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Beating the odds: Impacting Sustainable Growth in Haiti

On June 10th, 2008 the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress (LoC) will host an all-day symposium devoted to the history and accomplishments of **FOKAL** entitled: “Libraries and Human Development in Haiti: The Work of Fondation Connaissance et Liberte (**FOKAL**).” The symposium will be held in the LoC’s historic Thomas Jefferson Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.; the proceedings will be cybercast and subsequently available from the Library of Congress website: <http://www.loc.gov>.

Why FOKAL? FOKAL is an independent foundation in Haiti supported by the Open Society Institute, and other international and local organizations. Since 1995, it has provided a range of education, human development and economic activities to local communities and civil society organizations. Their story is one of partnership, integrity, transparency and accountability.

From the humble beginnings of support to a handful of libraries, the organization has created a web of 35 community-based libraries around the country, an early childhood educational program, an educational grants program, a dynamic art and culture program, and a debate program. FOKAL supports grassroots initiatives, including water projects.

About two years ago, it added two special projects to its core programming. A water and sanitation project in Labadie Village (northern Haiti, just west of Cape Haitian) has begun with the support of Royal Caribbean. And, after a formal governmental accord, **FOKAL** was named lead agency in the plan to rehabilitate the historic green refuge, Martissant Park now a national park, known formerly as Habitation Leclerc. This project is being funded with support from The Open Society Institute, The European Union, The World Bank, and many other national and international partners.

Beating the odds and impacting sustainable change in Haiti is a formidable task. The Executive Director of **FOKAL**, Michele Duvivier Pierre-Louis, the leadership of the Open Society Institute, Michele Montas, Spokesperson to the UN Secretary General, Lorraine Mangones, Deputy Director of **FOKAL**, among others, will be on hand at the Library of Congress to address distinguished members of Congress, state department officials, representative from Embassies, foundation and corporate leaders, those genuinely interested in the plight of Haiti. They will share their story of how **FOKAL** dares to make a difference in the day-to-day lives of Haitians in spite of the odds.

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