

Proposal

Internet Initiative for Development

*- Empowering LDCs Municipal Councils & Mobilising their
Diaspora population for Local Economic Development*

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1 PREAMBLE

1.1 Executive Summary

Internet Technologies Limited is a Software firm that seeks to use the power of ICT to foster economic development – ICT4D.

The Internet Initiative for Development seeks to use the Internet to empower Communities in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by fostering cooperative development effort between their **Municipal Councils** (MCs) and interested parties from around the world.

The initiative requires that websites be developed for all the MCs in the beneficiary country, and on completion the websites would fulfil the following objectives:

- Provide means whereby the diaspora population of the **Municipality** can be mobilised for the development of the locality.
- Provide means through which the sharing of knowledge on best practices, manpower development and co-operation can be facilitated between the Municipal Councils and twin municipal councils in a partnering First World country.
- Provide avenues through which the **MC** can provide information about the Municipality to a wide audience of people both within and outside the country seeking to obtain information for reasons such as investment, tourism, academic / media research, development assistance, etc.
- Facilitate an interface with which the MCs can improve their communication, interaction with, and overall accessibility to their communities.

Municipal Councils around the world perform essentially the same functions; the knowledge sharing component of the project would be seeking to enable the LDCs MCs learn about the requisite structures that need to be in place in a functional municipal council and also the best practices that need to be implemented in the running and management of the Council from their First World twin municipal council, some of which have had functional councils for over a hundred years.

Besides the knowledge sharing needs, several of the LDCs MCs also have developmental needs that they do not have the financial means and expertise to tackle, incidentally these

same countries usually have a large Diaspora population that can be mobilised to help meet some of these needs.

The MCs play a vital role in delivering several of the services essential to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the initiatives outlined above will go a long way in empowering them in carrying out these functions.

The initiative requires a modest capital outlay per MC, and when completed is expected to help build the service delivery capacity of the MCs and catalyse a process in which its diaspora population by the magnitude of the resources and expertise they would be channelling to the respective MC, will become key player in the local economic development effort – a situation where the beneficiaries take true ownership.

It is an initiative that would find ready application in all LDCs that have a sizable diaspora population; from heavy weights such as India, Nigeria and Mexico to small players like Haiti, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, El Salvador and Jamaica. It can even be deployed in the handful of stable communities in a largely unstable state like and Somalia.

In this write-up, we shall be using Haiti as a case study

1.2 Background

Haiti is about the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, with a long history of rulers that were unable to do much to improve the lot of its people. The 2010 earthquake dealt a heavy blow to the country, destroying a good part of the little infrastructure that was in place. Though there was a great outpouring of international sympathy and pledges of aid following the earthquake, several years down the line these flows are beginning to dry up, but there still remains so much that needs to be done. Reports coming out of there paints a picture of unstable governments, corruption, widespread poverty and despair.

However, with a population of over 1 million in the Diaspora, several of which are accomplished professionals in their respective fields, the country certainly has the potentials to overcome the problems that have kept it under, if this store of human capital is properly harnessed.

1.3 Introduction

With the extensively damaged infrastructure, slow reconstruction work and political instability, the situation in Haiti may come across as gloomy, as the government is not in the financial position to deliver on several of the nation's pressing economic and social needs, and especially as aids fatigue has set in amongst several of its foreign supporters.

This initiative offers hope that despite the obstacles that stand in the way of development, those communities with considerable densities of progressives within and outside the country can save themselves.

By collating and organising information, and dispensing it effectively, such communities would not only improve their internal communication, but also improve output and consumption in their localities. Furthermore, the same media used to facilitate access to information for locals could become a gateway to communities, organisations and individuals around the world that share their aspirations.

1.4 Objectives

It is expected that the proposed websites would fulfil the following objectives:

- Provide means whereby the potentials of the indigenes of the **MC** working as professionals outside the country, can be harnessed for the development of the locality.
- Provide means through which knowledge sharing and co-operation efforts can be facilitated between Haitian Municipal Councils on one hand, and city councils in the partnering Developed country on the other hand.
- Provide avenues through which the **Municipal Council (MC)** can provide information about the Municipality to a wide audience of people both within and outside the country seeking to obtain information for reasons such as investment, tourism, academic / media research, development assistance etc.

- Facilitate an interface with which MC can improve their communication, interaction with, and overall accessibility to their communities

1.5 Approach

The intention is for Internet Technologies Ltd. to develop websites for the MCs, which meet the above objectives in co-operation with the partnering OECD country and the project sponsors. It is estimated that the project will take approximately two years to roll out to all 140 Municipalities (Communes) in Haiti.

For purpose of consistency and to send a clear message that all the 140 sites are a part of one single programme, the same template will be used for all the sites. The individual sites will be access through a common home page which will state the objective of the initiative and have a list of the 10 States/Departments in Haiti. Visitors would click on the state of their choice to open up a list of Arrondissements and the Municipal Councils under them, they will then click on the Municipal Council name to open up its website.

The project will involve two main teams; a technical team comprising of programmers and graphic artists that would handle the software aspect of the project, and information gathering teams that would be travelling around the country interviewing MC officials, taking photographs and generally gathering the information that will go into the individual websites.

On completion of the project, Internet Technologies Ltd will be available as consultants to help formulate strategy for the MCs, to assist with continuous training, and to manage technology and advice on its optimal use. Internet Technologies Ltd is also able to help plan, design, and implement the infrastructure required to facilitate communication between the MCs and the Internet Backbone in those areas of the country where internet connectivity is unavailable.

2 HARNESSING POTENTIALS OF FOREIGN BASED PROFESSIONALS ↑≡

It is a known fact that most first-generation immigrants retain very strong ties to their home country, and many return in their old age to retire and to die. In the course of their lives, these indigenes will continue to express this attachment in acts of love and charity, providing financial and moral support to their friends and relatives back home.

With over 1 million Haitians living and working outside the country, most MCs in the country will have a good number of their indigenes working as professionals overseas. Such persons can, through their work experience and exposure to how things are done in better-organised economies, help, and directly influence progress in their MC. Their education, job training, business contacts and financial position can be leveraged to help the MC.

The intention is for this web site to facilitate this communication, interaction and exchange of ideas between professionals in the Diaspora and the MC. Professionals would be required to provide information about themselves such as their name; contact; profession; work experience; educational qualifications, as well as their interests. The information so gathered would be used to build up a register of indigenes abroad. Such a register would allow the MCs tap into the expertise and goodwill of the professionals.

The register would be used to open a channel for bi-directional communication with such indigenes and through this means intimate them on developments in their MC. These communications will include detailed reports on projects the MC is undertaking, services, and general information about happenings in the MC.

It is expected that these professionals can team together and undertake projects and/or provide services such as:

- Rendering free or subsidised consultancy services to projects being undertaken by the MC, including technology evaluation and contract negotiation.
- Make valuable contribution to formulation of policies, given their exposure and wealth of knowledge.
- Initiate investment projects, and with their professional contacts help source foreign funding and technical partners for such projects.
- Use their contacts to attract financial assistance and aid packages from NGOs and other donor organisations for programmes in the MC.

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- Use their business links and contacts to help find markets for processed / semi-processed goods from their MC.
 - Contribute to educational development in the local schools back home by helping in curriculum development, giving donations of books and other educational materials.
 - Team up and help carry out renovation of educational facilities at their alma mater.
 - Establishing scholarship awards for outstanding students or engaging in mentoring relationships with same.
 - With the aid of the online register of professionals, it would be easy to co-ordinate sub groups of professionals, such that medical doctors could arrange joint trips home to run subsidised medical clinics, and co-ordinate donations of medical equipment to local clinics.
 - Subscriptions to professional journals could be taken out for local schools and professional associations that would otherwise have been unable to afford them.
 - Schedule lectures, seminars/ workshops for students and home-based professionals, with the aim of bringing them up-to-date with the latest developments in their field. They could also arrange short term sabbaticals as well as encourage and support exchange programmes.
 - The foreign based professionals could share knowledge of social / economic programmes that have proven successful in their country of residence with their MC.
 - Professionals may also be moved to procure and donate “obsolete computers” to schools and organisations back home; several schools in Haiti do not have computers.
 - Subscribe to diaspora bonds which can be used to fund development projects back in Haiti.
 - Sponsor preventive programmes such as the distribution of free mosquito nets, de-worming of school children, sinking of water borehole/wells and deployment of water vendors.
 - Encourage use of shipping containers for mass housing; as they can be quickly deployed, are relatively cheap and can withstand future earthquakes/hurricanes.
 - Promote use of wood efficient stoves, to help slow down the alarming de-forestation rate and reduce the high incidence of respiratory diseases associated with firewood cooking.
 - Sponsor re-forestation programmes in the MC using fast growing multipurpose plants such as Jatropha, Bamboo and Neem to help restore the original forest cover of the country and curb the excessive runoff and accompanying soil erosion/ periodic flooding that have claimed several lives in the past.

Opportunities abound, and a major driver of the site is to facilitate and precipitate self-help and co-operation among indigenes, local and international. It is true that such activities are not unheard of now. However, while previously, such were spontaneous Actus Humanus, the site would hope to articulate and to help organise these into streams of synergistic drives with a greater potential for fundamental change.

Interaction is key, and the site will be designed to encourage communication and interaction between the main groups that it targets; local indigenes, foreign indigenes, and MC officials. It is unlikely that all interfaces will be defined in the pilot phase of the project. However, by adopting an incremental approach and a philosophy that is supportive of evolutionary systems, the site, and service can be adapted over time to be ever more effective.

3 FACILITATING CO-OPERATION

To help facilitate development and co-operation, it is proposed that a matching (twinning) arrangement be established between each of the Haitian Municipal Councils and municipal councils in the partnering OECD country.

Given that Local authorities around the world face essentially similar challenges, it will be safe to conclude that they can learn from and support one another, without as it were having to reinvent the wheel. A Haitian MC officials can for instance, narrate the problem that its MC has with issues like wastage disposal, urban renewal, increasing internally generated funds, youth unemployment or a greening initiative, and ask officials of its twin city how they handled the problem.

It would be safe to say that the majority of MC in developing countries do not have in place the appropriate departments and organisational structures that would make them truly effective in a 21st century setting. And in the MCs where such structures do exist, they rarely have enough adequately trained hands to man all of the crucial positions.

On the other hand, the MC in the partnering OECD country would have in place efficient structures that have evolved over the years with inputs from consultants, umbrella organisation, regional bodies, etc. They would have also developed best practices and critical skills which they can share with their developing country twinned MC. By sharing experiences and encouraging the exchange of good practice, the interaction provided by the site will help lead to improved service delivery by the Haitian MC.

It is intended that the MC website would provide a listing of projects that the MC is currently executing, giving details on near-future project plans, requisite funding, as well as personnel and skills required to execute the project(s). These should promote accountability and clarity on a level that should promote confidence and trust in the twinned municipal council, or any of the other agencies the MC is in collaboration/partnership with.

Deriving from the manpower needs stated above, retired or serving employees of the twinned municipal councils, where possible, may be despatched to help supervise or give advice on the planning and execution of the projects. These exchanges could be for periods ranging from a few weeks to over a year. Selected staff of the Haitian MC could

also be sent for training or attachment programmes with its twinned municipal council to broaden their skills.

It is intended that the site would maintain a directory of businesses on both sides, to provide opportunity for imports and export exchange. An on-line notice board that lists current needs would also be provided. This would display information on contracts being put out for tender; hardware requirements and payment plans; food/cash crop availability and export plans; service requirements and schedules, including financing status and plans. It is hoped that this would lead to increased trade, and that such new trade would catalyse the development of twinned-city/region-ties, as well as influence, however slightly, their economic output.

To regularly assess the impact of the initiative, details would be provided on joint projects, assistance and bilateral agreements reached between the two councils. Information would also be provided on progress made on such collaborative effort and the benefits that have accrued from such projects.

4 A WORLD OF INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the previous sections highlight the potential for interaction, there is an equally important dimension to this service, which is, the provision of structured and targeted information. The intention is that information provided will be useful raw materials to active and intelligent indigenes and others with an altruistic and/or business imperative. This information would consist of such as:

- History of the **MC** – when created, past officials, etc.
- Physical, economical, climatic, and other maps of the country, which can be zoomed down to the particular **MC**.
- Tourism and other attractions available in the **MC**, including information on hotels and guest houses.
- Information on business opportunities, including details of mineral and natural resources, which could help attract potential foreign and local investors.
- Information on commercial activities in the **MC**, the location of the main markets and the days that they hold.
- Information on the important institutions in the **MC** such as banks, schools, major commercial and industrial outfits etc.
- Information on religious outlook; main religions, places of worship and information on the leadership.
- A cultural page would provide information on the notable traditional institutions, history of the various ethnic groups, including their arts and culture.
- Indigenous knowledge on topics such as herbal medicine, conservation, food preparation and preservation, etc.
- Listing of the prominent sons and daughters of the land and their various achievements and contribution to the community.
- Community development programmes undertaken by various groups in the **MC** i.e. Town Unions, Youth groups, etc.
- Demographics such as literacy rate, life expectancy, Malaria / HIV prevalence rate, child mortality, average house income, etc.
- Current year's budget statement highlighting projects slated for the year and their expected benefits to the **MC**.

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- A ‘transparency page’ showing the monthly Income and Expenditure statement of the MC.
 - Information on the progress of the reconstruction effort and what still needs to be done especially as it relates to the Government of Haiti Action Plan.
 - Accomplishments of the present MC administration thus far, including such as photographs of some of the projects and programmes.
 - Organisational structure of the MC, the key official, councillors and ward officials – their function and contact details. This would help visitors appreciate better, the working of the MC and make it easy for indigenes to communicate with the officials.
 - Comments page(s), and message board(s) which would provide opportunity for people to articulate opinions, suggestions, complaints, observations, etc. or send in messages of felicitation, appreciation, gratitude to the MC or other users of the site.
 - An online Newsletter, which like an offline newspapers, would contain news about events and activities in the MC and could be updated weekly or monthly, as the MC is able.
 - Internal adverts and announcements on issues like job vacancies, invitation for tenders or contracts currently being awarded, bursary and other educational assistance programmes, agricultural extension services etc, that the MC offers to the public.
 - A Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) dashboard, showing where the MC is at with respect to each goal, the efforts it is making regarding each goal and the intervention it desires concerning the goals.

This wealth of information should give a clear picture of the MC to the residents, diaspora professionals and foreign partners. This will be important for some measure of auditing, and visibility and as a source of general information.

The site would also provide organisations like the UNDP, EU, WHO, UNESCO, NGOs and other donor agencies easy access to information about the Municipality. Such information would help them identify the needs that exist in the area and guide them in appropriately tailoring the type and level of assistance they would be rendering.

5 ENHANCING COMMUNICATION

There is a dearth of information in Haiti. The interface to government is convoluted and fraught with frustration and fuzzy costs and processes, and schedules are opaque to the outside world. Access to useful information is difficult and often out of date, vast sectors of the economy are underdeveloped because of a paucity of essential and timely information. Knowledge is key to empowering the productive sectors, while timely information is vital for distribution and organisation.

The traditional means of information dissemination are too expensive, and the necessary infrastructure is hard to come by. Such things as books, leaflets and newsprint are scarce; few Communes have daily newspaper that locals can count on. Access to simple paper forms for driving licenses, tax returns and many other forms are difficult. Citizens have little visibility, knowledge, or access to elected officials and mobilising the populace behind projects is difficult because the means available for communication are limited.

These problems among many others can be effectively addressed using the Internet medium. Not only does it extend the reach and access of the state; it emancipates small town residents from the oppression of ignorance. Furthermore, the Internet opens a gateway to international communities, organisations and people who may have, or cultivate an interest in those communities, facilitating communication and interaction. This visibility can be used to manage collaboration, to drive down the cost of communication and interaction, and to encourage investigation of alternative means of working together. This medium could be a short cut to development for many remote communities in Haiti and third world countries the world over.

As mentioned earlier, the sites would carry detailed organisational structure of each MC, showing who is responsible for what, and the email address of such persons, the sites would also include an online discussion forum. We expect that together, these would facilitate interaction with, and ease overall accessibility of MC officials to their communities, stimulating a more broad based and active participation of the people in the affairs of the MC. The enhance communication that this would usher, would help exert a bottom-up pressure for good governance and a more prudent use of resources as advocated by the World Bank in its Communication Strategy for Community Driven

Development, in which the local people are the key drivers of projects based in their communities.

6 CONCLUSION

We have chosen to focus on the Municipal Councils because it is the tier of government that is closest to the people and the one that delivers many of the services that are crucial to fighting poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Municipal Council is also the arm of government that foreign based indigenes are likely to identify most closely with, and one that they would most readily support.

The small donations and interventions that are expected to flow from the foreign based indigenes can only make noticeable and visible impact in a small setting such as Municipal Council; but as those communities with considerable densities of progressives begin to forge ahead, it is expected that this would provoke other MCs to follow in the same path, setting in movement a bandwagon effect of community based development all over the country.

A good portion of home remittances presently go to support family members; while these interventions are commendable, additional efforts would be made to help the diaspora members realise that some amount of “macro” intervention would go a long way in enhancing their “micro” intervention, i.e. its little use remitting school fees for a child that is attending a run-down school. Much more would be accomplished if they also contributed to renovating the school.

Amongst the several benefits the project will deliver, it is expected that the increased awareness it will create amongst the foreign based professionals will help attract funds / resources from them to the MC of an annual amount of as much as 7.5% of their annual home remittance figure. The 2017 home remittance figure for Haiti was estimated at about \$2.77billion (33.6% of the nation’s GDP).

This, unlike the regular aids program, only requires a modest take off funding from the sponsors and thereafter, it is expected to catalyse a process where the indigenes themselves are challenged to become the engine of progress – beneficiary ownership.

Total cost is expected to be minimal in international monetary value; however, any expenditure will be more than justified by the real benefits, economical and social, that, GOD willing, would accrue from the actualisation of the project.

The project is estimated to run for approximately 2 years at a total cost of about \$6.2 million.

At this point in “Haitian Internet Time”, the MCs can not be expected to make well informed decisions on the viability or cost benefits of the project due to a dearth of experience, exposure, or statistics. For this reason, our recommendation is for the project to be funded by external sponsors, with the MCs providing the raw data required as content for the site and necessary access to staff and facilities required for analysis and modelling, while the National Government gives the assistance and co-operation that would be required for the smooth implementation of the project.

Our opinion is that an online service of this nature would go a long way in fostering development and improved service delivery in the MCs.

We believe that this idea has great potential for Development in Haiti, and for the promotion of relations between grass-root leadership in Haiti and the partnering country, as well as between Haitian at home and abroad.

A decision to support and fund the project would send out a very clear message to Haiti that the sponsors and the city councils in the partnering country not only identifies with her aspirations for economic development, but that they also seek to bring cutting edge technology to bear in the pursuit of that objective.

The successful implementation of this idea would provide far-reaching lessons on the potential of socio-economic engineering using Internet technology in the Third World in general, as it is an idea which would find ready application in any Third World country with a sizable number of overseas based professional.

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