



## SNAPSHOT

# Empowering Community Leaders

**Haitians learn about their constitutional rights and how to use them.**



*Haiti Partners trained community leaders on the Haitian Constitution and methods of mobilizing for community empowerment.*

***Haiti's recovery will depend on citizen involvement predicated on an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of government.***

**Telling Our Story**  
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**March 2011** – Exuding a newfound sense of strength and conviction, Georgette Etienne proclaimed her surprise about how her country's Constitution applies to her life. "Many civic rights have been revealed to me that I didn't know existed...My government has a responsibility to protect me," she said after taking part in a USAID-funded civic education workshop.

Georgette lives in Champ Mars, a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) next to the ruins of the National Palace in Port-au-Prince. The land adjacent to the palace was hastily transformed into an IDP camp following the January 2010 earthquake, and over the past year, Georgette has become a leader in the community. However, the experience of being displaced had given her the sense that she and the other people in the camp were on their own and could expect little or no help with improving their situation.

To confront this all-too-common belief and promote citizen engagement, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives provided funding to Haiti Partners, a Haitian NGO, to train approximately 1,000 Haitians on their constitutional rights—as well as civic obligations—and on methods for exercising these rights.

Under the grant, 10 teams of facilitators conducted four meetings weekly with community leaders. Using the Circles of Change technique, the facilitators led discussions on selected constitutional texts and helped the participants evaluate where they are (in terms of the socio-political context), identify their individual and communal strengths, and determine how these strengths can help them get to where they want to be. Haiti Partners also provided practical instruction on holding community meetings, cultivating positive attitudes, and collaboration.

The leaders' next task will be to educate fellow Haitians on the duties and responsibilities of citizens and government, as a better understanding of these civic rights will allow Haitians to more effectively organize within their communities and petition local leaders. "Now that I know my rights, I can teach others in my community how to advocate for themselves," said Jospeh Delound, a training participant.

Having completed the 12-week civic education program, Georgette is engaging her neighbors with a new intensity. She and the other newly trained leaders are helping members of vulnerable groups—particularly women and children living in IDP camps—access services and advocate for protection and assistance from their government.

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