A Community-led Pathway to Sustainably Managing Water Supplies in Rural Haiti

Haiti Outreach and its Partner Communities Systematically Break With a Miserable Status Quo

The Haitian WASH sector can overcome a legacy of failure by adapting what makes Haiti Outreach's hundreds of rural community-managed water supplies sustainable

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Key Insights:

- The NGO Haiti Outreach has worked with Haitian community leaders to establish over 500 sustainable, community-managed rural water supplies despite multiple complex challenges
- So that others may replicate Haiti Outreach's success, IRC has characterized what make it special
- Changing the mindset and behaviors of local leaders is key to their success: *Solidifying within a community their **intention** to use, control, and manage a water supply as a communal resource*
- Three simple, proven, well applied approaches solidify their sustainability: (1) patient empowerment, (2) ensuring that 'hardware' follows extensive 'software', and (3) post-construction support
- IRC and Haiti Outreach have documented the approach and are prepared to share it with the Haitian WASH sector to break from its failed history of rural water supply investment

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A Small NGO Delivers Sustainable Rural Water Services Across Haiti

In 15 years, Haiti Outreach, a small NGO with a single office, has developed a network of hundreds of communities with sustainably managed rural water supplies. All are functional, and about 90 percent are functional at any given time. Locations and functionality information are available online[1].

In contrast, since official record keeping began 30 years ago, access to rural water supplies in Haiti has been the lowest in the Western Hemisphere[2] - and it is decreasing. In the World Bank's global compilation of rural water supply sustainability analyses[3], Haiti ranked last of 15 countries studied.

The Haiti Outreach model of service delivery, grounded in disciplined structure and patient commitment of time and resources to ensure that "hardware follows software", is uniquely successful. It is worth expanding from the 508 current community partners into new locations and replicating by other rural water supply service providers in this troubled and challenging country.

Is Haiti Destined Toward Water System Failure?

In Haiti's fragile governance environment, water service providers consistently fail to overcome a broadside of complex challenges. Less than 50% of the rural population has access to 'improved' water sources - the same as in 1990[4]. The national authority expands its reach but remains weak and incapable of supporting communities[5]. The sector is overly dependent on aid, continuing to finance shortsighted project-based approaches without harmonization or accountability. Freshwater is polluted by agriculture, industry, and sewage. Deforestation has degraded some 85% of Haiti's watersheds, reducing recharge and increasing uncontrolled runoff. Nationally, these challenges lead to unsustainable rural water supplies, citizen fatigue with repetitive failure, over-dependency on donors' fickle largesse, and a general lack of trust and limited sense of community[6].

Haiti Outreach Breaks Convention and Institutional Gridlock

For over 30 years, successful rural water supply provision globally has been grounded in a "*hardware follows software*" [7] approach. This emphasizes the proven importance of establishing ownership, decision-making, accountability, and management capacity ("software") before constructing related infrastructure ("hardware"). Putting this into practice requires investing time and resources to ensure consensus and commitment before

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[1] https://portal.mwater.co/#/consoles/27efb85a15c04913b6be751159301a4b?share=c54f0a51d0244a7299547bf3b2c820f9&tab=404dbd9b-89ea-4583-908d-a01c5cf7e7d6
[2] Gelting, Richard; Bliss, Katherine; Patrick, Molly; Lockhart, Gabriella; and Thomas Handzel (2013). Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Haiti: past, present, and future. American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, 89(4): 665-670.
[3] Aguaconsult, IRCWash (2017). Sustainability Assessment of Rural Water Service Delivery Models: findings of a multi-country review. The World Bank.
[4] World Bank (2017). Looking Beyond Government-led Delivery of Water Supply and Sanitation Services: the market choices and practices of Haiti's most vulnerable people. WASH Poverty Diagnostic. World Bank, Washington, DC
[5] Helvetas (2019). Fostering WASH System Changes in Haiti Using Principles from the Market System Sector. IRC WASH Systems Symposium: All Systems Go.
[6] USAID (2014). Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Sector Status and Trends Assessment in Haiti: Final Report. Integrated Water and Coastal Resources Management IQC.
[7] World Health Organization (1987). International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Consultation, page 16; USAID (1981). Water Supply and Sanitation in Rural Development: proceedings of a conference for private and voluntary organizations, page 26.

infrastructure investments occur. When properly implemented, the resulting community management systems anchor increases in drinking water access and sustainability of services. But, can this experience be applied in rural Haiti?

Haiti Outreach has learned ways to develop community trust and commitment to sustainable service delivery by applying this approach, adapting it to the local context, and not accepting failure.

"Software" + Local Leadership + 'Intention' + Support = Sustainable Community Management

Many have tagged community management of rural water supplies as misguided. It has been called "a fig-leaf for state and donor failure" that "enables government officials and donors alike to abdicate responsibility for ensuring long-term sustainable water services." [8] To this day, sector professionals maintain an active debate on the applicability of community management to WASH programs. But, rarely have critics introspectively examined the quality of their support to community management systems—before and after infrastructure construction—to identify where fault for failure lies: the state? the donor? the NGO/implementer? And, they make no comparable effort to comprehensively examine, document, and advocate success. All this despite the fact that community management has successfully supplied safe water to rural populations around the globe[9] for decades.

Figure A Where Haiti Outreach is Active

There are numerous communities that have demonstrated the ability to manage their water systems for prolonged periods of time[10]. These are not what are often trivialized as 'islands of success'. Instead, they are the foundation of the 60% to 70%

of rural water systems found to be functioning across the developing world at any point in time[11]. Haiti Outreach is doing something right with the 500+ groups of community leaders who now manage their water supplies. Together, they have learned the importance of disciplined preparation, shared trust, commitment to purpose, and post-construction support as foundations of rural, community-managed water successes.

Haiti Outreach's water supply program started conventionally in 1999. They drilled and equipped wells. They established and trained committees to operate and maintain the wells. But by 2004, a large percentage of these water supplies were not functioning. Subsequently, Haiti Outreach adapted its approach by formalizing systematic "software" as a pre-condition to construction, relying on local commitment and action, and putting in place mechanisms for continuous monitoring and support of functionality and service delivery. Support staff use monthly monitoring data to trigger action to facilitate resolution of operational issues. They continue to apply this approach in 508 communities (see Figure A) through their Commune Action Plan (CAP) program[12].

Acknowledging the critical importance of collective, committed management to sustainability, Haiti Outreach has organized its efforts around a single, central purpose: ***Solidifying within a community their intention to use, control, and manage a water supply as a communal resource***. Each activity Haiti Outreach conducts is intended to align community actors with the group intention. For Haiti Outreach, this is the necessary foundation of successful community management in rural Haiti.

IRC and Haiti Outreach Collectively Characterize their 'Secret Sauce' of Sustainability
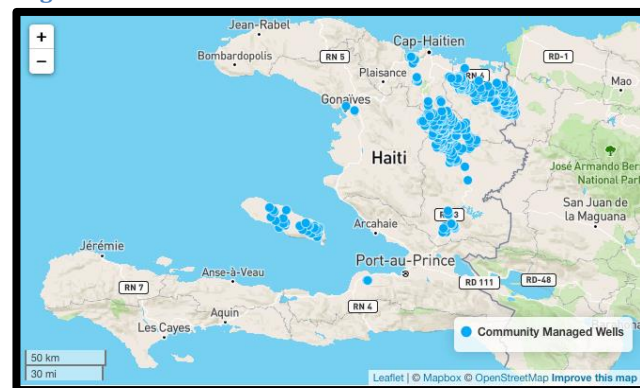
[8] Dr. Ellie Chowns, Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN) blog.
[9] Schouten, Ton and Patrick Moriarty (2003). Community Water, Community Management: from system to service in rural areas. ITDG Publishing, Great Britain.
[10] Schouten, Ton; Moriarty, Patrick; and Leonie Postma (2019). "Scaling up Community Management". figshare. https://hdl.handle.net/2134/28665.
[11] Harold Lockwood (2019). Sustaining Rural Water: a comparative study of maintenance models for community-managed schemes. USAID Sustainable WASH Systems Learning Partnership.
[12] Haiti Outreach (2016). FRAPE Survey Findings. Internal document.

IRC, supported by the Vitol Foundation, provides technical support and analytics to help organizations optimize their context-specific WASH systems strengthening approaches. IRC-Vitol supports them to develop strategies, programs, or research/learning outputs and inform others about successes. IRC-Vitol has documented, analyzed, validated, and described Haiti Outreach's approach so that others can adapt it and advance it toward scale. Due to COVID-19 constraints, IRC conducted the work through desktop study and conversations with Haiti Outreach staff.

Based on 50 years of global thought leadership, IRC has posited nine Building Blocks of Sustainable WASH Systems[13]. They have learned that sustainable water supply services require that actors in the service delivery system make achievements in all Blocks to some degree[14]. To understand Haiti Outreach's 'secret sauce', IRC examined each aspect of their program to determine if and to what degree they meet the requirements of each Building Block.

Colour	Score range
	1.0-1.8
	1.8-2.6
	2.6-3.4
	3.4-4.2
	4.2-5.0

Figure B How Haiti Outreach Performs Against Building Block Norms

Building Block: Policy and Legislation		
Sector policy and strategy, legal framework, norms and standards, by-laws[15]	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Institutions		
Coordination, roles, responsibilities, capacity, sector mechanisms	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Planning		
Planning and budgeting, capacity and frameworks for planning	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Finance		
Flows and responsibilities, frameworks for life-cycle costs and source identification	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Infrastructure		
Development and maintenance, project cycles, asset management, roles	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Regulation and Accountability		
Accountability mechanisms, regulatory framework and capacity	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Water Resource Management		
Allocating and managing abstraction, water quality, coordinated efforts	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Monitoring		
Framework and routine implementation, service levels, use of data	**Haiti Outreach Score**	
Building Block: Learning and Adaptation		
Capacity and frameworks to capture lessons learned, update and adapt program	**Haiti Outreach Score**	

Findings. There is nothing unique about the amount of money Haiti Outreach spends, the talent it employs, or the resources it mobilizes to generate sustainability and success. But, there is a 'secret sauce' that makes them unlike other organizations that have spent tens of millions of dollars on rural water supplies in Haiti only to leave the country an international failure in delivering this basic human need. To understand and describe the elements of Haiti Outreach's success, IRC characterized the unique recipe of the 'secret sauce'. We found many particular strengths in the program and its record of sustainable, community-managed, rural water supply service delivery in one of the most challenging investment environments in the Western Hemisphere: rural Haiti. The results are tabulated in Figure B and clarified in an accompanying, more in-depth document[16].

In short, Haiti Outreach is meeting the Building Block requirements quite well. Haiti Outreach exceeds minimum requirements of each Building Block: the organization is active in each to some level. Only two Building Blocks demonstrate areas where the actions of Haiti Outreach with communities and government are insufficiently strong.

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[13] Huston, Angela and Patrick Moriarty (2018). Building Strong WASH Systems for the SDGs: understanding the WASH system and its building blocks. IRC Working Paper.

[14] IRC WASH Systems Academy (2020). WASH System Strengthening: the basics. www.ircwash.org.

[15] Stoa, Ryan (2017). Water Governance in Haiti: an assessment of laws and institutional capacities. 29, Tulane Environmental Law Journal, 243.

[16] Christopher McGahey (2021). Haiti Outreach's Sustainability Programming: Building Block analysis of a proven pathway to reliable, affordable, safe, community-managed rural drinking water services. IRC Project Paper.

Lack of water resource management guidance from governmental service authorities and reliance on external sources for capital investment funds, rather than from government or other local sources, drive the lowest Building Block scores. The full document summarizes the relevant parts of Haiti Outreach's approach that result in positive findings and presents a step-by-step approach others can follow.

Haiti Outreach is Ready to Help Others Establish Empowered Community Management

Any rural water supply service provider committed to sustainability, community empowerment, and the importance of local governmental and non-governmental leadership can achieve Haiti Outreach's core element of *intention* and mimic their success. For those choosing to adapt their approach toward a wider scale benefiting the underserved citizens of Haiti, they must begin by committing to a "hardware follows software" approach and adopting a set of principles and the associated components of Haiti Outreach's Theory of Change (see Figure C).

The steps to take start with community discussions generating commitment to a vision, engagement of authorities, and the formalization of accountable and responsive management structures. These are described in IRC's larger document. Providing patient guidance in the beginning and ongoing support to solidify management systems after construction is within the reach of all. Detailing the process and elevating the rural water sub-sector in Haiti from its current dismal status begins here.

Figure C Haiti Outreach's Principles and Theory of Change

Principle	Component of Theory of Change
Change of mindset = Change in behavior	Equipping responsible water committees requires a change in mindset of each committee member and community members
	This change in mindset will manifest itself in behavior changes that ensure a sustainably managed water point
Contact intensity is required	The desired change in mindset requires several months of meetings guided by an adept social facilitator (Animator) twice a week
	The objective of these meetings is to establish technical, financial, and social capacity of the water committee
Sustainable management is a guided process based on four foundational elements	Haiti Outreach's engagement with CPEs (*Comités de point d'eau*, water point committees managing single water points) is not a fixed process of checkboxes. It is a guided process where each community is unique and has to work to overcome locally specific challenges
	The Animator emphasizes four elements—responsibility, integrity, transparency, and accountability—along with a sequence of trainings to ensure that each element is realized
Haiti Outreach has its tenets, but the community leads	This commitment to the process of capacity building by community residents and leaders ensures that CPE members create everything themselves and thereby increase ownership and sustainable behavior change