

Child Clubs in Haiti

We begin our walk down the long winding slopes of Tom Gato in Haiti, an area that has large steep hills with many areas being accessible only through foot paths. On the way down the steep ridges, there is a clear picture of the devastating effects of the January 2010 earthquake. Landslides in the area caused devastation with many schools, homesteads, and buildings being destroyed. It is approximately a 30 minute walk down the ridges before we arrive at Darlouse Thomas' house, a 23 year old mother of two children. Darlouse Thomas is a house wife, before the earthquake she was a small scale farmer and grew bananas; following the earthquake she is yet to restart her livelihoods. Darlouse family is one of the families that agreed to host the children's clubs Tearfund started after the earthquake. During an interview with Darlouse, she shared her views on the importance of the children's clubs for her community "After the earthquake, many children were traumatised, many of them were afraid because a lot was destroyed, my family thought of how best we could help our community. We do not have much, but we thought it would be good to assist by donating the space for children to come learn and play twice a week".



Photo: One of Tearfund's Child Clubs in Leogane

Tearfund currently runs 104 children's clubs in the Leogane area that have an average attendance of 5060 children twice weekly. The clubs offer psychosocial support through various recreational activities, as well as useful information on disaster risk reduction, hurricanes and earthquakes, and hygiene promotion. The children are taught songs about various illnesses and how to avoid them, which they then go home and share with their families: a fun way to spread important messages. In setting up the clubs, Tearfund used a community approach to ensure the clubs were owned by the communities. Each club is run by two community volunteers with guidance being provided by one community mobiliser. For each club Tearfund provided recreational kits as well as training to the community mobilisers and volunteers. Also, to ensure a clean suitable environment for the children, a latrine was also built for every household hosting a club.

Roselyne Ulysee a 29 year old mother of two brings her 2 year old and 5 year old to the children's clubs twice a week and shares her views ' My children always come to the child clubs. My five year old daughter especially likes skipping she also always comes home and sings the hygiene songs they learn. I am happy the clubs are there'.

Children's voices on the Child Clubs in Haiti



Photo: A young girl plays with a puppet with her younger sister

It is a cool afternoon in Leogane, a town approximately a one hour drive from Port-au-Prince the capital city of Haiti. The Leogane area was near the epicentre of the earthquake and many buildings and infrastructure were destroyed. We drive up to an open space where we find a football match in play. The children seem excited and hardly notice as the car pulls over. We watch the match for a while, before it ends. I approach a young boy, one of the players who seemed fully engaged in the match. He introduces himself to me as Robinson. Robinson is a 14 year old boy and lives in a house nearby and attends one of the 104 children's clubs initiated by Tearfund that take place twice weekly. I ask him what he likes most about the children's clubs and he says "I love the clubs, I never miss coming for any session. Most of all I love playing football; it's the best game ever! But on the more educative side, I think I like the information on hygiene. It has helped me and my family. Before, we did not know that keeping our compound clean can help reduce mosquitoes which cause malaria'. In another club about two kilometres away, I speak to Marisena Innocent an 8 year old girl and she had this to say about the clubs 'I like the clubs because I get to meet new friends and play with other children, the things in the toy box are also really nice to play with'.

For many children in Leogane, the children's clubs have given them a chance to heal, from the psychological trauma suffered following the earthquake that left thousands dead. However, the clubs also provides them with vital information on disaster risk reduction focusing on earthquakes and hurricanes as well as important hygiene promotion information that can help prevent illness.