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Haiti Partners Launching Social Business to Improve Education

Grameen Creative Lab working with seven schools to establish successful business plans

Haiti Partners, an organization committed to helping Haitians change the country through education, is working with Grameen Creative Lab (GCL) to develop social business that will improve access to quality education.

John Engle, Haiti Partners co-director, says since launching the partnership one month ago, seven elementary schools have identified possible revenue streams that would enable the schools to operate in a more sustainable manner. The schools are working with Philippe Lagrenade from GCL, a social business accelerator, to create business plans that are expected to launch in February, 2012.

Using business to fund education is an innovative and much-needed solution to the failing current educational system in Haiti, according to John, whose organization spent two years researching social business.

He says only 10 per cent of Haiti schools receive government funding, with 90 per cent operating on a charity or tuition model. And while the cost to send children to school is low, for most Haitians it's a significant amount of money. Parents are often unable to pay, and this directly impacts the schools with teachers underpaid and lacking resources to provide quality instruction.

Only 50 per cent of Haiti's school-aged children attend school.

"In order for this problem, a lack of funding, to change we have to find different solutions," John tells *Axiom News*. "Because the reality is the government just doesn't have money, and there is not enough tax base to think that overnight there is going to be a lot more schools."

Four schools are proposing a joint social business, a poultry farm that would provide local chicken meat and eggs. According to John, Haiti imports the majority of its chicken products from the United States and the Dominican Republic.

“It’s been determined that it would be an excellent opportunity,” says John, adding the business benefits the community by providing local food.

Two separate schools have identified community bakeries as a priority.

The social businesses will be managed and operated as independent companies. When possible, John says they are hoping to provide collaboration opportunities between the school and social business. For example, if a parent can’t afford to send their child to school, they could volunteer their time helping the business. School staff members who have skills that could be useful to the business, like an accountant, may serve both organizations.

While providing sustainable funding to elementary schools is the main outcome for the social businesses, John adds the model produces additional benefits for Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. He says the companies create local jobs and infrastructure. The model can also foster an entrepreneurial culture, which is new to Haiti, and essential to its success.

The schools’ business plans are estimated to require \$25,000 to \$100,000 in capital for each project. The partnership to explore social business was made possible by a grant from the Vista Hermosa Foundation.

To learn more about Haiti Partners’ social business plans, [click here](#).

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