

Assistant Professor of Anthropology Louis HERNs Marcelin founded the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) to develop research and education capacities in Haiti and apply them to the country's myriad social and economic problems.



HELPING HAITI

A UM-LED RESEARCH ORGANIZATION IN HAITI ENGAGES RESIDENTS IN REBUILDING BASIC INSTITUTIONS AND TURNING THE TIDE OF POVERTY AND VIOLENCE.

BY SHERRI MILES

The College of Arts and Sciences has worked in Haiti since 2006 through the presence there of the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED), an organization cofounded by UM assistant professor of anthropology Louis HERNs Marcelin. Given INURED's purpose—to develop research and education capacities in Haiti and apply them to the country's myriad social and economic problems—it was well positioned to assist in the recovery from the crippling earthquake of January 12, 2010, through programs established both before that natural disaster and afterward.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Consider Cité Soleil, a community of 350,000 on the outskirts of Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince and one of

the world's poorest, most stigmatized, and neglected places. In 2007 and 2008 INURED set out to conduct participatory research in Cité Soleil that would gather baseline data on the experiences and quality of life of its residents. To accomplish this end, INURED created a Community Advisory Council of grassroots leaders and trained a cadre of 100 local volunteers to complete household surveys throughout the area.

Responding to questions about what the community needed, 1,800 residents cited water, sanitation, and police presence as the top three priorities. These and other results inspired the Community Advisory Council to create another entity—a Community Forum for Cité Soleil—to channel the voice of community members, prioritize grievances and needs, and provide local oversight and execution of programs.

"The Forum grew out of residents' own concern for the community," says Bryan Page, professor and chair of the Department of Anthropology at UM and an advisor to INURED. Further, the Forum's data will be used as a template for planning any new interventions in Cité Soleil by nongovernmental organizations. "That's a very powerful paradigm," says Page. "It had already begun to work before the earthquake and it continued to work after the earthquake."

At present, "the Forum is engaging representatives from Cité Soleil's many neighborhoods to identify areas of intervention for children, youth, and the elderly, and it is reinforcing civic participation and advocacy," says Marcelin. For example, the Forum plans to conduct classes for children on productive citizenship. Looking toward the future, INURED members hope that the Forum will serve as a model for replication across Haiti—that it will help to bridge divides, reconnect people, and reintegrate a long troubled and conflicted island nation.

A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS

Another outcome of INURED's activities is an innovative program—the Youth-to-Youth Connection initiative—that connects UM students with young people in Cité Soleil to help achieve information-technology training, international exchange, and educational development. Latin American Studies student Austin Webbert ('10) participated in Marcelin's spring-break travel course to Haiti in 2008 and became a founding member of the program.

"We resolved to work toward opening

access to education and fostering connections between youth by setting up community centers in Cité Soleil," says Webbert. Since the 2010 earthquake, fundraising and planning programs to reorganize and rebuild community centers.

In yet another program, INURED is working closely with the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the UM to help correct a sudden and severe shortfall in graduate education in Haiti. "The earthquake killed more than 1,000 professors and many more graduate students and it leveled most of the major academic institutions in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area," says Marcelin. The Graduate Course/Doctoral Thesis/Seminars Program aims to help Haiti redevelop its human-capital base. More broadly, Marcelin's report, "The Challenge for Haitian Higher Education"—the first post-earthquake assessment of the country's higher-education system—examines that system both at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

In addition to its civic-engagement and education programs, INURED runs research laboratories in partnership with national and international institutions. For example, the World Bank and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) are funding two current projects.

As part of the World Bank's worldwide studies of areas in crisis, INURED received \$70,000 to conduct research on the "Societal Dynamics and Fragility in Haiti"—a project that included Marcelin and Pierre-Michel Fontaine, a lecturer in international studies and Africana studies at UM. The resulting report lays the foundation for

intervention projects—designed, for example, to empower women and encourage investment in microenterprises—that help people connect in new and more productive ways.

In the summer of 2011, INURED, together with the Center for Latin American Studies at UM, began a \$150,000 IDRC-funded research project, "Diaspora Engagement in Crisis Settings: Haiti Case Study," to examine how overseas citizens of countries in conflict and crisis influence their homelands' capacity for recovery.

TRANSCENDING POLITICS

Overall, "what INURED has done best is develop networks and human capital that have quietly made a great impact," says Webbert. "For instance, by engaging the community of Cité Soleil in participatory research and facilitating town hall-style community meetings, INURED has helped turn the tide of violence in an area that the United Nations had deemed 'the most dangerous place in the world.'"

Thus the cabinet of Michel Martelly (the new president of Haiti) met with INURED for guidance in the areas of health, rule of law, education, environment, urban planning, and security—based on INURED's previous work in Haiti. Though INURED does not get involved in political parties or governmental politics, it does aim to exercise its capacity to serve the public good.

"A key role of INURED is to help strengthen institutional and human capacity in Haiti," says Marcelin. "This is the only way Haiti can move from being a burden for everybody to being a partner with everybody."

