

# Haiti reconstruction will require local input

January 26 2010

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Destruction in Haiti, the result of a January 12 earthquake, is staggering. The majority of the capital city of Port-au-Prince will have to be rebuilt from scratch. Isabelle Thomas-Maret, a Université de Montréal urbanism professor who specializes in rebuilding after natural catastrophes, survived hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005 and was consulted in rebuilding that city.

Haiti must avoid many pitfalls in its [reconstruction](#), warns Thomas-Maret: "Elected officials and urban planners from [Haiti](#) will have to gauge the needs of the local population in their reconstruction plan. The mistake would be to parachute a team of international experts who would impose their vision without consulting the local expertise."

In New Orleans, a reconstruction plan was recently adopted by citizens and elected officials, close to five years after the disaster. It was a long participative process because an initial plan by an outside committee of experts was very poorly received - precisely what Haiti must avoid. "After providing citizens with temporary lodging and rebuilding the basic water, electricity and sewer infrastructures, decisions regarding the reconstruction mustn't be rushed, because mistakes will be difficult to correct," says Thomas-Maret.

Thomas-Maret says Port-au-Prince was ill prepared to face its earthquake. If the capital had possessed an emergency plan the impact of the [earthquake](#) could have been much less dramatic. "That said, urban planning in New Orleans didn't take into consideration the vulnerabilities of its territory," she says. "Three weeks prior to the hurricane, I

remember speaking with a hydrologist about the technical possibility of the dikes rupturing. His modeling clearly predicted what happened."

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: Haiti reconstruction will require local input (2010, January 26) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-01-haiti-reconstruction-require-local.html>

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