Haiti's Model Communities

Ending *Restavèk* Child Domestic Servitude

Restavèk is a traditional system in which Haitian children are sent by parents to live with other families and work for them as domestic servants with the expectation that the family will care for the child by providing schooling, food and shelter. However, these children are often abused, treated in a manner distinctly different from children born to the household, and enslaved in their new homes as child domestic servants. Many are also subject to rape and sexual violence.

In many cases, *restavèk* becomes child trafficking and forced labor slavery, where children are completely controlled through violence and exploited by members of the households where they work. Estimates of the number of children living in *restavèk* range from 150,000 to 300,000—two-thirds of whom are girls. Despite Haitian law and Haiti's signature on international conventions that specifically prohibit the practice, *restavèk* continues largely unchecked.

In 2011, Free the Slaves began a three-year project in partnership with Fondasyon Limyè Lavi entitled "Freedom for Haiti's Children: Community Action to End Slavery Locally and Nationally," funded by the U.S. State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (J/TIP). A report evaluated the effectiveness of the program.

The project utilized a holistic method for community development that is one of the first of its kind in Haiti.

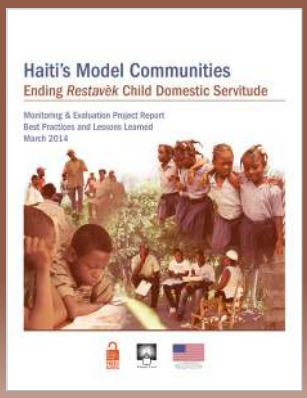
The Model Communities approach against child domestic servitude is based on the premise that building community consensus against the practice is a strong strategy to prevent and reverse the flow of children into domestic servitude.

CORE COMPONENTS:

- **Community-based assessment**, including social mapping and participatory wealth ranking, to identify children in servitude and those at risk.
- **Open space dialogues** to facilitate large-scale community discussion and consensus building.
- **A participatory learning curriculum** using illustrated story books that bring to life the trauma experienced by children in slavery.
- **Community-based child protection committees** to take preventive action with their neighbors, support the return and reintegration of *restavèk* children, and lead advocacy for needed government services.
- **An accelerated education program** designed to allow overage students to complete the standard six-year primary school curriculum in three years.
- **Livelihoods interventions** that integrate food and household security components to match the community's will to protect children while keeping them at home.

Key Project Results and Evaluation Findings

- An estimated 27 percent of the children in villages reached by the project who were initially identified as being in *restavèk* are now back home. Returned children reported overwhelmingly that they feel happier to be home with their families, feel freedom that they didn't experience when they were in *restavèk*, and are glad to be in school. The sending of children into *restavèk* has decreased.
- The child rights participatory learning method, in which 525 community members participated, was very effective at shifting norms by improving attitudes and behaviors related to children's rights, including increased awareness of the risks of *restavèk*, and diminished social acceptance of this harmful practice. Reported desirable behavior, such as better treatment of children, increased by 29 percentage points. This stimulated retrievals in all communities where there were *restavèks* to recover.
- Child protection committees were formed in each community to actively engage in efforts to prevent the sending of children into *restavèk*, to support returned children's reintegration and to promote overall child welfare.
- A reproductive health participatory learning module was included in the project because family size and parental health can affect whether children are sent into *restavèk*. The intervention increased knowledge among approximately 500 participants about reproductive health and created a shift among participants toward attitudes favorable of family planning and prevention of STDs.
- An accelerated education component provided education to an average of 148 children during each project year, helping to retain at-risk children in their communities of origin. It also contributed to the reintegration of children who returned from *restavèk*.
- Parents are facing difficulties in providing for returned children as a result of underproductive farmland and little to no work opportunities.



Read the full March 2014 Project Report and view the companion documentary video here:
www.freetheslaves.net/haiti

Lessons Learned to Increase Effectiveness of the Model Communities Approach

Child Protection Committees	Build capacity of child protection committees to conduct case management, home visits and provide psychosocial support in cases of children who have returned home.
Livelihoods	Ensure that future Model Communities projects include livelihood programming targeting the most vulnerable, including households that retrieve children.
Accelerated Education	Increase investments in accelerated education programming at the design phase in order to boost quality and success rates.
Reproductive Health	Ensure that real or perceived barriers to access birth control are addressed, including resistance from religious leaders and spousal partners.