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# On the Link between Conflict, Underdevelopment and the Pursuit of Basic Needs Satisfaction: A Survey of Haitian Construction Workers in the Dominican Republic

Joseph W. Alliance  
*SIT Graduate Institute*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore how conflict and underdevelopment impact Haitian construction workers' experiences and their basic human needs situation in the Dominican Republic. The Basic Human Needs Theory served as the main theoretical background to approach the topic. Qualitative data were gathered by employing a self-administered, one-time survey and conducting semi-structured interviews with 25 Haitian construction workers in sites located in the Distrito Nacional in the capital city, Santo Domingo and the Consuelo municipality in San Pedro de Macoris. Absence of work in Haiti for the very poor, systematic lack of access to social security, forced overtime largely uncompensated, and precarious living conditions constitute the main thematic categories that derived from the analysis of the data. Those findings indicate that Haitian construction workers feel trapped in a system which is unresponsive to the exploitative practices they suffer at the hands of employers imbued of anti-Haitian sentiments, thus impeding seriously their ability to meet their basic needs. This paper recommends that workers focus on using the channels of local human rights and labor organizations to be more educated about their rights and become empowered to be able to better claim their rights and influence public policies that could bring incremental changes to their situation. Another recommendation that this report advocates is solidarity between workers across the board despite their differences in order to strengthen workers' movements and give them more possibility to pressure employers for better working conditions.

The last recommendation builds on the previous ones and raises the question that creating equitable structures for workers could serve to resolve the underlying contradictions in their relationships with the employers by easing workers' sufferings and simultaneously give employers the possibility to even increase their profits maximization as they will benefit from the productivity and creativity of the workers which are underutilized in the current system. This suggestion in the end emphasizes that any efforts by Haitian employers to employ the poorest bottom in Haiti would not only serve as a form of conflict prevention by reducing the flow of Haitians seeking to meet their basic needs in the sensitive environment in the DR, but also offer these employers the possibility to maximize profits at unprecedented levels and give them a certain advantage over their Dominican counterparts in the labor market. In terms of practical applicability, the findings of this research can be useful to grassroots organizations that do not have the resources or the influence of the bigger organizations that tend to monopolize the public discourse on Haitian workers in the DR.