



# **UNIFEM**

**United Nations  
Development  
Fund for Women**

## **UNIFEM in Haiti:**

### **Supporting Gender Justice, Development and Peace**



**Contact:**  
**UNIFEM Caribbean Office**  
**Christ Church Barbados**  
**Roberta.Clarke@undp.org**  
**Tel: 246-467-6126**  
**July 2004**

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United Nations Development Fund for Women (July, 2004)**

*Gender-related trends in Haiti*

Haiti's history shows that women have remained the target of oppression irrespective of changes in political dispensation in the country. Women constitute 52 percent of the 8.1 million counted in the last census. Some 43 percent of households are headed by women, with over 80 percent of these households reportedly living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> Sustainable peace and development can only be ensured through the full participation of women, and by tackling gender inequality.

**1.1 Gender-related statistics and discussion of Gender Considerations:**

Several factors contribute to gender inequality in Haiti. Many are reviewed in the UNIFEM portal, [www.womenwarpeace.org](http://www.womenwarpeace.org) Country Profile for Haiti. Below is a summary of key issues for consideration and response.

Legal discrimination against women and girls is found in wage levels, the different age of consent for marriage without parental consent; unequal penalties for adultery and divorce; and the definition of violence against women as a crime of honor. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women who issues a report on Haiti in January 2000, Haitian women suffer what is termed "structural violence," meaning that structural inequalities based on gender, vulnerability and poverty disparately impact Haitian women and make them susceptible to physical violence and alienate them from various forms of protection.

In Haiti, just 24 percent of women receive qualified health care at delivery while 63 percent of pregnant women suffer from anemia. (PAHO News Release on Report, Sept 2003). Fertility rates, at 4.7 children per woman, are twice as high as for the rest of the region, while only 22 percent of Haitian women use modern contraceptive methods, the lowest in the region. Maternal mortality, at 534 per 100,000 live births, is by far the highest in the region.<sup>2</sup> This is of special concern given that one quarter of births are considered high risk (27% within 24 months of latest pregnancy, 21% higher than 3<sup>rd</sup> order).

Haiti has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the LAC region, with an estimated 38,000 deaths per year. Women and men are equally affected, through primarily heterosexual transmission. Among the 14 to 24 age group, 5 percent of girls and 4.1 percent of boys are infected.<sup>3</sup>

In his report on Haiti,<sup>4</sup> the Secretary General of the UN drew attention to the gender inequalities in the social, economic and political spheres, and highlighted women's vulnerability in the increasing incidence of sexual violence, and the trafficking of young children, especially girls. It recommended that efforts be placed on developing the capacity of women in organizations, and as leaders; and promoting their participation in electoral politics. The report further recommended

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<sup>1</sup> TAG, 2001, although the figure reported in the MCFDF is 33 percent

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA Executive Board Report, Dec 2001

<sup>3</sup> UN Secretary General's Report on Haiti, April 2004

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Secretary General on Haiti. UN Security Council, April 10 2004

the upgrading of laws to attack domestic and sexual violence; and the articulation and promotion of women's rights in accordance with international standards.

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Female household heads	43% of households
Fertility rate	4.7 children per woman (2001) (6.4n rural areas)
Maternal mortality	534/100,000
¼ births are high risk	27% within 24mths of last pregnancy 21% higher than 3 <sup>rd</sup> order
Contraception rate (modern methods)	22%
HIV/AIDS infections among women	50% of all affected are women
Illiteracy	68% of women
Poverty	65-70 percent of women in urban areas

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Sources: CCI, UNFPA, PAHO, MCFDF

### ***Women's economic activity***

Women make up half of agricultural workers, and are affected as the importance of agriculture to the Haitian economy has receded in recent years.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, many women have sought alternative employment in the urban areas, joining the women who make up 75 percent in the informal sector and 84 percent in petty commerce.<sup>6</sup> Women head over 40 per cent of Haitian families, a number that has increased since the unrest of the early 1990s. These families are over-represented in the large numbers of Haitians living below the poverty line. While poverty levels in Haiti are the highest in the region, 85 of female-headed households earn around a dollar a day (\$38/month), compared to 62 percent male headed households.

In April 2004, UNICEF estimated that 120,000 girls work as domestic servants in Haiti. In the wake of recent violence, their futures are particularly insecure.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Women in governance***

The achievements of Haitian women in the political sphere, in art, in the anti-resistance movement, are exemplary. The country that produced one of the few female heads of state (Mdme Ertha Pascal Trouillot in 1990), while it also has one of the lowest presence of women in parliament— 3.6%, compared to a high in Cuba of 28%.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> TAG, p 18

<sup>6</sup> UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND PROPOSE, PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES, DP/FPA/HTI/3  
20 December 2001

<sup>7</sup> West's most neglected children bear brunt of Haiti's upheaval, UNICEF Press Briefing, 14 April, 2004

<sup>8</sup> Gonzalez, Gustavo (2001). "Latin America: Scant progress in status of women, says UNIFEM" Article. Santiago. April 10 2001. The article reports that as of January 2000, Cuba had the highest percentage of women in its parliament,

### ***Education***

In education, the differential for primary and secondary level achievement between boys and girls is 52 to 47 percent, and 22 and 17 percent respectively, which shows the largest gender inequalities in the region, where in most countries girls achieve equal or higher levels of education than boys at both levels. Of the minority who do complete high school, there are twice many boys (67% versus 33% of girls).<sup>9</sup> Likewise only one third of university students were women (70 percent men and 30 percent women).<sup>10</sup>

### ***Violence against women***

In 1991, after the military coup that toppled the elected government, there were reported rapes of thousands of women, who were victimized because of their civic actions and their vulnerability because of their sex.<sup>11</sup> UNICEF-supported research by the Centre Haitien de Recherches et d'Actions pour la Promotion Feminine (1996) notes that seven out of ten interviewed women indicated that they had been victims of violence, with the most common form (37%) being sexual violence (rape, sexual aggression and sexual harassment), and one third had been victims of physical violence (blows, beatings). Fifty percent of the aggressors were husbands or boyfriends. Girls were more frequently victims of sexual violence, with 87 percent perpetrated by family or close friends.

It is alarming that 66 percent of these women kept their experience secret, for fear of social judgment (32%), reprisal (22%) or lack of legal measures (14%). Results showed a high level of cultural acceptance of violence against women, as exemplified by the 80 percent of the men interviewed who believed that violence was sometimes justified, when there is refusal to obey or adultery. The study cites findings from research on sexual behavior and AIDS that 29 percent of women had not consented to their first sexual experience<sup>12</sup>, which has direct implications for negotiating condom use for HIV prevention.

In the nineties, violence against women escalated and became the focus of attention because of the determination of women's organizations to address impunity and to invoke state accountability to end all forms of violence against women. According to the report of Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women on Haiti (2000), "the phenomenon of 'zenglendos,' or thugs, breaking into houses at any time, raping and beating the women, started during the Cedras regime as a form of political pressure but has now become a common practice of criminal gangs, terrorizing the entire population."

In response to these situations, women's experiences of gender-based violence, whether in the home, community or perpetrated in the context of political conflict, were made public and reform agendas were defined.

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with 27.6%. In its wake were Barbados (20.4%), Guyana (20%), Bahamas (19.6%), Trinidad and Tobago (19.4%), Jamaica (16%), Suriname (15.7%) and the Dominican Republic, with 14.5%.

<sup>9</sup> UNFPA, 2001

<sup>10</sup> TAG, p 9

<sup>11</sup> Concannon, Haiti Chapter, December 2003

<sup>12</sup> This study is cited in the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1997/44. E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.3 27 January 2000

The 1997 Truth and Justice Commission made a number of recommendations on legal reform, education and information campaigns and social services for victims:

**Legal Reform:**

- Rape to be redefined as an attack on physical integrity and well-being rather than honor, and for acts of conjugal and family violence to be explicitly defined as forms of physical, moral and/or sexual aggression, and thus, breaches of law subject to graduated penalties
- Legal proceedings to be instituted against the presumed authors of abuses noted in report, together with compensation for victims
- The protection of victim's private life in trials
- Modification of rules on medical certificates of rape, extending the competence to draw them up beyond physicians;

**Education and Information**

- Development of educational programs to improve the treatment of rape victims by police, judges, doctors and others
- Campaign to educate and inform the public about rape

**Social services**

- Creation of services and programs for victims

The issue of gender-based violence was the focus of the Tribunal on Violence against women in November 1997. The Tribunal called for:

- Reforms to the criminal justice system, including the establishment of a women's police unit composed of female officers to receive complaints and conduct investigations on violence against women;
- Modifications to judicial proceedings, including the provision of safeguards for plaintiffs and witnesses in trials;
- Establishing shelters for women victims of violence;
- Developing education programmes in schools to eliminate gender-stereotyping and to institute human rights education and sexual education;

The violence that brought about the change of Haiti's government earlier this year has had a severe impact on women and the 2,000 street children in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and on the 120,000 girls who work as domestic servants across the country, according to a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) assessment mission<sup>13</sup>. The mission's report says armed gangs recruited children in almost a third of the 31 surveyed zones. Children were shot and wounded or

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<sup>13</sup> "Haiti's Children Suffering Most From Strife", UNWIRE, Tuesday, April 20, 2004

were beaten by armed gangs in more than a third of the surveyed zones and the number of child rapes increased significantly in the urban areas. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in May 2004 that in light of the the rising crime rate in Haiti women are greatly affected by this insecurity because they are often the victims of these crimes. For example, women who run small businesses were often targets of violence such as kidnapping, rape, and theft.

## **1.2 The institutional environment for addressing gender issues**

### **Government**

A signatory to the major global conventions that require the dismantling of gender-based barriers to women's advancement, Haiti had for several years a well-established machinery for addressing women's issues. However, since 1997, under-financing and the required contraction of spending have severely constrained the scope of what the Ministry on the Condition of Women and Women's Rights can accomplish. While the government ratified the CEDAW (the Convention to end all discrimination against women)1981, it has yet to report on its implementation in Haiti. Operating premises and other forms of infrastructure are needed for the Ministry to be more effective.

The Ministry was singled out for special attention in the current Plan of the Government of Haiti, stressing the importance of strengthening the gender mainstreaming function of the Ministry:

*« Le Ministère à la Condition Féminine et aux Droits des Femmes (MCFDF) mérite une attention particulière. Ce Ministère a été rapidement instrumentalisé par les administrations précédentes. La période de transition sera mise à profit pour consolider la fonction transversale de l'institution en instaurant la généralisation de l'analyse selon le genre (gender mainstreaming) au niveau de l'ensemble des actions étatiques. Ce faisant, l'équité de genre, facteur primordial de la cohésion sociale, reprend sa place centrale.»*

The 2004/2005 Annual Plan of Action of the Ministry of Women's Condition and Rights has outlined four priorities: judicial/legal changes to improve the status of women; anti-poverty measures; anti-violence; and sensitization/communication.

### **Civil society**

Haiti has an impressive community of organizations that are dedicated to changing the *status quo*, in diverse sectors, including human rights (over 50 in Port au Prince); women's issues, domestic violence, and illiteracy. This sector is challenged by its heavy concentration urban areas, leaving un attended the areas outside of Port au Prince, where equity and social conditions are even worse.

In May 2004, women's organisations were invited by UNIFEM to help develop a strategy, priority and methodology for UNIFEM's action in Haiti. Several organizations have expressed an interest in securing more funding for their work, and training for professional upgrading. It is also apparent that skills in planning and project development will need great attention. The approach will be to examine women's organizations as part of a wider review of civil society, the experiences and potential in this period of Haiti's history. The complementary role of religious institutions and practices will need to be part of this analysis.

### **1.3 International Community**

#### **The UN System**

Within the Resident Coordinator system, there is already a mechanism which allows the UN and donor agencies to meet monthly to share updates, and responses. Parallel to this process has been the ICF/CCI, which in collaborations with all sectors of the interim government has developed an immediate plan of action to address the crisis. The Gender Theme Group, chaired by UNFPA, is being reactivated, and has collaborated on the issues of violence against women and maternal mortality.

Currently, several agencies<sup>14</sup> are developing a joint and integrated approach to violence against women which focuses on a multi-sectoral planning process to combat all forms of violence against women, with a focus on sexual violence.

#### **Donor community**

Gender issues were mainstreamed in each component of the ICF. The main focus on the issue is within the “Human Rights, Justice, Prison” Thematic Group, as gender-based violence was one of the major concerns identified by the Ministry on the Condition of Women, by women’s organizations, and other UN, local and international agencies.

While the ICF process was an important exercise in its intention to support a national strategy in the transitional period, the process has its limitations. Most importantly, women’s organisations consider the process inadequate in incorporating the perspectives of a wide cross-section of Haitian society, especially women, in devising the ICF strategy.

#### **A framework for action**

There can be no doubt, that even in the midst of tremendous need on the part of the great majority of Haitian men and women, women’s vulnerability to poverty is especially deepened by their overarching responsibility for child and household care, often in households where they are the sole income earner.

In many significant ways, strict gender roles and ideology continue to limit women’s capacity for self-expression and personal autonomy. And the articulation of these roles and ideologies with the economic crisis and poverty increases women’s vulnerability to violence and to HIV/AIDS.

Women’s organizations in Haiti are vibrant and committed to the struggle for Haiti’s political and economic development with equity and justice. Even in the context of strained resources, they manage to work for a range of issues, from women’s political participation, to adult literacy, to fighting violence against women and HIV/AIDS, to supporting programmes aimed at strengthening women as economic actors. These organizations give voice and visibility to women’s specific situations, while they seek to broaden alliances for social justice.

UNIFEM’s mandate is to support gender equality, women’s rights and their participation, in partnership with the state as well as with women’s organizations. UNIFEM’s strategic approaches include advocacy, brokering resources, communication and dissemination of best practices. In the Haitian context, all these strategies are needed to support the work towards women’s empowerment within the state, in civil society and within the UN system.

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<sup>14</sup> Collaborating agencies include UNFPA, UNIFEM, MINUSTAH, UNDP, UNICEF

Of particular interest to UNIFEM, given its thematic priorities, are the efforts to achieve peace and security, improve the climate of leadership and governance, reduce the rising levels of poverty, and combat the increase in gender based violence. UNIFEM will work with the peacekeeping mission, the UN country team and women's organizations, drawing on experiences in peace and security programming gained in Africa, including in Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, as well as in East Timor, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

**The main objectives of UNIFEM's support will be to:**

1. Institutional strengthening and gender mainstreaming an integrated response to violence against women could include: a) Mapping and assessment of governmental and non-governmental policies and programmes to end Violence against Women; b) regional and national consultations with sectors to determine priorities for policy and programmatic interventions; c) development of National Action Plan with time-bound benchmarks, indicators of achievements and identification of inter-sectoral coordinating mechanism
2. Create channels for dialogue among women's organization's in Haiti and between Haiti and the wider Caribbean, aimed at building solidarity, knowledge networking and advocacy;
3. Provide direct technical assistance to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and women's organizations in the areas which they have identified as priorities; and
4. Provide technical assistance to the UN system for mainstreaming gender into the country planning processes and participate in joint programming to maximize the impact of the work of the UN system around gender justice.

**1.4 Conclusion:**

The ICF process considered gender a cross-cutting issue and attempted to mainstream gender equity issues. This is an approach which, if implemented at all stages of the policy cycle, will ensure responsiveness to the specific needs of women. It is an approach to be encouraged and strengthened.

Yet still, there is a compelling case for specific support to programming targeted explicitly at women's empowerment. What is needed is programming which channels resources through state and non state agencies whose focus is on Haitian women. These agencies have a visceral understanding not only of the condition of Haitian women but also a deep and critical thinking on the strategies and approaches that will ensure that the resources to be placed in Haiti reach women and their households, strengthen security and reduce violence against women.