

Roads out of Poverty in Haiti

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At first glance, the road leading to Dade-Duvivier, a remote commune in the hills of southern Haiti, looks unremarkable: simple, unpaved, more of a track than a road.

But talk to the local people and you will understand that this road is their lifeline.

The road used to get washed out when it rained, trapping people in their homes. It may not be paved now, but basic rehabilitation has made it passable for both pedestrians and motor vehicles – in all seasons.

"With the road we can transport our products from the fields to the houses," says Jean-Albert Chéry, a small farmer who like many of his neighbors grows a mix of crops such as peas, millet, and bananas.

Other inhabitants of Dade-Duvivier say the rehabilitated road has not only made transport and communication easier, it has also inspired people to undertake positive steps such as renovating their homes.

Local Communities Take the Lead

The road rehabilitation project in Dade-Duvivier is part of the Haiti Community-Driven Development (CDD) Project which is financed by a US\$38 million grant from the International Development Association, the part of the World Bank that finances the world's poorest countries, and US\$2.3 million from local community-based organizations.

The project was selected by the local community through a democratic process and financed with a grant of US\$16,938.00 from the CDD Project.

"The community-driven development approach allows communities in Haiti to choose their own priorities," explains John Currelly, Resident Representative of the Pan-American Development Foundation. PADF is the pioneer CDD implementing agency and one of the partner organizations supporting the Dade-Duvivier and other CDD sub-projects around the country.

The Government of Haiti, the World Bank and the project partners all agree that rehabilitating basic rural infrastructure, such as roads, is a priority in the effort to improve living conditions in the country.

"When rural roads fall into disrepair, they cut off access to markets and basic services for some of Haiti's poorest communities," says Garry Charlier, World Bank task manager for the Haiti CDD Project. "Improving roads is essential to help end isolation and exclusion."

Transport Prices Fall

Carrefour Virgile-Bidouze, a village about 80 km from Dade-Duvivier, is another community that has chosen to invest in improving roads with help from the CDD Project.

Local inhabitants depend on the 12 km stretch of road that has been rehabilitated for access to shops and markets and to get to the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Some travel by foot, some on motorbikes, and others in the typical Haitian tap-taps (small trucks that take paying passengers).

"Before, the road was completely impassable and if someone was sick it was impossible to transport them to the hospital, especially as we couldn't afford the prices imposed by the drivers [of the tap-taps]," explains Polo Renel, secretary of the local association that is implementing the road rehabilitation project.

"Now the price of taking a tap-tap to the main road has come down from 100-200 gourdes to 35 gourdes."

resources

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Users of the road have suggestions for improving it further. For instance, Pascal Irvot, the owner of a general store along the roadside, would like to see the road surface strengthened by asphalt paving.

Tackling the Worst Spots First

The problems related to rural infrastructure are particularly acute in the mountainous regions of northern Haiti, where communities can become completely isolated if their feeder roads are not maintained.

One solution local people have found is "*spot rehabilitation*" which means fixing the worst stretches of road first so that at least people can get to their destination, even if the journey is a difficult one.

In the commune of Carice, for instance, a local association has rehabilitated a key stretch of road at the entrance to the village which used to be impracticable in the rainy season.

"*We installed a whole system of drainage canals and embankments,*" explains Erida Jean Simon, a member of the management committee for the project.

"*Now we can take our products to town, our children can get to school, and trucks can get through even when it rains. The local people are happy and proud of what we've achieved.*"

This is the second in a series of multimedia features on the Haiti Community-Driven Development Project.

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