

FROM DISASTER, A NEW DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR HAITI

In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, online opportunities are arising that could help resurrect the Caribbean nation

POSTED BY ALANNA MITCHELL ON FEBRUARY 22, 2018

Haitians were already the poorest people in the Western Hemisphere when a massive earthquake struck just southwest of the capital Port-au-Prince on Jan. 12, 2010.

It was devastating. As many as 300,000 died and more than a million were left homeless. Infrastructure was shattered. Many survivors fled the country to find work elsewhere, especially if they were highly trained. The workforce was torn apart.

Today, nearly three in five of Haiti's 10 million citizens live below the poverty line and nearly a quarter live in abject poverty. Unemployment is a fact of life for many. How do the poorest in the country find jobs when local opportunities are so scarce?

In another era, a country such as Haiti might have sought international loans to build physical structures: an industrial plant, some boats and a wharf. But today, as giant businesses such as Amazon, Netflix and Facebook drive a new digital industrial revolution, possibilities are emerging in Haiti that could never have existed before.

One idea gaining traction is to train women under the age of 30 to provide computer services such as data processing and web tagging to international companies, which normally contract out those types of jobs to web-based consultants. Why not do the same for Haitian women, who could work flexible hours from their homes or from an employment centre? "There are interesting opportunities to be explored," says Ben Petrazzini, a senior program specialist at the International Development Research Centre in Uruguay. "Things are very different from the past."

The **IDRC** is providing US\$800,000 over three years to prompt research on exactly what types of jobs could exist for young Haitian women in this new digital economy, what demand there is for them and whether they will last rather than being replaced by artificial intelligence over time. The program is known as **AYITIC**, a combination of Ayiti, which is the Haitian Creole name for the country, and TIC, which is French for ICT, or information and communications technology.

Course designers from the **Caribbean Open Institute** in Jamaica are specially tailoring classes to train Haitian women to work in the digital economy. The first 50 students are expected to be in class by May 2018, graduating three months later. The project's initial phase will see about 300 Haitian women receive training by July 2019. Project leaders are already exploring whether companies owned by the Haitian diaspora in Canada and the United States would be willing to consider hiring these new trainees.

After that, the task will be to evaluate the program and see how it can be replicated in other Latin American countries, Petrazzini



Women study at L'École Supérieure d'Infotronique d'Haiti. The school is one of the partners of the AYITIC program, which is helping train Haitian women to take part in the digital economy. (Photo: Jairo Abud)

says, adding that IDRC is working with partners, including Ecole Supérieure d'Infotronique d'Haiti and the Internet Addresses Registry for Latin America and Caribbean.

Over time, one of the project's aims is to attract investment to build up Haiti's Internet infrastructure and create an ICT cluster in the country, says Max Larson Henry, who coordinates AYITIC in Port-au-Prince and is president of L'Association Haïtienne pour le développement des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication.

Currently, about 13 to 15 per cent of Haitians have access to the Internet, he says. Despite that, about 55 per cent of Haitians have smartphones, but many aren't continuously connected to the Internet because it's too expensive or not available. Nevertheless, young Haitians are adept at using the phones and the Internet when they can, and have developed digital skills on them.

The long-term goal is to convince young women that, like men, they can be part of the digital revolution. The stakes are huge. One person's employment can help support a family of four or five with food and school fees, Henry says. That's good for young women, good for their families and good for the economy as a whole.

But there's another motivation, too. If Haiti doesn't start creating opportunities for young workers, they could move away, which could further weaken the country's prospects for building its economy.

"This," says Henry, "is the right thing to do."

FROM DISASTER, A NEW DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR HAITI

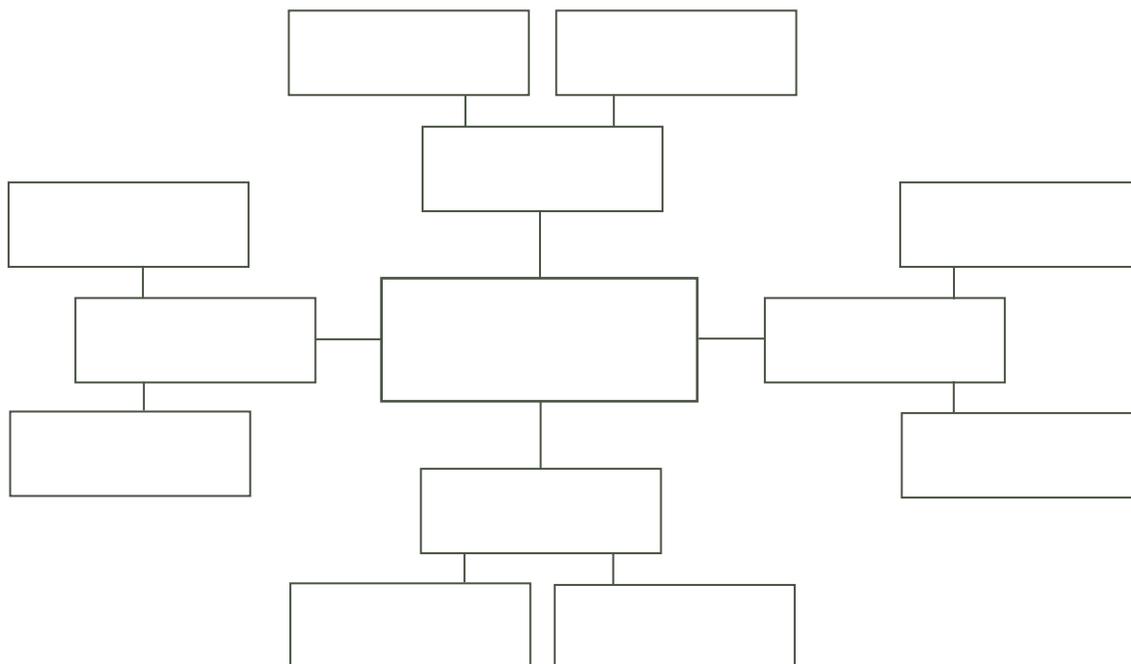
In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, online opportunities are arising that could help resurrect the Caribbean nation

READING AS THINKING

1. Before you read the entire article, think about the heading “From disaster, a new digital economy for Haiti.”
What do you think the article is about?

2. Use the mind map below to show your understanding. Start with a central idea in the middle. From this idea, note the important details in the branches, and use the sub-branches for further details. Use a combination of pictures and words to show your understanding of:

- The main idea of the article
- Important details
- Questions that you have
- Connections between content in the article and your own life



FROM DISASTER, A NEW DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR HAITI

In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, online opportunities are arising that could help resurrect the Caribbean nation

3. A) What effects could a massive earthquake have on a poor country such as Haiti?

B) How would these effects differ from those experienced by a rich country?

4. What are the benefits of training Haitian women under the age of 30 to provide computer services?

5. What are at least four aims of the AYITIC program funded by IDRC?

6. How will Haiti be affected if they do not create opportunities for young workers? Explain.

7. Why do you think that only 13 to 15 per cent of Haitians have access to the Internet?

8. Create your own insightful question that you would include in this booklet for students to answer.

FROM DISASTER, A NEW DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR HAITI

In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, online opportunities are arising that could help resurrect the Caribbean nation

Think-Pair-Share

9. *Think*

Find a list of the 50 poorest countries in the world. Choose a country and find the natural disasters that have taken place there.

Country	Natural Disaster(s) When, who, what, where, how

10. *Pair*

With a partner, think about how the natural disaster affected the country. How is that country handling the aftermath? Are any programs in place?

	My chosen country	My partner's country
Effects		

11. *Share*

As a class, share your work. Discuss what you can do as a class to help.

FROM DISASTER, A NEW DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR HAITI

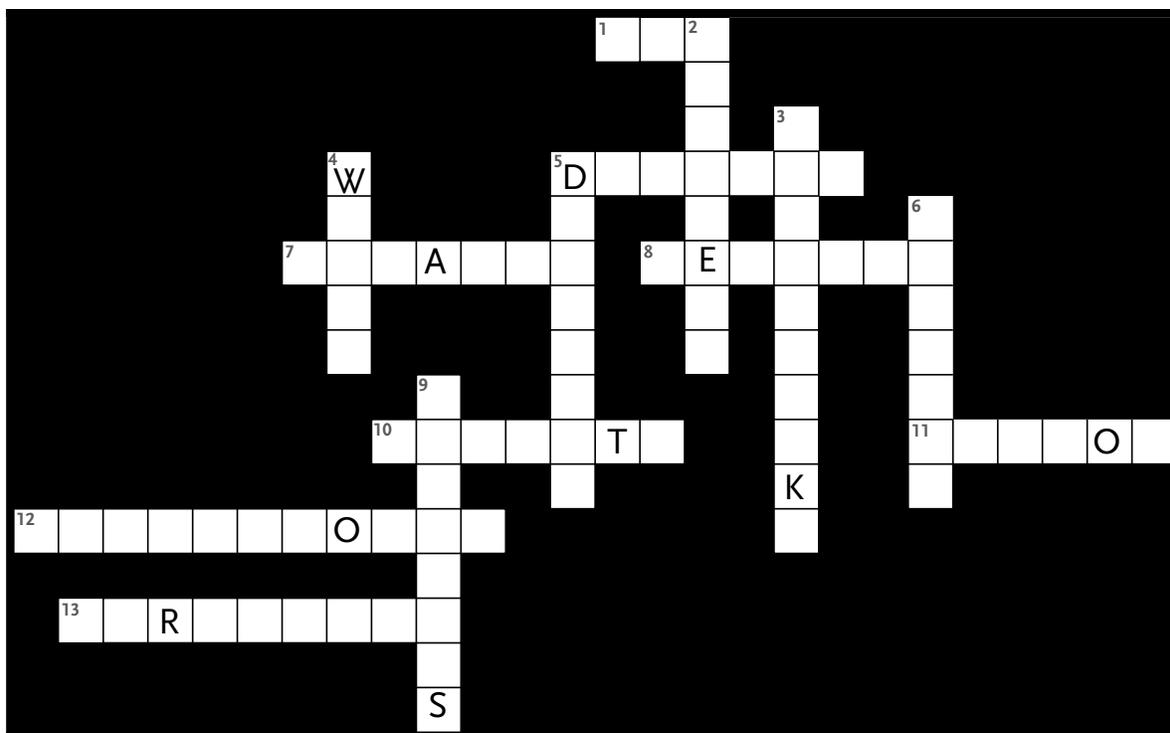
In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, online opportunities are arising that could help resurrect the Caribbean nation

ONLINE

1. Using [Google Maps](#), locate Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and explore the city by using Street View and the satellite and map modes. Using the quick facts section and other research tools, find the following:
 - a. The population
 - b. The neighbouring cities
 - c. The major bodies of water
 - d. L'École Supérieure d'Infotronique d'Haiti
 - e. The border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti
2. Look at what it looks like in [Haiti](#) five years after the earthquake.
3. On [AYITIC](#)'s website under "Methodology," choose a research team and look at the work they do. What are their goals? How are they improving Haitian society?
4. Learn [more](#) about how IDRC is preparing Haitian youth for digital jobs.
5. Explore the digital industrial revolution. Start by watching this [TED Talk](#) on artificial intelligence and how it could bring on another Industrial Revolution.

FROM DISASTER, A NEW DIGITAL ECONOMY FOR HAITI

In the wake of the devastating 2010 earthquake, online opportunities are arising that could help resurrect the Caribbean nation



CROSSWORD:

Across

1. Information and communications technology
5. A type of economy
7. The Caribbean Open Institute is in this country
8. Haiti is the poorest country in this Hemisphere
10. Nearly three in five of Haiti's 10 million citizens live in this
11. A giant business that is driving the new digital industrial revolution
12. About 55 per cent of Haitians have these
13. Those capable of working

Down

2. Beginners
3. A type of natural disaster
4. Where boats are kept
5. A group of people who have spread or dispersed
6. Primary
9. Displaced