

## **Promoting peaceful and inclusive society through citizen committees: the case of Les Palmes region in Haiti.**

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In Haiti, the local governments of the Les Palmes region (Gressier, Léogâne, Petit-Goâve and Grand-Goâve) have become more inclusive, effective and accountable with the creation in 2014 of local citizen committees. These structures are original and young, yet already transformative in a context of fragile state and weak decentralization. They are also significant in the current context of political and social unrest in the country. This initiative is part of the Haiti-Canada Municipal Cooperation Program (MCP), a project implemented by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the City of Montreal and the Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ) with financial support from Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

The citizen committees in Les Palmes were established through a general assembly, where members of the local community voted for their representatives. As part of the process, a concerted effort was made to encourage diversity of gender and age, as well as of professional and sector affiliations. The first mandate of these groups was to support their respective local government to educate and mobilize citizens to collect local property taxes. Committee members helped make a strong case linking taxation to municipal services, in the form of small projects such as street addressing, improvements to public spaces, etc. And they made sure the local government delivered on them. Over time, the municipalities have started to present their annual budget and priorities to the community during public meetings. This is a radical change in favor of transparency and accountability of government.

Although the committees have had good results they also have some challenges. All their members are volunteers making the participation in meetings and activities more difficult. We can also mention that elected officials are still learning from the experiences and don't systematically think about consulting with the population. To overcome those difficulties, communication of the results regarding citizen's participation is crucial to highlight the importance of this process.

This experience shows that, even in a situation of political polarization and weak institutions, it is possible to put in place transparent, democratic and accountable structures. The willingness of local elected officials and civil society representatives to have those dialogue and exchange platforms strengthen the community and democracy in the country.