

Secondary Cities in Haiti: Emerging ICT Access



Jacmel street across from a telecenter in a school

Uneven development

On his first long voyage from Europe” in December 1492, Christopher Columbus landed on the tiny island he called “La isla española”—later called Hispanola.

Although named by the native Arawak Indians “Hayti” or “mountainous land,” French colonists desiring Haiti’s location and lush soil called the island Haiti. This name had staying power, but much otherwise has changed over the centuries.

Haiti became one of the wealthiest countries of the region under French rule, with pockets of wealth that remain today. In 1791, the only successful slave revolt in the Americas led to Haiti’s formation as the

first black republic in 1804. Haiti also was the first independent nation in the Latin American/Caribbean region. In the early 20th century, the nation's infrastructure improved, and Port-au-Prince and secondary cities still retain adequate roads and health systems. This is not the case in smaller towns and rural areas, however, where electricity, water, and telephone services routinely fail. Still, Haiti's tropical beaches offer the possibility for development of modern hotels and tourist facilities found on other Caribbean islands.



Sabina Béhague

Beached on the coast of Jacmel

Today, as the least developed country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti struggles with poverty and instability. Its future depends on the ability of its leaders to generate solutions to bring the nation successfully into the 21st century.

Information Technology in its Infancy

Despite the eight million mostly impoverished Haitians, the modern landscape reveals pockets of wealth as visible as a satellite dish on a withering French colonial mansion and modern paved roads dotted with shanty towns.



Sabina Béhague

A house with a satellite dish in Jacmel

Signs of modernity are evident in Pétion-Ville, a community where busy cybercafes cater to Port-au-Prince suburbanites.



A cybercafe in Jacmel

Young, dynamic Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are just beginning to penetrate some secondary cities. In the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area, cybercafes use sophisticated wireless connections to access the Internet, in part because there is less than one fixed telephone line per 100 people, and wireless connections are more reliable. (Globally there are 16 telephone lines per 100, while the density is 35 per 100 in the Americas, including the USA and Canada.)

Zoom in on Haiti

Geography

Location: mountainous, western part of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, bordering the Dominican Republic

Area: 27,560 sq km

Environmental issues: storms, hurricanes, flooding, earthquakes, droughts, deforestation, soil erosion, inadequate supplies of potable water

People

Population: 6,867,995

Age structure: 41% <14 ; 55% 15-64 ; 4% >65

Population growth rate: 1.4%

Birth rate: 31.97 births/1,000 population

Infant mortality: 17.1 deaths/1,000 live births

Life expectancy at birth: 49.38 years;

males: 47.67 years; females: 51.17 years

Total fertility rate: 4.4 children born/woman

Ethnic groups: black 95%, mulatto plus white 5%

Religions: Roman Catholic 80%, Protestant 16% (50% also practice voodoo)

Languages: French (official), Creole

Literacy: total: 45%; males: 48%; females: 42.2%

Economy

GDP per capita: \$1,800

Population below poverty line: 80%

Inflation rate: 19%

Unemployment rate: 70%

Debt, external: \$1 billion

Budget revenues: \$317 million

Communications

Telephone main lines: 60,000

Radio broadcast stations: AM 41

Radios: 415,000

Television broadcast stations: 2 and 1 cable TV

Televisions: 38,000

Internet service providers: 3

Internet users: 6000

The World Factbook 1999,

www.cia.gov/cia/publication/factbook/index.html

Improving Access to ICTs

Under the U.S. Department of State and USAID, the Presidential Initiative for Economic Development (IED) promotes widespread Internet connectivity in the developing world as a boost to development. Programs under the Initiative focus on legal and regulatory reform, stimulating new business through electronic commerce (e-commerce), and promoting democracy and improved governance, economic growth, environmental management, education, health, and population services.

USAID/Haiti was the first Mission under this Initiative to launch an information and communication technology (ICT) program to increase access to the Internet and e-commerce. Through this activity, entitled “Improving Access to Information and Communication Technology in Secondary Cities,” AED/LearnLink was called upon to improve and expand Internet services and the development of human capacity within the Internet and ICT industry and among communities in selected secondary cities in Haiti. The activity includes three primary components:

- Building the technical capacity of the Internet Service Provider (ISP) sector;
- Providing equipment and technical assistance to the Réseau de Développement Durable d’Haïti (RDDH), which will manage the “.ht” Internet domain and

serve as a neutral forum for the discussion of telecommunication issues in Haiti; and

- Establishing three telecenters, one in each of three key secondary cities, through private sector partnerships, thereby increasing information and communication access opportunities for these under-served communities.



Outside the Les Cayes telecenter located on the second floor of an InfoSub business

ISPs

Prior to the LearnLink activity, there was considerable competition among ISPs for a small amount of business activity and limited progress in expanding services. In the role of facilitator, LearnLink established a Haiti domain name, brought ISP providers to the table for discussions, and offered training options. Through workshops in Port-au-Prince, the target

LearnLink

groups have explored such topics as ISP interconnectivity to ensure continuous service, network security, new business models, and network scalability. In addition, the Moroccan Trade and Development Services (MTDS), a LearnLink partner, facilitated a balanced discussion of communication issues in Haiti, where social and political instability presents challenges to project progress.

RDDH Support

The RDDH, a UN Development Program (UNDP)-supported project, has received assistance from MTDS for ensuring effective management of Haiti's Internet domain structure. MTDS purchased and installed equipment and software for management of the ".ht" domain and trained RDDH and some key Haitian organizations in how to manage the domain. The formation of an Internet society may evolve from RDDH activities that include acting as an effective neutral forum for other telecom groups in managing disputes and resolving issues.



Clients at Jacmel telecenter receiving user support

Telecenters

With a local Resident Advisor assisting the development of centers and overseeing project administration, three telecenters have been established in each of the three key secondary cities—Cap Haïtien, Jacmel, and Les Cayes. Local operators, carefully selected and trained, are responsible for establishing and managing the telecenters, meeting a minimum set of conditions that include:



Haiti Resident Advisor Thony Baptiste addressing a training crowded session, spilling over into the hall

- a furnished locale adequate for housing six to ten multimedia workstations and seating up to 50 users;
- a reliable electrical supply, including a required backup generator;
- airconditioning and humidity control;
- telephone access;
- Internet access; and
- telecenter staff to provide maintenance and training.

Housed in a business and two schools, the telecenters are offering general services, such as access to email and the Internet as well as orientation to computer technology and applications, training in productivity software (word processing, spreadsheet, presentation software), and email and Internet search training. To increase demand and spur economic growth, the project plans to collaborate with other development projects and various private sector partners to develop useful ICT applications. Preliminary observations indicate definite client demand and interest in ICT learning. For instance, during the initial three-month start up the last quarter of 2001, a steady stream of telecenter clients—businessmen, students, and some women—visited the telecenters, sometimes repeatedly.

Pending stability after the recent coup attempt, telecenter services should be



The entrance to a potential client, Aid to Artisans

marketed to businesses with offerings of no- or low-cost training in ICTs and skill building in finance, marketing, and other business practices. Four USAID-funded groups already have been targeted for training: Aid to Artisans, the Hillside Agricultural Program (HAP), the Jacmel Project Impact—a meteorology project—and journalists country-wide.

The artisan project, which also receives support from PeopLink, may receive training in marketing goods online, while HAP's farmers' groups, supported by Development Associates International, may learn how to access online agricultural information on suppliers and markets. As part of Disaster Preparedness Mitigation, the Jacmel Project Impact, which partners with the Pan American Development Foundation, may be taught how to track



Under the umbrella, guests celebrate the opening of the Jacmel center, while interested passersby watch

hurricanes online. With support from USAID/Haiti's Public Diplomacy Office, LearnLink may teach journalists how to form and maintain listservs and discussion boards as part of a virtual community.

Access to a Better Future

Notwithstanding the importance of consistent connectivity, the key to the success of the telecenters will be their ability to draw in the surrounding community and build a broad user base. Open-air inaugurations already have interested the public, and, despite recent political instability, people ventured into the newly-opened telecenters. To ensure a constant flow of clients, there is a need for community outreach that attracts all sectors and genders and advertises the opportunities for business and personal use. Community demonstrations, presentations, the production of promotional materials such as posters and fliers have been found to

attract users, as can special offers such as subsidized access for first-time users and events such as "Women's Weeks."

Monitoring of this activity will gauge telecenter success in serving present and future needs of community groups, commercial enterprises, and individual users. In addition, the Resident Advisor is working to quantify user characteristics for the entire country. Designed to stimulate development at the local and secondary city level and among the disadvantaged, Haiti's public access centers offer individuals, organizations, and small businesses a chance to assume greater control over their own progress and a 21st century approach to development that takes advantage of global opportunities through ICTs.



Businesses line the street where the telecenter is located in Les Cayes

Tools for Success

Multiple options are possible for building upon the foundations of this project. Education may be enhanced with multimedia-supported literacy training, automated language learning tools, and access to educational multimedia such as encyclopedias and other reference materials. Educational resources on the Internet also can supplement curriculum, assist teachers, and aid in student research and learning. Other possibilities include the production of local materials for classroom use, virtual networking with colleagues and peers around the world, and educational management information system data entry and transmission.

To meet economic development goals, the following types of services are possible:

- production of marketing and advertising materials,
- automated business accounting,
- access to global market information,
- support to electronic commerce via the Internet,
- access to product information, and
- online purchasing.

Social and civil society strengthening may be accomplished with Web site development and virtual networking for NGOs, online research on technical and programmatic issues, access to donor sites and proposal guidelines, and email access to elected and appointed officials. Other possibilities include creation and hosting of municipal information resources, email and Web access for human rights and elections monitoring and reporting, and access and contribution to free and open press information.

The health sectors may be strengthened through IT access, enabling enhanced research, telemedicine or remote access to diagnostic and treatment support, automated recording and transmission of health statistics, and electronic dissemination of health education and communication materials.

Environment/natural resource management may benefit from access to geographic information system tools, global environmental databases, and research on natural resource management strategies and programs as well as production of environmental education and communication materials.