



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

Background Briefing to the Executive Board, 2018

“Operational Response at Country Level: Haiti”

UN-Women’s operational response in Haiti may be of interest to the Board, due to the specific context and scope of its efforts to help bridge serious gender disparities in wellbeing, opportunities, access and control over productive resources, in a country consolidating the rule of law and undergoing a complex socio-economic transition, against a backdrop of decades of governance and security deficits, further compounded by atypically high levels of vulnerability to natural disasters and changing weather patterns. This note aims to: (i) share the main strategic thrust and content of UN-Women’s operational response in Haiti; (ii) explain new approaches and methods used to maximize UN-Women’s relevance and contribution; and (iii) highlight opportunities for support to women’s empowerment in Haiti.

UN-Women’s country level operational response in Haiti

Following a successful political transition at the beginning of 2017 after a lengthy electoral gridlock, Haiti finds itself at a critical juncture in its medium and long term political, institutional and economic development trajectory, in a setting characterized by an atypically high level of vulnerability to natural disasters and hazards. Compelling evidence from around the world suggests that women’s empowerment is one of the key pathways to securing the ‘stabilization dividend’. Locking in and consolidating the gains made by Haiti in close collaboration with the international community, will therefore require the sustaining of adequate levels of national and international public investment targeting women’s empowerment, and ensuring that this is done strategically. Three key insights from this evidence have guided UN-Women’s work in Haiti and include:

- a) Building the capacity of women to meaningfully participate in decision-making at all levels: we can now quantify the measurable impact of women’s participation in decision-making shaping stabilization processes, which has been shown to lead to a 35% greater chance of sustainable peace over 15 years;
- b) Job creation and community-level resilience: investing in women in post-crisis and stabilization settings exponentially increases the investment of families in health, education and the social sector – leading to greater stability and resilience at the community level;
- c) Ensuring equal opportunities for women and men to participate in the design and delivery of humanitarian interventions: placing gender equality at the center of planning considerations for humanitarian assistance not only leads to greater impacts for women and girls, but for men and boys and whole communities.

Therefore, integral to achieving Agenda 2030 is the need for sustained and vigorous efforts, constituting the strategic thrust of UN-Women’s operational response, aimed at: supporting the emergence of gender responsive public institutions and key legal and policy frameworks; closing gender gaps in leadership and access to decision-making and public services; and ensuring equal access between men and women to productive resources.

Since 2016 UN-Women has significantly increased the number of key strategic partnerships with key actors and mobilized donor funding. Prior to this UN-Women faced challenges in optimizing its strategic positioning in the context of the widespread economic and institutional dislocation, resulting from the 2010 earthquake. An intensive period of strategic re-orientation and re-organization of the programme portfolio in 2017 has now seen a significant ramping up of the scope, scale, impact and implementation capacity of our work. UN-Women’s has subsequently focused on bringing about concrete change in the lives of women and society more broadly through the concentration of evidence based interventions across four impact areas.

1) Gender Responsive Normative and Institutional Frameworks

Low levels of alignment between existing legal and institutional arrangements and the international and regional treaties and conventions to which Haiti is a signatory constitute a serious impediment to the achievement of gender equality. While the passing of key policies and legislation in the last few years present

important advances, the public sector continues to struggle with ensuring policy coherence and coordination, undermining efforts to mainstream gender equality at both national and local levels. In addressing this, UN-Women with Canada's active engagement, has played a key role in the rationalization and scaling up of support targeting the Ministry of Women's Affairs in its coordination and normative roles, through the development of the Ministry's first comprehensive capacity development and support plan. UN-Women is currently engaged in efforts supporting the capitalization of this plan.

2) Women's Political Participation and Electoral Gender Based Violence

Women's participation in decision-making spaces is extremely low including as voters, evidenced by the 9% turnout by women during 2016 Presidential elections. Following the most recent legislative elections, the rate of women's representation in the lower chamber rose from 0% to 2.5%, and from 0% to 3.6% in the senate, placing the country, currently ranked 187 of 190 in terms of women's political participation, among the 7 countries with the lowest rate of participation of women in parliament in the world. Furthermore, while making up almost 30% of the public sector, women hold less than 8% of senior positions. This under-representation in the political sphere results from multiple, persistent structural challenges (including discriminatory selection processes for party lists, funding of campaigns and gender-based stereotypes and biases), but stems first and foremost from high levels of Electoral Gender Based Violence (EGBV).

UN-Women played a key role in opening-up national policy dialogue and helped galvanize attention around EGBV, both during the 2016 parliamentary and mayoral and sub-national elections. With the support of Canada, UN-Women provided comprehensive capacity development support to a nationwide consortium of CSO's and key state actors such as the national police, the national election management body and the justice sector on the prevention, tracking and monitoring of EGBV. UN-Women also supported the strengthening of legal redress mechanisms through the provision of free legal aid for targeted candidates. Local level trends augur well for Haiti's future-prospects in the area of women's political participation, whereby in spite of low numbers of women elected at the national level, Haiti recorded a record number of women mayors and vice-mayors, registering at over 30% and comparing very favorably with sub-region and beyond.

3) Violence Against Women and Girls and Access to Justice

Pervasive gender-based violence against women and girls (VAWG) represents the most severe manifestation of discrimination in the country. This spiked following the 2010 earthquake and has not returned to pre-quake levels, following the slow, staggered and uneven pace of recovery that has affected all parts of society. A growing number of major initiatives to prevent and address VAWG have been undertaken. In 2017, UN-Women with the support of the Netherlands, supported the Development of Haiti's landmark ten-year National Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence and has been key in supporting the creation of an Office to Combat Violence Against Women and Girls. Nevertheless, there is still no legislation criminalizing violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence, incest, marital rape and sexual harassment.

Institutional capacities related to both the prevention and response to VAWG, including the implementation of laws, policies and programs are sorely lacking. Under the auspices of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), UN-Women, alongside UNDP and UNICEF designed and implemented the first phase of a Joint Rule of Law Programme implemented in 2016 and focusing on strengthening the prevention related capacities and responsiveness of the justice sector to VAWG; the capacities of the national police service and the corrections system, while facilitating the access to justice for survivors of gender based violence. In little more than a year of implementation, UN-Women contributed to important achievements paving the way for improving the prevention and access to justice by survivors of VAWG. UN-Women worked with over 100 human rights and women's rights focused CSO's in strengthening their capacities in the areas of administration of justice, and supported more than 30 civic organizations to respond to the specific needs of female prisoners, through psycho-social support, life skills training and vocational education.

4) Women's Economic Empowerment: Job Creation, Early Recovery and Resilience

Gender gaps in Haiti around the access, control and management of productive resources, in both the agricultural sector and the commercialization and management of utilities, such as energy or water, is pervasive and widespread. Haiti currently ranks 138th out of the 155 countries surveyed in the Gender Inequality Index (GII), helping place the extent of these disparities into context. The emergence of women farmers engaging in commercial agriculture and women entrepreneurs engaged in utilities management faces multiple gender specific barriers related to their access to skills, information, ICT solutions, finance and access to national and global supply chains and markets. In 2017 UN-Women, in collaboration with Haiti's official vocational skills accreditation body supported one of Haiti's largest CSO's to establish and manage a farmer demonstration school in one of Haiti's ten territorial subdivisions located in Western Haiti. The facility saw its first cohort of 250 women and men farmers graduate, following an intensive 4-month certification course in modern climate resilient agricultural farming practices. Negotiations are currently underway with international partners to replicate this facility in Haiti's 9 remaining territorial sub-divisions.

In the area of utilities management, UN-Women in collaboration with UNEP and with support from Norway are currently developing a joint programme that will leverage innovation and ICT's to strengthen the resilience of rural Haitian women in the coastal areas of Southern Haiti most prone to climate-related shocks. The programme will aim to reduce-dependency on humanitarian assistance, by increasing their revenue from the management and commercialization and their access to clean water and energy. This will be done in such a way as to reinforce and complement ongoing initiatives targeting the promotion of selected green value chains, as a means of fostering integrated area-based economic development.

UN-Women along with IOM, OCHA and UNDP work in close coordination to support the implementation of Haiti's national disaster risk reduction strategy. UN-Women ensures that the specific needs of women and girls are taken into account at the strategic, institutional and operational levels of disaster risk response planning. In terms of disaster response, following Hurricane Matthew in October 2016, UN-Women with support from Sweden and CERF funds directly supported more than 11,000 women and girls in the worst affected areas, through a network of women's organizations. Beneficiaries were provided with tools, materials, safe spaces and cash for work, enabling them to actively participate and lead in community-level early recovery and longer-term resilience related efforts. UN-Women also helped develop the institutional capacities of women's organizations to effectively participate and lead in the design and delivery of community-level humanitarian response.

Partnerships

UN-Women has established itself as a key partner in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Haiti with a broad range of national, civic, bi and multilateral, NGO, private sector, media and UN system actors. Through these partnerships UN-Women has been able to advance core elements of its operational, normative and coordination mandate in Haiti, as outlined in earlier sections. Building on this, UN-Women has successfully provided the impetus for the consolidation and formation of new intra and inter-sectoral coalitions and alliances, that have come to serve as 'force multipliers' for mandate implementation.

Within the international cooperation space for example, UN-Women in early 2017 led the establishment of Haiti's first donor coordination group on gender, in close collaboration with Switzerland and Canada. This has been instrumental in helping map, track, rationalize and build on synergies in existing and planned international support. Furthermore, UN-Women plays a key role in supporting Haiti's Ministry of Women's Affairs in its outreach efforts targeting key stakeholders, for the purpose of fostering new partnerships, examples including the UN-Women initiated 'High-Level National Gender and Infrastructure Round Table', held in 2016.

UN-Women's programmes in Haiti through which these partnerships have been cemented, have been made possible through the generous financial, material and political support from donors and partners including: Haiti, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. Additional support is being sought to continue and expand our work across the sectors outlined in this note, with an emphasis on women's economic and political participation. Both being critical enablers in ensuring that the aspirations of both Haiti and its international partners to see it become an emerging country by 2030 are met.