

Leopard Capital on the Haitian Frontier



By Marlynnne, August 20, 2012

In today's risk-averse world, a private equity fund that actively seeks investments in developing countries sounds like an oxymoron. This contradiction, however, is the essence of Leopard Capital's philosophy. Leopard prides itself on being a pioneer investor in pre-emerging economies.

Since 2007, Leopard has successfully raised funds for telecommunication, water, power, and housing enterprises in Cambodia and has been steadily building its funds to make investments in other Asian countries, such as Laos, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. When Leopard turned its eye towards the Americas, it found Haiti to be a natural candidate for its portfolio.

Douglas Clayton, founder of Leopard Capital, said Haiti initially stood out to him because of its long history of under-investment, pro-business government, and proximity to the United States. However after visiting Haiti, he also became impressed with the country's human resources. "The Haitian labor force is very hard-working and productive. The people are resilient and are willing to work for themselves," Clayton said.

Clayton observed much economic inefficiency in Haiti that he believes could be best corrected through the private sector. "People spend lots of time porting water, the agricultural industry can be modernized, and the beauty of the country is not well reported," he said.

Clayton's observations, combined with the economic priorities issued by the Haitian government, led Leopard to seek investors for a \$75 million fund to be invested in four industries: (1) renewable energy, (2) low & middle income housing, (3) agribusiness and (4)

hospitality. The fund's first closing with three development banks generated \$20 million. Leopard is seeking the remaining funds from investors "who believe in the opportunities" Haiti has to offer.

Haitian companies have a lot to gain by working with Leopard. "Leopard's focus is to leverage enterprises that are showing signs of success," said Clayton. Selected organizations will be connected to its resources for operational development, accounting assistance, management support and business expansion. The businesses must have a vision, commitment to transparency, developed management style, and willingness to work. "We want to scale-up companies to succeed," he said. "If the fund is successful, we want to inspire other people to come and invest in Haiti's private sector."