



**Civic Service
for a Better Haiti**

Sevis Civik Pou Ayiti Vin Pi Bel

Haitian National Civic Service

Options for Scaling it Up



April 2010¹



“We need to think differently about Haiti. We need to see the possibilities and promise of its young people. They are the future of prosperity, growth and development.”

Rubem Cesar



A major challenge for any national civic service is scaling it up in a sustainable manner. Haiti already has some experience in promoting youth service. The lessons from some of these experiences should be learned and applied.

Since 2008, the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio, with cooperation from Haitian authorities, has organized a [community protection brigade](#) (CPB) in Port-au-Prince. Initially constituted of a core group of **25 CPB** youth and adult members, it responded positively to the floods of 2009 and the earthquake of 2010.

With support from outside donors, the CPB is currently being scaled up to **200 members** from 2010 to 2012. This concept note considers opportunities to transform a brigade focused on neighborhoods in the capital into a national civic service program.

Background

Although the effects of the devastating 2010 earthquake were felt nationally, [certain neighborhoods of Central Port-au-Prince](#) were especially hard hit. In some areas, such as Greater Bel Air, over 60 per cent of buildings were substantially damaged.

The disaster has generated a wide range of reconstruction needs and a new set of security challenges. These include the destruction of schools, the deepening of unemployment, and new configurations of gang activity. Nevertheless, [community organizations](#) and individuals are assisting with disaster response and helping maintain community security.

Trained by UN peacekeepers and other agencies since 2008, the CPB is playing an important role in promoting security and coordinating recovery and reconstruction.

Where does the CPB come from?

The concept of the CPB builds on a well established tradition of civic service activities in Latin America, but also Haiti.² At its most basic, the CPB is designed to take young people off the street and put them to productive work. The CPB was initially designed with support from the former director general of police from Rio de Janeiro and his Haitian counterparts. It is an example of a [social technology tested in Brazil's notorious favelas](#).

With support from Viva Rio, early CPB recruits were provided with professional training from the Brazilian peacekeepers connected to the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). The CPB was deployed for tasks ranging from canal cleaning and sensitization campaigns to emergency flood relief and support for displaced populations.

Between **2010 and 2012**, as Viva Rio [scales up the CPB from 25 to 200 members](#), it will strengthen administrative and oversight procedures, introduce more rigorous training regimes, and provide accommodation, incentives, and payment systems, together with long-term support programs.

The CPB could serve as [a possible model](#) for the creation of a national Haitian Civic Service (HCS) program. In cooperation with a Haitian public institution, the CPB could form the basis of an HCS, with appropriate oversight from Haitian authorities. The HCS could play a central role in [restoring civic pride and the reconstruction](#) of Haiti.

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Next steps for the CPB (2010–2012)

With support from [Canada's](#) Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force and the [Norway](#) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Viva Rio is proposing a rapid [scaling up of the CPB](#). The CPB will be expanded in Port-au-Prince and extended to Caberet, a small town one hour's drive from the capital.

Over a period of [12 months](#), Viva Rio is pursuing the following steps:

Step 1: Establish a joint coordination committee (JCC)

The JCC will include community representatives from Greater Bel Air, the Haitian National Police, MINUSTAH, and Viva Rio. Monthly meetings will be held to consolidate lessons learned from the earthquake response, assess reconstruction needs, and [develop a coherent plan for the CPB](#). A strategy will be designed that accounts for monitoring, coordination, training, design of local emergency plans, and other activities.

Step 2: Deploy the CPB in Greater Bel Air and peri-urban areas

Building on a core group of CPB members, the JCC and Viva Rio will strengthen organizational structure and functions.³ The [core group](#) of the CPB will serve on a permanent basis, with [new recruits rotating](#) on an annual basis. [Equipment, uniforms, and accommodation](#) will be supplied by Viva Rio at their Bel Air headquarters, Kay Nou.

The CPB will initially focus on clearing rubble, reconstructing community facilities, and participating in other activities defined in local plans. In addition to community safety and disaster

response – a task involving all CPB members – the entity will be subdivided into specialized areas: [civic mediation and education](#), [gender equality](#), [primary health care and first aid](#), and [environment](#).

Step 3: Provide enhanced training to core CPB members and specialized skills to new recruits

A central objective of the CPB is to provide training and increase access to opportunities for youth. On the basis of signed agreements with CPB members, vocational training will be offered.

Practically, basic training in [community safety](#), [first-aid](#), and [rapid response](#) will be coordinated with Viva Rio, the Haitian National Police (HNP), MINUSTAH, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). [Partnerships](#) will be firmly established with other public and private actors to provide civic education training and instruction on environmentally sustainable practices.

Step 4: Mobilize community brigades to promote decentralization

Brigade members will be trained to become advocates of decentralization and community development. They will provide ongoing support to people moving from Port-au-Prince to outlying areas.

Moreover, CPB members will provide [training in key skills to resettling families](#) and host communities. They will also [monitor actions](#) that are meant to enhance the living conditions of residents in semi-urban and rural areas. Viva Rio will pilot this process in Cabaret, in the Western Department, to the north of Port-au-Prince.

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Scaling up to the national level

On the basis of positive CPB and other Haitian experiences, it is possible to consider opportunities for scaling up civic action. Owing to competing priorities and diminished capacities following the earthquake, any HCS would likely require combining a degree of [Haitian stewardship](#) with direct [donor and non-governmental support](#).

There are a range of precedents for civic action in Haiti, not least the development and activities of the civic action program of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Civic Action. In addition to the CPB, there are a host of non-governmental and university-based entities promoting organized youth mobilization to positive effect.

An accelerated plan to create a national HCS would need to be led by Haitian authorities and their counterparts. But rapid action is required. If planned appropriately and adequately resourced, it is possible to conceive of [500–1,000 core group representatives by 2012](#), with a target of at least [100,000 HCS volunteers by 2020](#).

The [legal provisions](#) for an HCS are already set out in [Article 52-3](#) of the Haitian Constitution. A responsible Haitian institution could assist in overseeing aspects of the expansion. On the basis of an accord with the CPB and its supporters, the Haitian government could designate a lead agency to set relevant priorities, policies, and coordinating activities of the HCSI units.

The HCS could be [structured](#) around a [core group of highly trained members](#), with additional members recruited and selected on the basis of established criteria and provided remuneration. These additional members could be cycled through on a rolling basis.

An [intensive training regime](#) could be established – drawing on principles adapted from the CPB. All new recruits could be put through a rigorous skills-development program, with core group members allocated additional education, numeracy instruction, and specialized education as required.⁴

The [financial costs](#) of the civic service initiative should not be underestimated. The budget for the CPB (FY10-11) is approximately USD750,000. This includes an initial complement of 100 recruits, training, and related management costs. Following this pattern, 500 members would amount to approximately [USD3.75 million per annum](#). There are [economies of scale](#) with any further expansion up to 2020.

A comprehensive budget would need to be established to anticipate the scaling up of the HCS. This would account for human resource and management costs, but also work uniforms and equipment, accommodation and board, and basic health services. On completion of service, program members would also receive certification, a modest [readjustment allowance](#), and support for employment placement.

Endnotes

- 1 This concept note was prepared by Robert Muggah. Substantive input was provided by Rubem Fernandes Cesar, Eric Calpas, Vincent Grammont, and representatives of Haitian civil society.
- 2 A prominent example in Haiti is the “agents multiplicateurs de changement” (AMC) formed by the Ministry of Youth (Ministère de la Jeunesse or MJSAC).
- 3 CPB members to be paid on a merit-based scale (monthly).
- 4 All will be expected to abide by a code of conduct that includes disciplinary measures.