HOW THE KENYANS DISCOVERED HAITI
In every city across the planet there are differences between the rich and the poor. There are people who live in large houses, drive cars, have drinking water, flush toilets and access to water and electricity and there are people that do not. In the case of rapidly urbanising and developing countries these differences are most pronounced. The poor live in cramped, unsanitary conditions, are marginalised by the state and struggle to access basic services. The assistance that they receive is often in the form of hand-outs and charity, not reflective of their priorities and politically re-enforcing top down relationships of power.

When slum dwellers from across the globe begin to talk to each other sharing common problems and challenges, they develop a dialogue and learning that is their own. These conversation may be in different languages and from vastly different contexts but almost always speak to similar challenges. This was recently the case when a Kenyan team from SDI (Slum Dwellers International) visited Haiti.

The team visited informal settlements in Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince and the secondary city of Les Cayes. They met with informal communities and learnt about the daily difficulties that they face. They gained insights into a complex and fractured political situation built on a history of foreign political interference. Despite world wide attention and millions of dollars Haiti’s urban poor remain marginalised and excluded from decisions that affect their lives.

Many people recall the devastating images of Hurricane Katrina that struck New Orleans in 2005. Katrina not only destroyed large swathes of the city but laid bare dire conditions of urban poverty that lay below the urban facade. In Haiti a series of tropical storms was followed by a massive earthquake that killed over 200 000 people. The scale of damage was immense and the urban poor who lived in the overcrowded slums of Port-au-Prince bore the brunt of the burden. Hidden between the cracks of the city, slum dwellers and the endemic conditions of urban poverty that they face on a daily basis were suddenly made visible on the global stage. In the aftermath aid agencies and governments poured millions of dollars into Haiti with the homeless survivors being housed in massive tent cities dotted across the country. As Haiti slowly rebuilds and some people leave the tents the economy remains propped up by foreign financial support, a situation that cannot be sustainable in the long term.

A global network of slum dwellers

A series of natural disasters

2004: Tropical Storm Jeanne kills 3000 people
2007: Tropical storms triggers mudslides and floods
2008: 3 Hurricanes & storms cause 1 Billion damage
2010: Earthquake in January kills over 200 000 people
A massive amount of foreign aid was channelled into numerous projects (housing, health, infrastructure, water etc...) Poor communities had little say in defining their own priorities and community participation was often a box to tick rather than a process built on collective voices and action. A history of politically fractured communities and sustained foreign interference did little to improve the situation in which the lines between aid agency and foreign power (and agenda) quickly became blurred.

“The poor were always in Haiti but it was only because of the natural disasters and the earthquake that they became visible to the rest of the world”-Joseph Muturi (Kenyan SDI federation)
The SDI approach has had traction in numerous slums across the globe and starting new initiatives is part of the networks approach thus continuing to grow a global voice for the urban poor. While languages, governments and politics may change the crippling poverty that characterises the lives of the urban poor resonates across borders. Jane Weru of the Kenyan SDI affiliate was requested by former US president Bill Clinton to visit Haiti and explore options for SDI to work with urban poor communities. Jane, as a recipient of the 2011 Rockefeller Innovations forum award, met Bill Clinton at the awards ceremony were he asked Jane to undertake SDI work in Haiti. The team visited Haiti from June 17th -26th, 2012.

The team was hosted by 2 organisations while in Haiti, Habitat for Humanity in Port-au-Prince and SARCLEE while in Les Cayes. Both organisations have previously engaged with SDI and dialogues were initiated prior to the exchange.

Port-au-Prince is extremely overcrowded and like many poor and rapidly urbanising cities the infrastructure is woefully inadequate. As more and more people flock from the countryside, forced to move by the economic aftershocks of the earthquake, amenities are stressed well beyond breaking point. Crowded informal settlements and the remnants of tent cities house the urban poor the majority of whom lack access to water, sanitation and adequate housing. Alongside the roads people sell mangoes, charcoal, cheap clothing, shoes and numerous other items to generate a small income, amidst crippling rates of unemployment. Traffic and uncollected rubbish clog the narrow roads that criss cross each other as they wind up the steep hillsides. Port-au-Prince feels like a city that is bursting at the seams.

The city authorities are overwhelmed by ever growing informality and lack the resources, experience, legislation and finances to make mean-
ingful strides in its reduction. Given the political history of Haiti the answer to these challenges need to be found internally and sustainably. The following extract illustrates the difficulties that informal housing presents to the local authorities.

"...a person that wants to buy the piece of state land that he or she occupies will have to demonstrate that he or she has legally (with a contract) occupied the site for at least five years, or that the necessary steps have been taken to obtain a valid contract. This involves 16 different public authorities and 64 administrative steps, which means a total of 749 days. After this, the lessee has to pay regular rent for five years before being able to start with the first actions of the process for purchase. As a whole, 31 public entities have to be involved in 111 administrative processes for a period of over 4,112 days. Finally, the price of the parcel has to be paid. Even more, this does not solve the issue of regularization buildings that have been built without the permits. The Haitian law does not have a procedure to deal with this issue."

This speaks not only to Haiti but many other countries that hold onto antiquated planning and developmental strategies that are better suited to colonial cities than the rapidly urbanising cities that characterise the developing world. A recognition of informality and urban poverty as part of the urban landscape is the first step in creating pro-poor legislation and a framework for inclusive cities. Communities that are organised can show how existing upgrading standards and procedures make little sense in their settlements and begin to demonstrate locally relevant alternatives.
In Port-au-Prince the Kenyan team visited communities in Simon Pele where Habitat for Humanity is using enumerations and profiling as an entry point to the community. Tents, used for temporary accommodation after the earthquake, still house families who pay monthly rentals. Being a tenant in an informal settlement is a tenuous situation. In an already marginalised settlement those who are forced to rent are at the bottom rung of the ladder, their tenure extremely insecure and their ability to access resources and make their voices heard severely curtailed.

Simon-Pelé is a “squatter” neighborhood of approximately 23,000 in a municipality called Delmas within the larger city of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Although Simon-Pelé is not formally recognized, the residents have de facto security of tenure, and the area is densely settled. As a result of the earthquake, however, at least 8,000 of those residents now live in one of eight camps surrounding the neighborhood.
While the neighborhood has a vibrant commercial main street and strong social connections, its informal origins mean it lacks water, sanitation, sewers, latrines, solid waste disposal, street lighting, and social amenities such as schools and playgrounds. Many streets remain unpaved. Diseases like cholera spread easily and often.

Enumeration in Simon Pele

Inspired by the work of SDI, Habitat for Humanity, with funding from UN-Habitat, launched a community-led “enumeration” (survey) process to help the community take stock of its resources, prioritize its needs, and develop plans of action to address them. Enumeration is comprised of three main activities: building numbering and mapping; a household survey administered to every single household; and focus groups to create community maps and a prioritization of needs. Community members are trained on how to read maps, how to use GPS devices and how to administer surveys. In this way, the community takes ownership of the process and demonstrates its commitment to work in partnership with government and non-governmental organizations to address its needs.

The surveys and focus groups are tools for building much more than housing. The enumeration methodology is designed to build community self-confidence, create a platform for on-going engagement with the community as a whole, and initiate post-earthquake reconstruction in a way that builds on existing community capacities, both physical and social. This is particularly important in a neighborhood whose residents have long been stigmatized as “illegal” residents of the city.
The second half of the exchange was spent in Les Cayes, 4 hours south of Port-au-Prince, where the team met various communities who had been working with SARCLEE, a community-based organization that had previous links to SDI through the PEER group. Madame Constance, the head of SARCLEE, hosted the visit.

In contrast to the crowded conditions of Port-au-Prince, the mainly rural and peri-urban communities visited faced a different set of challenges, including access to water, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Chronic unemployment is a theme that stretched across the country with little sustainable options available. With 90% of Haiti's wealth concentrated in 1% of the population, a succession of exploitative leaders, a series of natural disasters and foreign political interference—kickstarting the economy is a daunting challenge. Most communities list the creation of economic opportunities as a key priority. Joseph Muturi from the Kenyan Slum Dwellers Federation spoke to the communities about the challenges that they faced and what they themselves could do to overcome them.

"What SDI does is that it brings people together so they can start talking about their problems so they stop complaining and start looking within themselves to find solutions. Today I can come as an NGO and say that I want to build a school but maybe your priority is not a school, maybe you need water or maybe the women want something to do. Perhaps you wish to start small group projects...so it starts with us; what are our need and what are our priorities. What are we going to do about our problems? I understand that you have been independent for 200 years but many things are still the same. My country where I come from we have been independent for 49 years but even if you go to the poorest of the poor person you will never hear him complaining or begging. And if you ask him how are you he will say that he is fine. If you complain as individuals you will spend all your life complaining..."
In order for there to be meaningful development in our cities it starts with people in the grassroots with ordinary people such as yourselves. We also work with the city authorities and we look to create a partnership between the people and the authorities. We believe they make decisions which affect us all and have things which they can provide for us and we have rights to receive services from the government. But we also have a responsibility of following a process; of counting ourselves, collecting information, understanding our needs and saving together. We do not work with people who put their hands in their pockets, waiting to be helped. We work with people who have removed their hands from their pockets, they have rolled their sleeves up and are ready to work in order to change their own lives.

**Daily Savings**

Jane Weru also spoke to communities emphasizing the value of organising through daily savings. Organised communities who are able to financially contribute to upgrading projects force government to engage and re-think traditional relationships that cast communities as passive recipients of limited resources. Changing the structural dynamics that govern these engagements talks to an approach that is replicable at a significant scale. Jane encouraged the Hatian communities which she met to come together and save every day. In that way they could discuss and prioritize their problems.

I will provide an example of what happened in Kenya. There was a slum community who approached us telling us that they wanted to buy a piece of land and build houses for their families. They were only 100 people. They told us that the land costs 1 million dollars and that they had only saved 1000 dollars. We told them to gather people and come back when they had saved 20% of the total-this was the only way in which we could help them. Well this was just before christmas and to be honest we did not think we would hear from them again. But to my surprise they came back after christmas; they were now 1000 people saving daily and they had saved 100 000 dollars.

We then helped them to approach a bank and secure a loan. They have now paid off the loan and own the land. Soon they will start building houses for their families.
Building homes, Saving lives?

On the flight to Haiti we saw many people wearing t-shirts with bold statements such as “project for hope” or “building homes, saving lives”. We saw houses that had been built that had divided communities behind barbed wire fences, houses planned by foreigners with limited community input and designs that made little sense locally. Introducing limited and unsustainable resources that lack a clear and long term vision divide rather than build communities. Haiti is littered with projects that seem to have brushed over local context in favour of external ideas and assumptions. Is community participation just a box to be ticked in a list of project goals?

Haitian communities need to change the arrangements of power by pushing back and defining the priorities and actions which they deem to be important. They can do this when they are organised and speak with a single voice.

Earthquake Relief Where Haiti Wasn’t Broken

CARACOL, Haiti — On the first anniversary of the Jan. 12, 2010, earthquake, in a sleepy corner of northeast Haiti far from the disaster zone, the Haitian government began the process of evicting 366 farmers from a large, fertile tract of land to clear the way for a new industrial park.

The farmers did not understand why the authorities wanted to replace productive agricultural land with factories in a rural country that had trouble feeding itself. But, promised compensation, they did not protest a strange twist of fate that left them displaced by an earthquake that had not affected them.

“We watched, voiceless,” Jean-Louis Saint Thomas, an elderly farmer, said. “The government paid us to shut us up.”

(Excerpt from article in the New York Times July 6, 2012)
The government is extremely poor. They only produce a small quantity of goods every year. The majority of capital comes from foreign aid and remittances. This is an extremely unsustainable relationship. Communities must be organised and ready to receive this aid and push back against the decisions being made by large development institutions.

The relationship between the people and NGO's is a strained and difficult one. The large NGO's are offering short-term solutions that are not sustainable because one day they will leave Haiti. They are spending millions without consultation with the communities. The poor need to engage the state and create partnerships.

Everywhere in Haiti there is a high level of security with bodyguards and guns. The role of politics, gangs and guns are all interwoven so any intervention has to take this into account. There is a lot of politics involved in each community.

When it comes to mobilization in Haiti gangs, politics and voodoo might be an issue. People do not trust each other and afraid of each other. Limited access to banks for the poor will also make savings extremely difficult. It is important to start with the women because of the politics. Women, women, women.

Why do they use foreign doctors and nurses when there are many Haitians who are just as qualified but unemployed? For the same price as one foreign doctor you could get 4 local doctors.
The Kenyan team ended the exchange with a reflection session. In this meeting it was decided that the SDI approach could have traction in Haiti, especially in terms of creating a community voice to push back against the “top-down” decisions being made by large institutions and the state. This would take time, support and dedication and there would be no guarantee of success. The following steps were tabled as vital to moving this process forward:

• Identify a credible Haitian NGO working in a field related to Urban Poverty who can work to initiate the SDI rituals. Initially the NGO would be partly supported by Habitat for Humanity and work with the community in Simon Pele. Habitat for Humanity is happy to help identify prospective NGO’s. This NGO could in turn support an engagement with communities in Les Cayes.

• Members of the community and partner organization will be sent on an intensive learning exchange to Kenya where they would have exposure to SDI projects, rituals and structures.

• If SDI is to work in Haiti it has to be a long-term engagement. SDI processes and organizing communities take time. Both funding and institutional support need to be guaranteed over a starting period of 3 years.

• Working in Haiti is the first step in setting up a regional SDI “hub” for informal settlement upgrading in the Caribbean. This regional HUB would follow the existing SDI models in Africa and Asia.

Subsequent to the exchange these recommendations are being internally discussed by the Haitian team and SDI. It is hoped that a path forward can be charted as helping to create a voice for the urban poor in Haiti is sorely needed.
Closing Remarks:
Joseph Muturi (Kenyan Slum Dwellers Federation)

I think there is so much poverty in Haiti. They have so many challenges; lack of jobs and people has lost hope. The impressions we got is that in every settlement people are asking what have you brought for us. Anytime they see an NGO person they think they have brought something, is the same case we have been having with S. Sudan. They are used to the NGO’s bringing them food and all manner of aid. After our interactions with the Haitians they need support to do things for themselves and not the NGO’s to do things for them. They are very hopeful and think they can change the situation themselves. People need to listen to the Haitian agenda; their plans, their dream and their agenda and how they want to transform their lives.

The way forward is to look at how the situation is now; people should not come with short term interventions, they should come and look at the future of Haiti and long term interventions. Short term is not sustainable—they bring all their foreign staff, we need to support Haitians to do things for themselves. All the decisions and policy are set somewhere else, not in Haiti. If you give a Haitian 10 000 dollars he can do more than having a funny little house.

If you look at Simon Pele and the population; when they do the enumerations and the mapping and the community was brought together. The community was able to make decisions together—a collaborative process. How can we do this same process across the entire city?

Haiti can be transformed by Haitians working and living in Haiti, deeply knowledgeable about it, and working daily to solve the challenges it’s facing. Outsiders can only play a role in sharing experiences from other countries and offering alternative interpretations of the situation.