

# ENGAGING THE HAITIAN DIASPORA

Emigrant Skills and Resources are Needed for  
Serious Growth and Development, Not Just Charity

*By Tatiana Wah*

Over the last five decades, Haiti has lost to the developed and developing world a significant amount of its already meager manpower resources, largely in the form of international migration. This has led to a significant pool of skilled human capital residing mostly in the Dominican Republic, the United States, and Canada as diaspora communities. Some estimates show that as much as 70 percent of Haiti's skilled human resources are in the diaspora. Meanwhile, it is increasingly argued that unless developing nations such as Haiti improve their skilled and scientific infrastructures and nurture the appropriate brainpower for the various aspects of the development process, they may never advance beyond their current low socio-economic status. Faced with persistent underdevelopment problems and with language and cultural barriers, international aid agencies, development scholars, and practitioners are increasingly and loudly calling for diaspora engagement programs.

The processes required to construct successful diaspora engagement strategies for Haiti's development, however, are not well understood and consequently merit serious attention. Programs make implicit and explicit assumptions about diaspora members that do not apply to the general understanding of how émigrés build or rebuild their worlds. Programs fail to place strategies within the larger framework of any national spatial-economic development plan or its implementation. Current engagement strategies treat nationalistic appeals and diaspora consciousness as sufficient to entice members of the diaspora to return or at least to make indirect contributions to their homeland. Improving diaspora engagement strategies for

Haiti's development should begin with a better understanding of the Haitian diaspora population—why they left in the first place, the activities they undertake, their competencies and resources, and how they can effectively contribute to their homeland.

▷ Shantytown of Wharf  
Jeremie, Port-au-Prince,  
Nov. 7, 2010. *Marco  
Baroncini/Corbis*



## Why They Left

The Haitian population had been largely stationary before the 1960s, save for labor migration to neighboring Caribbean islands. Haitian mass migration to the more developed countries, and especially to the United States, remained insignificant, primarily because of racial tensions and segregation. Less than 2,000 Haitians legally immigrated to the United States from 1900 to 1950. By the late 1950s to early 1960s, however, many from the upper and middle classes began to flee the dictatorial regime of François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, thus constituting the first wave of Haitian mass migration. This first wave brought Haitians to the United States, to Europe (mostly France), to French-speaking Canada, and to Francophone Africa.

Massacres, confiscation of property, and persecution of members of the educated and professional class propelled their outflow. Those who were believed to be communists were also targeted. My half-Chinese father was jailed more than a dozen times because the Duvalier regime believed that he would agitate the proletariat and peasant farmers. The dictator’s goal of building a new black aristocracy in Haitian society under the *noiriste* ideology (the black power or ‘black is beautiful’ movement) called for the extinction of the existing upper and educated classes, and the nationalization of their property and enterprises. The *noiriste* ideology was also the basis for Duvalier’s promotion of the emigration of Haitian professionals and technicians to the newly independent countries of Francophone Africa in the 1960s. By so doing, Duvalier did effectively reduce potential political opposition, but this period also marked the beginning of Haiti’s brain and capacity drain.

Changes in U.S. immigration law and civil rights laws in the 1960s facilitated this first wave of Haitian mass migration. United States support for the Duvalier regime, largely because of Washington’s preoccupation with Fidel Castro’s communist regime in Cuba (Haiti’s neighbor), further facilitated both legal and illegal immigration of Haitians to the U.S. during this period. The outflow of Haitian immigrants to the United States tripled by 1970—from about 3,000 per year in the mid-1950s to 10,000 per year by 1967, and then to 25,000 in 1970. Little effort was made by the U.S. government to contain the illegal flow from Haiti until the 1980s; the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) did not go after temporary visitors with non-immigrant visas, who remained in the U.S. from that time.

The second and heavier wave of Haitian migration to the U.S. came during the 1980s. In fact, over three-quarters of all Haitians now residing in the U.S. arrived after 1980. The largest recorded number (44,570) of legal Haitian immigrants to arrive within a one-year period occurred in 1980–81. The largest number of refugees to arrive on the shores of southern Florida in makeshift boats occurred in the same time period—25,000 arrived in 1980 and 8,000 in 1981. This outflow of boat people from

Haiti to Florida persisted until the end of the Duvalier regime in 1986, but at a lower rate; averaging about 500 refugees a year.

The outflow of both legal and illegal immigrants rose sharply again at the beginning of the 1990s. This period is considered the third wave of Haitian outflow overseas. An estimated 38,000 Haitians fled the country in the first eight months of 1991, following the coup d'état against the democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In addition, over 10,000 boat people seeking asylum were detained at American facilities in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba the same year. About 30 percent of those were paroled into the U.S. and were later joined by their families under the family reunification provision of U.S. immigration law. During the same time frame (1991–94), refugees were also landing on the shores of the Bahamas, and many more crossed the border to the Dominican Republic.

By 1995, the U.S. Immigration Act called for more stringent requirements for family reunification and thus made legal migration more difficult for Haitians. The U.S. Coast Guard practice of intercepting Haitian boats in Haitian waters also contributed to diminishing the illegal entry of Haitians via south Florida beaches. Yet, according to the INS, Haitians have continued to arrive legally at a rate of about 15,000 per year since 1990. This persistent flow into the U.S. is due to the great backlog in the numbers of Haitians who are in the process of changing their status or that of their relatives from Haiti. It is also due to the political instability of the country. Since 1990, Haiti has had over nineteen governments—with prime ministers averaging only about sixteen months in office.

The 1990 U.S. Census reported 306,000 persons in the U.S. who identified their primary ancestry as Haitian. By 2000, the recorded number nearly doubled, and had reached 548,000. In 2010, the U.S. Census reported 907,790 Haitians (foreign and native-born) in the United States. Soon after the devastating 2010 earthquake, the U.S. granted temporary protected status (TPS) to about 200,000 Haitians who had been living continuously in the U.S. without proper documents that now permitted them to work. Moreover, the earthquake forced the return to the U.S. of many Haitian Americans (U.S. citizens of Haitian descent) who had been residing in Haiti, mainly students and retirees.

Haitian American organizations estimate that there are well over one million persons of Haitian descent in the U.S., which constitutes roughly 15 percent of the current population of Haiti. (They contend there are major problems of undercounting in the U.S. Census.) Roughly 43 percent of the Haitian diaspora reside in the United States, leaving the largest proportion of the Haitian diaspora in neighboring Caribbean countries, mostly in the Dominican Republic.

Haitian migration, like most migration to the U.S. from less developed countries, is characterized by a chain migration pattern whereby one or two people obtain legal

status, establish a household, and begin recruiting a series of relatives and friends. The chain migration of my own family began with the ousting of my great uncle from political office upon the installation of Duvalier in 1957—he had served the previous Paul Magloire administration. The continuation of a devastating political, environmental, social, and economic situation (including a 40 percent unemployment rate) in Haiti guarantees an unbroken chain migration, particularly to the United States and Canada; and when combined with already heavy backlogs in processing resident status changes, a large and growing flow of Haitians will persist.

### **“Diasporic Consciousness”**

Members of the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. and Canada are better off economically and have higher levels of educational and occupational attainment than those residing in neighboring Caribbean islands. As a group, they are seen to be able to contribute significantly to Haiti’s development. The higher level of accomplishment among those living in the U.S. and Canada is itself due to many factors, including legal status, the range of economic activities and educational facilities available to immigrants, and their level of education upon arrival. Haitians in the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, and other Caribbean islands, for example, are limited to employment as casual labor—whether in the agricultural, service, tourism, or construction sectors or in petty commerce. Members of the Haitian diaspora residing in neighboring Caribbean islands are further limited in that most who migrate there have had the lowest level of schooling and have limited experience in economic activities other than peasant farming and petty commerce. They also live precariously on these islands due to their illegal status, and are often subjected to mass deportations. There are, however, a growing number of Haitian skilled workers—particularly in construction, agriculture, and agro-processing industries—as well as a growing university student and graduate population and former political elites in the Dominican Republic.

One important factor that must be highlighted in terms of its significance in shaping the characteristics of Haitian diaspora communities—wherever they may reside—is that they suffer from prejudice and discrimination. This could be said to propel them to hold onto a “diasporic consciousness,” to use the sociologist Robin Cohen’s term. This fact is well recognized by all authors who write on the Haitian diaspora and refugees and their experiences, leading to Haitian diaspora communities being dubbed “migrants in isolation” —that is, isolated from other groups.

In the U.S., adverse publicity during the 1980s tarnished the image of Haitians for the general public. This focused on three elements: the vast numbers of boat people arriving on Florida’s shores; the rumor that tuberculosis (TB) was endemic among Haitians in southern Florida; and the wholesale labeling of all Haitians as an at-risk

group for AIDS by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Both the TB rumor and AIDS labeling were unjustified—Haitians were subsequently removed from the CDC’s at-risk list after much protest by the Haitian expatriate communities—but the group was left wrongly stigmatized. The preferential treatment given to Cuban boat people over Haitian boat people arriving on Florida’s shores also exacerbated the rift and distrust between the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. and mainstream Americans. Haitians were considered by Washington to be economic rather than political refugees in the 1980s despite the dictatorship in Haiti, and were treated differently than the Cubans fleeing Castro’s regime. The overwhelming majority of arrivals was therefore denied political asylum and jailed in disproportionate numbers compared to undocumented people from other immigrant groups.

### **The Hometown Factor**

Family and friends remain the central organizing institution of Haitian expatriates. Remaining loyal to their heritage (cultural taste in music, food, and language) and community (towns from which they came) mean Haitian diaspora members throughout the U.S. frequent restaurants, clubs, clinics, and stores that cater primarily to a Haitian clientele. Haitians register hundreds of associations in the U.S., spanning from student and professional organizations, to charitable causes for Haiti, to cultural and artistic groups and political cliques. For the most part, these associations orient their constituencies toward matters in Haiti and not that of the U.S. And, although there is a growing number of organizations that focus on issues relating to their own Haitian constituencies in America, tragic circumstances in Haiti—frequent natural disasters for instance—seem to always reorient diaspora activities back to Haiti.

The bulk of Haitian voluntary organizations in the U.S. center around regional associations that are named for the specific region, town, or village in Haiti within which they conduct their charitable work. Haitian institutions in the U.S. largely mirror those in Haiti in that they are weak or barely functioning, are plagued with capacity and financial resource deficiencies, are inappropriate due to parallel purposes, and are extremely informal. The unstructured nature of how these regional ‘hometown’ organizations operate limits their resources and their influence both in Haitian communities and in the American mainstream.

Haitian diaspora business enterprises tend to be micro or small in scale, and many operate as informal activities, relying mostly on personal relationships. Most Haitian-owned businesses either conduct transnational business with Haiti or serve the Haitian community in their U.S. neighborhoods. The market for both formal and informal micro-enterprises is almost solely Haitian-based. These businesses tend to have little potential for growth or to create any significant wealth since they cater to a limited

market and very few employ more than the owner; the latter is often fully and formally employed outside of the business too. Haitian enterprises concentrate in fields such as money transfers, travel agencies, and food preparation, and include the following services: bakeries, shipping, restaurants, translation services, music shops, and small grocery stores. The informality and small size of Haitian expatriate enterprises stem not only from their own lack of sophisticated entrepreneurial skills, but also from low production, low standards, and the low diversity of goods to be had from Haiti. Unlike the Chinese, Lebanese, or Iranian trade or merchant diasporas, the Haitian diaspora has not developed into large manufacturers, retailers or wholesalers, and distributors. The Haitian diaspora in the U.S. and elsewhere is largely a community of wage earners, focusing more on climbing professional occupational ladders and increasing incomes from their jobs. In 2000, only 4.42 percent of the employed sixteen years and over population in the Haitian diaspora in the U.S. were self-employed in their own business; in 2010, the U.S. Census reports a mere 3.5 percent of Haitians remain in this category.

### **Education as an Equalizer**

The primary significance of the U.S. Haitian diaspora for Haiti lies in its human capital—its entrepreneurial ventures and sources of capital are essentially negligible relative to Haiti's economic development requirements. While 93 percent of the Haitian diaspora in the United States over 25 years of age have had schooling, only about 40 percent of Haiti's population of a comparable age has had schooling. And while close to 32 percent of the U.S. Haitian diaspora has at least attended college or hold associate degrees and 18 percent hold a bachelor's and higher degree, only about 3.5 percent of Haitian nationals have attended college and only about 1.4 percent hold university degrees. In terms of sheer numbers, the gap in educational attainment is striking. In the U.S. alone, the Haitian diaspora counts close to 65,900 holders of university degrees in 2010 census, which is quadruple the number that the entire nation possesses. According to a 2006 Inter-American Development Bank report, Haiti has a university enrollment rate of less than 1 percent, and 84 percent of university graduates subsequently leave Haiti. The country has the highest illiteracy rate in the Western Hemisphere, estimated to be over 75 percent by the U.S. State Department, though other estimates vary between 50–60 percent.

This means that Haiti has no choice in the short and medium term but to utilize its skilled expatriates in its development efforts, unless the country wants to largely import foreign skilled workers across all fields. For it will take Haiti seventy-four years to produce an equal number of university graduates to that which already exists in the U.S. and Canadian Haitian diaspora communities. Further complicating the nation's skilled human capital production troubles is its high population

growth; one of the highest in the Latin American/Caribbean region. In just ten years, Haiti will have over 4.5 million children under the age of fifteen to educate, 3.8 million of whom will remain illiterate if current rates of primary school participation and completion are to persist.

Though trailing behind the general population, the U.S. Haitian diaspora has made great strides in terms of educational attainment as well as in occupational structure. Between 1990 and 2010, Haitians in the United States became much more highly educated, and are, therefore, now in a better position to contribute to Haiti's development. The Haitian work ethic and belief in the equalizing force of education remains the diaspora community's major asset. Based on the 2000 U.S. Census, over 10 percent of the U.S. Haitian population holds a bachelor's degree and another 5 percent hold a graduate degree (a master's, a professional degree, or a doctorate). Nearly 41 percent of the U.S. Haitian diaspora has at least some college education; capturing the many who have attended vocational programs, such as nurse-aide or home health aide certifications, auto mechanics, and equipment and appliance repairs. The 2010 U.S. Census shows an increase in educational attainment, with close to 13 percent of Haitians holding a bachelor's degree and close to 6 percent with graduate or professional degrees.

The Haitian diaspora in the United States has moved into the more highly paid managerial and professional occupations—business managers, lawyers, scientists, social scientists, teachers, and doctors—with these numbers increasing from 14 percent in 1990 to more than 24 percent in 2010. Close to 40 percent are in service occupations—with a concentration (36 percent) in health care and education-related jobs, 19 percent are in sales and office occupations, and close to 13 percent are in production, transportation, and material-moving occupations (2010 census). About 4 percent are in the natural resource, construction, and maintenance occupations. The portion of the U.S. Haitian population working in farming, fishing, and forestry occupations is 0.3 percent. The 2010 U.S. Census also shows a large increase in unemployment of Haitian population, which now stands at 12 percent.

### **Giving Back to the Homeland**

The 2010 average household income for U.S. Haitians was \$55,459, and the median individual income is \$32,223. There had been an increase in household incomes from 1990 to 2000 but the U.S. economic crisis has negatively affected the Haitian diaspora community. The strides that had been made in the preceding decades are now waning, a fact illustrated by a higher poverty rate for families, which stood at close to 20 percent in 2010. Yet, 44 percent of Haitian diaspora households live in owner-occupied housing. Savings, however, continue to be drained in money remittances back to Haiti, which curtails investment into their own future in the U.S.



Remittances are most often hailed as the greatest contribution that members of the Haitian diaspora make to their homeland. Haitians in the U.S. remit about \$2 billion a year—more than triple actual international aid disbursements. Haiti is among the highest remittance-receiver countries of fragile states relative to its population size, after countries such as Nigeria and Nepal. Remittance values are considered so high that several development think tanks in Washington are encouraging the U.S. to open its doors to more Haitian emigration, arguing that migration is not only a short-term recovery tool for Haiti, but is vital for its long-term development. Writing in *Foreign Policy*, Charles Kenny has noted that an estimate by World Bank economist Dilip Ratha suggests that the temporary protected status granted to Haitians post-earthquake might be worth as much as \$360 million in additional remittances to Haiti in 2010 alone, which is more than the total U.S. aid disbursement to Haiti in the two-year period of 2010 and 2011.

Remittances do make up a large share of Haiti's Gross National Product (GNP). Even before the earthquake, World Bank estimates in 2007 show that remittances from the Haitian diaspora accounted for about 20 percent of Haiti's GNP, close to double its total export earnings, and higher than Haiti's total foreign aid receipts. In 1998, Haiti derived \$167.7 million in total exports and \$106 million from the U.S. in foreign aid, while remittances received from Haitian workers abroad amounted to \$293 million and helped the balance of payment problems. Remittances curtail the nation's foreign currency difficulties, help stabilize the exchange rate, and contribute to the increase of net reserves of foreign currency in the banking system.

The U.S. Haitian diaspora also contributes tremendously to particular sectors of the Haitian economy. The tourism sector, for example, earns Haiti millions of dollars; besides the missionaries and the growing number of international NGOs and their visitors, most tourism earnings derive from the Haitian diaspora members who come to Haiti for tourist and family visits. The latest figures are from a 1999 Banque de la République d'Haiti report, showing that Haiti earned \$124 million in 1998 from Haitian diaspora tourism. In the construction sector, the Haitian diaspora has contributed to growth—through remittances—by starting building construction, adding to existing construction, or completing their family/relatives' homes or small businesses (often a guest house or small hotel, or hardware stores). These homes and buildings usually take years to complete, as the sums of money sent are not large and are remitted on an annual basis (thereby often adding only a room a year). These homes are changing the Haitian landscape from the traditional thatched homes to new cement foundations, half-built homes, and new architectural structures spread across the Haitian territory. In the telecommunications sector, Haitian expatriates contribute to the bulk of that sector's revenues via incoming and outgoing phone call fees from the Haitian diaspora.

To boot, the Haitian diaspora consumes the bulk of Haitian indigenous products exported to the U.S., which comprise mostly food and goods such as mangos, avocados and plantains, and arts and crafts. These products account for 15-42 percent of total Haitian exports over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s. No one really knows the correct figure as the Haitian diaspora also exports primary goods from Haiti via personal suitcases and shipping containers that are not accounted for by Haitian authorities.

### **Goodwill Ambassadors?**

Various diaspora engagement programs have been devised to tap into areas of diaspora significance in remittances, skill transfers, charitable contributions, tourism, and capital market investments so as to effectuate growth and development in their respective homelands. One rationale for undertaking diaspora engagement programs is that they facilitate the low cost transfer of skills due to shared language and customs; traditional international experts would cost more than double the diaspora. Another justification is that the diaspora, having acquired the technological knowledge abroad and having become proficient in the latest technologies, are better aware of the constraints of their home country's environment and are more motivated to contribute toward their homeland's development. Moreover, the utilization of the diaspora or those from similar cultures avoids social problems that could arise with the wholesale importation of foreign skilled workers. This helps to safeguard national identity.

The United Nation's TOKTEN program (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals), which began in 1977, is among the oldest of the diaspora engagement programs. It seeks to recruit potential sources of high-skilled professionals, those with the technical know-how necessary for the development of their countries of origin that suffer from a major brain drain. TOKTEN did not become operational in Haiti until after 1988, upon the fall of the dictatorial regime. TOKTEN seeks to utilize diaspora skills on a short term, voluntary basis—members of the diaspora are requested to take time off from their jobs and volunteer that time to go back to their homeland for short-term consultancies (two to twelve weeks maximum) to the government.

Similarly, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is also increasingly calling for diaspora engagement programs on a short-term, voluntary basis. Several of its Haiti programs seek to engage the Haitian diaspora in the agency's own agricultural and watershed management projects, (*Développement Economique pour un Environnement Durable*, or DEED Projects). While the USAID-DEED project calls for diaspora members to volunteer in commercial agriculture development and environmental recovery over short, multiple-week timespans, USAID has most recently sought out the diaspora for post-earthquake rebuilding efforts through the agency's Washington contractors in Haiti. The latter project aims to support the

government's post-earthquake efforts via a couple of months of paid work. USAID also solicits the Haitian diaspora to channel remittances into a diaspora fund that would ultimately be used to support enterprises and projects in the targeted watersheds. Both TOKTEN and USAID-DEED programs pay for travel and accommodation for the duration of the short stay. Yet, neither TOKTEN nor USAID have been successful in attracting skilled diaspora members into their programs in Haiti. And when USAID has managed to get a few members of the diaspora on short paid contracts to work with the Haitian government, they have not engaged them effectively.

It is incomprehensible to think that a two-to three-week consultancy period (or even a three month stint), which usually amounts to no more than a paid vacation to visit relatives, could be considered an effective way to engage highly-skilled professionals in the development of a country. Development work, conventional wisdom makes known, is a full-time occupation not to mention preoccupation. It seems to me that engagement programs are effectively engaging the diaspora not so much as development experts but as ambassadors of goodwill.

Moreover, programs such as the DEED project have not sought to match the occupational profiles of the U.S. Haitian diaspora to agricultural-environmental recovery goals in Haiti. USAID would have more chance at getting the needed agricultural skills from the Haitian diaspora in the Dominican Republic than in New York, Boston, or Miami. Gainfully employed as they are in American corporate or government offices—as teachers, school principals, nurses, doctors, lawyers, and policemen—it is difficult to see how diaspora professionals could leave their career work for a three-month contract that neither exceeds or even matches their pay, nor offers basic amenities. Even when diaspora members take such positions, they often are left sitting around for the government to get its act together. Their short time in-country is often idly wasted and accomplishes very little.

Members of diaspora hometown associations and professional organizations already take their vacation time with family and friends to go back to their respective hometowns to do volunteer work on philanthropic projects that they themselves conceive with the local community, based on their competencies and needs. Funneling the diaspora into projects conceived in Washington or elsewhere for Haitian towns or regional areas unfamiliar to them, and without local community input, does not make for effective engagement programs. Plenty of evidence shows that donor government diaspora programs are most successful when they build on existing diaspora initiatives. Current programs fail to comprehend that the diaspora are more attracted to their own local birthplace than to their homeland per se. Haitians want to give back to their own community, to that within which family and friends remain, for personal and emotional reasons. To the extent that their hometown-based

activities often evolve into small public works projects and micro-entrepreneurial ventures, the major benefits for the diaspora are social and cultural gratification, and frequently, social prestige, self-satisfaction, and self-promotion (not to mention self-aggrandizement) within the village or town.

While Haitian diaspora remittances are large and are increasing—making it tempting to channel them into a diaspora fund for development—they usually do not amount to the large capital sums required for necessary development infrastructure such as the building of dams, railroads, roadways, and sanitation and water systems. Remittances go to an individual's family, friends, and relatives who most often use these funds for the consumption of imported goods. Some economists show that as much as 80 percent of remittance funds are spent on everyday consumption and very little goes into savings or on productive investments. They also note that remittances create a dependency ethic among poor recipients, are a short-term monetary solution to a long-term development and foreign exchange problem, and may also decrease the likelihood of an improved economy. Promoting increases in diaspora remittances encourages the continued migration of the working age population and decreases the likelihood of investment by the government or foreign investors because what is left behind is an unreliable, remittance-dependent workforce. These financial resources also do not compensate for the continuing loss of skilled human capital.

Grassroots activities and remittances from regional hometown associations do fund a few small-scale projects such as schools, clinics, and rural electrification, but they have not had many positive sustainable development results. This is partly because local officials fail to define public work projects and do not coordinate their efforts with those of international NGOs, and also because of the lack of a skilled work-force to manage, maintain, and repair completed structures.

A great number of the Haitian diaspora do cling to some diasporic allegiance and are poised to serve Haiti, but are not enticed to leave their work in developed countries by short-term, possibly-paid contracts that offer squalid conditions, political instability, few amenities, and limited prospects for real progress in homeland development and self-growth. Many Haitian-born diaspora members lament that living conditions in Haiti have gotten worse in the last decades in all spheres. One can hardly breathe in the capital city of Port-au-Prince thanks to burning trash (there being no sanitation system), heavy dust clouds caused by unpaved streets, earthquake debris removal, and drying fecal matter particles, and carbon dioxide emissions caused by heavy traffic congestion. One prays that one will have no need to go to a hospital, for none is good or equipped for emergencies and good schools and housing cost as much as in Haiti as they do in the United States. Although it could be argued that the new comforts of developed countries—access to cultural events, efficient organization,

modern instruments and appliances, good roads for their cars, electricity and safe running water, as well as freedom of expression and liberal institutions—may have well provided a simple reshuffling of priorities. Of the over 500 members on both sides of my extended family who reside permanently in the United States—most are U.S. citizens—none but me wishes to return home to work full-time.

### **The Road to Development**

There is no denying that the activities of the Haitian diaspora in Haiti do make a great contribution and produce change in the homeland. Donor government-funded Haitian diaspora engagement programs, like that of the United States, are to be commended for highlighting the significance and growth of the Haitian diaspora. These programs, however, do not begin to address mechanisms for effective diaspora engagement in the development of Haiti. They have failed, for the most part, to build any approaches based on country conditions or the mutual needs of the diaspora and of the government, or to place any approach within a proper development plan and policy framework within a broader national development strategy. They have not pointed to where diaspora skills and resources would be most useful in the development process or at what stages. Nor do they focus on areas (physical and sectoral) where diaspora functions or competencies can best maximize each other's energies and activities for growth and development to occur.

The national plan must spell out the roles and functions that the diaspora will play in implementing sectoral or spatial development plans; it must specify how emigrants will be recruited, to what sector, where and how they are to be involved, and how they would benefit. Policies must outline the package of incentives for full return to Haiti and for limited engagement. The existence of such an operational, implementable national economic and spatial development plan in Haiti reflects a national will to try to achieve set economic and social priorities and targets that can be supported by donors and the diaspora community. Such plans delineate the most important tasks to be implemented in stages for growth and the location of development. Within this broader plan, the type and amount of resource needs, assets, constraints, and potentials—including those of the diaspora—are made known, and so are the policies designed to deal with them. Improving diaspora engagement programs will require institutional development investments and coordination from donors, the diaspora, and the Haitian government, and will require planning and strategizing.

Actualizing an effective diaspora engagement strategy for the development of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere is totally unlike launching a mere program or project. It is rather a process-oriented strategy with a collection of actions, well-conceived plans, appropriate conditions, prosperous activities, and analyses that

assist in arriving at the predetermined goal of economic growth and development. The process involves the formation and solidification of relevant institutional structures, the improvement of capacities, and the promotion of activities wherein the diaspora's engagement becomes a full-time economic growth and development preoccupation, rather than just a part-time, social, charitable or technical one.

The Haitian diaspora can be effectively engaged if mutual needs and interests—economic and extra-economic—of both parties are met in the growth and development process. This is made by means of a planned and systematic process through which the diaspora is made an integral dimension of the socio-economic and political life of Haiti, and that is congruous with the ways in which Haitian diaspora communities build their worlds and improve their standard of living. In considering the interests and needs of the diaspora, its economic rationality must be taken into account so as to entice Haitians abroad to go back to work or invest on a full-time basis in a country lacking the most basic of services and amenities. Instruments such as preferential treatment in joint ventures or contracts/sub-contracts with public and private sectors, and licensing and access to loans/guarantees can offer such economic-size benefits, and should not be seen as different to attracting foreign investors.

The long road to development requires a critical mass of full-time, highly skilled human capital—as the preferred in-country agents of growth and development. In search of global positioning based on comparative and competitive advantages in the new flexible world, what seems to matter most is that knowledge and a variety of skills are involved in the creation of capacity for homeland growth and development. Developing and keeping skilled manpower in Haiti is the best way to assure leadership for sustainable socio-spatial-economic and institutional development. For Haiti's development sake, international migration would be best used as a low-skilled labor absorption and training mechanism through well-targeted international labor agreements.