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The HLP Team

THE HEALTH LEADERSHIP PROJECT

NEWSLETTER

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Strengthening health systems must continue in 2021

Dear readers,

In 2020, the entire world faced the common challenge of how to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting hardships. In certain countries in particular, including Haiti, this pandemic has further worsened and put additional stress on the country's already fragile public health and economic system.

To address this multifaceted challenge, an integrated approach and a strengthened health system are absolutely critical. The work that is being carried out by the *Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population* (MSPP) to update the National Strategic Health Plan or *Plan Directeur de la Santé* for 2021–2031 is one example of these efforts.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Health, Dr. Greta Roy Clement, the USAID Health Leadership Project (HLP) is working closely with the MSPP to define and frame the main objectives of the plan; develop and structure it; and have it approved so its objectives can be achieved by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The HLP team has been providing key technical support to this work in the areas of governance; resource mobilization for health; and, as presented below, making human resources for health (HRH) available. Thanks to the involvement of all stakeholders, the new health plan should be available by the end of March.

However, a national strategy cannot succeed without buy in at the local level. As you will read in this newsletter, local initiatives such as the reopening of a remote health center are just as important for improving health as are the decisions and actions taken at the national level to roll out key guidelines and policies, such as the transition plan for human resources.

Happy reading to all!

Dr. Georges Dubuche

Chief of Party for the Health Leadership Project

A forgotten remote health center gets a second chance

The inhabitants of Morne à Brûler, a hard-to-reach community in la Vallée de Jacmel, located 100 km southwest of Port-au-Prince, were facing a significant challenge. Their health center closed three years ago after health providers were driven away because of the poor quality of the services they were providing. As a result, the population of this town had to either walk for hours or pay a heavy price for transportation to reach the closest health center.

Governance support to find a solution

The MSPP learned of this situation during a recent facility assessment visit. Concerned about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on routine service delivery, HLP provided technical and financial support to the MSPP to design and carry out an assessment of the level of services being provided at a representative sample of health facilities around the country. During this assessment, Dr. Ted Lazarre, Technical Officer for the *Direction d'Organisation des Services de Santé* (DOSS), discovered the closed health center and worked with HLP to address the situation.



A community meeting with Dr. Lazarre (center) and inhabitants of la Vallée de Jacmel. Photo credit: Dieunot St Paulin, biomedical technician at the DOSS/MSPP

“This work made me feel useful. I can see the concrete results of this assessment visit for the population. This assessment contributed to a better evaluation of the needs and constraints of the center to improve the health of the population.”

-Dr. Lazarre, Technical Officer, DOSS

Drawing on the HLP training on good governance practices and supervision tools, Dr. Lazarre organized a meeting with community members to develop a plan to reopen the facility. HLP helped facilitate the discussions with the *Directeur Départemental* to agree to staff the health center two days a week with health providers from a neighboring facility. Amazingly, the health center still had a good stock of unexpired medicines and supplies, and the facility was still in good condition. Because of all this, the health center of Morne à Brûler was able to reopen just one week after the initial discussions.



The entrance of the health center after it reopened. Photo credit: Dieunot St Paulin

The people of Morne à Brûler are happy to once again be able to seek health services like vaccinations and health consultations in their community. With their new contacts with the DOSS, the community will be able to continue to negotiate with the government so permanent and well-trained health staff can come to work at the health center. The actions of Dr. Lazarre and Morne à Brûler community leaders have shown that “*men anpil, chay pa lou*” (many hands make light work).

Building human resources that ensure continuity of services

Ensuring that there are adequate human resources for health to meet the needs of Haiti's population is one of the biggest challenges for the Haitian health system. Of particular concern is the country's reliance on donors to pay the salaries of 21% of public-sector health providers. Ninety percent of staff working in the area of HIV/AIDS are paid full-time by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and 71% of community outreach workers are paid by donor funding. If the donor funding were to suddenly end, the country would be in a grave crisis and the achievement of the health-related SDGs, such as the UNAIDS 95-95-95 initiative, would be compromised.

A sustainable solution to these issues: A transition plan for human resources

In response to the urgent HRH challenges, the government of Haiti, in collaboration with HLP, developed several strategies to strengthen the public health sector in the country. One of these strategies is to invest in the gradual absorption of health workers previously paid by donors into the government's budget, with a particular focus on staff working on HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria prevention, care, and treatment. Recent analysis has shown that the Haitian government has enough financial resources to pay more than 500 additional health staff each year.

HLP provided technical support to the MSPP to develop a transition plan for US government donor-funded staff. The plan aims to have the Haitian government directly pay the salaries of 4,964 donor-paid health care providers or community outreach workers working in public, mixed, or private nonprofit health institutions by 2030. Staff include doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, social workers, data clerks, and more than 3,000 community outreach workers.



Data collection for the transition plan in one of the health facilities of the Département Sanitaire de l'Ouest

The transition plan details

- A mapping of donor-funded health workers, particularly those assigned to HIV care
- Definitions of the selection criteria and process for the transition plan
- Estimation of the funds required to absorb these staff according to the country's salary scale

In this first year of implementing the plan, the government is on track to transfer more than 450 health workers as outlined by the plan, including doctors, nurses, lab technicians, and community health workers, for an estimated cost of 778,000 USD. Ensuring the gradual transfer of health staff to the government's budget will move Haiti closer to its goal of being able to provide its population with the quality health services they need.