

Finding support in family: the story of **Madeline**



Madeline, Mackenson, Wilson, and Junior.

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Madeline is 23 years old and is the mother of three boys. The first two boys, Mackenson and Wilson, are six and four years old, and her youngest, Junior, is less than a month old. She has been living with her current husband, Robenson, for over five years in Vyè Kay Village in La Chappelle.

Madeline had Mackenson from a previous relationship. Mackenson's biological father left Madeline to work and live in Brazil. She used to ask him for help in supporting their child, but only once did he send payment for Mackenson's school fees. Since living with Robenson, however, she has stopped asking and communicating

with her ex-partner. Robenson takes good care of all the children.

Robenson's mother, Naphtalie, and Madeline's older sister, Rachelle, live nearby, and they come and visit her frequently. Rachelle is also a member of the Chemen Lavi Miyò (CLM) programme, as well as the two nearest neighbours who are the families of Madeline's brothers-in-law. The wives of Madeline's brothers-in-law are also members of the CLM programme. The proximity, frequency, and levels of interactions with her extended family members allow Madeline to engage in economic activities more freely.



Madeline watching her goats.

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Participation in the CLM programme

Madeline joined the CLM programme in the summer of 2017. She decided to rear small livestock (goats and a pig) as her main CLM economic activities. She is one of the fastest progressing beneficiaries in the area.¹ From her initial endowment of two goats, Madeline has managed to increase to seven goats. Madeline has benefited immensely from the CLM programme. Madeline sells her goats and chickens to pay part of the children's school fees. To make up the rest of the balance, she borrows money from the community savings group that the CLM programme initiated.

Previously, her partners have done little to support her materially and financially, but thanks to the CLM programme, she has a permanent house where her children can sleep safely. Madeline feels that her life is stable and secure now. Her relationship with her husband has also improved throughout the CLM programme. Before joining the CLM programme, Madeline and Robenson struggled when Robenson could not find work and contribute to the family's

needs. After much encouragement from the CLM case manager, Madeline and Robenson talked together and made a definite decision to work hard together, improve their livelihood, and move out of poverty.

Additionally, coaching from the case manager has helped to change Robenson's attitude towards life. He used to be passive and uninterested in the CLM programme. The case manager met with Robenson and encouraged him to take initiatives and work purposefully. This talk fuelled Robenson's determination, and he has been searching for work since then. Today, Robenson works actively in farms as a day labourer in the area. During the peak season, he is out working every day except Sunday. Although job opportunities are not reliable and are intermittent, Robenson is not discouraged from the challenges that are beyond his control, and carries on working one day at a time.

The most practical and immediate benefit for Madeline is the latrine. Going out into the field to use the toilet is hazardous and posed both physical and psychological stresses for her. Moreover, having to ask visitors to use the open area for toileting made her feel shameful.

¹ The CLM programme evaluates the rate of progress as slow versus fast. Their six-month evaluation survey sets the cutoff point at 70 out of 100 points, where below 70 would be slow, and 70 and above, fast. For example, a beneficiary receives a high score when their animals reproduce successfully; they purchase an animal on their own; they improve the household diet by increasing protein consumption; they have clean clothes and shoes to go out in (to church, for instance); and they keep the house and children clean; among other criteria.

Positive or negative effects on her children

Since learning about early childhood development from the CLM training programme, Madeline and Robenson make an effort to create a cleaner and safer environment for the children to live and play in. For instance, on Sundays, the only day that Robenson is not working, Robenson helps Mackenson and Wilson with their schoolwork, and gives them baths and dresses them in clean clothes. Then, being fresh and well dressed, they go out on a stroll together in the neighbourhood. Robenson also takes his share of holding and carrying Junior in his arms while Madeline is doing other work. Madeline finds the CLM training extremely useful because 'it has shown [her] how to save money, how to live with [her] husband and children'. On a practical and material level, Madeline is grateful for the savings and livestock that help her keep her sons in school.

There are advantages and disadvantages to living close to relatives. Madeline's mother-in-law, Nephtalie, is often at home, so that she can look after her children when Madeline is away. However, there is a limit to how much Nephtalie can do physically and financially in order to take care of Mackenson, Wilson, and Junior. Besides the three boys, Nephtalie has six other grandchildren. Since her husband passed away, Nephtalie does not farm any more, and her sole income activity is ropemaking using palm fronds. Occasionally, Nephtalie receives money and food from her sons to support herself and to feed the grandchildren.

Since Madeline and Madeline's sisters-in-law became CLM members, Nephtalie has less time for herself and spends more time taking care of the grandchildren. Despite the hard work, however, Nephtalie finds joy and happiness seeing her grandchildren play, laugh, and dance for her.

Children learn from an early age how to take care of themselves and help with family chores. Both boys and girls, regardless of gender, learn to do tasks such as cooking, collecting firewood, fetching water, and looking after goats. Another important role that the older siblings play is that of childcare and supervision. For instance, Nephtalie taught her eldest granddaughter, Julia, from age six to help her manage household work. Julia is now 11 years old, and she is capable of and responsible for looking after her younger siblings and cousins by herself (including Madeline's boys).

One of the advantages of living close together is that the children can play with other children. There is no lack of playful social interactions. However, what may be lacking is appropriate adult supervision and guidance. For instance, one of Madeline's concerns is that her children learn foul words and disrespectful behaviour from other children. Madeline wants to teach her children good manners and values, but when she is not around and has to leave her children at her mother-in-law's, there are other children there (relatives and non-relatives), and she has no control over the negative influences that they can exert. When Madeline grounds her children at home and forbids them to go to their grandmother's, Nephtalie can misunderstand her intention. Madeline dispels this tension by allowing her children to visit their grandmother and eat there, but return home to play.

Challenges

School fees and related expenses for Mackenson and Wilson are beyond Madeline's budget capacity. She needs to pay in instalments to be able to afford their education. Such an option is uncommon, and Madeline had to convince the school principal to allow this alternative payment arrangement. She also had to borrow money to make up the balance of payment. The recurring school expenses can deplete the livestock numbers faster than its natural growth rate, which can result in slowing down (or worse, reversing) the progress made in asset accumulation.

Despite following the CLM healthy diet training, Madeline is not able to feed her family consistently and adequately because of a lack of cash and time. She leaves home very early in the morning to go to work in the field or to the markets and does not have time to prepare breakfast for her children. On such occasions, she asks Robenson to accompany them to school and buy food on the way whenever possible.

Madeline relies on Nephtalie and Julia to look after her children. The temporary relief from childcare duties is tremendously helpful to Madeline, but this may be at the expense of the wellbeing and time of her mother-in-law and niece. However, it could be argued that Madeline's economic activity is more beneficial and valuable for the family than the inputs drawn from those family members who may not be able to engage in economic activities (due to old age and schooling).



Tyaka (black beans and maize).

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Hopes and aspirations for the future

Madeline hopes that Mackenson, Wilson, and Junior will grow up to be doctors and professors. She would like her children to pursue high-earning jobs. She wants her children to have full-time professions and to hold highly regarded positions in society.

The CLM teachings and practices will continue to guide her life and livelihood. Madeline's progress since joining the CLM programme has been stellar. Previously, Madeline did not believe in herself, and thought that she had no talent, but through participating in the CLM

programme, she has discovered and learned how to use her many skills. Thanks to the confidence-building exercises and coaching, she does not wait for others to come and help her any more. Instead, Madeline now plans and resolves household needs with the help of her husband and the case manager. The most apparent change in her attitude to life is that when she first joined the CLM programme, she was a shy person, but now, she is beaming with a confident smile, sings joyfully, and has a positive outlook on life. In the words of her case manager who has seen her transformation over the last 18 months, 'she is blossoming'.



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