



Background

The Faith Community Initiative (FCI) is a PEPFAR/USAID-funded project that works in several African and Caribbean countries to spread messages of hope about HIV through faith communities. Specifically, it intended to expand HIV care and services through the engagement of faith leaders committed to educating in order to reduce HIV related stigma & discrimination and facilitating access to HIV prevention and treatment services. In Haiti, the Institut pour la Santé, la Population et le Développement (ISPD) has implemented FCI in three municipalities in the country: Delmas, Cap-Haitien and Jérémie between 2020 and 2021 (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Regional distribution of FCI activities

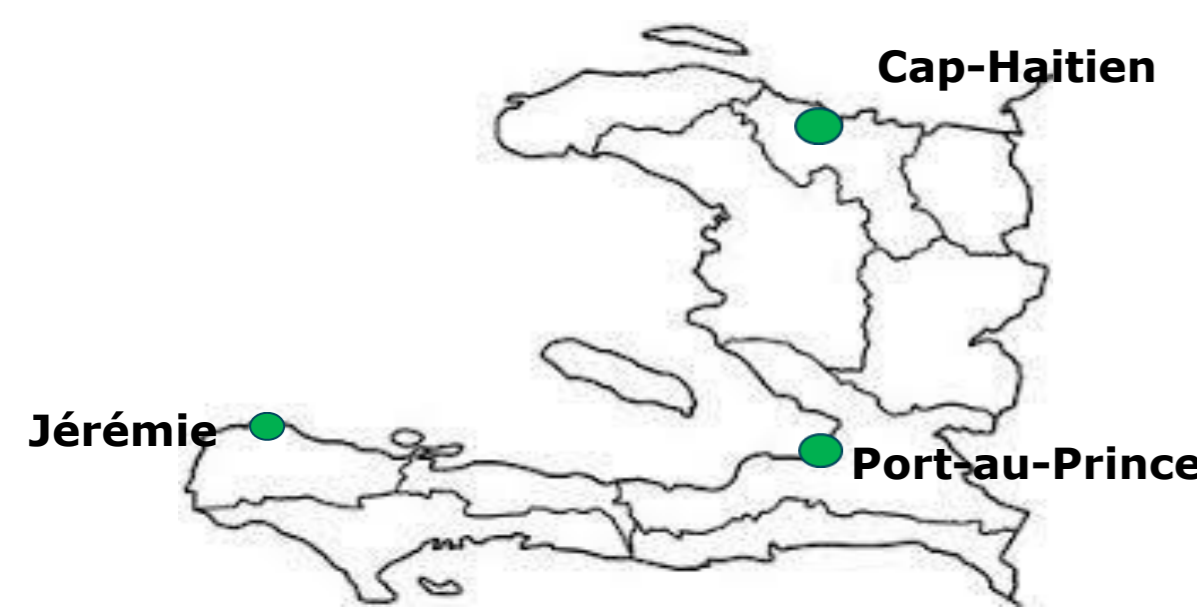
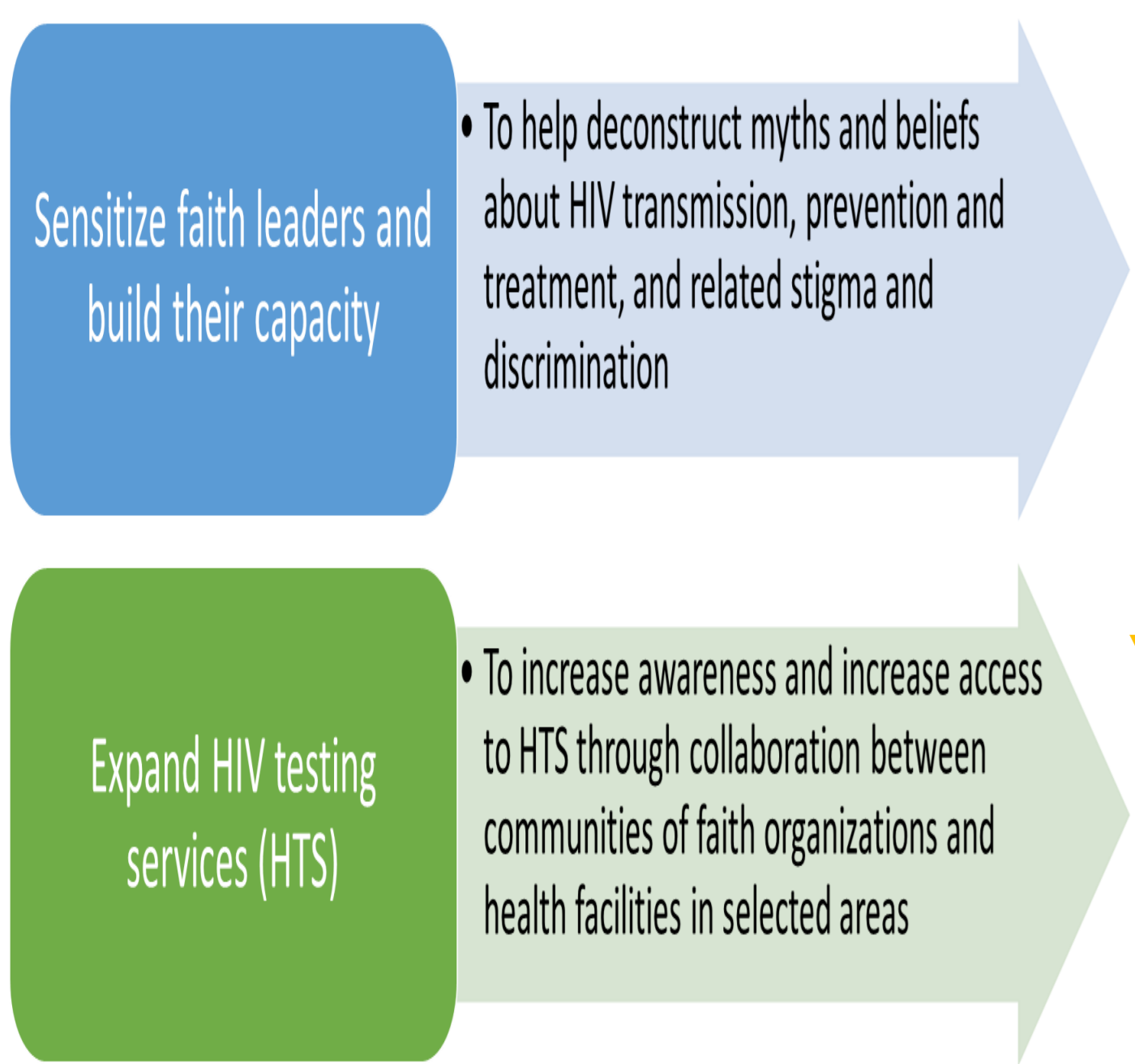


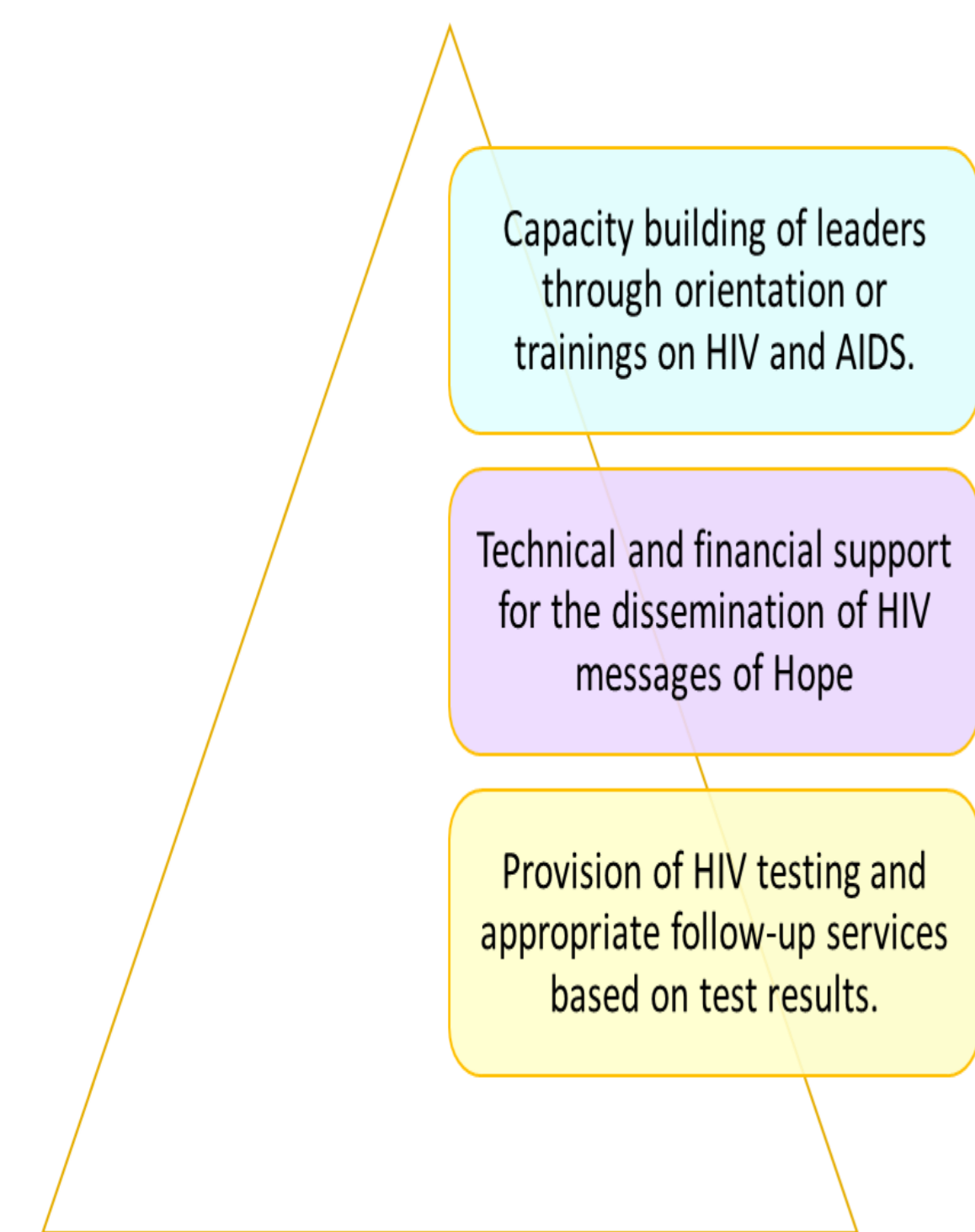
Figure 2: Core objectives of FCI



Areas of FCI intervention

Regarding these objectives, the interventions prioritized three main areas (Fig. 3), although most of them were concentrated in HTS while raising more awareness through the dissemination of HIV messages of hope and prevention.

Figure 3: Main FCI areas of interventions



Description

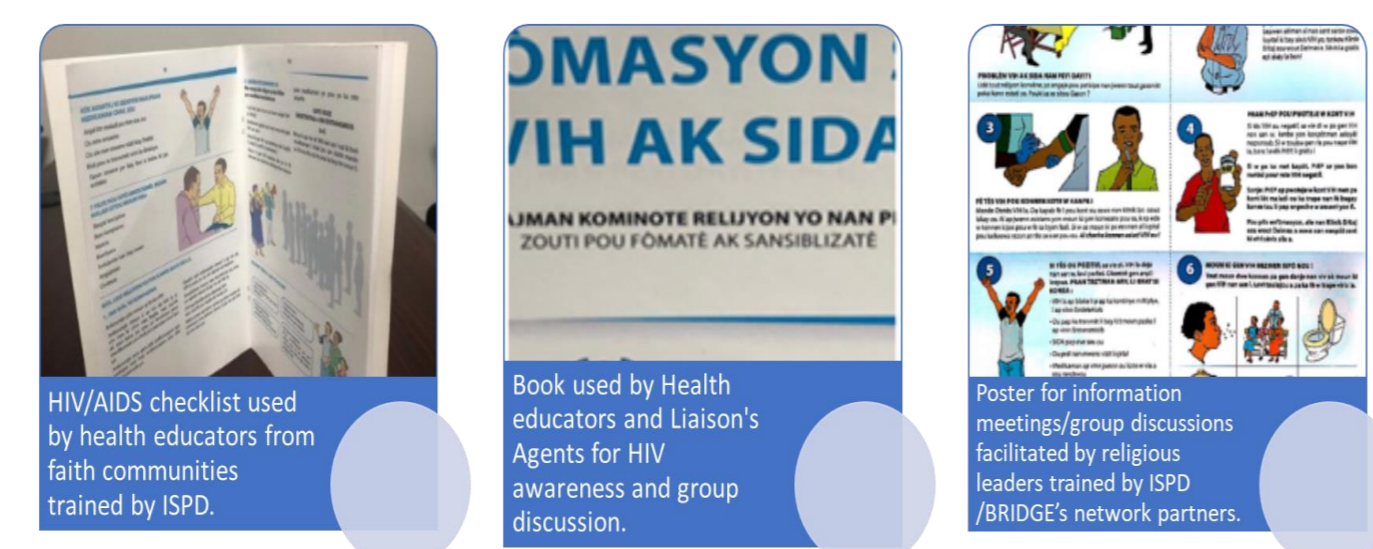
Following the presentation of the project to key Civil Society representatives (Fig. 4), ISPD initiated a series of meetings with the hierarchical leaders of the largest religious congregations, namely, Catholic, Protestant and Vodoo. The objective was to share essential information about the initiative in order to ensure consistency, describe the proposed activities and create the Steering Committee which will act as an advisory body to their respective denomination. Due to the fact that HIV and AIDS is a taboo topic, notably in religious communities, they played an important role in facilitating the integration of FCI among the leaders of their respective faiths.

Description/Key Activities

Educational Materials

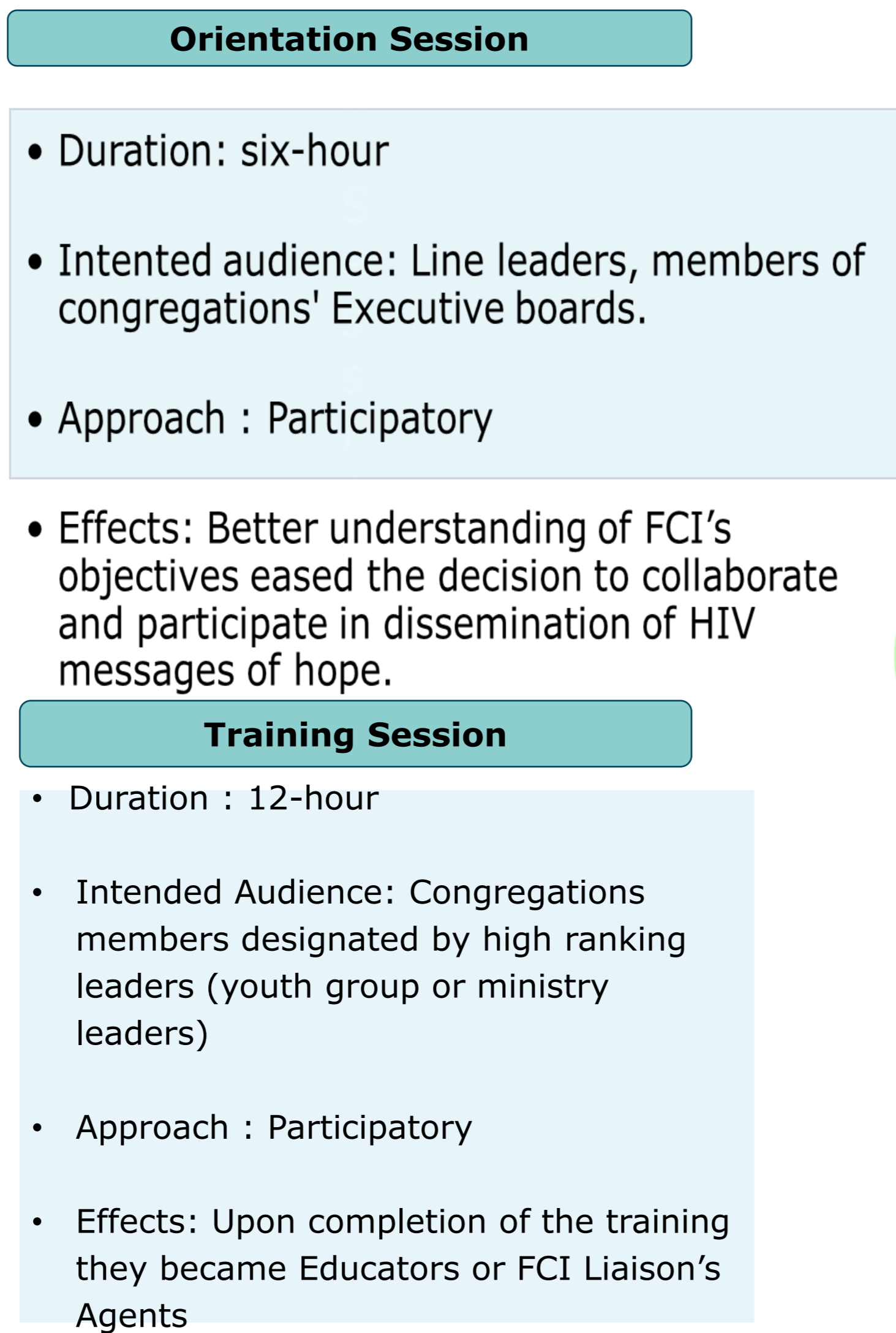
ISPD developed technical tools and educational materials (Fig. 4) for the training of facilitators and community workers as well as printed materials to be distributed in the community.

Figure 4: Training and Educational Materials designed by ISPD



HIV Prevention Training and orientation sessions for faith leaders.

ISPD conducted training and orientation sessions based on the Educational HIV Tool curriculum which was adapted to the Haitian context. Here are the specificities of each



Training sessions on Therapeutic Adherence and Faith Healing held by Haitian Episcopal Conference

Two-day training sessions were held on therapeutic adherence and faith healing for 100 Catholic young leaders, including youth group and choir leaders in selected areas (Fig. 5). At the end of each session, two participants per area were selected as "leader-educators" to sensitize members from their respective communities. A total of 703 Catholic followers from parishes pre-selected by the Episcopal Conference of Haiti were reached.

Figure 5: Young Scouts conducting information sessions on HIV/AIDS in Jérémie



Peer outreach among vodoo adepts

Collaboration with vodoo sector started with a conference on the issue of stigma and discrimination against People Living with HIV held jointly by ISPD and the Executive Committee of the National Confederation of Haitian Vodooists (KNVA in maternal tongue) (Fig.6) Subsequently, ISPD facilitated training sessions for "KNVA's Heads of Zone" who would in turn conduct sensitization campaign through 300 Vodoo temples [honfò(s)] in the commune of Delmas. They reached more than 1500 members of the honfòs' Management boards.

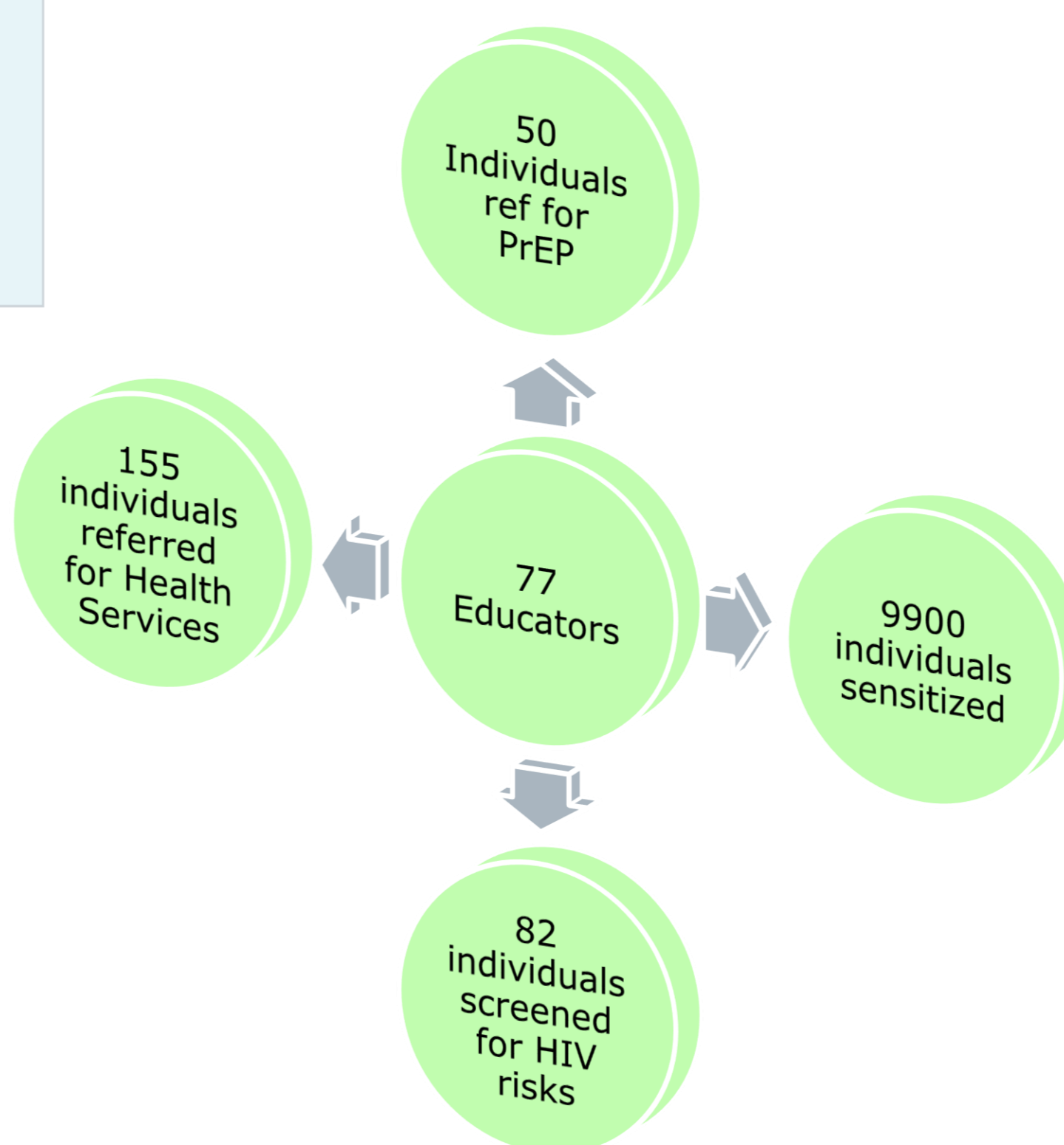
Figure 6: Sensitization among vodoo temple at Delmas in partnership with KNVA



Community Outreach and Dissemination of Messages of Hope on HIV by Seventh-day Adventists

Pastors from at least 40 churches as well as members of the national office were oriented on HIV. In addition, 77 young leaders were trained by ISPD as Educators (Fig. 7). They conducted community awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS in Delmas and Cap-Haitien, disseminating messages of hope and promoting HIV self-testing services.

Figure 7: Results of Activities' conducted in the communities by the Educators



Civil Society Organizations Activities

Collaboration with CSOs (Fig. 8) consisted in a proximity accompaniment to provide close support to faith-based organizations in addition to their participation in the Steering Committee. Two CSOs, ODELPA (Organisation de Developpement et de Lutte contre la Pauvrete) and ACESH (Action Citoyenne pour l'Egalite Sociale en Haiti), collaborated with the Catholic and the Vodouists respectively.

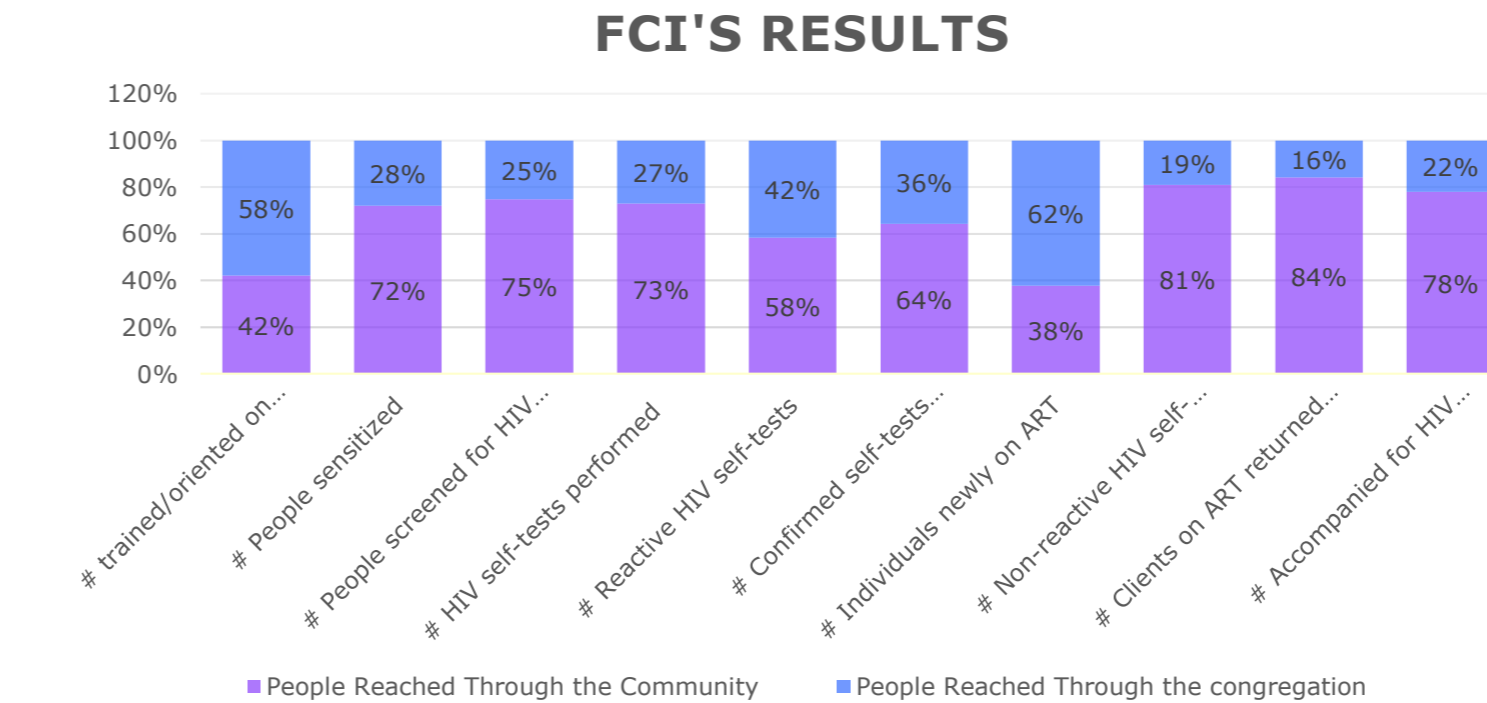
Figure 8: Launch of the steering committee in the presence of the MOH and CSO's members



Results

Following the strategy to push awareness messages to the most isolated communities through sensitized faith leaders involved in the fight against HIV, the majority of individuals were reached through community-based activities (Fig. 9).

Figure 9: FCI data



30607 individuals were reached during sensitization campaigns, 2234 underwent HIV risk Assessment, 817 received testing services, 70 were newly enrolled on HIV, 63 returned to care and 291 were enrolled on PrEP. A total of 9977 leaders participated in training and orientation sessions on HIV and AIDS.

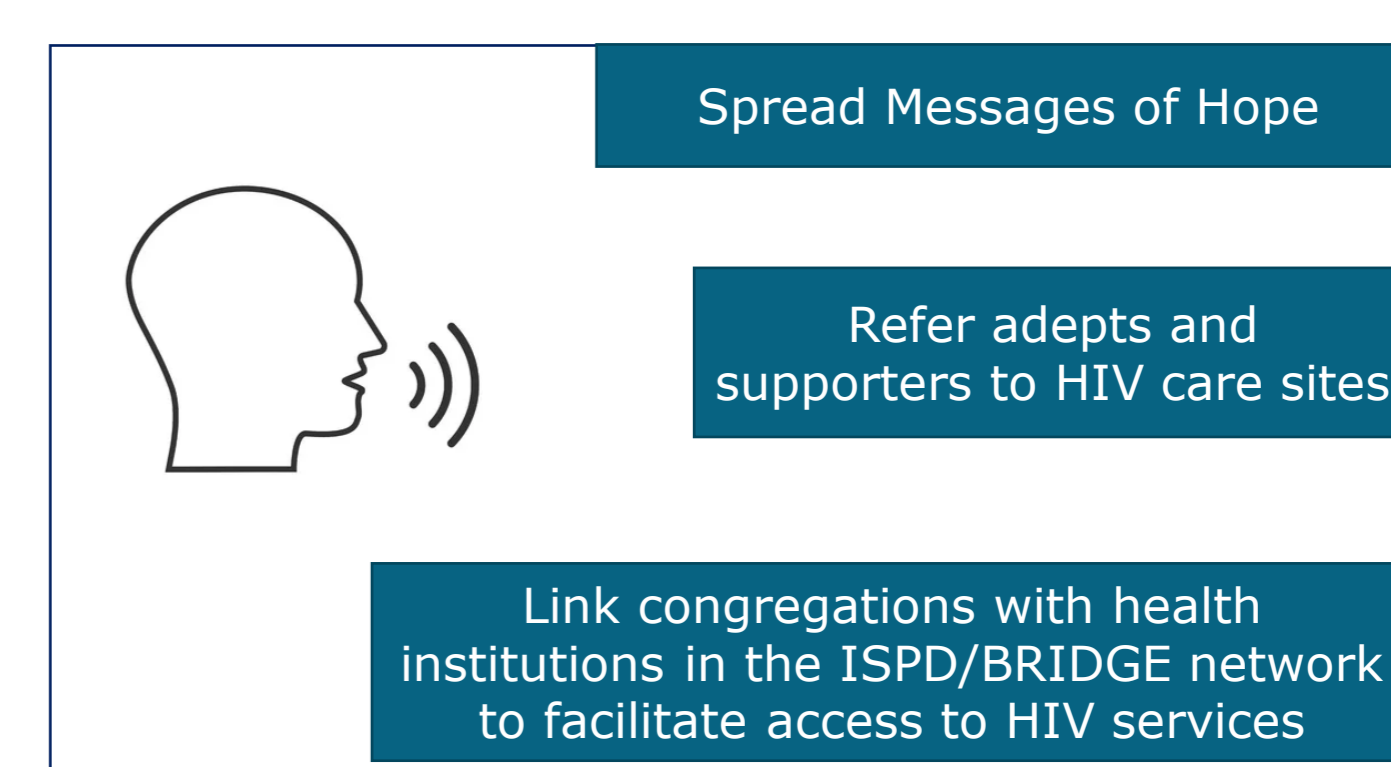
Lessons learned

With appropriate trainings addressing the taboos, Community of Faith Organizations can potentially play a key role in the response against the HIV epidemic in Haiti. The following data summarize their contributions to FCI performance.

Best Practices

1.- Strategic Collaboration
 To address the difficulties of church members in accessing HIV services, ISPD opted to have a networks of Agents (liaison officers) linking health facilities to healing sanctuaries where a large part of the population seeks alternative care. They received a basic training on HIV/AIDS, Interpersonal Communication and educational materials printed by ISPD (Poster, photo album, flyers) in order to played a major role in HIV testing and care enrolment outcomes.

Main Tasks of the FCI Liaison's Agent



2.- Provision of HIV services and care through faith-based congregations

Following the dissemination of messages of hope on HIV and the positive reception of congregations' members, faith leaders in Delmas and Cap-Haitien proposed that ISPD brings HIV counseling and testing services (HTS) to their shrines and churches in order to facilitate access to such services for followers. A team comprised of community nurse and Community Health Workers goes to the different places to provide HTS. Eligible people received assistance for self-testing. Those with reactive test were sent for Confirmation test and ART enrollment. High-Risk individuals with non-reactive tests were referred to Health facilities for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) services. Other clients were also referred for non-HIV services based on needs identified during consultations.

Figure 10: Health care services including HIV selftest at vodoo shrine



Success Story

On AIDS Day 2020, ISPD facilitated the participation of the President of Seventh-day Adventist Missionary Union (UMASH) in a capsule on "the commitment of leaders in the fight against HIV & AIDS" produced by the National Program to Control HIV&AIDS. He called on his colleagues to join him in an engagement towards the achievement of the 2030 objectives. The fact that a Christian leader of major congregations in Haiti has taken an open stand in the fight against HIV&AIDS is an unprecedented and amazing accomplishment.



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