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HAITI

SNAPSHOT

Lighting the Night for a Safer Neighborhood

USAID assisted a local women's group to keep women and children safe.



Solar lamps are illuminating key crossroads in St. Marc and improving security for city residents.

USAID/OTI

February 2011 – In the neighborhoods of St. Marc, a coastal city due north of Port-au-Prince, many women and children fear the night. Damaged and unsecured homes allow easy access for criminals. And to obtain water at any of the community's limited number of water collection points, residents must travel predictable paths where attackers can prey on their victims under the cover of darkness.

In an attempt to make St. Marc's neighborhoods safer, Organisation des Femmes de Charette, a local women's group, partnered with USAID to install solar street lamps at several key locations along the Bas Charette road. The lamps were sited in strategic spots where women and children have been accosted in the past—near water collection points, taxi-moto stops, and key intersections.

The solar lamps do not rely on the electric power grid: they charge during the day, shine brightly throughout the night, and have a life-expectancy of more than 10 years.

The lights are expected to make the neighborhoods safer not only for women but also for children returning home late from school activities.

Response from the community has been universally positive. The lighting is allowing cooperatives and churches to gather at night and fostering commerce, as nearby businesses can remain open in the evenings.

Vierge Mauricette, an elderly woman who heads a large family, glowed with pride as she explained the impact of a newly installed solar lamp close to her house. "I started a food business in our yard. This will benefit my entire family and the profits from the business allow [me to pay] for the children's school fees," she said, speaking of her grandchildren.

Further down the street, people could be seen leaving an evening church service and walking home in the safety of a lighted path.

Tens of thousands migrated from Port-au-Prince to St. Marc after the 2010 earthquake. The solar lighting initiative is one of several USAID projects aiming to make St. Marc more attractive to small businesses and foster safe and comfortable neighborhoods where displaced Haitians will want to settle permanently.

Telling Our Story
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