

INCREASING STABILITY BY IMPROVING URBAN SECURITY:

USAID's Haiti Transition Initiative in Port-au-Prince

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The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) began its Haiti Transition Initiative (HTI) in May 2004, with implementing partner the International Organization for Migration. Recognizing that Haiti's stability rested in part on the security of its cities, HTI activities in Port-au-Prince developed along three principles: USAID support for community-driven, small-scale urban development projects; law enforcement provided by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to encourage community leaders to take action regarding the problem of gang violence; and community leadership and ownership of programming. With these three pillars in mind, the HTI initiated quick, visible, high-impact project activities in the neighbourhoods of Martissant, Bel Air and Cité Soleil.

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The projects included the rehabilitation of roads, bridges, water and electric systems, public markets and sports infrastructure, and socio-cultural activities. They involved a high proportion of youth normally at risk of criminal and gang activities and created frameworks for bridging the gap between government and community residents. The final result was a concrete example of the security-development nexus: residents benefited from an improved urban living environment and learned tools of conflict resolution and dialogue, while simultaneously enhancing citizen confidence and participation in the state (thus building government credibility).

The HTI activities in Bel Air are a case in point. The community was wracked by gang violence and a population that deeply distrusted the interim government. After months of consultation with the community, a series of HTI project activities were initiated in the neighbourhood, commencing with the repair of a public kiosk that had been burned down by police during riots earlier in the year. This positive interaction encouraged Bel Air residents to nominate additional

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projects in the immediate vicinity of the kiosk, which HTI pursued. MINUSTAH peacekeepers established a permanent base in Bel Air at Fort National, which resulted in an improved security situation. HTI reinforced MINUSTAH's permanent presence in the area with intensive clean-up and road rehabilitation projects — using community labour — to saturate the