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productive cooperatives HAITI



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~ a pCH literacy professor



The Foundation for International Development Assistance
Fondation pour le soutien du développement international



EDITORIAL

“For you shall go out with joy, And be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Isaiah 55:12

I chose the above as the scripture for a recent staff meeting in Haiti. It has long been a source of comfort to me particularly in times of distress. We are having plenty of that in Haiti these days. I wanted to affirm the dedication of all our Haitian staff who day to day continue to “go out with joy”.

In this season that kneels before the Prince of Peace may our gifts be those that bring the singing of the mountains and the clapping of the trees in the fields. Such was the sound for me at FIDA’s Fall Event in Niagara-on-the-Lake where I was given the opportunity to say a few words. I began by addressing the language of businesses/companies where I am regularly conflicted by the expression of “giving back” which in itself suggests that something was taken.

As I don’t believe this to be the case, I presented what I learned from my father, Jack, who was founder of FIDA. My Dad was in business but was, but all accounts, a rather lousy businessman. He never looked at what he could get back but, rather, what he could give away. One may say that he was the pioneer of the “pay-it-forward” model. His idea of profit-making ventures was to make a lot to give away more. He did so at his peril and eventually was forced to face bankruptcy.

My father then fell into a state of depression as my mother took on laundry and housekeeping duties in one of their previously owned nursing homes. After a period of time, she chose to give my father renewed purpose. Armed with his FIDA charter carved with the vision to





“empower the poorest of the poor to be masters of their own destiny”, he and my mother sold what was left of what they had and moved to Haiti. They were sixty years old. My father decided he was going to take this pay-it forward concept to a whole new level. And so he invested in Haitian expertise who were required to invest in a productive agricultural cooperative model, whose leaders were required to pay-it-forward by investing in their members who were required to pay it forward by investing in their families and in their communities.

My father passed away in May of this year. He died as he lived... penniless. He had already given everything away. The only thing we as children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren inherited was his pay-it-forward vision of FIDA.

Benjamin Disraeli, a nineteenth century British Prime Minister and a man of great wisdom said this: *“The greatest gift we can give to someone is not simply to share our riches but to reveal to them their own.”*

This is the heart of paying it forward and what so many of you have done for this work we do in Haiti. Each of you are a part of a giving legacy where the gifts of others are revealed and multiplied.

Blessings to all and may you “go forward with joy” this season...

Betsy Wall, Executive Director





WHEN WILL THIS VIOLENCE END?

For those of us living and working in Haiti, this is what we ask ourselves each day. For the Haitian and non-Haitians alike, the question they all weigh in on is this: “What will it take for Haiti to change?” “Haiti is no longer a country,” wrote one Haitian recently, “It is just a place where we live. There is no governance, no laws, no rules. Only guns.” Sadly, this is what has come of Haiti’s “democracy”. I was here when democracy became an imposition upon Haiti... a country that knew nothing about how to govern democratically and a people who had no concept of its implications. As a Haitian colleague of mine said at the time, “With Duvalier, we knew who had the guns. Now, everyone has guns. This is what democracy has meant for Haiti.” Indeed. If history has taught us anything, democracy is a bottom up (r)evolution, not an edict.

While the strife in Haiti has somewhat eased, the stress is heavy: as the stench of the mountains of garbage burning in protest on almost every street. The stories from here continue to paint the grimmest of life. However, there are other stories, particularly of how life does go on, what it takes for that to happen, and the determination to change what otherwise might be a dismal destiny. This is that story...

We rose early the morning of July 22nd. It was graduation day for about 400 adult literacy participants in the community of Delis. Knowing the risks before us, we prayed that God would keep us safe before heading out. It is a difficult drive but there is also beauty on the way. I never cease to marvel at the mountains of cultivated land. After class photos taken, settling down into the sweltering heat of the church and all being welcomed, a graduate was chosen to speak. This is what she said:

“I am 60 years old. My father died when I was eight years old. There was no money to send me to school. When I grew up I chose to become a member of KOTADA Cooperative. I never thought I would be able to do this great thing of learning to read and write. I thought I would surely die before this dream would ever be realized. I have now read through the first and second books. I am ready to go forward to the next level! I feel sadness for those who decided not to continue. I can now read my Bible. I am so grateful to pcH and to everyone who is a part of this great thing.”

The applause was thunderous. Following this testimony, one of the monitors took to the stage to speak.

“I want to thank you all for making this program possible. We believe we can make change. With alfa (literacy) we saw that we can make a dream come true. Hands up for cooperative! Hands up for pcH! Hands up for the monitors! Hands up for you the participants! Our dream was to build strong relationships and today you can see the results. Imagine, being 60 years old and learning to read and write for the first time! No matter how insecure the situation was in our country and even though we had to pause from time to time, pcH was always there for us. This dream has come true. Greater change is now truly before us.”



The applause was equally thunderous. Then came one of the supervisors:

"On behalf of all of Delis I welcome everyone and thank those who have made this happen. It is the first time in the life of us all here in Delis that we are able to receive a certificate for something we achieved. We never stopped fighting. It was not easy but we held fast. And now this day has arrived for us. We need to remember that it is our children who were able to go to school that became our monitors to teach us as their parents. Think what more we can be now that we can read and write ourselves!"

Finally, Rene Joseph Pierre, the President of KOTADA Cooperative (pictured with me) rose to say these words. He is truly a leader with a vision.

"Today I want to weep because my mother has died and she will now never be able to know this experience. The door has been opened for us. We have been given the key for all things to be made possible. This year we had 21 centres. For the next level, we want to open 75 centres (with an average 25 participants per centre totals about 1800 which is no small vision) Not only will these centres strengthen KOTADA but it will strengthen the whole community. We ask pcH to stand with us and continue to the next level so our advancement can be greater."

Before the certificates, gifts and Bibles were presented, I offered my own few words of congratulations, reminded them it takes vision, motivation and action to make change. I then asked them what their next vision was. Responses ranged from starting a cooking school, becoming a monitor, to reading to their children. The oldest graduate was 87 years old. He could not stop smiling. After the last certificate had been presented, down the centre aisle came a group of women singing and carrying various fruits and vegetables as gifts to the pcH team. It was an appropriate acknowledgement of the members of this agricultural cooperative.



Betsy Wall, Executive Director, FIDA/pcH



FIDA/pcH hosted a seminar on adult literacy this past summer for some 40 organizations in order to present the impact of our approach and preview of our revised Level II curriculum to launch in January. Several literacy participants gave their testimonies following which one was asked to demonstrate by writing their name. Rosalie aimed to do just that! Everyone then stood with applause to honour her accomplishment.

THE LIGHT OF LITERACY

One thing I truly inherited from my father was a love, and a hefty sense of competition, for the word-game of Scrabble which I passed on to my children. When you win this game, you know you have earned it. (My father regularly exceeded the game time limit in order to form the perfect word to achieve maximum points.) Recently, my adult son suggested that his Dad and I try our hand at the popular game “WORDLE”. It appears to be all the rage among my FaceBook friends and while I tended to ignore it, I can no more. It has now taken on a family friendly competition that begins our respective mornings no matter where we are in the world.

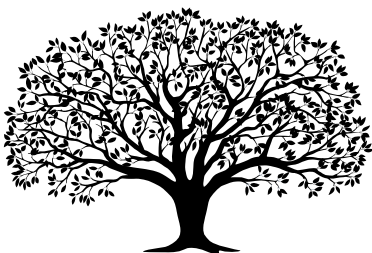
WORDLE is a challenging but not impossible puzzle.... Each day players are given six chances to solve a simple five-letter word. Over 300,000 people are in on it. Needless to say, I am now a WORDLE convert. At least once a day, I can say I have solved a problem. I have been able to imagine and believe that I can do something I may not have otherwise thought possible. Simple as this may seem, I feel a sense of empowerment.

I think about this. Here I am, a literate 62-year-old woman reacting so powerfully to solving a word puzzle. I think what it must be like for a 62-year-old illiterate woman previously locked in the darkest of worlds, to be able to see such light when she learns to write her name for the first time, to be able to write the names of all her children, to read them a story, to read her Bible... I simply cannot imagine how this must be for her and how this has affected her life.

Solving a WORDLE puzzle has not changed my life. However, it has given me pause to reflect on this mission of FIDA/pcH; to recognize the power of literacy in acknowledging that we are all created in the image of God with the desire and capacity to have light in our lives. Literacy is their “Road to Damascus”; the darkness to light journey of the Apostle Paul (yes, I was a student of theology).

My literacy serves to deepen further my commitment for others to know the same. We currently have over 2,000 men and women committed to their “Road to Damascus”. Will you journey with them and with us in their search for light from their darkness by contributing as you are inspired to do so?

Ruth Wall-Olbrych, Country Director, FIDA USA



Kado Encore

Investing in the dignity of
Haitian men and women to provide for
themselves and their families.



I moved to Haiti three years before my parents arrived in 1984. I loved my time living and working in a public relations role for International Child Care. It is here that I met my future American-born husband who managed a Stridrite shoe factory during Haiti's better times. We married and immediately began a family. My love for Haiti was now packed in suitcases full of "atizani" and a newly formed business I called "Kado d'Haiti"... Gifts from Haiti.

Much time has now passed. I have spent years in Bangkok, Thailand and in Taichung, Taiwan. My children are grown. I have grandchildren in Ontario and in Florida where my husband and I maintain residences. Kado d'Haiti has been re-established as "Kado Encore". I have chosen to envelope my love of selling within my role as Country Director of FIDA USA. My summers in Southampton, Ontario give me opportunity to introduce the work of FIDA by featuring the unique art of Haitian atizans at local markets. I am now doing the same throughout the winter months in Vero Beach, Florida.

Not only do these venues serve as a means of showcasing the beauty of Haiti but it reinforces the mission and vision of FIDA to invest in the ability of men and women to be able to provide for themselves and their families. Now, more than ever, this approach, pioneered by my parents nearly 40 years ago, is proving to be the true hope of Haiti. In collaboration with my sister and FIDA/pch Executive Director, Betsy Wall, who does all the purchasing and shipping direct from the atizans, and pch Financial Comptroller, Veniel Jean, who assists me in cataloguing all the inventory, I, in turn, ensure that all proceeds are re-invested in the cooperative programs established by FIDA/pch.

Market venues, private events, church/club networks, pop up shops, I can be contacted for showings and presentations in Ontario (April-September) and in Florida (October-March).



Ruth Wall-Olbrych
Mobile: 207-838-2675
Email: ruth.wall.olbrych@fida-pch.org



OUR EYES ARE OPENED

In the mountain community of Fon Batis, 187 men and women ranging in age from 16 to 75 years, donned caps and gowns to celebrate something they never thought possible. I found myself particularly moved by their testimonies, by the power they see is in their hands...

"Literacy has opened our eyes. It is our dream come true. We now must put our heads together for those who still don't know how. This responsibility is in our hands. If we want our country to go forward, we cannot have people who are blind and cannot read or write."

One graduate rose to tell a "joke" about his dog. Each day as he rose to go to work the dog would just sit and do nothing. He would never go out or to the neighbours. He would just stay put. Then, one day, he rises to go to alfa (literacy) class. And what do you know? The dog follows him! As the audience claps and laughs uproariously, he delivers the punch line... *"Even the dogs in Haiti know the importance of being able to read and write."* Let me repeat.... *"Even the dogs in Haiti know the importance of being able to read and write."*

Haiti can never hope for change when the majority are illiterate and disempowered. There will always be fear and mistrust. There will always be greed and corruption. There will always be poverty.

And, yes, when there is a graduation, the dogs in Haiti show up!



productive cooperatives Haiti
www.fida-pch.org

FIDA CANADA

155 Frobisher Drive, Unit G-215
Waterloo, ON CANADA N2V 2E1
T: 519-886-9520

PRODUCTIVE COOPERATIVES HAITI (pCH)

#8 Delmas 19, Rue Mackandal
Port au Prince, HAÏTI HT6121
T: (509) 2209-5854

FIDA USA

121 E Lincoln Way
Jefferson, IA USA 50129
Mobile: (207) 838-2675