absence from 1804 to 2024

Marthe and Maxius are engaged daily in their affairs. Marthe is a street vendor selling mangoes at Carrefour Dufort, and Maxius is a courtyard worker in Port-au-Prince in the Pacot neighborhood. I know both and meet them when I travel to the southern peninsula on National Road 2 and in the capital. Both are motivated and strive to survive in Haiti, plagued by chaos since its independence. They are trying to find the right solutions to improve their daily lives, educate and feed their children; in a word, to be as efficient as possible and, in their view, to be the most rational in their actions.

While Haitians are clearly peaceful people, they face individuals who find in violence what they believe to be the solution to their problems. These individuals also act rationally in their search for solutions to their conditions. The latest example is personified by "Barbecue," who illustrated himself in the famous French weekly "Paris-Match" on April 3, 2024, in a communication exercise to justify violence as a solution to the country's fate. It is a justification that attempts to give a rational sense to the macabre executions, notably of the innocent civilian population.

The reflection inspired by these disparate situations is the observation of a common point that links Marthe, Maxius, and Barbecue. According to them, they act rationally with the sole aim of producing a more beneficial result. Therefore, they will make the best choices to achieve their goals by seeking what will satisfy them the most and will act with the perception that their choices are evidently rational.

A study model teaches us that this approach is called "rational choice theory," where "the individual will maximize their utility or reduce their costs" (Coleman and Farago (eds)/Rational Choice Theory p.XI. We can thus speak of increasing their satisfaction goals and reducing their various efforts.

Seen from the outside, the observer seeking to understand the rational reasons of the individual will deduce that Barbecue has good reasons for making these choices. Indeed, he is the only one who can perceive the reasons, even if Blaise Pascal once observed that "the heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of." The observer must free themselves from any value judgment and adopt a neutral position to scientifically analyze these social facts.

Suppose Marthe, Maxius, and Barbecue have their short or longer-term projects that fall within their motivations to increase their satisfaction from an individual perspective. In that case, it remains true that "Man" is above all a social being, living collectively in a society. They share with other individuals a common sense of belonging to a community, to a country.

The useful choices of a community to increase their satisfaction with the quality of public services such as health, drinking water, or security will de facto cause an increase in these useful choices, likewise by other individuals who will have the same feeling of belonging. A collective synergy and competition among individuals will develop, and we will gradually move from personal rational choice to choices shared by a greater number, if not all citizens. Everyone will come together to request improved utility and, in this case, public services that a State, which interfaces as a legal entity in charge of citizens, can and must implement this request to improve their utility. Progress and innovation translate into implementing this improved utility, which can be exemplified, for instance, in the performance of public services by introducing digital technology to optimize administrative processing and reduce bureaucracy.

For example, to maximize their utility, mango vendors will ask the Carrefour Dufort authorities for more security and better-placed, cleaner spaces. These demands will expand and become a generalized concern for all street vendors in the country. Personal utility will become collective utility, a driver of improvement and progress leading to a less vulnerable, fairer, more secure society with more beneficial development for all. As the philosopher Nietzsche said, we move from the status of the Bear (individual life) to that of the Ant (collective life). Society's actors will therefore cooperate to increase and obtain individual and collective results. Thus, they will make choices that will inherently include a moral value.

A current issue summarizes this problem of choice and morality: Is it more just to approach collective destiny through debate and dialogue or through violence and arms? This is a moral assignment to a choice of collective utility.

Morality will thus appear as one of the vectors of social constraint leading to the rejection or acceptance of the proposed or retained choices. But cooperation among individuals will also create a need for institutions to respond to their demands. The emergence of these institutions responsible for regulating public affairs and staffed with representatives will both meet the demands and ensure a regulation between supply and demand. This regulation will be at the heart of an interaction between citizens and their representatives. It will generate what can be termed a Nation-State, that is, a collective sharing of values and a common sense of societal objectives.

Thus, the Nation-State will be the socio-cultural construct that will provide all citizens with various guarantees to optimize the choices for improving society in a collective movement now shared between all citizens and their representatives. Therefore, it is a virtuous cycle at work, expressed in a sentiment of trust. Over the history of this Nation-State, trust, but sometimes mistrust, will be present. However, trust remains the main driver of improvement.

Since its independence, the crisis of trust, exacerbated by prolonged periods of political turmoil and State-Nation failure, has deeply marked Haitian society. This crisis manifests itself as a "failed state" characterized notably by a lack of governance, insufficient food, health, security, and the list goes on. This complete failure of the State calls for urgent and in-depth reflection on restoring trust among the population, highlighting the importance of the commitment, vision, and concrete actions of Haitian political and economic leaders.

This failure of the State, illustrated in all areas, has tipped the balance towards mistrust, causing a break for some, leading them to sever ties with the country through legal or illegal immigration. This immigration demonstrates that individuals have sought to maximize their utility at the risk of their lives. The rational choice for them is to leave the ship of Haiti to board another ship to other countries in search of a new Nation-State in which they will integrate and recognize themselves. This flight, which is immigration, is the sad symbol of the absolute mistrust of a citizen toward his country and thus its governing representatives. This mistrust must be recognized as a paroxysmal symptom of the situation in Haiti.

In summary, what is trust? It is a psychological state, crucial for social cohesion and development. Trust is based on a relationship of alterity in which one accepts one's own vulnerability and recognizes the benevolent intentions and behaviors of the other. This is why we simply talk about a bond of trust. This bond will connect one person to another or a citizen to the public institutions that govern him. In Haiti, the reconstruction of trust must transcend simple interpersonal interactions to anchor in institutional trust, essential for the country's stability and prosperity.

Today, the Haitian people are at a historical crossroads, where restoring trust is a moral imperative and a lever for economic and social development. The widespread mistrust toward the State, exacerbated by decades of poor governance, corruption, and political instability, has created a significant divide between citizens and public institutions.

Haitians must sweep away the past and rebuild their nation. This reconstruction is not only physical and institutional but also psychological and emotional. It requires a collective awakening, an electroshock that will transform the crisis into an opportunity to build something positive and lasting.

Haiti, still grappling with its legacy of slavery, faces the colossal challenge of transitioning to modernity. This transition involves not only changes in infrastructure and institutions but above all, a profound change in the mental and emotional landscape of the Haitian people. They must forge a new identity in a modern context where new educational, scientific, and cultural benchmarks gradually replace those derived from deeply rooted ancient rites and traditions.

A renewed vision with visionary leadership is essential, where the quest for a "providential man" in Haiti is not limited to searching for an individual but rather to the emergence of a collective of committed, transparent, and responsible leaders. These leaders must embody hope, articulate a clear vision for the future, and demonstrate a tangible ability to meet the citizens' needs. They must combine "the ethic of conviction with the ethic of responsibility" (Max Weber/the scholar and the politician), an ethic of success that aligns means with ends. Today, the needs in Haiti are immense.

Therefore, the means must be proportional across all areas of public action, through concrete and tangible actions with measurable results. In Haiti, this entails improving basic services such as access to food, clean water, health, and security. Every tangible improvement in the daily lives of Haitians will be a step toward rebuilding trust. Trust cannot be decreed but must be built.

Community engagement and citizen participation are crucial in restoring trust and require citizens' active inclusion in the decision-making process. Participatory governance initiatives, where citizens actively develop and monitor public policies, will strengthen the sense of belonging and trust in institutions. Institutional arrangements must facilitate this active inclusion of citizens.

The Haitian state must demonstrate impeccable transparency and establish accountability mechanisms to rebuild trust. Fighting corruption, implementing regular audits, and publishing the results of government actions are essential to regain the people's trust.

In this context, the international community also plays a crucial role in supporting Haiti's reconstruction efforts by recognizing and supporting the will to restore trust. Foreign aid must be coordinated, transparent, and aligned with priorities defined by Haitians themselves to strengthen interventions' legitimacy and effectiveness

The rigorous application of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, established in 2005, and reinforced by the Accra Action Agenda (AAA) of 2008, lays essential foundations for international support. These initiatives emphasize five key principles: a) the ownership of developing countries in defining their strategies, b) alignment and donor support for these strategies, c) harmonization of donor actions to avoid redundancies, d) focus on achieving and evaluating results, and e) shared responsibility between donors and development partners. The AAA aims to consolidate this approach by enhancing cooperation among donors, governments of developing countries, and civil society organizations to improve aid effectiveness.

Today, Marthe and Maxius, on the one hand, and Barbecue, on the other, each represent, in their own way, the potential transition toward which the country can progress. Every citizen must now be empowered to make informed choices, seeking collective utility that will provide maximum satisfaction and well-being, or resign to resignation, immigration, or violence, one of its forms of expression. This requires political representatives in charge of this transition period to do everything possible to ensure that trust, the expression of the moral value society can uphold, is implemented to quickly satisfy the population's well-being.

In conclusion, restoring trust in Haiti is the foremost challenge. This challenge is monumental but essential for the country's future. It demands sustained commitment, a clear vision, and concrete actions from Haitian leaders and the international community. By placing trust at the core of their efforts, Haiti can pave the way for a more stable, prosperous, and harmonious future, where every citizen feels involved and confident in their country's development.

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April 192024