



Conference of the Committee for Teaching about the UN (CTAUN)

Achieving the MDGs – Teaching for Action

14 Jan 2011

David Stillman, PhD, Executive Director
Public-Private Alliance Foundation

“Fighting the silent killer in the kitchen – Achieving the MDGs”

We think of a barbeque as a pleasant alternative for weekend outings in good weather. For half the world's population, biomass fuel (wood, dung, agricultural residues) is the everyday essential to meet all the basic energy needs of cooking, boiling water, lighting, and, depending on climatic conditions, for space heating. This is not a picnic but a serious problem with implications across the range of issues treated in the Millennium Development Goals.

Since adoption of the MDGs the World Health Organization has reported country by country on “percentage of population using solid fuels”, as a key indicator in relation to Goal 7, on environmental sustainability. But WHO and others have found significant implications from noxious fumes for most of the MDGs, especially Goals 4 and 5 on children's and mothers' health. That's why WHO has coined the term “the silent killer in the kitchen” and has estimated that 1.9 million people die worldwide each year from exposure to cookstove smoke. WHO and others have also found serious effects of smoke and gathering fuel in relation to Goal 1 on extreme poverty and Goal 3 on women. Effects can also be counted in relation to Goal 2 on primary education and Goal 6 on serious diseases.

The Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, launched in September 2010 and housed in the UN Foundation, responds to this very simple problem which has such major negative effects. The founding partners are an impressive group of organizations, companies and UN and government agencies, including strong support from the USA. The aim is to save lives, empower women, improve livelihoods and combat climate change.

The Public-Private Alliance Foundation is a partner in that organization, and works with many collaborators. It aims to reduce poverty by networking with business, government, academia, the financial community, non-profits, the UN and others. It focuses on several key issues in the focus countries of Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Madagascar. Currently the chief emphasis is to promote and help implement in Haiti the introduction of ethanol stoves and fuel, chiefly from locally grown sugar cane. That's what I'll talk about today, one year since the tremendous losses in the earthquake of January 12, 2010.

Burning wood and charcoal for cooking and small business is Haiti's greatest energy use. Trucks arrive daily into Port au Prince and other population centers with the charred remains of dwindling forest, often from clandestine operations. With ever-increasing demand exceeding annual supply, this has stripped the country bare, leading to erosion and hurricane mudslides. Since the devastating earthquake one year ago, conditions have become worse, especially for over a million people now living in cramped tent camps. Prices have gone up. Add to this the crisis of cholera, which would be greatly eased by ensuring that water was boiled before drinking or washing.

But sugar has a long history in Haiti, though agricultural production and mill output has declined greatly in recent decades. Distillation for rum and home-made spirits is also well known, but with inefficient processes and much waste.

So there are challenges but also opportunities, and the current situation of so much misery in the country has brought attention from all over to help and to find innovative solutions.

Moreover, as the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves has declared, the time is right internationally, in terms of awareness, research, technology, commitment and the potential of carbon financing. Pilot projects can blossom into the creation of a thriving and sustainable clean cookstove industry.

Prospects are positive for alcohol fuel and stoves in Haiti. Ethanol is cheaper than the alternatives – liquid propane gas (LPG), kerosene or charcoal, and the great majority of people can't afford LPG fuel or stoves. Ethanol is safe and clean, rivaling LPG in efficiency. So-called Improved wood and charcoal stoves still rely on trees.

Our efforts aim to improve the lives and pocketbooks of families, provide jobs for farmers, stove-makers and small entrepreneurs, encourage micro-finance and reduce deforestation.

Several areas of action must be addressed – ethanol production, ethanol distribution, stove production and stove promotion, sales and use. Plus governmental policy, regulations and promotion. Each of these involves various actors – public sector, business, technicians, funders and workers.

The Public-Private Alliance Foundation is collaborating with several partners to take action in this seemingly simple but actually complicated area. Representatives of some of these organizations are here in this room.

One is a Haitian-American investment group known as SIMACT. Most of the shareholders in SIMACT left Haiti in their youth. They have become successful in the USA but their hearts and their resources extend back home to help develop their country of birth.

Another partner is Project Gaia, which has done research, mobilized collaborators, conducted pilot studies in several countries, and has selected the Dometic CleanCook stove as the ideal for production and use in Haiti and elsewhere. This stove has been in production for many years, and is now going to the “bottom of the pyramid” market. You can see an example at the information fair.

I also want to introduce to you Blume Distillation LLC, which aims to produce community-level alcohol fuel distilleries, linked to sustainable agricultural options. This grows out of the long-standing work of David Blume, founder of the international Institute for Ecological Agriculture. The company is currently gathering investors and purchasers for appropriately scaled distillation systems that can use various feedstocks and have advanced flexibility, productivity and remote diagnostics.

In brief, our group of for-profit and non-profit partners is focusing on:

- Simple cook stoves from a well-known marine and leisure camping company,
- Syrup from a Haitian sugar mill and local sugar farmers,
- Conversion of syrup into fuel by community-level distilleries,
- Target populations of low-income families, street vendors, and small businesses,
- Support by local and international relief organizations to people displaced by the earthquake,
- Participation by Haitian-American investors and supporters of micro-finance,
- Increased jobs and earnings by Haitian farmers and small entrepreneurs,
- Improved health, especially for women and children, and
- Decreased deforestation.

These efforts draw inspiration from the international policy priorities and constitute practical actions to help achieve the MDGs in Haiti, especially in relation to the themes of today's panel – Poverty / Hunger / Sustainability. Please talk with me if you would like to get involved.

Thank you.

Public-Private Alliance Foundation
166 Edgars Lane
Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706
E-mail: ppafoundation@gmail.com

David Stillman, PhD, Executive Director
Tel: (914) 478-3450
Cell: (914) 924-0108
Website: www.ppafoundation.org

