



SUCCESS STORY

Health Education for Community Stability

A USAID-funded clinic brings dramatic community change through information and behavior change education programming.



Photo by CSLB/SDSH staff

"Information and health education empower and transform individuals by promoting positive attitudes and practices leading to healthier lifestyles." The Saint-Vincent nuns at the Sibert clinic are proud of the solid bridge built between their community's different social groups and the clinic thanks to the USAID-funded health program.

The Santé pour le Développement et la Stabilité d'Haiti (SDSH) 2007–2012 health project serves about 45% of the country's 8.9 million people through a public-private network of 147 service sites in Haiti's ten geographical departments. The strong community program of the SDSH project empowers over 4,000 health workers to undertake outreach activities in health promotion. Though information, education, and communication sessions, the service providers place community-level prevention within reach of the families and other groups in their service areas with related impact on treatment services.

"I find it sometimes difficult to explain the dramatic and encouraging results of the behavior change communication activities we developed for youth under our health program," says Sister Scatolin, head nun at the Croix des Bouquets clinic. Within the Croix-des-Bouquets suburb located northeast of Port-au-Prince, the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul run a clinic in Sibert with USAID funding through the *Santé pour le Développement et la Stabilité d'Haiti* (SDSH) health project.

Many young people living in Croix des Bouquets risk falling into delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence. In response to this crisis and in addition to providing health care in this deprived locality, the nuns and clinic staff run a series of outreach activities through the clinic to encourage young people in the community to seek clinic services and make positive changes in their behaviors and lives.

Health promoters and nuns hold educational talks on relevant topics, and 90 young men recently gathered for a special meeting focused on responsible behaviors, the dangers of drug use, self-esteem, resilience, and the relationship of each individual with his environment—including family, friends, teachers, or partners. The meeting was highly participative and exchanges among the attendees and the facilitators were enthralling, animated, and often intense. Some of the young men were disconcertingly frank about their struggles and the trust established through the event was palpable.

Since the program's establishment, clinic staff members have been encouraged to see these young men return to the clinic seeking advice or more information regarding violence, drugs, sexual abuse and depression. They've also spread the word about services, accompanying friends, relatives, and other community members to the clinic. "At other times, they drop by just to say an affectionate hello to the nuns or the clinic staff," says Sister Scatolin, marveling at how the positive relationship with these community members continues to thrive.

"They mostly wish for understanding...and reaching out to them has brought a lot of good to this community whose living conditions are so harshly tested," she says. "We are grateful for this miracle attained in part, thanks to the American people supporting us."

Serving a population of more than 40,000 during the 2009–2010 period, the Sibert clinic has potentially reached half of its catchment area residents with health education program on hygiene, environment, maternal and child health, reproductive health and infectious diseases including tuberculosis and HIV and AIDS. In the challenging times faced since the January 2010 earthquake, the program has also trained 13 staff to help manage gender-based violence.