

Folk Healers of Petit-Goave:  
A Proposal for Research and Program Action  
in Rural Haiti

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In accordance with a request from Dr. Ary Bordes and Dr. Adeline Verly, the author expanded the scope of his work to include not only assistance in the design of a research project, but also inputs into the design of a pilot program involving traditional healers in health care delivery services and observations on the functioning of the midwife program in the area of the Projet Intégré. The report contains sections dealing with these matters, as well as a brief overview of the traditional healing system as observed in Meilleur.

Any errors in fact or interpretation contained in this report are the sole responsibility of the author. The opinions expressed here are likewise those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of International Development Research Center, the Projet Intégré de Santé et de Population, of the Division d'Hygiène Familiale, or of any other institution or individual with which the author had contact in the course of his work.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Objectives

The author was contracted to assist in the design of a small-scale study of traditional medicine to be undertaken under the direction of the sociologist working with the Projet Intégré de Santé et de Population in the Petit Goave area of Haiti. Among the tasks to be approached were a clarification of the objectives of the study and a preliminary statement concerning the methods that would be most effective in reaching these objectives, the resources needed and/or available for the study, and the timing and costs of the study.

At the request of Dr. Ary Bordes and Dr. Adeline Verly of the Division D'Hygiène Familiale, the objectives were expanded to include:

1. the design of a pilot project for identifying and training traditional healers with a view to incorporating them into the modern delivery system;
2. the observation of the midwife program, in which a number of empiric midwives had been trained and supplied with sterile delivery materials.

It was requested that the study to be carried out bear a direct, immediate relationship to the small pilot project involving traditional healers that will possibly be implemented later this year. It was therefore in the light of this projected pilot program that the research proposal was designed.

### 1.2 Activities

On the first day of this consultancy, the author met with Dr. Ary Bordes, Dr. Adeline Verly, Dr. Warren Berggren, Dr. Gretchen Berggren and M. Calixte Clerismé in the Division D'Hygiène Familiale to discuss the proposed activities. That same afternoon the latter three individuals and the

author went to Petit Goave. The following day the author familiarized himself with the organization and functioning of the Projet Intégré and spoke briefly with M. Pierre Paisible and Mlle. Mireuille Henry.

On the following day Dr. W. Berggren, Dr. Verly, M. Clerismé and the author travelled to Meilleur, a mountain community which is the center of one of three areas served by the Projet Intégré. Brief visits were made to the Health Center in Meilleur, the Nutrition Center in Septième Gerard, and the Nutrition Demonstration Foyer in Beaudin. M. Clerismé and the author remained in Meilleur for six days, including travel days.

During their stay in the community, they visited several community development projects involving terracing, spoke with several members of the Health Center, including the resident physician, Dr. Mérétil, travelled about and talked with several community leaders, including Valenbrun Midy, Clement Fayette, Dessoit Belfleur and Neveu Desané, and interviewed about a dozen traditional healers, including midwives (fam saj), leaf doctors (mèdsin fèy), injectionists (chalatan), and shamans (gangan).

On returning from the field, the sociologist and the author once again met with Dr. Bordes, Dr. Verly, Dr. W. Berggren, as well as with Dr. Dieudonné and Dr. Montero, to discuss preliminary findings, the proposed research, and the proposed pilot program involving traditional healers.

In addition to these activities, the author had several extended conversations with Drs. Warren and Gretchen Berggren, and an interview with Dr. Evariste Midy of the Planning Bureau of the DSPP, who offered several suggestions for the design of the pilot program.