

# Principles of engagement

## Principles of engagement

(from [Beyond Borders](#))

This document explains the principles Limyè Lavi should follow when supporting a project

As the Haitian proverb says, "A rock in the water does not understand the suffering of a rock in the sun". The people who suffer a problem understand it the best. They also have the greatest interest in finding a solution.

Organizations which have funds, technical and material resources, and a mission of helping people in need, are rocks in the water. They are trying to solve other people's problems, not their own. They can end up doing harm while they are trying to do good.

For example;

- They can create an attitude of dependency on outside help
- The way they intervene can lead the beneficiaries to think that they can't do effective work without foreign aid
- They sometimes reinforce people who are exploiting others in the community
- The resources that are shared sometimes fail to reach the intended beneficiaries
- Outside involvement can upset the social equilibrium of the community. Even if the existing situation is unfair, turning it upside down can make things worse for everyone

Because of these sorts of problems, there are sometimes negative reactions to aid and development organizations. Suspicions can grow to the point that the intended beneficiaries believe the aid organization is part of a plot to keep the community under domination.

Nevertheless, we believe that it is possible for an outside organization to play a positive role in a community.

- We can encourage and support local people who are working to improve their own community
- We can provide appropriate technological support and financing that leverages local contributions
- We can help people, who are in need and working for change, to make contact with others who are involved in the same struggle
- The presence of an outside organization can help local people take an activity more seriously, thus increasing local participation
- People who are working to improve their society are sometimes singled out for persecution. Being associated with an outside organization can provide some security

In light of all this, we have to ask ourselves the question: How can we make a positive impact while avoiding the risks of intervention? In an attempt to answer this question, we have developed the following principles which should guide us when supporting any project.

1. Since those who don't suffer the consequences of a problem don't understand it in the same way as those who do, we should learn to listen. Also, we should not isolate ourselves so that we never taste any part of the suffering of the poor.
2. We should learn all we can about the roots of poverty and our relationship to them. Poverty is not an accident; It is related to wealth. We should act individually and collectively to avoid benefiting from the exploitation of others.
3. The people in need are the ones who have the greatest interest in their problems being resolved. If work is being done which intends to benefit them, they should play an active role in every part of it, from identifying needs, brainstorming solutions, developing a plan, identifying resources, executing the plans, and evaluating the results.
4. If the intended beneficiaries of a project are to participate in this way, they must be organized. An outside organization can help provide the training they need in order to organize. This is why Limyè Lavi puts so much emphasis on education that leads to liberation, because it enables people to hold in their own hands the tools for building a better life.
5. We should not initiate projects on our own. We should support the work that local organizations are doing by responding to their invitation to participate.
6. We should research local organizations before we decide to support them. We should work with groups that are truly representative of and accountable to their community. An individual who claims to represent a community bears close inspection; they may be acting out of pure self interest.
7. We should provide our support on the basis of a clear written agreement, which includes details on why the groups are working together, what role each organization should play, when and how the project will be evaluated, how long the support will last, and what will happen afterward. We should never agree to fund any project for perpetuity. Copies of the agreement should be made available to every interested party in their own language, and anyone concerned should be able to question the agreement.
8. A community should not become dependant upon outside aid. We should support projects that lead toward autonomy.
9. We should support projects which help people recognize the value of their own resources; their culture, knowledge, and abilities.
10. We should work with those who are in the greatest need.
11. We should continually reflect on our experiences, learn from our mistakes, and refine these principles of engagement.