Cultural Preservation Projects as the Basis for Community Building in Post-Earthquake Haiti

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One of the goals of the Association of Cultural Equity (ACE) is to ensure that the work of ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax is preserved, disseminated and repatriated to the Caribbean cultures where it was originally produced. While the plans for digital repatriation of the Lomax recordings across the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Martinique, Dominica, Guadeloupe, St. Kitts and Nevis, Netherlands Antilles, St. Barthelemy, Anguila, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Bahamas) are well underway, the return of these recordings to Haiti after the devastating earthquake on January 12, 2010, illustrates the potential for preservation and digitization of cultural heritage as both mechanisms for disaster preparedness and active factors for social rebuilding after the disaster. Lomax’s 1936 Haitian recordings—1,500 audio recordings and six films—are the earliest major set of audio and audiovisual recordings of cultural expression to have been made in Haiti, and the largest to-date. ACE began to digitize and catalog these materials in 2004. Working with NGOs (the Green Family Foundation and the Clinton Global Initiative), Haitian government ministries, the
FOKAL cultural center (The Fondation Connaissance et Liberte/ Fondasyon Konesans Ak Libete) and ISPAN (Institute de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine National), ACE has begun an effort to repatriate digitized copies of these intangible cultural assets of Haiti to be made available to the Haitian people through access in diverse Haitian repositories, reintegration into school curricula, representation via local media, and reuse by living artists and traditions. What does it mean to have these recordings suddenly available to the people of Haiti? What might the impact of such a project be in a country struggling to sustain its population and to rebuild its infrastructure after a massive natural disaster such as an earthquake? This poster will link digital repatriation of intangible cultural heritage with community building efforts currently underway in Haiti.