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FIRST PERSON

Clearing the Rubble and Starting Anew in Carrefour

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Photo: Sara Schomig

“Thanks to USAID, we can live. They believed in us, invested in us, supported us...but, we do not do the work for USAID. We do it for ourselves.”— D’jimmy

Desriveaux, wearing the white hat in Côte de Plage 24, Carrefour, Port-au-Prince

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 earthquake rocked Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. Buildings collapsed across the city, killing and injuring hundreds of thousands of people.

One hard-hit community was the Côte-Plage 24 neighborhood of Carrefour, located southwest of the city center. Here, a four-story primary and secondary school, le Collège Catherine Flon, crumbled to the street, taking the lives of an unknown number of students and blocking the sole entry into the area. In the wake of the destruction, the survivors resolved to help one another and start the recovery effort. Through USAID, the community received support to organize a team of workers to clear the debris from its streets.

D’jimmy Desriveaux, 34, is the leader or “chef” of Côte-Plage 24’s rubble removal team. He supervises 20 workers, four of whom are woman, as they clear debris and trash from the streets, outfitted with uniforms, protective equipment, and tools. The workers earn approximately five dollars a day for 20 days, resting for a mid-day meal and on Sundays.

This cash-for-work project, one of many that USAID is funding as part of early-recovery activities, has multiple, mutually reinforcing objectives: connecting the community to the outside once again, cleaning up the streets, offering the community an opportunity to participate in its renewal, injecting cash into the local economy, and enabling those affected by the earthquake to replace damaged items or to purchase necessities. As D’jimmy shares, “After the earthquake, the people here had nothing to eat. We desperately needed aid. Thanks to USAID, we can live. They believed in us, invested in us, supported us.”

D’jimmy’s team began work on January 28, first creating a path through the mountain of rubble obstructing movements in and out of the community in front of the school. Truckloads of debris have been cleared to date, and today, work has progressed several hundred meters down the lane, allowing vehicular traffic once again to enter the road. Speaking to D’jimmy, however, he makes very clear, “We do not do the work for USAID. We do it for ourselves.”