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Partnering in creating positive change



By **Troy Sanon**
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World Renew has been working in Haiti since 1975 and, despite the unstable environment of Haiti, the work of World Renew and its local partners there continues to bear fruit.

Our partnership with Église Chrétienne Réformée d'Haiti — the Christian Reformed Church of Haiti or ECRH — continues to show positive change in the communities of Haiti. Legally recognized in 1999 and with 45 affiliated churches, the Christian Reformed Church of Haiti is involved in literacy, environment protection, agriculture, youth ministry, community development, gender justice, and leadership training there, seeking to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the people in the communities around the Christian Reformed churches of Haiti.

The church suffered a denominational leadership crisis in 2014-15, and funding of national programs was suspended while the church worked through the situation. In September this year, church leaders and an evaluation team took time to look back at this difficult period and assess the health of the church at the local level amidst denominational challenges.

The evaluation team and church leaders were pleased to see that local leaders continued firm in their work at the local level throughout this time, that the strengthening of local leadership in previous years proved a wise and worthy investment. When denominational leadership issues were resolved, and programs resumed, the work bounced back into action. The leaders look back with satisfaction at the resilience of the communities, feeling that the church as a whole is as strong as ever.

During the evaluation process, local leaders showed a healthy understanding of what community transformation is, why it is important, and what are its challenges. In their discussions, they displayed great understanding of the importance of involving the community in assessing needs and wants and plans for reaching agreed-upon goals.



Evaluation Committee Members

The ECRH network of 45 churches is well-equipped to help integrate justice and community development activities that foster sustainable community transformation. The ECRH leadership training for church leaders and deacons has helped to increase the connection between all Christian Reformed Church leadership in Haiti as well as among their congregations.

Before the local Christian Reformed churches became active in community development, the communities around those churches had some of the lowest literacy rates in the country, preventing community members from fully participating in their communities. In response, the church supported the development of strong literacy programs in those communities. The Christian Reformed Church of Haiti's literacy program is a powerful tool in helping community members seeking fruitful and fulfilling livelihoods.

ECRH has also developed village savings and loans associations where villagers, many of whom are women functioning as the head of their family, are involved in self-managed "banks." Together they share their experience, save their money, access and extend to their fellow villagers low-interest loans, and so improve living conditions for themselves and their families. These self-managed, adaptable systems enable families to respond to economic hardships that would otherwise drive them into a cycle of uncontrollable debt.

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Transforming communities through the empowerment of local churches and schools *a story of transformation by Troy Sanon*

The Ministry of Christian Development, or MDK, is a World Renew organizational partner in Haiti. MDK is a Christian organization whose mission is to empower local churches and schools by bringing local leaders together and facilitating discussions of important community development issues and related ministries. MDK also offers training to leaders of local churches and schools. The Leadership Program is designed to empower church pastors, preachers, evangelists, Sunday school teachers, and youth leaders, as well as directors and teachers of local Christian schools, all of whom in turn train those with whom they work.

The Ministry of Christian Development also offers a Diaconal Training Program that supports deacons from different communities and a variety of churches, helping local churches to develop their own diaconal ministry. This three-year

program includes fourteen subjects per year, fostering a broad understanding of community development and teaching deacons how to organize local projects in their community. After three years, the graduates organize themselves into a diaconal association dedicated to improving their administration and working in their respective communities.

MDK's trainees encourage these "graduate" diaconal associations to develop local community projects by providing them with technical assistance, connection with other local or intermediary organizations, and seed money for projects, often in the form of matching funds. So much exciting work has come out of this program. MDK has been involved in three road improvement projects; an agricultural store project in Badyo, Kenscoff, a community near Port-Au-Prince; a village savings and loan



MDK Trained Community leaders in the remote community of Robin

project; a literacy project; a tree nursery; a latrine construction project, and a series of community organizing activities. MDK training is all about the church as an agent for transformation in a community.

From Training to Application: A Church Is Rebuilt

The Church of Prophecy in Robin, Haiti lost its roof during Hurricane Sandy in November 2012. Unable to get funds from their denomination for a new roof, the church struggled on, holding services and other activities under the hot sun. Church members bought tarps, but they needed a more permanent solution, because the tarps could not keep them dry during heavy rains.

Dorvil Valmond and Heubreux Lindor, two deacons trained at the Ministry of Christian Development, or MDK, asked the pastor of the church to let them organize a fundraiser to rebuild the roof of the church. Last year, they put their plan into action. In three months, Dorvil and Heubreux collected 60,000 gourdes

(\$943 USD), all the money necessary for the construction of the roof. They organized a team of church and community members to provide the labor for rebuilding. The community mixed mortar, did carpentry, laid steel work, and completed the construction of the church.

Valmond and Heubreux credit MDK's training in promoting the community collaboration to make this a success. They say that MDK gave them the communication and organizing skills as well as an understanding of the importance of community initiative that they needed to complete this project.

The community showed great satisfaction in being part of the church roof construction project. The newly-roofed



Prophecy Church of Robin

church provides a place of gathering for the entire community and it makes the unreached people in our community now reachable by the gospel.

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The Christian Reformed Church of Haiti has helped to build churches in communities, providing the community with not only a place of worship, but a community gathering place. The church serves as a tangible asset for the church itself and its members, as well as a physical point of reference for the community.

ECRH also manages a seminary in Haiti that teaches formal theological leadership development to its students, allowing for formal theological training of its current church leaders and preparation of the future generation of church and community leaders.

Through its local churches, the Christian Reformed Church of Haiti has raised awareness of justice issues and promoted community renewal. The long-term benefits of these projects include the creation of more opportunities for the poor and vulnerable, improvement in community relations, and community empowerment. In general, the efforts of the Christian Reformed Church in Haiti have heightened economic status, social justice, environmental restoration, and the quality of life of impoverished families in the neighborhoods it serves.