Imagining Renaissance: Towards the Creation of an e-Institute for Haiti's Urban Youth

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The January 12th earthquake dealt a devastating blow to Haiti's education sector, and exacerbated challenges to providing equitable education to Haiti's people. While the disaster has undoubtedly severely disrupted the state of affairs, it has also birthed opportunities to explore and exploit—ethically and thoughtfully—alternatives to the status quo. This is especially pronounced given the massive loss of life and physical infrastructure, compounded by displacement, migration, and disability among the Haitian people.

Without question, Haiti cannot grow, nor expect sustainable returns on reconstruction investments, without addressing new and persistent educational challenges. Arguably, now more than ever, building human capital is critical to Haiti's future. In this regard, the education sector is one of the first responders, charged with providing the environment and programming conducive to the acquisition of knowledge and skills requisite to participating fully in the workforce and developing Haiti. Economics have long played a prominent role in determining access to education causing sporadic enrollment in secondary education, late or low enrollment in higher education, tensions between school attendance and wage earning, and thus, an overwhelmingly undereducated and low-skilled youth populace.

In a knowledge-based, global economy, information and communication technology (ICT) can serve as a catalyst, facilitator, and equalizer of educational opportunity and advancement. ICTs have evolved with increases in power, storage, and portability, making knowledge more accessible, and thereby opening the world to anyone who wants to learn. ICTs coupled with dynamic learning platforms enable asynchronous learning, interactivity, collaboration, reduction of administrative costs, and more effective and protected academic records. In the case of Haiti, the affordability and capacities of these devices may be able to mitigate the impacts of the earthquake on the education sector. While a few ICT-based and ICT-enhanced efforts have emerged to fill voids in a devastated education sector, the learning opportunities available through ICTs have not yet been thoroughly investigated, particularly among older youth.

The *Renaissance* project, developed by master's student Alexandra Morgan, seeks to provide an innovative approach to help address these educational challenges. By harnessing the advances and ubiquity of computer and mobile technologies, this pilot e-learning initiative, scheduled to deploy in 2011, aims to provide easily-accessible technology-based vocational education opportunities for Haiti's urban youth. After briefly introducing *Renaissance*—its importance and implications for Haiti's development—this poster focuses on the technical considerations of this proposed learning model by exploring the virtual learning software Second Life® and mobile device options through which student-centered learning may be facilitated in Haiti in the post-earthquake context.