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guest view

Help Haiti rebuild in a sustainable way

BY JEANNE BETSOCK STILLMAN

The world's attention has shifted from Haiti now that the immediate crisis has passed, but as the slow process of rebuilding and recovery begins, the Public-Private Alliance Foundation is increasing its activities in the country.

The Hastings-on-Hudson-based foundation brings together investors, companies, government, nonprofits, academic institutions and individuals in a business approach to development. Under the direction of founder David Stillman, the foundation works to promote activities that reduce poverty and encourage sustainable development in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Madagascar.

Despite the international outpouring of generosity following the earthquake, government aid money has been slow to reach Haiti. Realizing that government alone cannot rebuild the country, the foundation seeks to unite investors and businesses with

relief and development organizations, while ensuring that the local communities have a strong voice in decisions.

Working with Simact Inc., a Haitian-American investment group based in New York, the foundation held a successful workshop in June in the southern coastal city of Jacmel. This brought together 50 investors and business people from 30 organizations, including from the U.S. government and the U.N., plus 20 local representatives of government, business and nonprofits.

In his keynote address, Haitian Minister of Tourism Patrick Delatour stressed the goals of revitalization of infrastructure, decentralization from Port-au-Prince, job creation, income generation and rebuilding Haitian pride.

The group toured the Jacmel port and airport, the ruined and existing residential and commercial areas, the historic district, with its ornate 18th and 19th century buildings, a former coffee plantation with prospects for ecotourism, fish farming and

integrated community agriculture, and a site called "Belle Rive," where Simact proposes to build a mixed-use residential community.

Later, participants met in small groups for lively discussions on possible business deals, partnerships and follow-up. Business proposals are now in process.

Bringing clean, ethanol-burning cookstoves to Haiti is an example of the foundation's efforts to help not simply rebuild, but build back better. Burning charcoal for cooking has resulted in deforestation in much of the country and it causes numerous health problems. Because they are closest to food preparation, women and children are most affected.

Through Project Gaia, a foundation partner, 1,440 donated stoves and a gift of ethanol from Brazil will soon be on their way to Haiti. The Clean Cook Stove producer, Dometic A.B., and a working group including Gaia and Simact, expect to start producing stoves and ethanol soon in Haiti. This is to become a long-term business

proposition linked to microfinance – it will not only improve family health and the environment, but will create jobs in manufacturing and local ethanol production, and will help food vendors and other small businesses.

The challenges facing Haiti are unprecedented, and all sectors of society – individual, non-profit, corporate and government – have a role to play. The foundation will continue working to find common solutions to common problems to help the country rebuild in a sustainable way.



Jeanne Betsock Stillman is board secretary and conference manager at the Public-Private Alliance Foundation in Hastings-on-Hudson, a 501(c)3 non-profit. For information, go to www.pfafoundation.org

and www.pfafoundation.org/blog.