



SUCCESS STORY

Helping Haitian Entrepreneurs Create a Brighter Future

“I believe that one can only master his destiny through entrepreneurship,” says Blaise Saint-Louis, a MEMA participant.



Photo credit — HIFIVE

MEMA participants attended training sessions at the University of Quisqueya in Port-au-Prince to finalize their plans for the next round of competition.

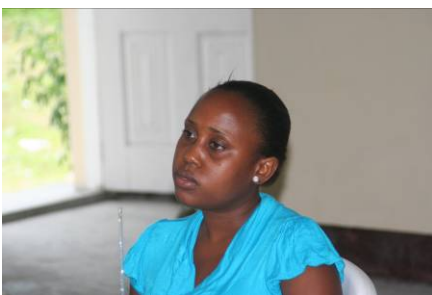


Photo credit — HIFIVE

Marie Lyvie Delice joined the BPC for training and support as she develops a new product line for her family’s artisanal food product business.

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Blaise Saint-Louis became a MEMA (“Mon Entreprise Mon Avenir” [My Business, My Future]) business plan competition participant because he wants to become an entrepreneur. He dreams of creating a driving school in his hometown, Pignon, a northern crossroads that is becoming a business and transport center. “I believe that one can only master his destiny through entrepreneurship,” Saint-Louis said. “I joined this competition in order to not only learn the skills but also win the prize and fund my business.”

The eager response of Haiti’s entrepreneurs prior to the earthquake encouraged the USAID-financed HIFIVE project¹ and its partner, the Inter-American Development Bank, to re-launch its business plan competition (BPC) as soon as possible after the disaster. In June, they began accepting MEMA applications again to encourage the creative spirits of Haitian entrepreneurs and give them an opportunity to make their plans reality. Implementing partners TechnoServe² and the University of Quisqueya toured the country to encourage the entrepreneurs and explain how the BPC could help them realize their dreams. Hosted by local chambers of commerce and universities, hundreds of college graduates, young professionals and current entrepreneurs learned about MEMA.

Haiti’s entrepreneurial spirit was evident in the success of the first round of competition. HIFIVE received 377 applications, well beyond the expected 200. In July, judges selected the top 80 applicants who then received training over six weekends to finalize their plans for the next round of competition. Twenty of the top applicants will compete before a live jury in December for 10 finalist prizes of US\$10,000 each. Training participants gathered in three cities for a learning process that will help determine the success of their enterprise and their future.

Among the participants was Marie Lyvie Delice, who plans to diversify her family’s artisanal peanut butter business by introducing a line of more expensive almond butter. She joined the BPC for training and support. “I really enjoy the collegiate atmosphere during the training modules,” Delice said. “In the role playing exercises, I’m able to receive feedback from both the participants and the trainer.”

The diversity of the participants’ plans — from driving schools to almond butter — illustrates the creativity of Haiti’s entrepreneurs. USAID/Haiti’s support of the BPC underscores the importance of the micro, small and medium enterprise sector, whose success and growth will dramatically affect the country’s recovery and development.

¹ HIFIVE is a USAID-funded project implemented by World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU) and AED. It empowers Haitians by providing access to innovative financial products and services with a focus on rural areas, value chains, remittances and use of technology to expand financial inclusion.

² TechnoServe, a subcontractor to HIFIVE, helps entrepreneurial men and women in poor areas of the developing world to build businesses that create income, opportunity and economic growth for their families, their communities and their countries