



ADDRESSING HAITIAN WOMEN'S PARTICULAR NEEDS THROUGH THEIR LEADERSHIP ROLE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The economic and social development of Haiti continues to be hampered by political instability, increasing violence, unprecedented levels of insecurity, and exacerbated fragility. For the past three years, Haiti has been facing an upsurge in acts of violence of all kinds organized by armed gangs fighting for control of territories, as a way of better positioning themselves during national elections. The Haitian National Police is insufficiently equipped and trained to address this situation and to protect the population. The departure of Prime Minister Ariel Henry has fanned the flames of violence, and armed gangs have begun to dislodge people from residential areas, looting and burning down their homes and killing some of the owners. These people, gripped by fear, had to abandon everything, and end

up in makeshift camps which in no way meet the basic needs of any human being. The different categories of people affected by this terror—girls, boys, women, men, people living with disabilities, etc.—find themselves in the same infrastructure, with no regard for their sex, privacy, dignity, or specific needs.

Gender-based violence has reached alarming levels, with aggression against women and girls, and more specifically rape, being used in most camps as a deliberate tactic to control access to humanitarian assistance. Children live in an environment that is ill-suited to their needs; they find themselves out of school, malnourished, and exposed to the unhealthy acts and behaviors of poorly educated adults.

II. METHODOLOGY

According to the Humanitarian Country Team, approximately 580,000 people are displaced in Haiti as of June 2024, almost 98 per cent of whom have become internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to gang violence. Unfortunately, there is little information about the special

needs of different categories of people, i.e., women, girls, men, boys, and others with special needs.

In April 2024, UN Women collaborated with the Youth Development Initiative (IDEJEN) and the Network for

Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action (REGAH) civil society organization-led committee members to conduct a Rapid Gender Assessment (RGA) to shed light on the specific challenges and needs of women and girls in the current context, and to propose recommendations on how to best address them.

The RGA was conducted in the six most populated and diverse IDP sites of Port-au-Prince in the west department.

The methodology included qualitative and quantitative approaches and considered data including semi-structured interviews and focus groups using questionnaires and guides translated into Creole. Interviewers used tablets for digitized questionnaires and dictaphones to record the focus groups.

A dedicated team, including a statistician for data verification and table production and members of the REGAH technical committee, handled the translation and analysis of all collected data and a literature review to understand the issues better and address potential research gaps.

The survey included 98 respondents, while the focus groups involved 130 participants, with an average six people per group, except for groups of individuals with reduced mobility, which included 10 participants.

The sampling methodology combined randomly selected respondents with a systematic selection per site, using the random method considering the diversity of the target group: girls, women, boys, and men. Specifically, sampling was conducted in two stages: first, a random selection of respondents, followed by a systematic selection by site, considering specific categories of the target audience.

A team of 15 well-trained young surveyors, already familiar with the IDP environment, collected the data over five days. Before deployment, they received a one-day training session on the RGA, followed by a pilot test at IDP sites to ensure the effectiveness of the data collection tools. A debriefing session on the third day was conducted.

The results are presented at the sample level, providing insights into access to health and emotional services, the security situation, economic activities after displacement, access to food, access to education, protection against gender-based violence, participation and leadership, family situation, and the assessment of the humanitarian response among the surveyed population. They also show how women and men are affected differently. **The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) must encourage various data collection initiatives by humanitarian actors.**

III. KEY FINDINGS

1. Security situation: The camps are devoid of any security features for children, girls, and women. There is no lighting in the bedrooms, toilets (which also have no locks from the inside), or other meeting places frequented at night at night, which are used by women, girls, boys, and men without adequate privacy. Armed gangs operate daily in the streets and around the camps, with the constant risk of stray bullets being fired at displaced persons. **The HCT needs to lobby the state authorities responsible for security to provide better protection for the camps, and for humanitarian actors to facilitate the**

electrification of the camps. Humanitarian norms and standards with regards to sexual exploitation should be respected and safeguarded.

2. Economic activities after displacement: Nearly 88.1 per cent of women and 82.8 per cent of men who participated in this study have no source of income in the camps. All respondents expressed a desire to leave their accommodation sites. Respondents are looking for help to obtain the resources they need to find another home in a quiet area, to return to the provinces with their children, and to start an

income-generating activity to meet their family responsibilities. Of the women surveyed, 67.6 per cent advocated greater economic and social integration. Just 1.5 per cent of women wanted to leave the country, and 13.3 per cent of men wanted to move to the provinces. They also called for support in getting their children back to school. The girls also asked for help to continue their vocational training and to have a job that would enable them to ensure their children's education. **Women and girls need to learn new trades and life skills to give them new perspectives and opportunities for a better future.**

3. Access to food: Displaced people face difficulties in accessing adequate and nutritious food. Food resources are very limited in IDP sites, leading to food insecurity. Pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of malnutrition. Of the IDPs surveyed, 43.3 per cent of men were able to buy food supplies, and 34.8 per cent of women. **The humanitarian community needs to mobilize more resources to provide food and non-food items and hygiene and sanitation facilities aligned to camp residents' statistics.**

4. Access to education: Education is a fundamental right and is essential for the empowerment of women and girls. It is crucial to ensure that they have equal access to education in IDP camps, by removing obstacles such as costs, inadequate infrastructure, and discriminatory cultural norms. Some 75.9 per cent of respondents said they lived in constant fear. School is the ideal place for children to develop and socialize, but over 90 per cent of children surveyed in the camps no longer attend school. Educating children remains a major challenge for families.

"How can I educate my child in such an environment? I can't take it anymore".

— A mother told one of the surveyors through tears

5. Access to health and emotional services: Women and girls in IDP camps need equitable access to health

services, including prenatal care, reproductive health care, and mental health services. It is important to establish adequate health facilities and provide gender-sensitive services to meet their specific needs. Before fleeing their homes, 66.2 per cent of IDPs surveyed said they had access to health services through a health center or hospital close to their neighborhoods, but only 10.3 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men had access in IDP sites.

"I'm 19 and pregnant. During the flight from the neighborhoods, my boyfriend disappeared. I couldn't benefit from health care during my pregnancy because I couldn't afford to pay the consultation fees, I was never able to see a doctor. I had to give birth in the displacement site with the help of a midwife in the difficult conditions you know".

Among respondents, 69.8 per cent of women and 63.3 per cent of men said they were mentally affected by the upsurge in violence in early 2024. Additionally, 70.8 per cent of those surveyed have emotional problems due to the scale of the violence, and 85.7 per cent live with feelings of sadness, anger, and despair about the outcome of the crisis. Moreover, 75.9 per cent of the children surveyed reported being sad and lacking fulfillment and adequate nutrition because of their forced displacement. Only 8.2 per cent of the children included in the study in the sites have received educational assistance.

6. Protection against gender-based violence: Women and girls in IDP camps are highly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence and exploitation. Some camps have no toilets, forcing people to find unconventional ways of relieving themselves, while others relieve themselves in the open air not far from the sites. Girls are exposed to different types of violence (physical, sexual, psychological), unlike men. They are intimidated, harassed, traumatized, and afraid of potential invasions of violence by armed gangs.

Some 16.2 per cent of women surveyed feel they are victims of discrimination and harassment. During the focus groups, they testified that they did not have basic privacy. In addition, 10.8 per cent of women in the camps who participated in the survey said they had resorted to sex work/prostitution to meet their needs at least once, and an additional 20.6 per cent reported knowing at least one person who had done so. **The humanitarian response must include appropriate measures to prevent all forms of violence and sexual violence in IDP camps.**

7. Participation and leadership: The number of women on site management committees is minimal. Among women respondents, only 2 per cent are involved in camp management, while 15.3 per cent provide support during aid distribution. During focus group discussions, women confided that they did not take part in site management because they feared the men on the management committees could be disrespectful to girls and women and did not believe in women's abilities to manage the camps. Some women said they had doubts about the ethics and judgement of the men managing the camps, and did not want to collaborate with them for that reason.

Others reported conditions imposed by men, including demands of sexual favors to join management committees. To improve their living conditions, some of these women have chosen to join camps' cleaning committees. **Camp managers must encourage the active participation of women and girls in decision-making within IDP camps (ideally a 50 per cent quota between men and women). This can include their involvement in camp management committees, community recovery initiatives, and training programs to strengthen their skills and leadership.**

8. Family situation: Most of the families currently living in the temporary accommodation sites come from the commune of Port-au-Prince, and more specifically from the Carrefour-Feuilles district. The focus groups addressed to family members revealed that 40.2 per cent of families own their homes, while the majority rent. This internal displacement disrupted families, distancing their members from each other, and adversely affecting their psychological and emotional status. A large proportion of displaced families took part in social cohesion activities in their communities prior to their displacement. Indeed, 89.8 per cent of respondents attested to having been involved in social activities as active members of a community structure. These activities enabled them to assert their abilities and make their voices heard, and consequently boosted their self-esteem. The same was true of all the displaced families. **The humanitarian community must facilitate the reunification of members of all families in a safer and more friendly space.**

9. Assessing the humanitarian response: The humanitarian response needs to be better coordinated, and aid distributed ethically and efficiently, while considering the diverse needs of different population categories. The current humanitarian response is insufficient in both quality and quantity, as 75.6 per cent of respondents had not received aid from any organization or a group since they arrived in the displacement camps. Aid that does arrive is irregular and does not meet the distinct needs of the different categories of people settling in IDP sites. **Humanitarian actors need to coordinate their assistance to the victims and ensure that it reaches the victims according to their needs.**