

I Don't Need a Water Bottle; I Need a Job."

Help in times of crisis is necessary and important, but the long-term solution to poverty is job creation.

Julie Colombino arrived in Haiti just days after the devastating January 2010 earthquake. A trained disaster responder, she gave up her two-week vacation to help in a country overwhelmed by loss and suffering. Nothing could have prepared her for what she encountered—the sounds of barking dogs, men screaming, and women singing through grief echoed through Port-au-Prince. Amid the chaos, Julie prayed for guidance and sensed God saying, "Julie, do less and listen more."

Working alone without an established organization, she distributed relief supplies in a tent in central Port-au-Prince. That was when a woman tapped her on the shoulder and spoke words that would change everything: "*Dame blanche, je n'ai pas besoin d'une bouteille d'eau, j'ai besoin d'un travail.*" ("White lady, I don't need a water bottle; I need a job.")

Ten days later, Julie returned to Florida, but she could not leave Haiti behind. She sold her home, quit her job as a manager at United Way, and returned to Haiti with \$7,000 in savings. Drawing on her background in nonprofit management, she founded an organization focused on education and job training for the most vulnerable. But Haiti's reality soon became clear - unemployment hovered around 40 percent, and training without jobs offered little hope.

Then came an idea. Inspired by something she had seen in Kenya, Julie used donated funds to hire women to make sandals from discarded car tires. One year after the earthquake, Julie and three Haitian women sat on the floor cutting tires with razor blades, determined to reclaim Haiti's future by creating dignified employment.

The journey was anything but easy. A cholera epidemic struck in 2010. In 2012, a newly purchased vehicle caught fire and was destroyed. Their workshop was robbed, then flooded, wiping out what remained. Julie contracted dengue fever, ran out of money, and grew weary of illness and setbacks. Yet surrounded by

Haitians who demonstrated extraordinary perseverance, she resolved to keep going.

In January 2015, Julie and her Haitian partner Jolina registered a for-profit company: **Deux Mains**, a brand inspired by the strength of the Haitian people. The company was founded on a simple conviction—that business can and should alleviate poverty through the creation of great jobs. Today, Deux Mains provides living wages, benefits, health insurance, paid holidays, and maternity and paternity leave. More than 500,000 hours of dignified work have been created, primarily for women, who are recognized as the backbone of society—*fanm se potomitan*, as the Haitian proverb says.

Deux Mains is also committed to environmental sustainability. Its factory is now 100 percent solar powered. Producing in small batches, the company sources 99 percent of its raw materials locally and upcycles discarded tires into durable sandals and accessories. An estimated 10,000 tires have been repurposed, reducing CO₂ emissions by approximately 11 metric tons.

Julie affirms the value of charity but insists that sustainable businesses are essential for rebuilding economies and restoring dignity. Looking back, she says the greatest gift was learning to be quiet, ask questions, and listen. That posture made all the difference.

“Our brand goes by many names—eco fashion, fair trade, ethical fashion—but at the end of the day, people come first. Our products are made in Haiti and are rebuilding communities one sandal, handbag, and accessory at a time.”

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you agree with the first line of this story?
2. Would you have the courage to do what Julie did? If not, could you see yourself joining someone like her, somewhere in the world?
3. Julie believes that “...business can and should alleviate poverty through the creation of great jobs.” How might this belief correlate with the Great Commandment of Jesus to love our neighbor?

4. Why might sustainable business have an advantage over charities?
5. Julie is a Jesus-follower. How did she create a context for free conversations about the gospel?
6. She values the idea of “...learning to be quiet, ask questions, and listen.” Do you find that easy to do? What steps can you take to listen well, especially in another culture?