

Success Story/Lessons Learned

Operating Unit: USAID/Haiti

The Resurrection of Haiti's Infamous Cité Soleil

USG efforts through the Haiti Stabilization Initiative (HSI) -- an integrated, inter-Agency foreign assistance effort within which USAID/Haiti is a principle partner -- have become a significant factor in moving Haiti's infamous Cité Soleil towards an atmosphere of improving, civil stability.

Progress in Cité Soleil is palpable, and it is no longer the destabilizing enclave it was in 2004. Over much of the last decade, Cité Soleil, a bitterly poor slum of some 300,000 inhabitants, became the icon of Haiti's dysfunctionality and lawlessness. Gangs had driven out the institutions of State from the urban third of the town of Cité Soleil and used it as a base for criminal forays. However, there is mounting evidence that this image is recently becoming obsolete. During the last year, for example, economic activity in Cité Soleil has grown to the point where Avenue Soleil has again become a busy thoroughfare. During the food riots that rocked Haiti in April of 2008, Cité Soleil remained calm and free of violence and USG-funded projects continued while most of the rest of the Port au Prince area shut down. At the time of the April unrest, approximately \$5.5 million of the USD \$20 million HSI budget had actually reached the ground in the form of community infrastructure, a large road and drainage project, and smaller vocational training and justice sector projects. Many community representatives and residents attending a community meeting marking the completion of the last 1.4 km link in the Boulevard des Américains repeatedly told USAID and HSI representatives that the road is a "dream" and that it will "revolutionize what we know of Cité Soleil." This road is the neighborhood's primary outlet to the south, including to the national port and downtown Port-au-Prince.

These projects have materially improved the living conditions for a large number of Cité Soleil residents, while providing temporary employment and, more importantly, providing a cadre of local community leaders with grassroots support. Results of a six-month survey of Cité Soleil residents, covering the period of April 1, 2008 to September 31, 2008, reported that residents' perceptions of economic and social well-being conditions had improved by over 10% from September 2006 to December 2007. The majority of respondents also reported feeling relatively safe at home (84%), that their children were safe when they went to school (72%), and that they felt safer in August 2008 than they did before January 2008.

In the last few months, the mayor (the first elected leader of this newly created commune) and his team were able to lead, improve security and practice good governance in Cité Soleil. Elected leaders of Cité Soleil were held in extremely low esteem (with only eight percent approval rating as measured in a November 2007 survey). Nevertheless, in May 2008, the mayor was able to relocate a large, reluctant and vocal group of merchants to the new local market

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without resorting to force or provoking unrest or violence. In contrast, the mayor of upper class Petionville had to use police force to move merchants there to a new market. A Community Forum process, under the guidance of the Inter-University Research Institute, is also building much-needed community support for the mayor and, through holding public forums, has recently served to help diffuse some potentially violent public demonstrations.

Unfortunately, in September 2008, there were two shooting deaths at the gateway to Cité Soleil, one of a uniformed police officer, and periodic assassinations still continue. Nevertheless, while any violence is disturbing, USAID's support promoting stability and security activities is resulting in Cite Soleil's improving environment. In these shooting cases, rather than the traditional indifference from authorities or impunity previously enjoyed by the perpetrators of crime, the Haitian National Police, with community support, acted decisively, investigated the crimes, and in several cases suspects are now in custody.

While the impact of the USG's approach to Cité Soleil is noticeable and the area is no longer the destabilizing enclave that it was in 2006, the situation still remains fragile. Cite Soleil's especially poor citizens remain subject to the same, broader challenges of crushing poverty, pervasive unemployment, and weak institutions that face most Haitians. While many Cite Soleil residents are becoming more civic-minded citizens, sustained progress in Cite Soleil will depend on the continued, focused attention and involvement of the international community, national partners, and Haitian institutions.

Pullout Quote (Optional):

"This will revolutionize what we know of Cité Soleil."

(Comment from a Cité Soleil community leader in reference to the HSI-funded refurbishment of Boulevard des Américains.)

Background Information:

The Haiti Stabilization Initiative is a \$20 million innovative, whole-of-government program that integrates security and development in Cité Soleil, one of Haiti's most dangerous, gang-controlled neighborhoods and a persistent source of instability. To create a climate conducive to the delivery of regular assistance, this short-term initiative combines increased security efforts with simultaneous, intensive assistance to local government and the community with a focus in five interrelated areas: Police Strengthening; Judicial Outreach; Community Building; Public Works/Infrastructure; and Strategic Communications.

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Photographs (optional, but recommended):



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