BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF HAITI

Beyond the mountains
there are more mountains.

—HAITIAN PROVERB

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

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BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS

THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF HAITI

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OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

THE STORY OF FOKAL

This report is an urgent plea for help.

In May 2003, I visited Haiti to report on the effective education, economic development, and civil society programs of FOKAL, the foundation established by the Open Society Institute. At the time, Haiti was relatively calm with only two incidents of political violence during my brief stay.

But the calm was short-lived. In early 2004, the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence, violence once again burst into flame as rebel soldiers overran much of the country and forced President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to resign.

The country the soldiers fought over is the poorest in the Western Hemisphere, one of the poorest anywhere. Its infrastructure—roads, electricity, water, sanitation—is deteriorating, almost to the point of nonexistence. The schools cannot make a dent in the illiteracy rate. The health care system cannot stop the spread of preventable diseases.

The months of political violence, following years of government repression, have made living conditions worse—at least in the short term. The international community, which reduced its presence in Haiti several years ago in response to the corruption and mismanagement of the government, must now return to


KREDO LAKOU LAKAY

help Haiti recover, restore order and stability, and complete the job of establishing truly democratic values and institutions.

The few bright spots in the chaos and dysfunction that have overwhelmed Haiti are a small number of successful civic organizations that desperately need funding to survive and expand.

FOKAL is a leading force among these grassroots groups. FOKAL stands for the Fondasyon Konesans Ak Libète in Creole, the Fondation Connaissance & Liberté in French. Its programs improve conditions for young people and rural communities, instilling optimism and hope and a commitment to work for the common good.

Through civic organizations such as the ones described in this report, Haitians are tackling a mountain range of problems. A year after my visit, their work is more difficult and urgent than ever. A strong civil society offers the only lasting solution to political repression and violence.

This report tells the story of FOKAL and some of the programs that deserve support because they work in a country where so much doesn't. It is a journey through the unfinished business of Haiti.

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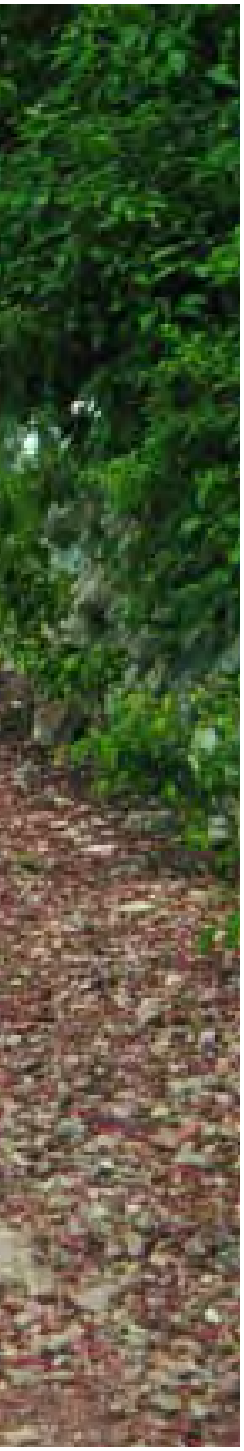

TUESDAY, 8:00 A.M. PORT-AU-PRINCE.

POTHOLES ON THE ROAD TO PROGRESS. THE RISE AND FALL OF A REFORMER. A CONSPIRACY OF BRIBES. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENSHIP.

The journey began in the capital of Port-au-Prince. In the car with me were the driver Jean-Marie Joseph, FOKAL's director Michèle Pierre-Louis, and the photographer Raphaelle Castera. Garbage lined many of the city's busy streets, overcrowded with vehicles and people. Pigs rooted through the mounds of refuse for whatever they could eat.

The road, any road, is the first mountain everyone in Haiti must climb. No matter where you go in the country, from one part of Port-au-Prince to another, from the cities to the rural villages, the problem is getting there. The not-so-bad roads are full of potholes. On the really bad roads, the macadam has worn away, leaving miles of rocky, dusty roadbed. The worst roads go uphill. They are little more than deep gullies from rivers of rainwater eroding away the dirt. Many villages are accessible only by footpath.

Beyond the roads there are more problems. Haiti ranks near the bottom of every survey of living conditions, from clean water to electricity to sanitation to nutrition. Life expectancy is less than 53 years, the unemployment rate is anywhere from 50 to 70 percent, and the HIV prevalence rate is over 5 percent.

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The poor, over 80 percent of the population, drink, cook, and bathe with contaminated water. Sanitation is a luxury the majority of people cannot afford.

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Our car slowed down as we approached a stretch of road in Port-au-Prince, three lanes in either direction, where the traffic lights weren't operational. At the time, electricity in Port-au-Prince only came on three to four hours a day, usually at night. Businesses and affluent private homes had their own generators.

Michèle Pierre-Louis knows well the unfinished business of Haiti. In 1991, Michèle joined the administration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first president of Haiti to be selected through a democratic vote. Aristide, a priest with a reputation for honesty, won as a reformer. Michèle and others advised a comprehensive approach to reform so that, for example, the health ministry would work collaboratively with the ministries of education and

public works to improve public health. And Aristide listened. Perhaps he would have made improvements. No one will know. Only seven months after taking office, he was ousted by the military and sent into exile.

Three years later, the United States and 20,000 U.S. soldiers restored Aristide to his rightful presidency. It was a time of renewed optimism for reform. The Open Society Institute founded FOKAL that year to take advantage of the transition to strengthen democracy and open society values and practices.

But the second coming of Aristide proved a disaster. He was more concerned with retaining power than enacting reforms. After being forced by the constitutional ban on consecutive terms to give way to a faithful surrogate, he ran for a second term in 2000 and won. In the parliamentary elections that year, analysts with the Organization of American States reported fraudulent manipulation of the returns in favor of candidates from Aristide's party.

Because the elections were deemed fraudulent, the large international financial institutions withdrew their support for the government, and other donors reduced their support for NGOs.

"The money dried up," Michèle said. "The whole country lost."

With international aid suspended, the government had a pretext for doing nothing. Ordinary Haitians suffered yet again:

cheated in the elections, punished by a loss of aid from abroad, abandoned by their government.

In such a political climate, Michèle said, "there is no bond between government and citizens. Since the government doesn't provide any services, people feel they shouldn't pay taxes. Most people work in the informal economy, selling and buying in the street markets, but even those with formal businesses, who are supposed to pay taxes, don't. They would rather pay a large bribe than a small tax. Bribes create a conspiracy, not a bond. No one is accountable."

"What people don't understand," Michèle added, "is that if you pay taxes you can hold the government responsible for how those taxes are spent." FOKAL tries to teach people their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Through it all, FOKAL continues to adhere to its strategy for building open society in Haiti by focusing on improving the social and economic lives of the excluded majority, to instill hope where none

existed. It identifies local initiatives that are effective and show a potential to grow and expand their work.

“All our partners are at a crucial stage,” Michèle said. “Without government involvement, five or six years of support are not enough to make these projects sustainable. We cannot abandon any of these programs.”

“It’s like you are driving up the mountain, and you run out of gasoline before reaching the top.”

FOKAL must find more donors to fill the tank.

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TUESDAY, 9:30 A.M. BIBLIOTHÈQUE JUSTIN LHÉRISSON.

A PATH ACROSS THE MOUNTAIN OF ILLITERACY. DRUMS AND SINGING, POETRY IN THE LIBRARY'S BACKYARD.

The first stop on the journey was a community library, the Bibliothèque Justin Lhérisson, on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Ninety percent of its 800 members are students, who pay a nominal fee to use the library. Justin Lhérisson is one of 51 community libraries supported by FOKAL.

A group of young musicians performed for us in the library's backyard. They belonged to a music program that holds practices on Saturdays. Drums and singing, and then one of the singers, a young man standing behind the drummers, recited poetry to the beat of the music.

"Many young people in Haiti," Michèle said, "have a drive to learn, but they lack books as well as a space to study, to meet and discuss ideas."

Support for community libraries is essential for the country's future. Haiti has no public libraries. Although the illiteracy rate in Haiti is officially 65 percent, in some places it is as high as

90 percent. The education system is so bad that a child can go to school for 12 years and still not be able to read or write.

Students who use the community libraries regularly, however, do well in their studies. Some of them go on to attend university in Haiti, to study law, medicine, education, agriculture, and computer science. Many leave the country for the United States and Canada. In 2002, Canadian computer companies recruited some 20,000 Haitian young people with the lure of permanent visas.

The social and cultural association that runs the library also runs a health center and a savings and loan association. The library's programs include dance, music, and theater. Painters exhibit their works, and writers come to talk.

The young people who manage the library described its programs and posed for photographs with serious faces, but they laughed as soon as the interview and photo opportunity were over. The managers work on a volunteer basis in the library, keeping hope alive for Haiti's young people.

"Working with the young," Michèle said, "I too have a lot of hope. Without them, I would despair. This country is very frustrating."

Leaving the Bibliothèque Justin Lhérisson, we headed south from Port-au-Prince, on Highway 2, the road to Vallue. The road was only a year old. For a while it seemed decent, but then the not-so-bad road ended and the bad began. The road was meant to go to

Les Cayes, but, due to corruption, much of the money side-tracked elsewhere, and the road was never finished.

Highway construction skirted villages, but since the country lacks commercial planning and regulations, the villages simply picked up and moved to surround the road. As the highway entered each village, a market began, a crowded mass of humanity and products, and traffic slowed to a crawl and stopped altogether as trucks, buses, and cars loaded and unloaded and tried to maneuver around each other and the vendors and their customers.

We turned off onto a secondary road, a steep, rocky road, rutted from the rain, and started to climb the mountain to Vallue. The peasant organization we were visiting built the road, 13 kilometers altogether. Even a bumpy, washed-out road is an improvement over no road at all.

The car hugged the sides, beeping its way past school kids, in colorful shirts and blouses. At almost any time of day, children seemed to be on the road walking to or from school. Only the color of their uniforms changed.

Another rise and there, in the bend of the road, on the side of the mountain, was the complex of buildings belonging to the Association des Paysans de Vallue, or APV.

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TUESDAY, 3:00 P.M. VALLUE.

PEASANT LIFE. SEWING SCHOOL UNIFORMS. CANNING PRESERVES. GROWING SEEDLINGS. LEARNING ABOUT REPRODUCTION.

Elementary school kids greeted us on a cement yard in front of APV's complex, where they were practicing formations. The yard was just big enough for tennis, which the kids have learned to play so well Vallue has produced an eight-year-old national tournament champion and another player who is training in Cuba for an international tournament.

The peasant association, founded in 1987, consists of 60 groups with 5,000 active members and reaches about 30,000 people with its development activities. FOKAL supports 27 other rural development sites.

"APV is trying to improve the quality of life of the peasants through programs in education, health, housing, nutrition, agriculture, and microenterprise," Abner Septembre, its founding coordinator and now treasurer and public relations director, said. "We have a school, a radio station, a cybercafé, a sewing

association, canning and metal working businesses, a clinic, a store, a restaurant, and the guesthouse Hotel Villa Ban-Yen, as well as rooms in peasant homes, for ecotourists. Over 1,000 ecotourists visited in 2002."

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The members of APV's sewing association, supported by UNESCO as well as FOKAL, make clothes to sell, deducting costs and distributing profits evenly among members.

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The sewing association's one-room building contains 10 regular sewing machines and one heavy-duty industrial machine. The group has contracts with APV for school uniforms and the protective blouses and hats used in the canning business. It trains young people, some of whom, having found their own customers, return to use the machines for a fee.

The food processing operation makes jams, preserves, and peanut butter. It employs 35 people on a rotating basis, producing 3,500–4,000 jars a month. It uses fruits from the area and lime juice as a preservative. Marketed under the brand name TOPLA, the products are popular, sold to stores and restaurants throughout the country.

At the metal working site, two young men, sitting on benches, hammered pieces of metal on the crumbled cement floor, making wall decorations, one a sun, the other a rooster. A finished metal rooster leaned against a wall as a live rooster strutted by, pecking at the floor, looking for food.

APV also operates a nursery, where it grows seedlings for avocado, coffee, grape, Haitian apricot, grapefruit, and papaya. It sells the seedlings to peasants at a low cost and follows up with technical support. Its seedlings include trees as part of APV's program to help peasants protect and regenerate the environment. The mountainside near the nursery was barren a few years ago; now it was covered by grass and trees.

"If you don't work on the environment," Michèle said, "you're not doing anything. Even springs dry up, water disappears."

Later in the evening, at the radio station, a young woman who heads APV's women's group interviewed Michèle about gender issues. A priority for rural women is to learn about their bodies, about their reproductive organs. FOKAL employs a doctor who teaches women using a medical dummy with visible organs. Much in demand, she had yet to visit Vallue.

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TUESDAY, 4:30 P.M.

A PRESCHOOL ON THE MOUNTAINTOP. POVERTY IN COUNTRY AND CITY. DAY'S END. THE PROMISE OF A BETTER LIFE.

The road continued to climb from the APV complex. Over two dozen people—children, women, and men—waited at the top of the mountain. They were building an extension to their preschool. They had dug a trench for the foundation. Women carried rocks, one by one, on their heads, creating a big pile next to the site.

There was much hugging and kissing and laughter as Michèle greeted the peasants and practically everyone introduced themselves as an officer of the new preschool committee. The young boy with the school notebook was the treasurer.

The Japanese Embassy donated $50,000 for two preschools, one at the top of the mountain, and one down the other side. With the two new schools, children would no longer have to walk to the preschool at the APV complex farther away.

Near the preschool was an open hole, some eight feet deep, six across, where the peasants had tried to dig a well by hand

through the hard-packed, stone-filled dirt. A foot or two of reddish rainwater sat at the bottom. From the top of the mountain, we could see three women, small, distant figures, walking slowly up the road, each carrying a white plastic bucket of water balanced on her head.

On the way down, at a homestead between hills, we met an APV founding member who was experimenting with tomatoes, cabbages, and other vegetables to discover which grew best under mountain conditions without chemicals. So far, the tomato was the winner. Above the garden, tethered to the rocky hillside, scrambling for grass among the rocks, were a cow, a goat, a donkey or two. Higher still, a man carrying a hoe on his shoulder walked across the ridge of the mountain, silhouetted against the dusky sky. Behind us, a peasant family sat on chairs in the dirt yard of their home, talking and watching. It was a lovely, peaceful time, the hush at the end of the day.

"Is it better to be poor and living in the country or poor and living in the city?" I asked.

Michèle smiled and said it was a good question, even though the answer at that time and in that place seemed obvious.

"Here it is hard, but better," she said. "Being poor in the city is hell. Yet people still want to escape the country for the promise of the city."

The more people migrate to the cities the more living conditions deteriorate. It is one of the reasons FOKAL made supporting the work of peasant associations a priority—to ease the burden on the cities.

“We must offer the peasants the promise of improving their lives right here, without leaving,” Michèle said in Vallue. “We must offer the promise of a better life to everyone in Haiti.”

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WEDNESDAY, 9:00 A.M.

A NEW DAWN IN VALLUE. RETURN OF A NATIVE SON. CHILDREN LEARNING STEP BY STEP. A LESSON MISSED, A CHILDHOOD LOST.

Yvon Faustin, the current APV coordinator, and Abner Septembre, the former coordinator, are both from peasant families—born and raised in Vallue. Faustin was lucky enough to attend university, where in his classes all the examples of successful development efforts came from abroad, none from Haiti. His university years coincided with the forced departure of President Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. It was a time of great hope, a belief in change. The peasants began to organize because they understood that, with the land deteriorating, their children's futures were in jeopardy.

"Is APV a success story the university can now teach?"

"Yes," he answered, laughing. "There's still a lot to be done, but APV can be used as a reference. You wouldn't have come before. I hope a lot of other people learn about it from you."

When Faustin decided to return to Vallue to help organize the

peasant association, his parents were angry and disappointed. His parents had made sacrifices so that he could attend university and escape. They did not want him to come back. But Faustin and APV's achievements have changed their minds.

"How do they feel now?" I asked.

"Now they are proud."

The APV school goes from kindergarten to the ninth grade, with 180–200 children. The school belongs to FOKAL's Step by Step (TiPa TiPa) program. Step by Step, an OSI education reform program active in some 28 countries, emphasizes child-centered teaching, parental involvement, and democratic practices.

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APV does not have enough funds to pay secondary school teachers or to buy the supplies needed at that level of education.

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After ninth grade at the APV school, the children go to a secondary school in Grand Goave or Petit Goave. Before the APV school, the younger children in Vallue did not attend school. It was too far away. They waited until the age of 10 or 11 or 12 to start the trek to school, by which time they were at a great disadvantage in class.

The nurse at APV's clinic treats many patients with stomach ailments and hypertension, and children with breathing problems. But there are other problems as well.

On a bench in front of the clinic sat a skinny 12-year-old girl in a pretty floral print dress. She was just a child.

The photographer asked her in French what she was doing at the clinic.

"I have a baby," the girl answered.

The nurse said there are many such preteen mothers, because the girls know nothing about sex. They start young, have as many as 15 children, and grow weak and sick from bearing so many kids. Statistics support her experience. Women in rural areas average 6.4 children, most deliveries are unattended, and 534 women die for every 100,000 live births, giving Haiti one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world.

Michèle understands the limits on resources, knows she cannot do something about every problem, but she promised to try anyway.

"We must get our doctor up here soon," she said.

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WEDNESDAY, 12:00 NOON. PLICHÉ.

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR PROGRESS. RADIO: HEARTBEAT OF THE COMMUNITY. STANDING UP, SPEAKING OUT, FACING DANGER.

Father Yves Edmond, coordinator of the Fondasyon Peyizan Sid, stood in front of the wall that separates the pitted dirt road from the Pliché collective's center. The walls on either side of the entrance carry painted signs, many of them illustrated, that state the association's 10 commandments.

Father Edmond said that the commandments represent the spirit of the community, and he explained each one. He began by saying that "sustainable development has to start on the local level" and "development shouldn't be corrupted by political parties or religion."

One of the commandments read, "Even though each individual has his or her own needs, we must work collectively, for alone we cannot survive."

Another commandment quoted a Haitian saying, "You cannot eat okra with one finger." As Father Edmond commented, "You need


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1.
Ayiti Se peyim . Ayiti Se peyi w .
2.
Nou se ayisyen . Nou renmen ayiti .
Ayiti pap peri .
3.
Ayiti ap viv .
Nap travay ak bondye lavi a


Pou ayisyen çen respè ak la vi.
Pou lakou lakay lounen yon sous
espwa pou tout pèp la.
Pou tout ayisyen reprann valè ak
diyite yo.

every finger, every hand, every man and woman, to build a community."

Still another echoed the famous line from U.S. President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

There were commandments about the importance of culture and conservation and respect for Haiti's past, namely, the successful slave uprising and 12-year war that led to independence. And this about globalization: "Developed countries should help poor countries, not crush them. Globalization should not be the strong against the weak but putting resources together to help everyone."

Father Edmond led a tour of the peasant association's projects.

Across from Lekol TiPa TiPa, the Step by Step school, was a building with a meeting room in which coffee growers were considering statutes for a federation of coffee cooperatives. The growers are trying to return coffee to its former status as an important export item for Haiti. In negotiating contracts, the federation can guarantee higher volume and quality control. As the man in the glasses said, the cooperatives represent "the local approach to globalization," and everyone laughed at how well he talked the language of our times.

The community radio, operating since July 1995, broadcasts local news, environmental education, children's, women's, and health programs, and music. Among its most popular programs are

sociodramas, or more accurately sociocomedies, which entertain and educate on subjects such as AIDS and domestic violence. The characters and situations are exaggerated for humor and recognition.

Community members pay dues to belong to an association that supports the radio. At the association's last meeting, the biggest request was for 24-hour radio.

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"They breathe through the radio," Father Edmond said. "When the radio doesn't work, it's like they are not breathing."

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Since spring water is plentiful in the area, the collective has established a fish hatchery to grow fish for eating and selling, bringing more protein to the peasants' diet and additional income. The association expects to replicate the hatchery on a smaller scale among the peasants.

Father Edmond showed us an experimental tank for the production of bio-gas from human waste (the bio-gas will be used for cooking). Then, in quick succession, a library; a cybercafé (including computer training); a mill for sorghum; a food processing operation (local cherry jam); a savings and loan; a shop selling essentials at low prices; a tree-planting program; and peasant homes with rooms for ecotourists.

Father Edmond said he wanted to expand ecotourism regionally and nationally, putting together a list of natural sites and meeting places for guests. He also wanted to hold an ecotourism fair at the border in cooperation with the Dominican Republic. This was another of his goals—building bridges between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

"Are you working with APV on expanding ecotourism?" I asked.

Father Edmond nodded yes, but did not elaborate.

"Is it a rivalry?"

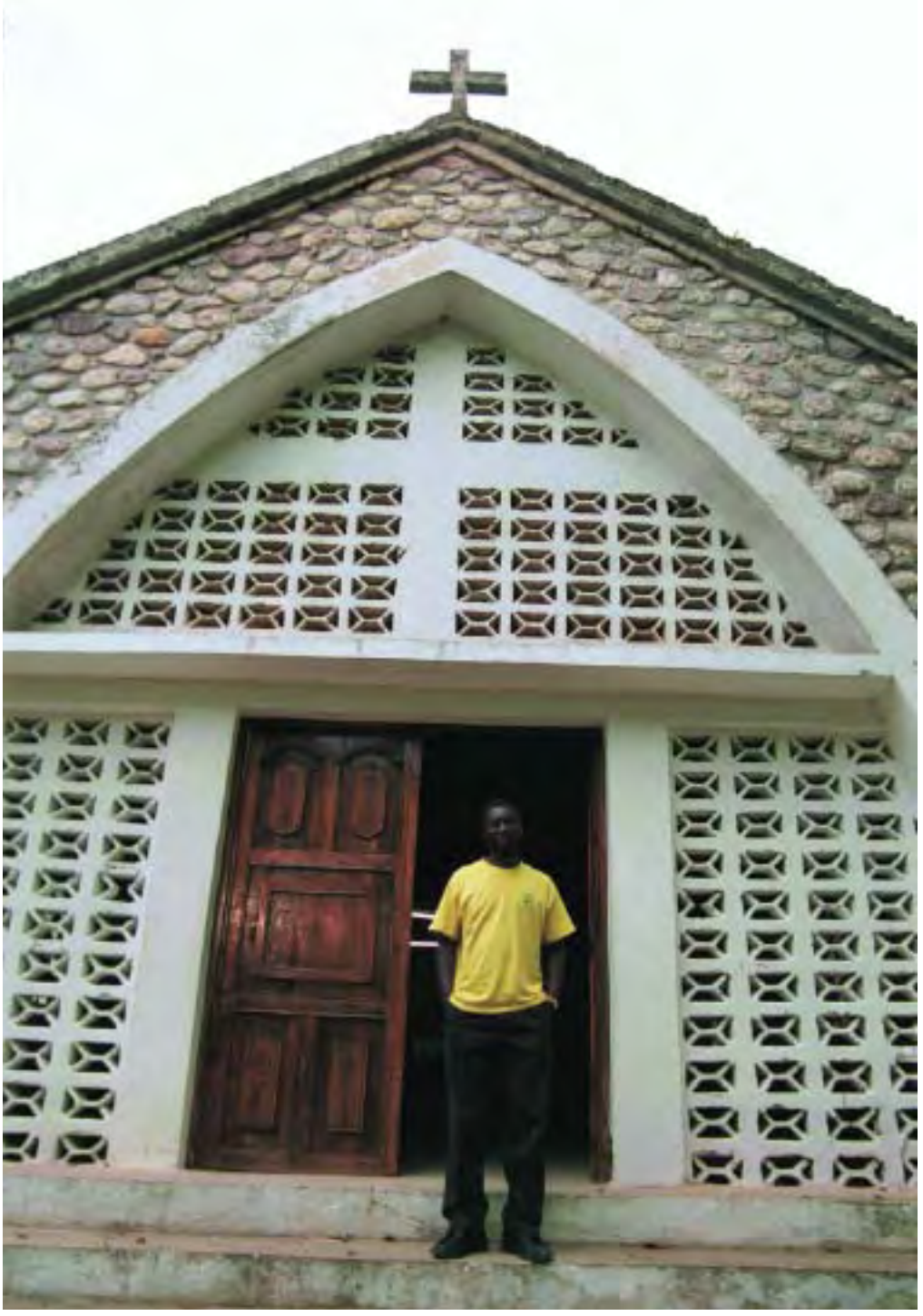
"No, it is complementary."

"That's very diplomatic," I said. When my words were translated, Father Edmond laughed.

"Our environment is nicer," he finally admitted.

The association operates a woodworking shop that makes chairs, a common micro-industry in Haiti. Such shops can be found in every community along the side of the road. The chairs are made to order and are much less expensive than factory-made, imported chairs. The shop also makes coffins.

The collective's health program distributes condoms, even though Father Edmond cannot approve their use in his official capacity as a priest. The clinic sells traditional medicines from herbs and



plants for diseases caused by the stress of living with poverty and political violence.

In a large schoolroom, an artist had painted a huge "Haiti tree" falling over. Its roots—liberty, economy, culture—had to be strengthened.

Father Edmond saved the church for the last stop on the tour.

In front of the central pulpit, on one side, were speakers, a guitar, and two drums. On the other side, four benches faced each other in a square; one had been knocked over. In the middle of the square was a small pile of dirt and rubble, broken flowerpots, the remains of flowers.

On the eve of the presidential elections in 2000, the church held a community meeting at which people vowed not to vote as a protest against the earlier fraudulent parliamentary elections. A group of armed men, including government officials, entered the church and forced the parishioners outside, kicking and striking some of them. Everyone was ordered to lie down on the ground. Only the priest, a gun pointed at his head, remained standing, refusing to prostrate himself before the government. The scene inside the church had been kept intact as a reminder, a symbol of community and resistance.

"We must remind people," Father Edmond said, " that even though they've been hurt, they must continue to struggle."

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THURSDAY, 7:00 A.M. LES CAYES.

AN AIDS PLAY. A DRAINAGE PROBLEM. ON THE ROAD TO PORT-AU-PRINCE. FOKAL'S NEW BUILDING, "FAITH IN HAITI."

The night before, arriving late in Les Cayes, we visited another community library, this one housed in three large rooms rented from a church—two rooms with shelves along the walls, filled with books donated from Quebec, and a third room with a stage and chairs. The backdrop for the stage was a large AIDS awareness ribbon.

A young man who worked for the library described the HIV prevention play performed earlier in the week for an audience of young people. In the play, a group of teenagers acted irresponsibly, engaged in unprotected sex, and became infected with HIV. Then they returned to their friends, who had warned them about their behavior. The friends repeated the message that had fallen on deaf ears before—what they should have done to protect themselves.

The young man in the library asked us for help. He said the people there appreciated all the support they had received, but there was so much more to be done.

It rained during the night, and several of the streets we drove on were flooded. People walked or rode their bicycles through the water. When we hit the highway, the small homes lining either side, built on ground much lower than the highway, were also flooded, the yards, alleyways, many of the houses. The people who lived there walked up to their knees in muddy water.

The poor drainage spreads disease, including malaria. The problem has been worked on many times, but the money, whether through mismanagement or corruption, has never lasted long enough to finish the job.

Contaminated water and poor sanitation are two major causes of disease, especially in children, who suffer from diarrhea, parasites, skin problems. Once you deal with water and sanitation, these health problems disappear. Nurses with the Step by Step schools monitor the children's weight, treat them with antiparasite medicines, and work with parents on hygiene and nutrition.

"In this country, you have to invest in health care, roads, jobs, education," Michèle said. "We must strive to achieve practical objectives to show that things can work here."

Bouncing along on Highway 2 back to Port-au-Prince, the car weaved in and out of traffic, passing oncoming vehicles on the

left or right, always searching for a more level part of the road, a less difficult ride. It seemed as if everyone in the country was on the road—walking, riding bikes and donkeys, pushing wheelbarrows, carrying stuff on their heads.

Going over a bridge, we saw dozens of women washing clothes in the river and on the rocks along the bank, then hanging the clean clothes on the guardrails and bushes to dry.

An unfinished section of the highway, which would have detoured around a village, was a nice straight, empty stretch of road—unused, so I was told, except by drug-running planes at night.

In Port-au-Prince, we stopped briefly at the beautiful new Resource Center of Avenue Christophe, which FOKAL built and owns. The center houses the foundation's offices, the Bibliothèque Monique Calixte, which has 4,500 members, and a 180-person auditorium primarily for conferences and seminars but also performances. Port-au-Prince hasn't a single theater. The Haitian Ballet performs on a stage built in a private supporter's yard with folding chairs and a canvas roof. One of the Resource Center's main activities will be training programs in library management, business entrepreneurship, and English language.

The center represents FOKAL's legacy, a statement of its "faith in Haiti," as Michèle put it.

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FRIDAY, 8:00 A.M. FRETTA-MAS.

"GET UP AND GO TO SCHOOL." A MACHETE FOR EVERY PEASANT. MICROCREDIT AND FAMILY PLANNING.

We followed a narrow road along the side of a mountain. Below, to the left, was a rapidly flowing, muddy river. The road curved to the right and the village of Fretta-Mas with its school and church became visible among the trees in a bend in the river. A small village with lots of people, but no community radio and no phone service.

The three-year-old Step by Step school, built with UNESCO funding, consists of two buildings with metal roofs. The doors are gates and the upper halves of the outer walls are built with open cement blocks to keep the classrooms cooler. The school goes from preschool to sixth grade. After the sixth grade, the students here, as elsewhere, take national exams. Last year only 2 out of 36 Fretta-Mas students failed to pass the exams.

The pupils, some in pink and white striped shirts, others in blue-checked shirts, stood in line in the courtyard as the Haitian flag was raised.

Two teachers waited in the school director's office. The young man wore a tie. All male teachers wear ties as a matter of status. The woman, a first grade teacher, was almost finished with her three years of training. Fretta-Mas is one of three Step by Step training sites in the country. Trainers come to the school every six weeks for a week; they include a master trainer and teaching consultants in math, science, Creole, and French as a second language.

The French NGO, Fondation Energie pour le Monde, provided solar energy equipment for a room used at night for training—to power lights, a computer, a few fans. The NGO partners with FOKAL at all its sites to provide solar power.

In one of the preschool classes, the pupils sat on the floor and sang a song that included the lines:

> "If you want to learn, you have to go to school.
> Don't just sit at home, get up and go to school."

"When I first came here," Michèle said, "the kids were so scared of new people they ran away from me screaming. Now they all come to me when I arrive. It only took two months. School has an enormous socializing effect."

The school's director, Paul Saint-Georges, received a scholarship from a Protestant church to study in Port-au-Prince. He finished 11th grade. At Fretta-Mas, he opened a school in the church left unfinished by the Protestant mission. The little school was totally different from Step by Step. All 100 students, from the

age of 5 to 15, were in the same class. He was the only teacher, and he didn't know how to teach students of such different ages—or measure their individual progress.

"I couldn't believe the difference Step by Step made," he said. "The pupils' intelligence is so much more developed now."

Step by Step emphasizes cooperative or collective learning. "The teacher is a guide who works with children to create a better environment for learning."

The director said he needed more skills training for the teachers and a library.

Pressoir Saint-Georges, the coordinator and a founding member of the Òganizasyon Peyizan pou Developman or OPD-8 at Fretta-Mas, told how the organization started. In 1998, the peasants realized they were being left behind as others organized and improved their lives—and they recognized that the government wasn't going to help.

At the time, the peasants were barely subsistence farmers. They could not afford seeds or farm tools, even machetes. They had to rent tools, and often the sale of their crops didn't even cover the rental fees.

The peasant organization began by establishing a tool bank and a seed bank. Now, five years later, the director proudly showed off small metal "silos" for storing corn and millet. The silos, capable of storing grain without rotting for over two years, had made a huge difference, allowing the peasants to keep the grain off the market when prices were low and to sell when prices rose. In 2002, without the silos, they had a deficit of 10,000 gourdes or $250. In May 2003, with the silos, they already had a profit of 15,000 gourdes—and they hadn't sold everything.

"The peasants in Fretta-Mas are better off than in many other places," Michèle said, "because they have lots of water." Water makes all the difference. She would like to find support for a microturbine that would harness the power of the river for income-generating projects, such as the making of ceramics from clay or paper from banana leaves. Solar generators are adequate for lights and computers, but too expensive for industry.

OPD-8 works in five areas: leadership training, education, income-generating activities, health, and agriculture. It provides microcredit (up to 2,000 gourdes or $50) to women for buying produce from the farmers and selling it in the marketplace. The women (162 women have participated) buy beans in the mountains and walk long distances to the best and largest markets to get a good price.

The health program teaches the peasants about family planning and nutrition (a balanced diet). It teaches them to make water drinkable, purifying contaminated water with drops of chlorine (they have to learn how many drops). They also learn to build, use, and clean latrines. As a result of better sanitation and drinkable water, diarrhea and skin problems have practically disappeared.

Pressoir Saint-Georges answered with an emphatic "Oui!" when asked if community life had improved. The improvement was most visible in the area of health, he said. Family planning was a great success. Men used condoms or the rhythm method. Women knew their bodies better.

"Families now stop at three or four children. Before they were having kids every 12 months," he said. Pressoir himself set a good example. "My mother had 11 children. I have 4."

The oldest one was at the university in Port-au-Prince, he added proudly.

The peasants gave us gifts: bananas, coconuts, pineapples, cabbage—and two live chickens. Michèle courteously declined the chickens, but she, the photographer, and the driver divided up the produce.

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FRIDAY 3:00 P.M. GRAN PLÈN.

BIG SKY COUNTRY. CHICKENS AND GOATS. THE CHALLENGE OF ORGANIZING ACROSS DISTANCES. "LIVING WITH MORE DIGNITY." WITH HELP FROM FRIENDS WHO LEFT.

Between the mountains above Gros Morne in the north is Gran Plèn, a lovely, rolling plain and a river that runs through it. This is big sky country, open space for miles around. As the car pulled into the schoolyard, the children celebrated our arrival with singing and dancing. The pupils had waited two and a half hours for us to arrive. The school director made them stay so they played tricks on him, locking the door to his office and chanting his name.

The school, which goes from preschool to sixth grade, is run by another peasant collective, the Òganizasyon Peyizan Gran Plèn. It has 260 pupils, some of whom walk two hours to school and two hours home. The school serves one meal a day for the children. Twice a week they get eggs, supplied by the chickens living in a cage near the school buildings.

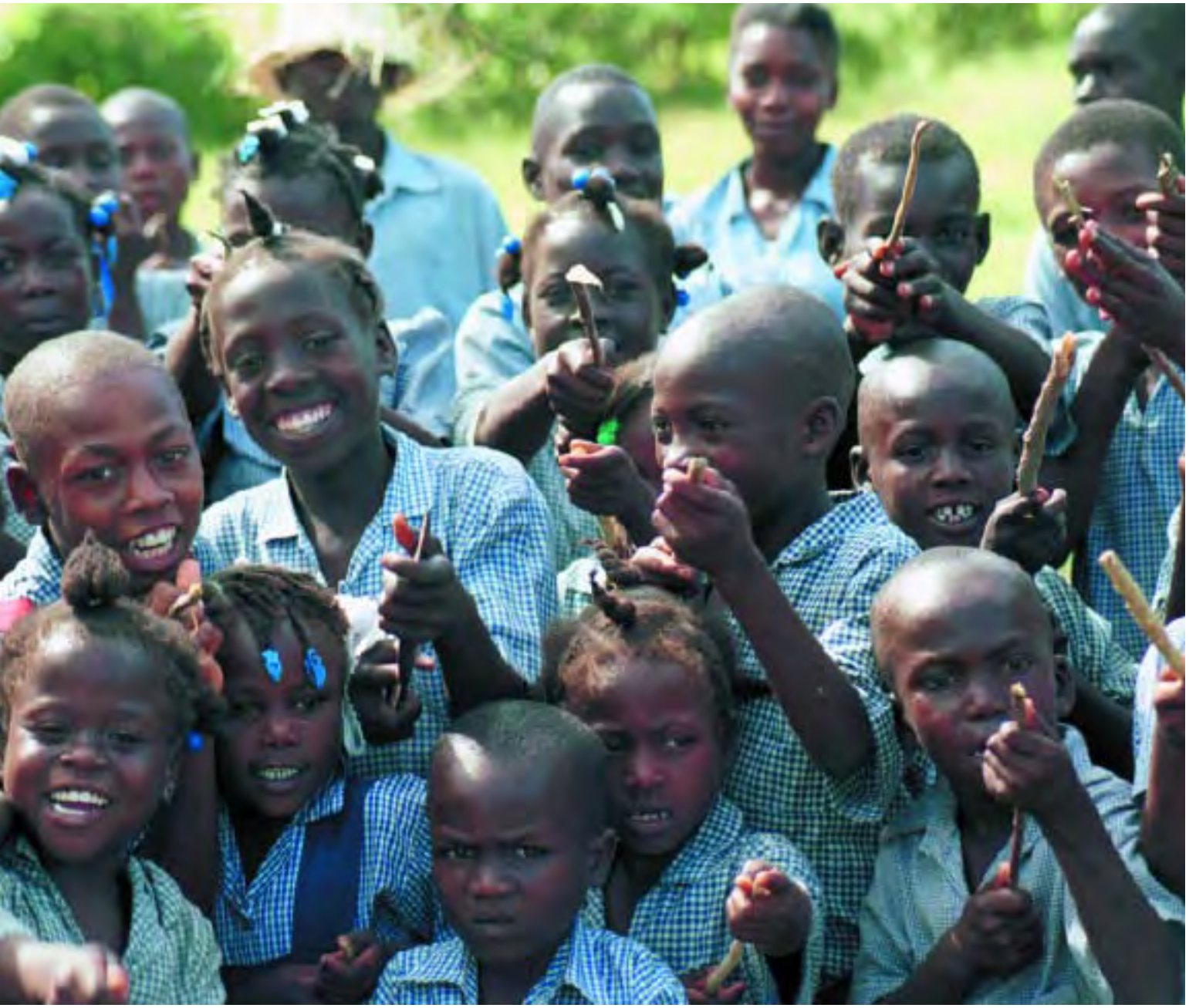
The school, which opened in 1995, does not have its own water source (the pupils help carry water to the school), but it does have solar lighting. Lighting is necessary for the adult literacy program, which meets in the evenings. The 100 adults in the program are learning how to read and write so that they can sign their names when dealing with government agencies, instead of marking documents with a fingerprint.

The school's director, Adolphe Rociny, said they would like to add more grades, more teachers, and more classrooms. It is difficult to keep teachers, who, after receiving training and experience, often move on to better positions in less isolated places.

The school's job, the director said, is to educate the children so that they are better prepared to struggle for decent living conditions. A few will leave, but even those who leave will remain part of the community through the Asosyasyon Originè Gran Plèn, the most dynamic of the many Haitian diaspora organizations that send money to their families and communities back home.

The diaspora organizations are essential to Haiti's economy. It is estimated that the approximately 1 million Haitians living in North America contribute more than $600 million to the economy each year.

The director of the Òganizasyon Peyizan Gran Plèn is Jean Gaston. He is the son of peasants, born and raised within sight of the school, which was built on land donated by his family.



He went to primary school in a church, continued his studies in Gonaives and Port-au-Prince, and now teaches high school botany and chemistry.

The peasant organization owns a truck for taking their produce—sugarcane, corn, millet—down the mountain to the market. The peasants are negotiating with a large landowner for 60 to 100 hectares of land near a river. The absentee landowner is amenable to the deal. The well-irrigated land by the river would allow the peasants to grow vegetables, plantains, papayas.

Seven young people from Gran Plèn have received scholarships sponsored by FOKAL to attend technical schools or university. One has finished studying agricultural techniques and is now working with the peasant organization. He is responsible for the school's chickens and will handle raising goats and growing vegetables.

The peasant organization also operates an environmental protection program, called Friends of Trees, for children between the ages of 5 and 18. The children learn how to make compost, grow seedlings in a nursery, plant trees, irrigate the land.

Utopia for the peasants, Gaston said, would be to achieve better living conditions for the community so that everyone can "live with more resources and more dignity." The mountain to overcome is the huge distances between people. Bringing everyone together is a difficult organizing challenge.

Gaston showed us the organization's Internet center in Gros Morne. Two or three students were doing research, which they paid for by the hour. The center pays for itself, with money left over for scholarships to kids who can't afford school tuition.

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The center also provides a community service, G-M online, Gros Morne online, a way for diaspora adults to keep in touch with parents and family. Gaston and his staff receive email messages and take them to family members, and they also reply, sending messages back from the family.

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In early 2003, a Haitian in the U.S. military, stationed in Frankfurt, Germany, took advantage of G-M online's services. He was being sent to Baghdad and wanted to talk to his father before he left. But his father's phone wasn't working. G-M online informed the father and arranged for them to talk. The military man was so grateful he promised to send a digital camera for the Internet center.

Leaving Gran Plèn and Gros Morne, we returned the way we came, once more traveling down a peasant road and then a secondary highway. Here and there we forded a river, some quite wide and deeper than usual from the rains. Again we saw men

and women washing their clothes and themselves in the rivers. Naked children running and playing. People riding donkeys or leading donkeys laden with goods. Women carrying baskets on their heads. Bikes, motorbikes, tap taps—the country's colorful passenger vans or minibuses; an endless stream of people, sometimes packed together, sometimes spaced apart. As always, there were the school kids walking home.

On Highway 1, the road back to Port-au-Prince, the black top had worn away, and we drove for hours across a rutted roadbed of stones and dirt. Cars bounced and weaved from side to side. Across the valley of rice fields you could see the dust thrown up by trucks and cars for miles.

People lived along this road, as they did along every road, their houses and belongings covered with dust. Still they hung wash and dried rice, going about their business, living their lives.

A truck carrying people was stopped on the road with the driver and a few men working on something underneath the vehicle while the passengers waited patiently, sitting and standing along the side of the road. They could be stranded for hours, or for days. Perhaps the vehicle would have to be abandoned, like others we had passed.

And then the people would take their belongings and move on. They would find another ride. Or they would walk.

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SATURDAY, 1:00 P.M. PORT-AU-PRINCE.

EXIT INTERVIEW. WATER AND LIBRARIES. FREEDOM AND LAUGHTER. A PASSION FOR HAITI. A REVOLUTION OF INCLUSION.

During lunch on the porch of the Hotel Olofson, which Graham Greene used as a setting in *The Comedians*, his novel about Haiti, Michèle talked about the future of FOKAL and the programs we had seen on our tour.

Many of the rural site development programs, such as Vallue and Pliché, were at the end of their funding cycles after five or more years of support. FOKAL wanted to recruit other funders to their cause so that the activities and influence of the peasant organizations would continue to grow.

Most of FOKAL's own budget will go to the new resource center and its programs, and some of it will go to the community libraries that are crucial for the country's future. The libraries provide young people with training in library work, civics education, management, project development, and democratic debate.

FOKAL will also continue to serve as a legal umbrella for other nonprofit organizations. Whether supporting FOKAL's own programs or the work of other organizations affiliated with FOKAL, funders are assured of good management and a record of accountability and achievement.

"We've shown that, despite horrible social, political, and economic conditions," Michèle said, "there are grassroots organizations striving to improve living conditions and make a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities."

FOKAL vouches for the organizations it works with. "If the money is channeled through us, we will monitor and account for the funds, and issue reports on the progress being made."

There are so many urgent projects that require funding. Establishing water systems is one priority. "A community's water supply system is a conflict resolution issue," Michèle said. "Water can resolve conflict or it can create conflict." Neighborhoods can organize to negotiate with officials for a water line and, if approved, manage the resulting water system. It's a simple matter of tapping into the main line, putting in a meter, and collecting money from neighborhood residents to pay the government.

Another priority is the library program. Michèle said she wanted to strengthen the 51 community libraries FOKAL had helped establish. She wants the libraries to be managed by young people

and oriented toward young people. But the young people who run the libraries as volunteers will inevitably leave as they grow older and develop in their professions. Or as Michèle put it, "The young people are going to stop being young very rapidly and go on to other things." The libraries need institutional support to help find and train staff so FOKAL is working on creating an association of community libraries.

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FOKAL's scholarship program changes the attitudes of young people simply by paying attention to them. "It opens their minds," Michèle said. "It pushes them to be more interested in their country, instead of just wanting to leave."

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Working with young people in the scholarship program, Michèle continued, "We never tell them, 'no, no, don't leave.' I have never said that. I wouldn't dare. I've seen young kids who thought there was no other way than to get the hell out of here . . . and who, after a few years working with us, admit that they now see a few things that they could try to do here. Which is a big change. It's something to work on. Because not everyone will be able to migrate. If you think that's the solution to all things in life and you can't do it . . . what then?"

Michèle herself, as a member of the affluent, educated elite, could have left Haiti, but she stayed to work for the improvement of her country.

"There is something about Haitians," she said, "their sense of freedom, their sense of being at ease with themselves—even in misery. When I look at the faces of people in the most deprived and destitute environments, I sense both freedom and grace. Here I can communicate with everyone, laugh with everyone. I have a real passion for this place. It is so strong that sometimes it hurts."

"On the bicentennial of Haiti's independence," I asked Michèle, "how would you describe the kind of revolution that is needed now?"

"You cannot keep having a country where the majority is excluded from the rights and responsibilities of citizenship," she answered. "The next century has to be the century of citizenship."

"A revolution of inclusion?"

"Absolutely, absolutely," she said.

"Freedom to want to stay, not just leave?"

"Absolutely. We must make this place livable for everyone, a country you want to build, not destroy."

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AFTERWORD

The violence and chaos that marked the ouster of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide from Haiti in early 2004 left a desperately poor country in worse shape than ever. FOKAL, the foundation established and supported by the Open Society Institute in Haiti, is not able to address the country's immense need for economic assistance and infrastructure development. Yet we believe we can contribute to the reconstruction of the country by maintaining and, if possible, expanding the programs of FOKAL described in this report. In addition, there are at least two other areas where we would like to assist.

One is to help relaunch Haiti's lively independent media. In the weeks of mob violence led by gangs and militias opposing and supporting Aristide, a number of the pro-Aristide groups attacked the media. In some instances, radio transmitters on the mountains were demolished. In a country with such desperate needs, the media do more than provide news and entertainment. For many Haitians, radio especially has fostered a sense of community that is vital for the country. This is a field in which the Open Society Institute has extensive experience in all parts of the world, and we have the skills with which to assist FOKAL.

Another area where we can draw on our international resources is the rebuilding or, in this case, the actual building of Haiti's criminal justice system. The country urgently needs an honest and effective police force—a need that others must address. But a police force is only an instrument of repression to those arrested if there are no courts, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and others to deal with them fairly.

Building a justice system is a tall order in any country. It cannot be done in the short term. Establishing the capacity to train lawyers and judges, attracting qualified personnel ready to work for modest salaries, and ensuring that the funds are available to pay them for sustained periods are all very difficult. Yet there is little hope that other expenditures or reconstruction efforts will succeed unless a justice system can be established.

Fortunately, FOKAL has attracted remarkably able and dedicated people to its board and staff, starting with its executive director, Michèle Pierre-Louis. Their presence is what bolsters our belief that it is possible for us to make a difference in such troubled circumstances.

Aryeh Neier
President
Open Society Institute
June 2004

FOKAL PROGRAMS

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RESOURCE CENTER

The Resource Center, built with OSI funding and owned by FOKAL, houses a café, a cybercafé, a multipurpose auditorium, a youth library (Bibliothèque Monique Calixte), training and exhibit space, an audiovisual production unit, and FOKAL's administrative offices.

The library and cybercafé count over 5,000 members, mostly children and youth from the capital's impoverished neighborhoods. Inaugurated in 2003, the center is already a popular meeting place and training ground for youth, artists, women, peasants, and many other sectors of Haitian society.

TIPA TIPA PROGRAM (STEP BY STEP)

The TiPa TiPa Program is the Haitian adaptation of OSI's Step by Step education program for children in kindergarten and primary school. It develops a child's autonomy, his/her natural curiosity, creativity, decision-making capacity, and ability to take a critical view of ideas.

TiPa TiPa gives children from impoverished backgrounds access to high-quality schooling in an appropriate environment, and allows parents and the community to participate in the education of their children. The program, which exists in 30 schools throughout the country, also trains teachers, school administrators, and parents.

TiPa TiPa is spinning off as an autonomous entity focusing on preservice and inservice teacher training and family and community integration within the education process. It is in urgent need of funding.

SITE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

TiPa TiPa schools provide the cornerstone of a broader, integrated, school-centered development program that reaches parents and the rest of the community.

Leveraging existing initiatives and local leadership, FOKAL has made investments that stimulate local agriculture, stock farming, the transformation of goods, and the development of services. Water and energy projects have received special attention. FOKAL has also supported the training and improvement of the local credit unions and the cooperatives.

The site development projects reach people through the education of their children and encourage the synergy of local initiatives. The Association des Paysans de Vallue and Òganizasyon Peyizan Gran Plèn are among the peasant organizations that received support from the Site Development Program.

LIBRARY PROGRAM

The Library Program supports a network of over 50 community libraries, reaching tens of thousands of people from the Grande-Anse to the North. Located in remote rural areas as well as crowded urban neighborhoods, these libraries are often the only places where local people can read a book or magazine. The libraries underscore the importance of reading and contribute to remedying the deficiencies of the educational system.

FOKAL provides training, collection improvement (particularly dictionaries, encyclopedias, books by Haitian authors, and children's books), network organization, and promotion of activities. The community libraries have succeeded in creating public support for and interest in cultural and literary activities.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The Scholarship Program supports academic excellence among underprivileged students, particularly from rural sites, partner institutions, and other FOKAL programs. Such support goes to a small number (less than 100) of young people with exceptional academic records for their university studies locally.

Bibliothèque Monique Calixte

Resource Center of Avenue Christophe

CULTURAL AND LITERARY ACTIVITIES

FOKAL supports gifted visual artists, dancers, and musicians. It also contributes funds to Haitian literary production and assists in the production of local documentaries. FOKAL collaborates with UNESCO in supporting art exhibits and debates on literature, freedom of the press, and human rights.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

FOKAL gives general support to peasants' associations, community radio stations, human rights organizations, women's groups, and other nongovernmental organizations.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Cover photo: mountainside, once barren, now replanted with grass and trees, Vallue

Page 2: peasants at mountaintop preschool, Vallue

Page 4: peasant association compound in Pliché

Page 6: walking to school, Pliché

Page 11: school buildings, Fretta-Mas

Page 14: musicians, Bibliothèque Justin Lhérisson

Page 16: studying at the Bibliothèque

Page 18: students practicing formations, Vallue

Page 20: a member of APV's sewing association

Pages 22–25: APV's cannery and nursery

Page 26: peasants at mountaintop preschool, Vallue

Pages 28–29: mountaintop preschool and garden

Page 31: peasant, Vallue

Pages 36–37: peasant association's credo, Pliché

Our Credo in Lakou Lakay (Home Yard)

Haiti is my country, Haiti is your country

We are Haitian, We love Haiti

Haiti will not die

Haiti will live

We are working with the help of God

So that Haitians will respect life

So that Lakou Lakay becomes a source of hope for the people of Haiti

So that all Haitians regain worth and dignity

Page 38: Michèle Pierre-Louis, FOKAL's director, and students of Pliché's Step by Step school

Page 42: Father Yves Edmond, the Pliché peasant association's coordinator

Page 44: a well with potable water

Page 48: students raising Haiti's flag, Fretta-Mas

Pages 50–51, 53: teacher and pupils, Fretta-Mas

Page 54: Paul Saint-Georges, director of the school at Fretta-Mas

Pages 58, 61: students of Gran Plèn

Page 67: Several FOKAL staff members in the stairwell of the Resource Center of Avenue Christophe, which houses the foundation's offices, an auditorium, and the Bibliothèque Monique Calixte. Left to right: Dinette Antoine, Jacob Gateau, Michèle Pierre-Louis, Katy Jean, Real Cherizard, and Lorraine Mangonès.

Page 72: students of Gran Plèn

Back cover: students of Pliché, peasants of Vallue

The Open Society Institute, a private operating and grantmaking foundation, aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, legal, and social reform. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses.

OSI was created in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help countries make the transition from communism. OSI has expanded the activities of the Soros foundations network to other areas of the world where the transition to democracy is of particular concern. The Soros foundations network encompasses more than 60 countries, including the United States.

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Through a handful of effective civic organizations, Haitians are tackling a mountain range of problems. Now, after the political violence that followed years of government repression, their work is more difficult and urgent than ever. This report tells the story of FOKAL, the foundation established by OSI in Haiti, and some of the programs that deserve the international community's support because they work in a country where so much doesn't. It is a journey through the unfinished business of Haiti.

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