PLAN INTERNATIONAL HAITI

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

MULTI SECTORAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT (MSNA)

December 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In December 2023, Plan International Haiti, through its dedicated Emergency Response Team, conducted a Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) in the communes of Gonaives, Gros Morne and Saint-Michel-de-l'Attalaye in Artibonite department to support the scale-up of its Emergency Response in the department. The assessment aims at providing a comprehensive understanding of the needs and challenges faced by the local population with a specific focus on food security, protection and education.

The results highlight the multi-sectoral linkages with contextual needs as well as additional vulnerabilities brought on by the displacement crisis and the deterioration of the security situation. Indeed, the assessment reveals that the main protection risks faced by girls and boys, and adolescents, are family separation following forced displacement or for economic reasons, sexual violence and early marriage against adolescent girls, as well as association with armed gangs. Also, the food crisis experienced by members of communities contributes to the intensification of risk factors for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) among girls and teenagers. Violence, food shortages and difficulties in accessing education and basic social services characterize families' experiences. Difficult socio-economic conditions remain a main challenge preventing parents and caregivers from satisfying children's basic needs including food and education needs.

Recognizing the complexity of challenges faced by the communities in the targeted areas, Plan International Haiti recommends the implementation of a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the financial burdens associated with the economic challenges faced by households to support food security and education but also the access protection services. There is a need to improve the overall well-being and prospects of the community's children through the set-up of safe spaces for children, awareness-raising activities on protection and SGBV risks and by encouraging advocacy towards the strengthening of alternative learning opportunities for the targeted children.

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1. CONTEXT

Since 2021, humanitarian conditions in Haiti have steadily deteriorated as a result of the country's political stalemate and 3-year-long economic recession. Haiti is currently experiencing an unprecedented level of violence, with armed gangs controlling more and more territory. 4,850 cases of homicide have been recorded for the year 2023 according to UNDSS[1]. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), this violence has led to the displacement of 313,901 people, 55% of them being children. The Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) published in December 2023 reveals that 9% of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) - or 27,430 people – and 17% of returnees – 6,724 people - are in Artibonite[2]. The priority areas where IDPs have relocated in Artibonite are Saint-Marc (24%), Gonaives (13%) and Gros-Morne (11%).

The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2024 ranks Artibonite as the second department, after the West, with the greatest needs, with more than 1 million persons in need of humanitarian assistance[3]. The latest analysis of the IPC, to which Plan International Haiti contributed, reveals that for the period from August 2023 to February 2024, 46% of the population of Artibonite is in a situation of crisis food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 - 31%) and emergency (IPC Phase 4 - 15%), above the national average of 44%[4]. The rate of severe acute malnutrition has risen from 0.8% in 2020 to 1.7% in 2023[5]. Indeed, lower Artibonite is known as Haiti's most important rice-growing area, but gang violence spreading has forced producers to flee the area leaving over 70% of farmland abandoned, according to UNICEF[6].

Family separation due to migration has resulted in many child and female-headed households, increasing the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse for women and children. The response to protection needs is limited by the absence of services, the lack of qualified personnel or the fear of reprisals or stigmatization.

Further, youth resort to joining gangs given the levels of poverty and lack of economic opportunities, and an estimated 30-50% of gang members are children often coerced into joining gangs, with displaced and Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) at higher risk of recruitment by gangs[7]. Gang violence has led to the closure of 402 schools in Artibonite in 2023[8].

Finally, Artibonite is the department that has seen the greatest exacerbation of access constraints in the last quarter of 2023, due to the expansion of armed gangs and their influence on areas of humanitarian interest such as Bas Artibonite. The main factors influencing the severity of access are: the need for continuous adjustment for humanitarian actors, including advocacy, due to the and recurrent block roads affecting the delivery of goods and the transport of humanitarian personnel.

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[1] *Presentation from Humanitarian Forum, January 19th, 2024, UNDSS*

[2] *Haiti Displacement Tracking Matrix, December 2023, IOM*

[3] *Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan, January 2024, OCHA*

[4] *Haiti IPC Analysis of Acute Food Insecurity August 2023 – February 2024, September 2023, IPC*

[5] *Combating Child Malnutrition Amidst Crisis in Artibonite, October 2023, UNICEF,*
https://www.unicef.org/haiti/recits/combating-child-malnutrition-amidst-crisis-artibonite-haiti

[6] *Rapid Needs Assessment Artibonite, May 2023, UNICEF*

[7] *Findings of the appointed expert on the situation of human rights in Haiti, September 2023, UNHRC*

[8] *Haiti Humanitarian Response Plan, January 2024, OCHA*

2. OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of this assessment was to conduct a targeted multi-sectoral needs assessment in areas targeted by Plan International in Artibonite department. The aim was to identify priority needs and key multi-sectoral linkages with contextual needs as well as additional vulnerabilities brought on by the displacement crisis and the deterioration of the security situation.

Specific assessment objectives are as follows:

- Under <u>Food Security</u> sector:
    - To evaluate food security status at the individual level, with a specific focus on marginalized groups including people with disabilities.
    - To evaluate the coping resources used at individual level.
    - To evaluate the utilization of food at individual level.
    - To identify the livelihoods resources available at community level.
    - To identify food sources and supply chains and assess their resilience in the context of armed conflicts.
    - To determine the potential barriers in accessing food at individual and community level.
    - To determine the main consequences of the food security situation on the general well-being of the individuals, including marginalized groups.

- Under <u>Protection</u> sector:
    - To identify the child protection and GBV protection needs and vulnerabilities of the local population, including women, children, adolescent including survivors of SGBV and marginalized groups such as person with disabilities (mental, physical).
    - To understand how armed conflicts affected the physical and psychosocial well-being of the community.
    - To evaluate the availability and accessibility of protection services and mechanisms.
    - To analyze the protection risks and threats faced by the population, including gender-based violence and child protection concerns.
    - To identify the coping mechanisms used at community level to protect children and adolescents.

- Under <u>Education</u> sector:
    - To determine the educational needs and barriers to access education services for children and youth in the conflict-affected area.
    - To examine how conflicts affected educational outcomes and the potential for continued learning.
    - To assess the condition of educational facilities, materials, and infrastructure.
    - To identify the availability of qualified teachers and support staff.
    - To assess the status and gaps in educational provision (formal, non-formal and alternative).
    - To explore the role of family and social networks in education support.

This assessment will inform strategic objectives and program design for potential grants-funded programs.

3. LOCATIONS

The needs assessment was conducted in the department of Artibonite, in the 3 communes of Gonaives, Gros Morne and Saint-Michel-de-l'Attalaye as per the map below. Each commune has 3 communal sections so 9 communal sections were assessed in total.

***Figure 1:** Map of Artibonite department*

4. METHODOLOGY

The research design for this assessment adopted a robust mixed-methods approach, with both qualitative and quantitative data-gathering methods, including the following techniques:

- Direct observation of the conditions of health facilities, the presence and supply of markets, roads, the state of infrastructure and other public services.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGD): mixed groups and separate women's groups.
- KIIs, with representatives of the Regional Directorates, representatives of local organizations and associations working with the population of the selected communes, representatives of health structures, as well as people with access to and knowledge of the communities. Interviews were conducted with the Departmental Directorate of Agriculture and Civil Protection, Departmental representative of the MCFDF, Departmental representative of the Ministry of Education, Departmental representative of the CNSA, IBESR, Brigade for Minors Protection as well as with the Mayors and CASECs of the selected communes and health centers managers;
- Combined with secondary data review which included:
  - Integrated Framework of Food Security Classifications. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Analysis (IPC). August 2023
  - Bulletin: Food basket and food security conditions. Coordination National de la Sécurité Alimentaire, Haiti. October 2023
  - Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Report: Areas affected and unaffected by the latest shocks (EFSA/ENSSAN, 2022)
  - Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)2023, OCHA
  - Evaluation reports including lessons learned of past projects
  - Programme data and reports from ongoing projects
  - Rapid Gender Analysis report from Northeast department conducted by PIH in March 2023
  - MSNA conducted by PIH in 2023 in South department
  - Rapid Needs Assessment conducted in Artibonite by UNICEF in April
  - Multisectoral Needs Assessment conducted at national level by IMPACT Initiative in August 2023
  - Multisectoral Needs Assessment conducted in Lower Artibonite by Impact Initiative in October 2023
  - Minutes of the Child Protection Working Group in Artibonite
  - Case management databases of existing services
  - For gendered data, see: SDG Gender Index (developed by the Equal Measures 2030 partnership); OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index; World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report; World Bank's Gender Data Portal; UNICEF's State of the World's Children Report; Girls Not Brides' Child Marriage Atlas; UNESCO's World Inequality Database on Education; UN Women's Global Database on Violence Against Women; Population Council's The Adolescent Experience In-depth Guides.

4.1. Sampling Method

Plan International ensured key informants and focus groups participants met a number of criteria before selecting them. Key informants were representatives and/or leaders of an organization, institution, community with a strong knowledge of the socio-economic environment of the area covered by the assessment and the sector of interest (Protection, Education and Food Security).

Regarding the FGDs, they were distributed across communal sections. In total, 54 FGDs were conducted in the 3 targeted communes – 18 FGDs per commune. Each FGD was comprised on average of between 8 and 12 participants. So approximately 500 participants took part in the FGDs. To allow for a gendered perspective, for each group, we considered having masculine and feminine groups. Three groups were formed: Children aged between 8 and 12, and adolescents and youth aged between 13 and 24 and adults aged 25 and more. Those participants were selected within the communities and were able to express themselves about their experiences and the communities they lived in. 12 KII were also conducted in the 3 targeted communes – 4 KIIs per commune.

4.2. Data collection

The data collection tools were composed on the one hand, of a structured questionnaire designed per sector for the KIIs. The questionnaire was directly filled out by enumerators on KoboToolBox through tablets. All responses were gathered at the end of the assessment in Excel workbooks. On the other hand, questionnaires for FGDs featured open questions that spoke to community's experiences and challenges. Therefore, those tools were provided and fulfilled on paper in the first place. At the end of the assessment, the enumerators did a transcription on the Word document prepared with the questionnaire.

In total, 3 Enumerators were recruited in the 3 targeted communes with one Supervisor per commune. In each of the commune, Plan International Haiti has ensured that at least one woman and one man were part of the team to ensure female and male representativity. A MEAL Officer based in Gonaives has supervised the data collection throughout the assessment. To ensure the quality of the data to be collected, Enumerators and Supervisors were trained by the MEAL Officer and Technical Specialists – including Cash and Vouchers Specialist, Child Protection in Emergencies Specialist and Education in Emergencies Specialist – to conduct both community KIIs and FGDs. An orientation on the assessment objectives, methodology, tools and deployment planning was presented to Enumerators and Supervisors followed by a day of practice with the tools. In addition, a session on Safeguarding was part of the training agenda to ensure compliance with safeguarding rules and mitigate such risks throughout the assessment.

4.3. Quality Insurance

In terms of quality assurance, Plan International Haiti:

1) Ensured designed tools were composed of clear questions for each sector. All tools have been translated into creole to allow for a better understanding of the content by both Enumerators and Interviewees/Respondents;

2) Optimized the data collection process for each tool. Since the KII tool was structured, administering it from Kobo made it less error prone. When designing it on Kobo, the MEAL team watched out for question types and skip logic to minimize errors;

3) Ensured Enumerators and Supervisors were trained on the data collection tools and the methodology of the assessment before starting to collect data. Enumerators and Supervisors were also trained on safeguarding protocol and active listening techniques;

4) Conducted pilots of the questionnaires before they were fully deployed. The pilot was part of the Enumerators and Supervisors' training process;

5) Ensured same-sex interviews regarding the FDGs as it is known that Respondents are more likely to express themselves on sensitive issues when being around with persons from the same sex. Also, each commune was of composed of at least one male Enumerator and one female Enumerator so Respondents could feel more comfortable being interviewed by persons from the same sex;

6) A MERL Officer based in Gonaives was designated as the focal point for this assessment to supervise the Enumerators and Supervisors, provide guidance to the assessment team, help them in case of challenges. The MERL Officer was in charge of doing check-ins, spot checks, and data quality review;

7) Reviewed the transcription and cleaning of interviews and FGDs notes.

4.4. Limitations of the assessment

In terms of limitations observed during this assessment, the following is to be considered:

▪ This assessment is based on declarative answers so there is a risk for Respondents to provide approximative information, have forgotten some answers or provide some answers with the expectation to receive assistance in the future;

▪ As Plan International Haiti has recently set-up its office and team in Artibonite, it was the first assessment conducted by the Enumerators and Supervisors with Plan International Haiti tools so a stronger guidance from the MEAL Officer was requested and some adjustments in deployment planning had to be made to ensure the MEAL Officer could assist where and when necessary;

▪ Plan International Haiti also aims to deploy mobile activities within the Bas Artibonite areas. However, due to access constrains in the communes of Bas Artibonite, the assessment had to focus on the Haut Artibonite communes.

4.5. Safeguarding

Child safeguarding is a term used to describe the responsibilities and activities undertaken to prevent or deter child abuse or maltreatment. It is Plan International's duty and responsibility to reduce the risks of abuse to the children with whom we come into contact and to keep them safe from harm. Plan's Child Protection Policy, "Say Yes to Child Safety," is Plan's primary framework for protecting children who meet Plan employees, volunteers, partner organizations, and individuals, including consultants, working on Plan's behalf.

In addition, PIH Global Policy on Preventing Sexual Harassment Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA Policy) ensures that all staff, Associates and visitors understand the importance of preventing Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse and their responsibility to ensure that

they, their behaviour and work does not result in Sexual Violence or Harm against a child, programme participant, a member of staff, Associate or visitor.

The Assessment team has ensured ethics and child protection throughout the assessment by implementing Safeguarding Risk Assessment, collecting consent and using the checklist for ethical MERL as per MERL Ethics and Safeguarding Guidance. The team has ensured that ethical protocols were followed during the study. The research team has secured consent from the respondents and/or the children's guardians prior to the interview, or case narratives can be used in the report and for public dissemination. After explaining the purpose of the study, they have been given the option to refuse and say no, and to discontinue the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Only minimal personal information have been collected to maintain data privacy. The use, storage, and disposal of this information are governed by the Plan's data protection policy.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Food Security and Income

Impact of food insecurity on the protection and well-being of caregivers. The assessment conducted in the 3 communes reveals significant challenges faced by caregivers in three key areas.

- o Firstly, economic instability poses a pervasive difficulty in sending children to school, reflecting broader financial constraints impacting educational opportunities.
- o Secondly, caregivers struggle to exercise parental authority due to economic hardship, hindering their ability to fulfil fundamental caregiving roles.
- o Lastly, parents experience a deep sense of sadness and remorse, exacerbated by financial constraints, suggesting a prevalent sentiment among economically disadvantaged families in the commune.

Overall, the assessment emphasizes the intricate interplay between socioeconomic factors and parental struggles, impacting education and overall well-being. The findings underscore the urgency of addressing systemic issues to uplift and empower the community, particularly the poorest families. Additionally, food insecurity is highlighted as a potential contributor to heightened stress and violent behavior among parents and guardians, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support in addressing these complex challenges.

Food insecurity affects parents and guardians in their ability to care for their children. In the targeted areas, particularly within the inner city, a discernible pattern reveals that guardians are compelled to limit their attention to their children due to economic constraints, hindering their ability to provide basic needs. This condition arises from the harsh realities of financial struggles, forcing guardians to grapple with the challenge of sustaining their households. The pressing economic hardships act as a force driving a shift in parental oversight dynamics, leading to children engaging in labor to contribute to family well-being. Despite their young age, some children demonstrate being resilient, actively seeking ways to address food insecurity and contribute to the household. This unexpected role reversal highlights the adaptability and resourcefulness of families facing economic hardships.

Parents and guardians protect their children from food insecurity through various means. In the localities of Lacedrace and Marmont, a unique social phenomenon, termed "*restavek*," unfolds in response to community challenges. Despite limited means, individuals entrust their children to others' care, turning them into domestic servants, highlighting the negative coping measures parents take due to financial constraints. This complex relationship between poverty, lack of resources, and food security is evident as some opt for better opportunities for their children, while others navigate a delicate balance between limited resources and familial bonds. Conversely, in downtown's urban areas, a community spirit emerges amidst economic hardships, with neighbors supporting each other. However, widespread begging and instances of sexual

exploitation for food underscore the severity of food insecurity. Both men and women engage in such negative coping strategies, emphasizing the harsh choices individuals make due to limited alternatives. These practices underscore the need for comprehensive social support systems to address the systemic challenges, reflecting the community's resilience amid shared struggles and emphasizing the imperative for profound, sustainable solutions to address poverty and food insecurity.

Main Source of Food. Most of FGDs participants affirm buying their food from the local market, like vegetables, root crops, grains, and beans. People rely on the market because they cannot grow these foods themselves — among the reasons includes not enough resources or access to land for food production. So, community members depend on the local market to get what they need to eat. This creates a close connection between what people need and what the market provides. Other community members can grow food for consumption and surplus to sell in the market.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for community development initiatives, as it sheds light on both the strengths and limitations of the local agricultural landscape. As the community actively contributes to local production for several food items, strategic interventions, and support systems could potentially enhance self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on imported goods, fostering a more resilient and sustainable food ecosystem within the community.

Coping strategy of households when faced with food insecurity. The survey findings indicate that participants in the FGDs employed various coping strategies to manage food insecurity. The most frequently used strategy involved restricting adults' consumption to ensure sufficient food for children, implemented on 6 out of 7 days in the specified period. Another common approach was distributing available food equally among all household members for each meal, occurring on an average of 5 days out of 7. Additionally, participants adapted by consuming less-preferred food for at least 4 days and borrowed food from relatives and friends at least 3 times a week. Unfortunately, the most severe coping strategy involved families going without food for an entire day, reported at least 2 days within the last 7 days. While these strategies showcase resilience, they also underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions addressing the root causes of food insecurity within the community.
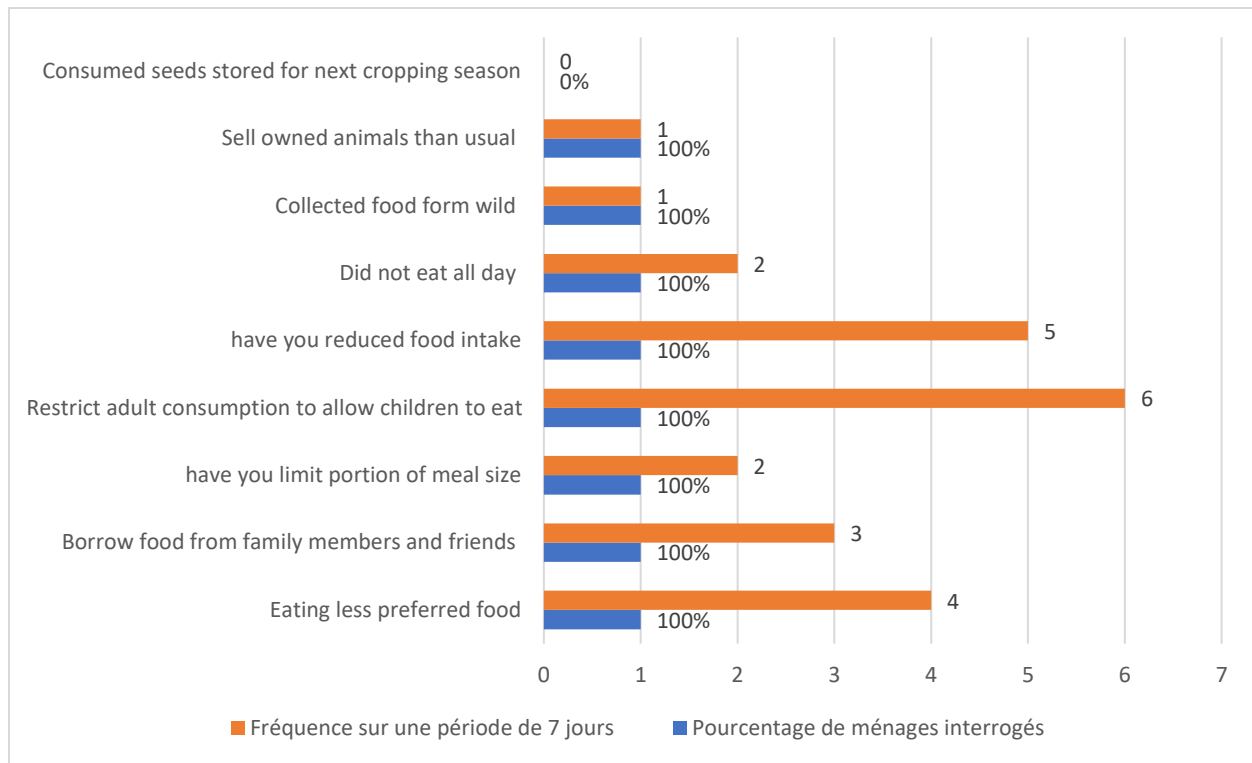
Figure 2: *Negative coping mechanisms used by FGDs participants in Gonaives, Gros Morne and Saint-Michel-de-l'Attalaye*

Main Source of Income. Among the interviewed respondents, a limited number of income sources were identified, primarily categorized into three main areas: agriculture, micro-enterprises, and operating a motorcycle taxi. Agriculture is a significant source, with visual observations revealing a diverse range of crops cultivated, emphasizing those essential for sustenance and potential market sale. The micro-enterprise sector plays a substantial role, with many respondents engaged in businesses related to selling food items sourced from local produce, showcasing entrepreneurial spirit and community provisioning. For men, an additional income source is operating a motorcycle taxi, serving both the community's transportation needs and providing a livelihood. These three income sources collectively form the economic backbone of the community, highlighting the importance of understanding and supporting these activities for fostering economic resilience.

Food Security Program in the Community. The feedback from respondents highlights a significant lack of awareness regarding any existing food security programs within their communities. The unanimous response indicates that community members are uninformed about the presence or nature of initiatives specifically addressing food security concerns. This collective lack of awareness suggests a potential communication gap or the need for improved outreach and information dissemination regarding food security initiatives within the communities.

5.2. Protection

Unaccompanied and Separated Children. Several cases of separated and unaccompanied children (UASC) were mentioned in the different FGDs of the 3 targeted communes. The main causes of such situations are linked to the displacement of families fleeing gang violence in Bas Artibonite and Port-au-Prince. In other cases, the reasons for separation are essentially economic. Because of the difficult living conditions, some parents find themselves obliged to send or let their children go off to beg or do domestic work ('*restavèk*') outside their respective communities. According to one key informant, there are currently more than 1,500 separated children in the Artibonite department, in a number of care institutions, awaiting reunification with their families.

More than the half of the key informants reveal being unaware of the existence of institutions/services/NGOs dealing with UASC, as well as the reunification procedure for these children.

Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) including child, early and forced marriage. During interviews carried out in the 3 communes, both with key informants and during FGDs with adults or adolescents, rape, child marriage and denial of resources were cited as the main typologies of sexual and gender-based violence faced mainly by girls and teenagers.

Indeed, according to some parents and key informants interviewed, the food crisis experienced by members of these communities is currently contributing to the intensification of already pre-existing risk factors for GBV (such as social norms that enshrine inequalities in terms of power between men and women) against girls and adolescents. As a result of difficult living conditions, some girls are forced into sexual exploitation and abuse in order to earn money either to meet their personal needs, or the needs of their families, resulting in cases of early pregnancy, sexual violence and school drop-out, while other girls aged 13 to 17 are often early and illegally married, sometimes to adults, because of their parents' inability to meet their basic needs such as food, education and even menstrual hygiene.

Cases of rape against adolescent girls are often committed within communities or at school, but rarely reported for fear of stigmatization by community members or reprisals by the aggressor. However, according to some key informants, in cases of rape against their daughters, some parents often prefer to resort to out-of-court settlements with the aggressors or the families of the aggressors, resulting either in marital cohabitation between the survivor and the aggressor, or payment in cash or kind by the aggressor to the survivor's family.

Interviews with communal representatives in 7 sections reveal that all communes claim to know of cases of SGBV, and 4 of them are unaware of the existence of institutions/services/NGOs dealing with unaccompanied and separated children, as well as the reunification procedure for these children

In Gros Morne and in Saint-Michel-de-l'Attalaye, MSF-Hollande currently supports a shelter and GBV case-management center in each of these 2 communes, but activities are due to cease in June 2024, with no organization yet available to provide support for these centers, which are managed by local women's organizations.

Children associated with armed gangs. Some key informants confirmed the recruitment of children, both girls and boys, by armed gangs in the department, especially children who have dropped out of school and have no prospects for a better future, and those from poor families. For other key informants, it is currently difficult and risky to raise cases of children associated with armed gangs for fear of reprisals from the latter and/or stoning of these children by the community. According to another key informant, some armed gangs leaders are present in the commune of Gonaïves, but are not currently threatening people in the communes of Haut Artibonite, whereas they are more active and violent in the communes of Bas-Artibonite.

No humanitarian or state organization is reported providing services aiming at preventing or responding to cases of children associated or at risk of being associated with armed gangs in the Artibonite department.

Mental health and psychosocial distress. Some parents and key informants have reported cases of behavioral disorders for some children, such as withdrawal, anxiety, nightmares and specifically for boys aged 13 to 17 and over. It often results in acts of aggression, delinquency and banditry, as well as resort to strong alcoholic beverages or drugs as a consequence of the gang violence often observed among displaced children.

However, according to parents consulted during the FGDs in the 3 communes, there are few safe spaces or community structures where children and adolescents can easily access structured psychosocial support activities to protect and promote their psychosocial and emotional well-being, as well as services appropriate to their needs.

In Gonaïves, MSF runs a reception center offering medical care and psychosocial support to children and adolescents due to close on December 31, 2023, according to the head of MSF-Holland, who plans to direct its beneficiaries to 2 Child-Friendly Spaces set up by Plan International Haiti in the city of Gonaïves.

5.3. Education

Poor school access. In the 3 targeted communes, the data collected within the FGDs show a low rate of access to education. Statistics on the various school enrolment rates in the communes, gathered from primary and secondary school heads, are presented in Figure 3 below. It should be noted that none of the targeted communes has an average enrolment rate approaching half of its school-age population. Indicators of access to education include irregular attendance by children and young people, the proportion of children not enrolled in school, drop-out rates, etc.
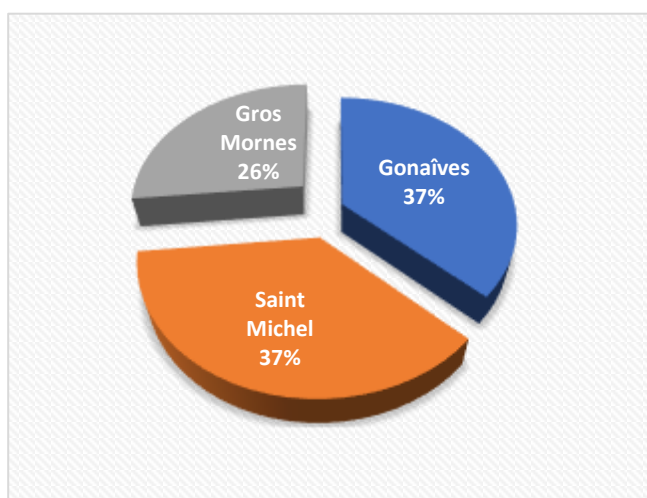
Figure 3: Average school enrolment rates in the communes of Gonaives, Gros and Saint-Michel de l'Attalaye in Artibonite

Out-of-school children. In the 3 targeted communes, access to education has been impacted by a high proportion of out-of-school children. These include children who were unable to return to school after being displaced, pupils who enrolled but did not attend, and children from the host community outside the education system. An overall idea of the age category with the highest number of children dropping out of school was estimated in each commune, in line with the statements made by the various groups interviewed. Figure 4 below summarizes the responses obtained from the different age groups, according to their school levels.

In addition, the results highlights the large number of out-of-school boys compared to girls in all school cycles in the targeted communes. The out-of-school boys represent 35% of the children proportion in all 3 targeted communes while out-of-school girls represent between 15% and 20%. Out-of-school boys are also concentrated at primary level in the communes of Saint Michel and Gros Morne, and are absent from the next two levels. Out-of-school students in Gonaïves are essentially adolescents of secondary cycle.

The interpretation that lends itself to the concentration or dispersion of out-of-school children in the various school cycles is consistent with the situation of each pupil, impacted by the socio-

economic situation in Artibonite. In fact, the displaced status of many children in the targeted communes points to the challenges encountered, whether in adapting to the school environment or in financing their return to school and all related costs.

School drop-out and absenteeism. Absenteeism assessed by age group to determine the portion of children least attending school in the target communes showed that:

- o In Gonaïves, the age group with the highest number of people not attending school or dropping out is 18 and over in the communal sections of Praville and Bretagne, and 15-18 in Pont Tamarin.
- o In Gros Morne: the age group with the highest number of out-of-school or school dropouts is 15-18.
- o In Saint Michel: the age group with the highest number of people not attending school or dropping out is 6 to 12 years old in Centre-Ville and the same age group for girls in Marmont and Lacedrat while it is 12 to 15 years old for boys in these last two communes.

There are a number of reasons for non-attendance, absenteeism and dropping out. According to the FGDs with parents in the three communes, the challenges at family level can be explained by the fact that parents are unable to send their children back to school. This is due to the decapitalization of households as a result of family mobility (in the case of the displaced) and the difficult socio-economic context. Poverty is the biggest obstacle to children's access to education, as it cuts across all the target communes. The groups interviewed described it in general terms as the inability to provide school fees, food, clothing, housing and school supplies. The following obstacles shared by FGDs participants in the targeted communes were: unemployment of parents/caregivers, lack of food, early work, sexual abuse, psychological trauma, GBV and aggression. It is important to note that out of these 8 obstacles, 4 are related to protection risks representing the main correlation between the access to education and protection situation in the targeted areas.

It should also be noted that other exclusion factors, such as disability or the fact that children are occupied by an elderly or disabled parent, are not as decisive as poverty, and were only reported in the commune of Gros Morne as a secondary factor in children's exclusion from school.

Children's chances of accessing education seem to be determined primarily by their status, in particular whether they are internally displaced or members of the host community. Indeed, interviews with school principals in the 3 communes of Artibonite highlighted the discrimination in access to education based on pupils' situation or status. Over and above the very low average school enrolment rate in the three communes, internally displaced pupils present numerous difficulties determining their access to education. For example, displaced children in the 7th Marmont section and the 3rd Rivière Blanche section in Saint-Michel commune were formally categorized during the FGDs as an at-risk group, poor, with unemployed parents and favorable to food aid in the school environment. This social situation tends to exacerbate difficulties to the point where the poverty in which the displaced child evolves is the factor that most determines exclusion in the school environment. In addition, there are other, albeit minor, factors of exclusion from school. The following table presents a summary of those identified in the targeted communes.

	POVERTY	DISABILITY	CHILDREN TAKING CARE OF ELDERLY	CHILDREN TAKING CARE OF PwD
Gonaïves	✓			
Saint Michel	✓			
Gros Morne	✓	✓		✓

Figure 4: *Factors of exclusion from school mentioned during FGDs in the targeted communes*

IDPs parents' economic activities do not allow them to support children's education. The economic activities pursued by displaced parents in the 3 targeted communes show that, for the most part, they do not have stable activities capable of supporting their families, especially regarding their children's education. In the commune of Saint Michel, small-scale commerce and subsistence farming were cited as activities carried out, despite the fact that they were insufficient to manage their children's schooling. In Gonaïves and Gros Morne, the issue of housing and the availability of food in good quality and quantity were mentioned as the most important difficulties expressed by parents and caregivers. In the 3 communes, FGDs participants were asked about the most pressing need through which families could be relieved of their school burdens. Figure 6 below presents the priorities of the interviewed parents and indicates the most pressing need they would like to be relieved of. All FGDs participants chose the school canteen option, the choice of school uniforms was made only by the commune of Saint Michel, and the cancellation of school fees concerned only Gonaïves and Gros Morne communes.

CANCELLATION OF SCHOOL FEES
22%

UNIFORMS DONATION
22%

SCHOOL CANTEEN
56%
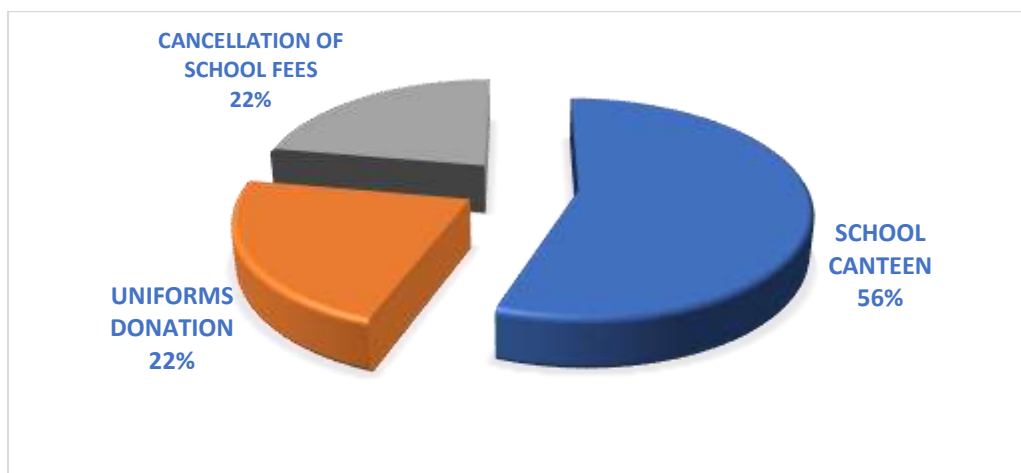
Figure 5: *Factors of exclusion from school mentioned during FGDs in the targeted communes*

Girls, boys, adolescent girls, and adolescent boys' interest in decision-making around humanitarian food security responses. Respondents strongly express a desire to participate in an education assistance program, highlighting the critical need for support in accessing essential educational resources such as school supplies, uniforms, shoes, and payment of school fees. This underscores the acknowledgment of education as a vital aspect of children's development, despite challenges posed by limited access to public schools and associated costs.

The scarcity of public schools, coupled with the requirement for fees even in public institutions, emerges as a significant hurdle, emphasizing the financial constraints hindering children's educational access. Respondents also express a desire for a school canteen or feeding program, rooted in prevalent food insecurity at home, highlighting the role of educational institutions in addressing fundamental needs related to nutrition. These preferences signify the complex challenges faced by the community, where economic constraints intersect with concerns about children's well-being and educational opportunities. A comprehensive approach that addresses financial burdens associated with education and provides reliable access to nutritious meals is crucial for enhancing the overall well-being and prospects of the community's children.

Educational and learning opportunities. Interviews with school administrators enabled to assess the actions taken in the targeted communes to ensure that the educational offer was able to meet specific needs. Indeed, learning disabilities, declining academic performance among host pupils and persistent school dropout among displaced pupils in all communes represent challenges for both the school system and the community. One of these is the ability of teachers to respond to the specific needs of their pupils, and in particular their training in psychosocial support for displaced children. Out of the 3 targeted communes, only Gonaïves (2nd Section communale du Bassin) reported having teachers trained in inclusive teaching practices. It is important to remember that gang violence and the need for protection reported in the targeted communes are factors of mental health and psychosocial distress among pupils (as reported above in section 5.2). The difficulties reported among students in fact reflect the unavailability of consistent care at school level and main consequences are learning difficulties, absenteeism and dropping out of school.

	EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT			
	Training on inclusive education	**Catch-up Class**	**Distance Learning**	**Reintegration of pupils following parallel programs**
Gonaïves	X	X		
Saint-Michel		X		
Gros Morne		X	X	X

Figure 6: *Factors of exclusion from school mentioned during FGDs in the targeted communes*

However, to compensate for learning delays, catch-up classes have been organized in the commune of Gros-Morne. However, it has not been possible to introduce alternative learning opportunities in the target communities (radio courses, e-Learning, mobile education units, etc.). Follow-up of pupils benefiting from catch-up programs is progressing well in Gros Morne. In fact, it has been reported that in the 7th Section Ravine and the 8th Section Moulin, 4 and 9 teachers respectively are available to reintegrate children following catch-up programs into the formal school system.

Gender-based violence was also identified as a discriminatory variable in access to education among students in emergency situations in the targeted communes of Artibonite. Indeed, discussions with a group of children in Gonaïves, precisely in the communal section of Bassin (Bretagne), revealed cases of sexual abuse by teaching staff. Another participant, SGBV survivor also testifies in these terms: *"I'm 11 years old, and a 16-year-old disabled boy has the habit of touching me. He often penetrates me. When I don't agree, he hits me. I don't want it to happen again.''* The vulnerability of pupils in the targeted communes is fostered by the fact that, after the crisis, many children found themselves in the situation of forced separation as mentioned above in section 5.2.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

o **Addressing Root Causes:** Comprehensive and sustainable solutions are imperative to address the root causes of economic instability and food insecurity. Initiatives must focus on uplifting and empowering the community, particularly the most economically disadvantaged families. Cash assistance can respond to the immediate needs of the family while also responding to their long-term needs including livelihood recovery. Assistance must be complemented with capacity building including food security at the household level through food production/home gardens and livelihood skills for diversification of income.

o **Social Support Systems:** The study underscores the need for comprehensive social support systems. Community development initiatives should prioritize creating networks that assist families facing economic hardships, offering practical solutions to alleviate their struggles. As part of the intervention, starting a village savings and loan association (VSLA) in a small group of 15 households can create a support system while also promoting financial inclusion and a sense of security during emergencies. This can also be a good venue during their weekly meetings to learn new things on income diversification and protection.

o **Enhancing Local Agricultural Landscape:** Understanding the dynamics of the local agricultural landscape is crucial for community development initiatives. Strategic interventions and support systems can enhance self-sufficiency, reduce dependence on imported goods, and foster a more resilient and sustainable food ecosystem within the community.

o **Awareness and Outreach:** A significant lack of awareness regarding existing food security programs calls for improved outreach and information dissemination within the communities. This can bridge the communication gap and ensure that community members are informed about available initiatives to address food security concerns. A community feedback mechanism can provide a two-way communication system not only to disseminate information but also to gather feedback from the community related to the program.

o **Strengthen Safe Spaces and Psychosocial Programs Access:** A significant gap in access to protection services within communities needs to be addressed. Access to safe spaces should be strengthened linked to the provision of adolescent life skills and positive parenting programs to promote the psychosocial well-being, health and safety of adolescents, and to enable parents and other caregivers to understand and respond to adolescents' needs, practice positive parenting methods and guide adolescents towards healthy behaviors and safe choices.

o **Set-up Case Management Services:** The absence of case management services in certain targeted areas requires the prompt establishment and/or strengthening of case management services and coordination mechanisms between all service providers in the department to provide a comprehensive and quality response to child protection incidents, including sexual and gender-based violence cases.

o **Integrate Child Protection aspects into Basic Services:** With the support of the child protection sub-group, the integration of child protection aspects into basic services such as health, food security, education, WASH and justice through the organization of training sessions for various actors on child protection, GBV and case referral mechanisms.

o   **Guarantee Community Awareness-raising on GBV and Protection Risks:** The numerous protection risks faced by the communities, especially boys and girls, call for the strengthening of communities' awareness on protection risks including child protection and GBV as well as on sexual and reproductive health. It should also the support with materials for menstrual hygiene management.

o   **Improve Access to Alternative Learning Opportunities**: Given the very low school enrolment rates in the targeted communes, there is a high need to increase the educational offer by strengthening existing alternatives learning opportunities such as catch-up programs and setting-up other opportunities such as distance learning to mitigate the risk of children to drop out of school and ensure their integration into the formal education system.

o   **Educational Assistance Programs:** Respondents have expressed a strong desire for educational assistance programs. It is crucial to develop initiatives that support children's access to essential educational resources, including school supplies, uniforms, shoes, and payment of school fees. This includes addressing the financial barriers hindering access to education.

o   **Holistic Approach:** Recognizing the complexity of challenges faced by the community, a comprehensive approach that addresses not only the financial burdens associated with education but also provides reliable access to nutritious meals is crucial for enhancing the overall well-being and prospects of the community's children. Public schools can be linked to the existing school meal program of humanitarian organizations providing similar assistance.