

Haitians Respond to “Stay Out of Haiti”

April 4, 2022

The “Stay Out of Haiti” Opinion article has prompted reader responses from around the globe. Native Haitians weigh in to add more depth and context to the ideas and thoughts Lisa Hyatt shared in her piece.

Special to the Philanthropy Journal

The recent Philanthropy Journal opinion piece by Overture International Executive Director Lisa Hyatt, “Stay Out of Haiti,” has elicited considerable response from readers. Most of the feedback has agreed with the premise of Hyatt’s article, that unless aid organizations are committed to equipping Haitians to move toward independence and self-sufficiency, they should stay out of Haiti. There have been some who have inquired about the feasibility of this approach, and those questions are welcome and will be addressed in future content. And while everyone’s feedback is appreciated, offering a platform for the voices of the Haitians themselves is of the utmost importance. Following are the views of three native Haitians on staff with Overture International. Their responses have been translated from Haitian Creole or French.

Sainval Wijems, Licensed Social Worker in Haiti

This is an article that comes a little late for Haiti, but better late than never. When I read this article (“Stay Out of Haiti”) in the Philanthropy Journal, I thought, “Here at last is someone who has the courage and bravery to put the spotlight on the mess that punctuates the interventions of many Non-Governmental Organizations in Haiti!” I do not see this article as a condemnation of other NGOs and their interventions, but rather as an opportunity to raise awareness of the need for a change in the paradigm of aid that has persisted for so long.

There is no denying it, Haiti, is in dire need of NGO support. But few organizations are dedicated to producing true social development that results in real and sustainable improvements in living conditions. In Haiti, Overture International is defined by an approach and leadership focused on

development outcomes that truly empower communities and families for independence and self-sufficiency. It is the leadership that obsessively ensures that the work is actually done on the ground by community members for the benefit of the community.

The situation of poverty, deprivation, social exclusion and cumulative vulnerability in Haiti is appalling. However, as a social worker born and raised in Haiti, I'm confident our communities and families can produce social change and achieve autonomy when they are empowered and equipped for success. **What I desire for my dear families and communities of Haiti is the opportunity to develop their own opportunities for independence and self-sufficiency. For this, we need access to information, training, technical support, financial support and opportunity.** What we don't need is to have organizations come to Haiti and do **FOR** us what we should do for **ourselves**.

Pierre Richard Peronneau, Licensed Social Worker in Haiti

Revolutionary! This is the first word that came to my mind after reading the opinion piece. Many articles have already addressed the issue of NGO intervention in Haiti, but this one stood out from the rest in that it addressed the problem directly and with authority. **"YOU may be the problem,"** this little phrase from Lisa Hyatt sums up the real truth about traditional NGO "intervention" in Haiti. The reality is that if the presence of NGOs was for a long time justified by the different problems generated by poverty in Haiti, they have now become (or most of them) part of the problem, an obstacle to any attempt to reduce poverty or to make it disappear altogether. **My hope is that this article will signal the end of irresponsible NGO intervention in Haiti and usher in a new era focused on this one vision: "the people and communities of Haiti becoming independent and self-sufficient".**

Since the earthquake of January 12, 2010, which had more than 300,000 victims, the presence of NGOs in Haiti has grown considerably. At the same time, their coffers have also grown exponentially, even historically. Sadly, it is no secret that the majority of NGOs have an old and dishonest practice of spending exorbitant amounts of money on logistics (car, hotel, office). Also,

they get accommodated in the most luxurious and expensive hotels in the country and their offices are usually housed in the most posh spaces in the country. In other words, the money is NOT being invested in empowering Haitians, but in the comfort of outsiders.

Sadly, the results of the work most NGOs are doing is creating dependency in communities. To be of ultimate service to Haitians, any NGO project within a community must aim at the independence of the community members, it must strengthen their capacity to be the master of their own destiny, to have the freedom to choose between what they want and what they do not want for the community, in short, to be able to decide for the area, ***their area***. Many NGOs do the opposite.

At Overture International, we focus on the capacity building of our Haitian brothers and sisters. We believe any community must assume their responsibility within the community, that they must be masters of their own action, that they must take their destiny and that of their community in hand and that they must be free to decide. Globally, Overture International believes that the development of communities, in fact the real one, must pass through the Haitian man and woman. This is why Overture is so focused on the reinforcement of the people's capacities.

I dream of a Haiti where Haitians are able to take their destiny into their own hands, that they experience independence and self-sufficiency.

Enel Andre, MSW, Licensed Social Worker in Haiti and the US

This article has pointed out a huge reality regarding the way international organizations are intervening in Haiti. And reinforces the fact that these kinds of interventions will never help to empower Haitians to be independent or self-sufficient. This article says what millions of Haitians have been saying for decades. It is the voice of courageous Haitians who are against interventions that only result in creating more dependency and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Most of all this article gives a clear path for organizations who are truly committed to helping Haitians achieve the autonomy of the Haitian people.

I have the chance to see many organizations implementing projects in Haiti. Most of the time the projects don't bring any solutions to the identified issues that need to be addressed. Some organizations, especially from the USA, Canada, France, etc... identify and pursue the project that THEY want to implement in Haiti without any consultation with the Haitians themselves. Most of the time this money is spent the same way they have decided to raise it, that means without Haitian's participation.

Overture's approach is different because it starts from a clear understanding of the need **from those with the need**. Through Overture's interventions, the community leaders and members are the ones who identified their problems and needs. They are the ones too who can propose the solutions to solve their problems. And unlike most outside organizations, Overture's operational staff in Haiti is entirely made up of Haitians. My fellow Haitians are really smart people and they know better than any foreign expert how to solve their own problems. They just need the resources and the appropriate guidance to lead their own way.

My biggest desire is to see Haitians families become independent through training, equipping and guidance that allows them to experience the freedom of self-sufficiency. This alone will end the cycle of poverty that Haitians families have experienced for centuries. And while we can't do it alone, it also can't be done **FOR** us!

For more information about Overture International visit www.overture.international. You can contact Executive Director Lisa Hyatt at lisa@ooihaiti.org.