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How Kellogg and Partner Philanthropies Are Funding in Haiti, a Country Beset by Crisis

Laurie Udesky | April 25, 2024



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Dr. Wilfrid Cadet, chief medical advisor of [Health Equity International](#), recalls a pivotal moment during his time as a physician at St. Boniface Hospital in his

native Haiti that convinced him to shift his career focus to public health.

Lack of good sanitation and safe drinking water meant that children he was treating for dangerous parasitic infections in the mid-1990s came back repeatedly with the same problem, ultimately causing their mothers to lose trust in Western medicine and to turn to traditional Haitian worries about hexes. “They’d start believing it’s the neighbor doing this or that to their children,” Cadet said. These dynamics are one factor in Haiti’s high rates of infant and child mortality, which are the worst in the [Western Hemisphere](#).

The urgency of solving the root causes of such public health problems compelled Cadet to join St. Boniface’s parent organization, Health Equity International (HEI). Previously known as the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, HEI partnered with a local priest, community organizations and outside funders from 1993 to the early 2000s to fundraise and build safe wells, household latrines and clean water distribution centers.

Systems-focused work like that of HEI and Cadet is precisely the sort of thing the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) and its funding partners want to support through [Pockets of Hope](#) — a \$90 million, three-year campaign launched by Kellogg last year. Along with \$30 million from Kellogg itself, the campaign has attracted other funders, including the [Digicel Foundation](#), [Porticus](#) and the [Dunn Family Charitable Foundation](#).

Kellogg returns to Haiti



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The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has been active in Haiti since the 1940s. After leaving the country in the mid-2000s to restructure its international activities, it recruited program officers and other staff of Haitian descent who were better equipped to work with local organizations. According to Alix Cantave, Kellogg's senior program manager for Haiti, it sought to make long-term commitments to projects in specific communities in central and southern Haiti, aware that such commitments were better suited to uproot dysfunction in government and civic life, stemming from slavery, colonialism and racism. Kellogg returned to Haiti in 2011, a year after a devastating earthquake killed more than 220,000, injured more than 300,000 and displaced 1.3 million people.

The purpose of Pockets of Hope is to shore up engagement with Haiti among private philanthropy, which had fallen away because of what Cantave calls a misguided narrative that “nothing is happening, so you're basically throwing money in a bottomless pit.”

That perception, Cantave said, does not take into consideration how corruption interfered with billions of dollars in donations that flowed in after the 2010 earthquake. “What they need to know is that only a small percentage of the donations went to Haitian organizations, and that was a big part of the problem,” Cantave said. To prevent such problems, he went on, Kellogg has been working directly with Haitian-led organizations with proven track records, like HEI.

Ongoing upheaval complicates funders' work

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Interruptions in how grantees are able to do their work are indeed part of the current climate in Haiti, Cantave said. In recent months, [an upsurge in gang violence](#) and pillaging has brought Port-au-Prince, the Caribbean island nation's capital, to a standstill, cutting it off from the rest of the world with its airport closed, imports stalled and [aid workers](#) reporting that people are going hungry.

The upheaval — in a country reeling from [one crisis after another](#) — began brewing after the assassination in July 2021 of Haiti's President Jovenel Moïse. In mid-March of this year, in response to mounting pressure [locally and abroad](#), Haiti's Prime Minister Ariel Henry said he would resign, which became [official](#) on April 25.

Most of what Kellogg supports, which includes medical facilities like St. Boniface Hospital, small family farmers, and schools in areas outside the capital, are coping with shortages. Medical supplies are stranded at customs, affecting patient care at hospitals that Kellogg backs. The cost of fuel has also skyrocketed, affecting transportation and groups Kellogg supports, like smallholder farmers selling produce grown on their land.

“They're not able to get products to market so they're losing income,” Cantave said of the farmers. “So that's a huge impact.”

But life in Haiti goes on. “Children are still going to school every day. Women still need access to quality medical and maternal care. Families have to eat,” Cantave said.

Dr. Cadet, who also served as hospital director of St. Boniface Hospital, is now working closely with it as an adviser. He reports that St. Boniface, which is three hours from Port-au-Prince, where many hospitals have shut down, is picking up the slack. “We have had women in labor coming to St. Boniface from Port-au-Prince, in labor!” he said.

Over time, with the help of Kellogg Foundation funding, the hospital has dramatically increased the number of pregnant women and healthy births it oversees, which jumped from 50 to 300 monthly, following intensive training of and expansion of its clinician and medical staff and refurbishing its labor and delivery rooms, according to Cadet. As an added draw, the hospital offers 24-hour care at no cost to patients. (Other Kellogg Pockets of Hope grantees include the [Model School Network](#), the [Haiti Food Systems Alliance](#), and [Partners in Health/Zanmi Lasante](#), the international organization started by the late public health visionary Paul Farmer.)

How three other funding partners are pitching in

In addition to Kellogg, the other philanthropic organizations that joined the Pockets of Hope campaign work closely with grantees to foster sustainability. For the [Digicel Foundation](#), for example, that translates to not only helping build schools that have served thousands of students, but upskilling teachers and helping communities create school boards, PTAs and student councils. “All of these structures build a sense of ownership,” said Digicel Foundation CEO Sophia Stransky. The foundation has

committed \$3 million over three years to the Pockets of Hope campaign.

Because most schools in Haiti are private, the Digicel Foundation helps schools develop income-generating enterprises so they can retain skilled teachers and pay for other expenses like school maintenance and repairs. “It might be goat breeding; animal husbandry is very popular,” Stransky said. “They might sell food, basic necessities. I had one school that sold cosmetics, hair products.”

For Porticus, which has been supporting grantees in Haiti since 2011, sustainability also means recognizing that Haitian-led organizations are well-equipped to develop their own solutions to problems, said Christina Kirby, program manager for education for Porticus, North American region. With Haitian and international experts, for example, Porticus developed a social emotional learning (SEL) framework, and Haitian educators field-tested a feature that’s common in SEL, known as morning meetings, which typically involve students [sitting in a circle](#) and interacting. In an activity that reflects the Haitian practice of community gathering and participating in a joint activity known as kombit, students practice active listening or a shared activity. “As a result, morning meetings have become one of the highlights of the school day for students and the school community,” Kirby said.

The Dunn Family Charitable Foundation was drawn to the Pockets of Hope campaign after witnessing how its own investments in local organizations have made a difference, according to Jay Dunn, the foundation’s

executive director. As such, the foundation is planning to provide support to small farmers that are part of the [Haiti Food Systems Alliance](#), a partnership among 14 organizations that has helped 40,000 small holder farmers by providing them with seed, livestock, loans and training and provides food for hospitals, schools and indigent families.

So while Haiti is certainly [a challenging place to fund right now](#), Kellogg and its partners are demonstrating that it is possible, and that philanthropies shouldn't be put off. Pointing to the work that's being done on the ground, Kellogg's Cantave said simply, "Haiti will succeed when the right individuals and organizations get the support they need."

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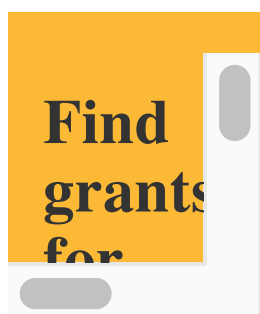
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