

Title: Entrepreneurship and Youth: The Critical Role of the Christian Community in Development

Author: Ruth Dykstra (Eastern University and Deep Springs International)

Abstract:

Pastors and their churches play leading roles in community development worldwide, in direct response to God's command to serve the disadvantaged. As globalization extends the reach of the market, new opportunities and challenges exist for these leaders, who seek to obey through holistic ministry. In particular, pastors and churches could be involved in an integral way, encouraging their members, particularly youth, to engage in entrepreneurial activity based on biblical principles. As community members they are able to utilize existing resources to facilitate solutions that are dynamic, sustainable, and driven by God's love.

This paper explores these possibilities by focusing on a case study of youth entrepreneurship in Haiti. Written by the President and CEO of Deep Springs International (DSI), this paper analyzes an attempt by DSI, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization focused on providing a holistic development program geared towards youth entering the workforce, to empower pastors and community leaders in Haiti to spearhead the provision of those resources and skills and encourage entrepreneurial activity among youth. DSI's key innovation is the holistic integration of sustainable solutions to the problems of lack of safe water, unemployment, lack of job-relevant education and spiritual poverty. The approach is to facilitate the creation of incubators for youth businesses by establishing partnerships between schools, MFIs, public health NGOs and the community. Youth are enabled to establish businesses, supported and encouraged through the growth stages by complementary community business centers. These centers draw on the community's existing human resources by involving community business leaders and pastors in leadership.

In its conclusions, drawing on primary and secondary research on youth entrepreneurship and best practices around the world, this paper emphasizes the importance of developing sustainable, independent business centers to serve the needs of youth entrepreneurs. Pastors and their churches, this paper argues, are and can become key figures in developing and launching these business centers. This approach provides Haitian youth with greater access to job-relevant education and income generating activities, and in so doing points to a universal template for youth entrepreneurship programming based on a holistic approach that has the potential to impact youth around the globe.

The Christian response to poverty should not only be immediate aid to the desperate, but a hand-up in development of capable, passionate, young adults who have the potential to change their world. The centrality of the church provides an optimal position for family, community, and country change. Holistic development, driven by community faith efforts, will grant young adults opportunity for job-relevant education worldwide.