

Developing Community Leadership for a Healthier Haiti

While the right to health is universally recognized, in Haiti, it can often feel more like a dream than a reality. With vast distances between villages, access to even basic health services is a major challenge. Furthermore, without the involvement of community leaders and citizens addressing health issues that directly affect them, local potential for innovative and resourceful solutions is neglected.

In an encouraging nod toward sustainable and locally-led health initiatives, Management Sciences for Health has implemented the Community Leadership Development Program (LDP) to serve the town of Anse à Foleur. This program has enabled local leaders from Méance, Dity, Anse à Foleur, and Côtes de Fer to gather together despite their distance and differences to address health issues confronting their communities.

Inspired by universal values such as solidarity, trust, respect, forgiveness, and democracy – which are also key elements of the Community LDP – program participants have gained the vital support of decision makers and individual community members to rally around health-related causes, despite minimal resources.

During the Community LDP, participants examined maternal health, vaccination, family planning, cholera, and other issues, and brainstormed how they might mitigate some of these problems. By mobilizing community support, they began to see results. In Dity, for example, leaders identified protecting their community against cholera as a priority. As a result, they cleaned 10 water sources, dug 46 toilets, and distributed 2,079 aquatab water purifiers. They also vaccinated more than 2,100 children and educated 459 women about family planning.

By participating in the Community LDP, Dity's leaders have not only gained an increased appreciation of their values and local leadership, they have established a new-found pride in their ability to address health issues at the community level without seeking external aid.

As Dity resident Zéline Aristilde said so well, “Before the Community LDP, each person was trying isolated actions that did not have a great impact on the community. The Community LDP showed us the need to come together, despite our different points of view, in order to discuss the problems in the community for communal action, to the benefit of all its members.”

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