



Randolph Gilbert_presentation Haiti Working Group 18 June2026

English version

Onè/Respè... Honor/Respect

Introduction

I would like to thank the **Haiti Working Group**—particularly Peter Hakim—for inviting me to participate in this discussion. As with any dialogue, we will likely not be able to exhaust all the avenues of the two topics suggested for debate today: **the economy and job creation**, but both are undoubtedly extremely relevant. The second (employment/labor market) has been the most immediate and complex link between the economic and the social... the necessary bridge when we wish to comprehensively address the economic challenges of any nation... even more so in the case of Haiti, which will be the subject of this conversation.

Before beginning my remarks, let me point out:

- i) ONE: I speak strictly in my personal capacity; I am a retired ECLAC employee (since February 2025) and I have immense gratitude towards the institution, my professional training, and the privilege of having been able to observe and analyze the socio-economic reality of Haiti -my own country- and some others in our region.
- ii) TWO: As far as possible, I will focus my narrative/analysis on **the five points** suggested by the Haiti Working Group team. However, in some cases, given certain differences/disagreements about the questions raised, my analysis will take other paths...
- iii) THREE: Finally, I hope this may be useful, serving as input for future debates, where other more relevant actors may eventually contribute with “*clear recommendations*”... in my case, it is not my place to do so... this is not false modesty, but intellectual honesty.

1. Socio-economic overview. A brief summary

Eight consecutive years (since 2019) of GDP decline... In a decade, Haiti's GDP will have suffered an average annual drop of (minus)-2.4%... almost 20 percentage points accumulated. This represents a significant loss of wealth, as well as jeopardized lives and futures... not to mention the considerable socio-economic cost of insecurity, violence, loss of life, and the thousands of displaced people who have been affected, primarily in three departments: West (Port-au-Prince & Metropolitan Area), Artibonite, and Central (Hinche/Mirebalais)...

What indicators do we have to capture it? Without wishing to overwhelm you, nor to inject a barrage of statistics and economic indicators that we could quote, let us simply say that:

...of course, GDP (both overall and sectoral) is one of them, declining GDP per capita, inflation (25-30%), foreign trade, low tax pressure (5%-7% of GDP), chronic balance of payments deficit (even the slightest recovery tends to overwhelm imports (intermediate goods, but especially consumer goods)...

“The fiscal situation in Haiti remains structurally precarious, as tax revenues remain very low, due to a narrow tax base (linked to high levels of informal employment) and high inflation, fueled by the monetization of the deficit.” (ECLAC, Haiti, Preliminary Overview 2025)

	GDP annual variation	
2018	1.7	
2019	-1.7	
2020	-3.3	
2021	-1.8	
2022	-1.7	
2023	-1.9	
2024	-4.2	
2025	-2.3	
2026 (*)	-1.9	

(*) Projection as in MEF-DGB "Budget rectificatif", june 2026

...meanwhile, **remittance flows (around \$4 billion a year)** remain one of the few “booming” outcomes, a source of some exchange rate stability, and a source of some equilibrium or recovery of net international reserves (NIR)... (at the cost of migration).

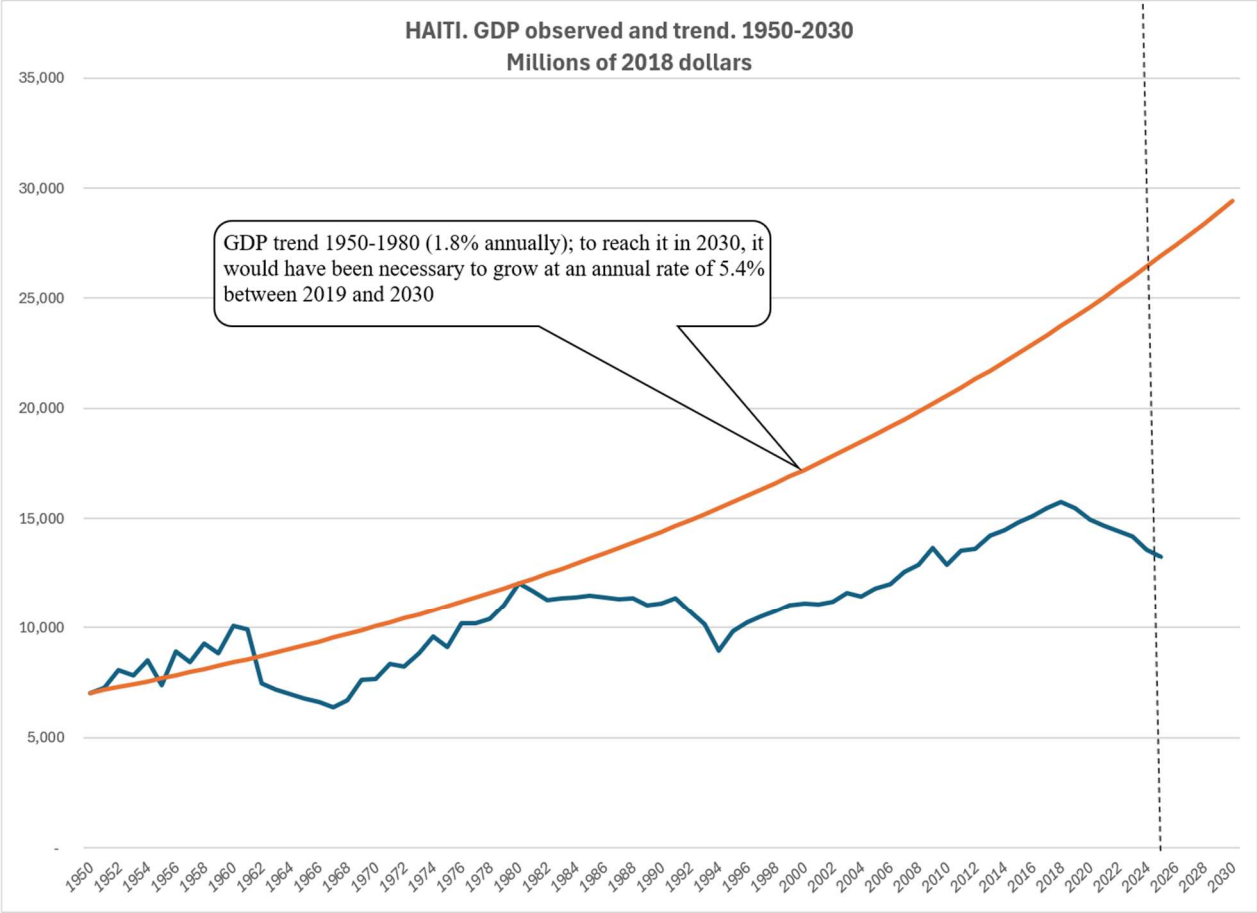
Note that there is a narrative —not exclusive to Haiti, and quite common in other countries of the Central America/Caribbean subregion where remittances are

relevant, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, to name a few—that has made **remittances a quasi-autonomous/independent variable of its inevitable corollary**: MIGRATION (it is a binomial) and all that it implies.

Chart.

Haiti: GDP Observed and Trend, 1950-2030. Millions of constant 2018 US dollars.

Source: Based on ECLAC statistics (CEPALSTAT) and own estimates.



2. Five questions and five approaches (tentative answers)

2.1. Assuming the Gang Suppression Force is successful in “liberating” parts of Port au Prince and its environs from gang control, what are the most important things that need to follow to provide jobs and economic stability and growth? What sectors of the economy in general are most ready for short to medium term growth when security improves and what would it require for them to thrive?

Historically (it's a structural condition), Haiti has suffered from a **lack of growth** (see the attached graph of GDP observe and trend 1950-2030), prolonged economic instability coupled with (or associated with) political instability, and a lack of job creation. In other words, this is NOT a temporary phenomenon linked to the security crisis. Answering this question forces us to examine what hasn't worked in an economic model and its guidelines that have been in place for more than three decades (since the 1980s). For example, unrestricted economic openness; a rentier economy (see Surin's article); regressive taxation, with a predominance of indirect taxes (VAT, etc.); in an already impoverished economy, captive taxpayers... (see income distribution Gini with and without tax; cf. Latin America); and high levels of informality. Now, one of the most important aspects is generating HOPE. A narrative of FAILURE often surrounds Haiti and its prospects, fueled by both internal and external actors.

Let's be reasonably realistic... For example, the agricultural production sector (outside the three zones mentioned earlier) remains active... with its usual challenges: lack of incentives, limited access to credit, little State support, deficient infrastructure, etc. Haitian agricultural production has NOT disappeared, although sector statistics show a continuous decline... and the levels of food insecurity are alarming (40% or more)—as indicated by periodic reports from the CNSA and various other organizations.

However, we must ask ourselves HOW millions of people in that country have lived/survived for more than five to eight years of crisis (since 2021/President Jovenel Moise assassination or 2018/PEYI LOCK)... In the vast majority of the country, families continue to send their children to school every day (a gamble); thousands of farm laborers and agricultural workers continue to sow and harvest on their small plots of land... They are NOT waiting for a handout... despite a dire narrative to that effect.

Asking the question of "**seeking quick wins**" overlooks (I believe) a more relevant objective: how to create lasting results... What are the dilemmas in terms of public policy, production policies, what are the social consensus? The MAQUILADORAS “textile assembly industry”? ... first generation; it once represented 40-50,000 jobs (today less than 30,000), low-skilled, with little added value... of course, with indirect

jobs (transportation, food, related services...) but is it a panacea? I don't have a definitive answer, but I would bet on economic sectors where the value chains (production, transformation, distribution) would allow for short- to medium-term spillover effects.

2.2. What sectors of the economy could most effectively absorb large numbers of unskilled youth as part of a gang diversion strategy and what would these sectors need to be impactful?

The lack of options/employability for young people did NOT originate with insecurity...we repeat, it is a structural issue. Incidentally, it is not unique to Haiti. Several countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region face a similar challenge— with greater or lesser severity. Job creation in Haiti is a CORE/STRUCTURAL necessity; it must be separated from the issue of gangs... The education system is largely deficient and archaic. Public provision—primary and secondary education—represents less than 30%... However, as the most recent available analyses reveal (see ECVMAS-Survey on Living Conditions of Households after the Earthquake, 2012), household expenditures show a considerable percentage that families allocate to these categories...

2.3. What can be done in the short to medium term to increase internal food production and help alleviate the country's crisis of food insecurity?

Increase the productive base... Haiti is a country that produces little, and produces poorly...

Nominal GDP (current dollars)

Haiti: \$18 billion vs Dominican Republic: \$114 billion

GDP per capita PPP 2023

Haiti: \$3,125 vs Dominican Republic: \$21,923

Establish reforms in different areas: tariff reforms, tax incentives, etc., that are not perverse (again, the issue of elites who have monopolized the benefits). In addition, improve distribution channels (collection, transportation); innovative financing mechanisms; creation or strengthening of value chains... Marketing (the weight of the tertiary sector in the economy; excessive intermediation, but realism demands it...) has become the central core of economic activity. Marketing of both local products,

but also and above all a plethora of imported goods (of dubious quality, with little control, and widespread de facto smuggling...). Let us recall a certain economic policy speech that prioritized competitiveness over food sovereignty... the dismantling of an already weak manufacturing sector in favor of excessive trade liberalization (1980s and later).

2.4. Are there reforms in the areas of fiscal and economic policy and the rule of law that need to be made prior to an election and the establishment of a legitimate government that are essential to job growth and economic development? What are the most important areas of government capacity that will help with investment and job growth?

Any fiscal/economic reform, etc., will need time to mature... therefore, I don't think it's appropriate to link their implementation as a condition BEFORE the elections' process... There is a chronic lack of key economic statistics for analysis, evaluation, action, etc. It's striking that the State itself has relinquished (a transfer of sovereignty?) control over the public coffers... In January 2026, news broke of the 10-year transfer of the country's customs/borders to a US consortium (*Evergreen*). What is the rationale? Is this a response to the issue of corruption: greater private efficiency versus public incapacity?

2.5. What financial and technical support from the US, Canada, and other nations will be needed to initiate and sustain Haiti's economic revival, and what can be done to mobilize a stronger contribution from the countries of Latin America.

In addition to, or instead of, the suggested bilateral contributions, why not consider preferential financing from multilateral organizations (World Bank, IDB, etc.)? Replacing aid with investment... as an alternative (a new(not so paradigm)... Haiti has not been eligible for international credit for several years; only donations/grants. Due to its HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Country) status, this situation has become counterproductive in the long run. A vicious cycle: the country's conditions are not favorable (high risk) for undertaking credit mechanisms (medium/long term), but at the same time, this situation prevents progress in carrying out larger-scale projects with long payback periods; Also, where transparent forms of public-private partnership would be desirable (again, the issue of elites)... For many years (too many years), Haiti looked towards Europe/North America, and very little towards the South... particularly the closest South: Latin America and the Caribbean... EXCEPT in terms of migration... In just 15 years (2010 to now/one generation), migration flows to Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico... became representative of a new map of South-South

migration... not forgetting the Dominican Republic, a historical/conflictual/proximity and distance destination.

On South-South cooperation, challenges and scope. See CEPAL/Instituto Mora publication in references, on the Brazil, Chile and Mexico experience.

Now, the question remains: How many millions, billions of dollars are needed to initiate and maintain a growth trajectory in Haiti? *"Just for her beautiful eyes" /* remember, **there is no free lunch**... someone will have to pay, we know that. Haiti's absorptive capacity has often been quoted as one of the main operational challenges/obstacles. Likewise, two major constraints exist in terms of institutional capacity (let's be blunt: the STATE capacity)... there was a dismantling of its already limited capacity (public administration and public services)... Does anyone remember the Washington Consensus? And then there are the ELITES (economic, political) role... Reversing the role of the supposed elites... see **Réginald Surin's article** where he points out that *"It is necessary to mobilize the productive part of the elite."* (vs rent seeking elite)

"But it could also change. Not through a miracle. Not through an unexpected turn of events. Through construction. Through the meticulous and silent work of men and women who will have rejected both resignation and drama, and who will have accepted that their generation may not be the one that reaps, but the one that sows."

"The reason is trivial, and precisely for that reason it is so persistent. Haiti's downward spiral is exceptionally profitable for those who know how to operate within it. Control of the points of entry—docks, customs, licenses, brokers, administrative access—generates income without productive investment and without exposure to market risk. Remittances from the diaspora, exceeding four billion dollars annually, sustain the domestic demand that captive imports and monopolistic distribution divert, regardless of any local production. This external windfall decouples the prosperity of the extractive sector from the health of the productive market. It doesn't matter if the real economy contracts; the flows that fuel this income continue."

3. Final Reflections (as a Conclusion)

In the “post-gang” era, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of transitional justice (see ECLAC-Colegio de México seminar, October 2024).

A debate on the “post-gang” era will also involve not only restoring (or rather, providing) the State's essential functions (justice, security, defense) but also the provision of other public goods (health, education, infrastructure, etc.).

ECLAC document for the 2024 session. The three **development traps** identified are: limited capacity for growth, high social inequality, and weak institutions and governance. These traps, all three, are exacerbated in the case of Haiti...

Finally, Building/Rebuilding Hope... Michèle Duvivier Pierre-Louis (FOKAL) and her incessant/permanent plea (**plaidoyer**) (cf. January 12 Earthquake Memorial)

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<https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/84460-balance-preliminar-economias-america-latina-caribe-2025>
2. CEPALC-El Colegio de México. Actes du séminaire international Insécurité en Haïti et construction de nouveaux paradigmes. Octobre 2024
<https://repositorio.cepal.org/entities/publication/6c8ae2d5-d042-4834-addb-ee64ee3636d3>
3. ECLAC 40th Session, 2024. Development Traps in Latin America and the Caribbean: Vital Transformations and How to Manage Them.
<https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/80728-development-traps-latin-america-and-caribbean-vital-transformations-and-how>

***i. Limited Capacity for Growth.** This trap refers to the limited capacity of Latin American and Caribbean countries to achieve sustained and high economic growth. This translates into stagnation that hinders progress toward more productive and sustainable development.*

***ii. High Social Inequality.** Social inequality in the region is alarming, meaning that the benefits of economic growth are not distributed equitably among the population. This situation perpetuates poverty and limits opportunities for social mobility, affecting the overall well-being of society.*

***iii. Weak Institutions and Governance.** The lack of strong institutions and effective governance are significant obstacles to development. This includes the inability of institutions to implement effective public policies, which in turn affects public trust and investment in the country.*

4. Réginald Surin. <https://lenouvelliste.com/article/265948/la-dette-de-sang-de-la-complicite-a-la-redemption-des-elites-et-de-letat>
5. Réginald Surin. <https://lenouvelliste.com/article/267250/haiti-ne-seffondre-pas-elle-est-tendue>
Version in english: <https://lenouvelliste.com/en/article/267250/haiti-is-not-collapsing-it-is-being-held-in-place>

6. Gabriela Sánchez Gutiérrez /Randolph Gilbert, Coord. « Coopération internationale en Haïti: tensions et leçons. Les cas du Brésil, du Chili et du Mexique »

<https://www.cepal.org/es/publications/45031-cooperation-internationale-haiti-tensions-et-lecons-les-cas-du-bresil-du-chili-et>

7. On Evergreen contract.

<https://rlnewshaiti.com/modernisation-des-douanes-un-contrat-a-10-ans-pour-evergreen-progres-ou-piege-financier/>

« La modernisation des douanes est une nécessité absolue pour endiguer la corruption et renforcer les recettes de l'État. Mais moderniser ne doit pas signifier hypothéquer l'avenir budgétaire de la nation. Les parlementaires, la société civile et les corps de contrôle doivent se saisir du dossier pour exiger une transparence totale.

Un contrat de dix ans n'est pas une simple formalité technique : c'est un choix politique majeur qui engage le futur fiscal et économique du pays. L'État haïtien ne peut se permettre d'entrer dans une relation de dépendance sans avoir pesé, avec rigueur et patriotisme, les avantages et les risques. La vigilance citoyenne est donc de mise : moderniser oui, brader non. »

Idem 2. https://lenouvelliste.com/article/263305/haiti-signs-border-control-contract-with-evergreen-led-consortium#google_vignette

Idem 3. <https://haitieconomie.com/le-pari-risque-du-contrat-evergreen-securiser-les-frontieres-a-quel-prix/>