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Global Partnerships talks more than microloans at annual fundraiser

Puget Sound Business Journal by Valerie Bauman, Staff Writer
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At [Global Partnerships'](#) tenth annual Business of Hope luncheon Tuesday, the microfinance nonprofit highlighted its expansion into health care services and green technology.

A creation of Seattle philanthropists [Bill & Paula Clapp](#), Global Partnerships was founded in 1994 primarily as a microfinance institution serving Central America. Since then, the organization has expanded to serve 10 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through [impact investing](#).

More recently, Global Partnerships has gradually broadened its strategy of providing microloans and support for entrepreneurship to include areas such as health care and green technology. The expanded focus was shown by the selection of the keynote speaker: Dr. Carine Roenen, director of Fonkoze, a microfinance and health institution in Haiti.

Roenen, a physician who has dedicated her life to working in developing countries, spoke about Global Partnerships' commitment to improve the delivery of health care in Haiti, despite the many challenges the country faces.

With infrastructure already in place to deliver financial aid and business counseling, Global Partnerships has been able to use those systems as it has expanded its ability to offer health screenings.

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Fernando Concepcion

Brigida Rodriguez shows off her corn bread that she sells in her town in the Dominican Republic. She started her business with a microloan from Esperanza, a Global Partnerships partner.

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Global Partnerships set a fundraising goal of \$605,000 for this year's luncheon, held at Seattle's Westin Hotel. Eight anonymous donors supplemented attendee donations with a pledge to match all gifts of \$1,000 or more. Another anonymous donor also pledged to donate \$5 for every tweet that mentioned the event's hashtag on Twitter: #GPHope.

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With more than 900 people in attendance Tuesday, officials were optimistic that the event would meet its goal. [Last year the luncheon](#) raised \$540,000.

As is traditional for the Global Partnerships luncheon, the organization brought out a microloan recipient with a remarkable personal story just before asking donors to open their wallets.

This year's guest speaker, Brigida Rodriguez, of the Dominican Republic, didn't fail to deliver the requisite emotional blow.

A mother of a 15-year-old son who also provides for her husband, mother and grandfather, Rodriguez started a business serving lunch to construction workers in her neighborhood — with help from a roughly \$200 loan from Global Partnerships' partner, Esperanza.

She continued to build her business, until the recession slowed down construction and wiped out her customer base.

At that point she decided to start selling sponge cakes and corn cakes. That has made her even more successful. Her son is able to remain in school and her mother no longer goes without medication.

"My sponge cakes are selling like hot cakes," Rodriguez said through a translator, with a grin.

Check back for an update on the final fundraising numbers for the 2012 luncheon.

Valerie Bauman covers nonprofits and health care for the Puget Sound Business Journal.

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