# Haiti - Gender Note

Prepared by the LCSPP Gender Team, August 2014

An active civil society and women's rights groups have contributed to a favorable environment for promoting gender equality and women's rights in Haiti. Despite considerable progress at the institutional level, however, significant challenges remain regarding endowments of health and education, access to economic opportunities and agency.

### **Poverty**

Haiti is the poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with the highest level of inequality. It ranks 168 out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index (2013), with a score of 0.471, and is considered as a low human development country.<sup>1</sup> The poverty headcount ratio at the national poverty line is 58.7%,<sup>2</sup> and 24.7% of Haiti's population (approximately 2.5 million people) live on less than \$1.25 a day. Haiti has the highest income inequality in the region, with a Gini Coefficient of .59.<sup>3</sup> Haiti also ranks 168 (of 187) on the Gender Equality Index (score of 0,599), which controls HDI data for gender differences. This rank is significantly lower than other countries in the region, such as Guatemala (125), the Dominican Republic (102) or Costa Rica (63).<sup>4</sup>

Women represent about 41% of all heads of household in Haiti. Data pertaining to the differences between male and female-headed households are scarce, particularly regarding the number of household members and the number of economically active members within households. Such information would provide information relevant to gender-specific barriers to the labor market and the gender-segregation within the labor market, which might impact income and poverty.

#### Legal & Institutional Framework for Gender Equality

Haiti has signed the most relevant international instruments related to gender equality and women's rights. It ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1981) and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women (1997). It also adopted the Cairo Program of Action on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>5</sup>.

The Government of Haiti has established national institutions dedicated to the development of policies and programs relevant to women's rights and gender equality. The Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's Rights (MCFDF) is the national machinery serves as a coordinating mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of gender equality commitments. In 2005, MCFDF established focal points in all sectoral ministries to enhance gender mainstreaming. In 2013, a Gender Equality Office for the Haitian parliament was created to foster gender equality on the legislative level and women's participation in formal politics.<sup>6</sup>

Haiti has mainstreamed gender and women's rights into both general national policies and gender-specific policies. General development policies, such as the National Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction (Document de stratégie nationale pour la croissance et la réduction de la pauvreté (DSNCRP 2008-2010)), the Development Strategy for Haiti (Plan Stratégique pour le Développement d'Haïti (PSDH until 2030)) and the three year investment program (Programme

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> UNDP (2014b)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> WB (2014a)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> CIA (2014), WB estimates Gini at 0.61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> UNDP (2014b)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> ECOSOC (2010)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> UNDP (2014a)

triennal d'investissement 2014-2016) include standalone gender goals. Legislation guarantees equal rights for children independent of whether they were born in or out of wedlock (Loi sur la paternité, la maternité et la filiation), and provides guarantees for the rights of domestic workers (Loi sur les conditions du travail domestique). In the education sector, learning materials have been revised to reflect gender equality norms, and affirmative action legislation seeks to increase girls' participation in higher education. In the political realm, a constitutional amendment instituted a quota for women's occupation of 30% of Haiti's public offices, but there is no enforcement mechanism.

With regards to violence against women, various policies have been enacted and several more are envisaged for the future. In 2005, a decree modified existing law and officially recognized rape as a punishable crime (Décret du 11 août 2005 portant modifications du régime des agressions sexuelles), and a National Plan for Eradicating Violence against Women is in effect (Plan national de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes (2012-2016)). Despite a strengthened legal framework, formal gender discrimination persists and is exacerbated by flaws in implementation. With respect to sexual violence, cases are often not investigated and perpetrators not persecuted rigorously.<sup>7</sup> The Penal Code criminalizes all forms of abortion, and mandates penalties for medical practitioners and women involved.<sup>8</sup>

# Access to and Quality of Endowments

#### Health

In Haiti, women face significant risks regarding reproductive and maternal health, with varying levels of vulnerability at different income, geographic location and education levels. The maternal mortality ratio in Haiti has improved significantly, but still remains over four times the LAC average (87 in 2013). In 2009, an estimated 630 women died per 100,000 live births;<sup>9</sup> this rate fell to 380 in 2013 estimations. Declines in maternal mortality are most likely attributable to increased antenatal coverage for women, which grew from 79% in 2000 to 90% in 2012.<sup>10</sup> Almost two thirds of these women (61%) attended all four recommended consultancies. A woman's level of education affects her access to antenatal care: 81% of women without any education access antenatal services as opposed to 97% of women with secondary education or higher.

Despite increased antenatal care, the majority of births in Haiti occur outside formal institutions. In 2012, almost twothirds (64%) of births occur at home, and only 37% are attended by skilled health personnel. Disparities exist, particularly based on the level of income: only 8% of women from the lowest wealth quintile gave birth in a health facility as opposed to 75.7% of women from the highest quintile. Education and location of residence also affect women's access to health institutions. Rural, poor and less educated women are particularly disadvantaged—only 24.6% of rural births are attended by skilled health personnel compared to 59.4% of urban births. The percentage of women with no education being attend by professional staff during birth is significantly lower (14.4%) than the proportion of women with at least secondary education (61.1%). Coverage gaps relative to income show that wealthy women have much higher access to maternal health care: only 9.6% of women from the lowest wealth quintile.<sup>11</sup> Contraceptive prevalence is low; among women in union, only 35% used modern methods at the time of the survey (the regional average was 75% in 2010).

**Chronic malnutrition is a significant challenge, and carries intergenerational effects.** In Haiti, 13% of women have a BMI (kg/m) of less than 18.5, indicating that they are chronically malnourished. Women's malnutrition has critical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> US State Department 2010

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> UNDP (2013b)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> RH IHSI (2006)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> RH MSPP (2013)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> RH MSPP (2013)

implications for child malnutrition; about one fifth of children under five (22%) are chronically malnourished, and 8% of them are affected by severe malnutrition. The rate of chronic malnutrition declines very clearly with longer birth intervals; child malnutrition declines from 27% at a birth interval of 0-48 months to 16% when the birth interval is over 48 months.

Haiti has the highest percentage of HIV/AIDS infections in the region, and disproportionately affects young women. According to the 2012 DHS, 2.2% of those aged 15 to 49 are HIV-positive. Gender relations affect women's autonomy and empowerment with respect to decisions about sex and negotiating contraceptive use; and socio-economic factors create additional gendered vulnerabilities to HIV/AIDS. The prevalence rate is among women is 2.7%, versus 1.7% among men. The prevalence of HIV\_AIDS peaks among women age 25 to 29 years (4.2%), and peaks later in men in the age range of 40 to 44 years (4.2%).

### **Education**

There is evidence that post-earthquake conditions have greatly impeded Haitian girls' and boys' ability to attend school; supply-side constraints persist and households have fewer resources to finance school expenses. In rural areas, this has led to setbacks regarding gender parity in primary enrollment, where households have favored boys' school attendance over that of girls. This might explain that the gender parity index in primary education was 1.02 in 2006, but dropped to 0.93 in 2012 on the national level. In urban areas, there still is gender parity, indicated by an index value of 1.01, in rural areas, this value was 0.88 in 2012.<sup>12</sup>

**Literacy rates exemplify further differences between women and men.** In 2012, 73.6% of all adult women can read and write as opposed to 78.8% of all adult men. At the age of 15 to 24 years, this relation is slightly reversed; in this age group, 85.9% of women are alphabetized, but only 84.2% of their male counterparts. At the age group of 15 to 19 years, this gender disparity is even larger, with 86.2% alphabetized women versus 82.9% men.<sup>13</sup>

# **Economic Opportunity**

### **Participation in the Labor Market**

**Overall, there is low involvement in economic activity in the country.** The net rate of activity among men is 66% and 48% among women. There is a gender gap favoring males, but the gap is more severe in rural areas and in provincial cities.<sup>14</sup> Gender gaps in labor market participation are closely related to traditional gender roles that assign the core responsibility for household chores to women. Accordingly, women invest more than twice the time men invest in unpaid care work activities weekly (15 versus 7 hours, respectively).

Gender and age determine dynamics of labor market participation, with an increased share of young male participation in recent years. Between 2007 and 2012, the labor market participation of young men (10-24 years) has increased almost 20%. For their female counterparts, it has gone up from 16.3% to 25.2%. However, assumptions about economic empowerment or disempowerment of these specific groups cannot be easily drawn due to the lack of further age disaggregation. On one hand, male *child labor* could have increased, which would indicate boys' vulnerability due to their withdrawal from school and lack of long-term human capital accumulation. In the post-earthquake economy, children may be required to supplement family incomes by working in the fields in rural locations and/or helping to sell items through informal markets. On the other hand, the increase of labor market participation among children and youth could also indicate discrimination on the labor market against young women. Further age disaggregation would be necessary to assess whether participation has increased among very young boys (10-16), indicating an increase in male child labor, or

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> UNDP (2014a)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

whether the increase has been among older age groups (17-24) of men, which could signal an unequal access of young women among these ages to the labor market.

**For older cohorts, the female labor force participation has increased slightly more than that of men.** In the age group of 25 to 54 years, male labor market participation has increased slightly from 87.75% to 89.6% as opposed to an increase of female labor market participation from 63.8% to 68.5%. For men aged above 55 years, this increase was from 73% to 80.5% and for women of the same age group from 44.7% to 54.6% respectively.<sup>15</sup>

**Women face greater barriers in accessing high quality jobs, in terms of formality, security and decent wage levels.** In the informal sector, 55.9% of all employees are women and they represent no more than 30% of all formal private sector employees. In 2012, 86.3% of working women work under conditions that do not comply with ILO standards. Women face precarious working conditions and face multiple constraints, such as sexual harassment, non-renumerated work, and low pay.<sup>16</sup> Estimates of a gender wage gap determine that women earn about 32% less than men. In the light of the MDG 3 indicators, it can be mentioned that in 2012, women occupied 42.6% of all jobs (15-49 years) and that only 9.2% of all employed women worked in the agricultural sector as opposed to 43.9% of men.<sup>17</sup> **Unemployment particularly affects women and youth.** In recent years, unemployment has been decreasing stronger for men than for women (-3.3% versus -1.9%), resulting in a male unemployment rate of 11.5% and a female unemployment rate of 17.3%. For the urban workforce, unemployment affects almost 50% of the active female workforce. Furthermore, young people are specifically affected by unemployment; unemployment rates among this population tend to be above 60%.<sup>18</sup> Others face the challenges of *underemployment*, 42.4% of women only have access to seasonal or occasional work, and this ratio increases in the case of agricultural labor to 62%.<sup>19</sup>

# **Housing and Infrastructure**

Although laws on land ownership in Haiti are not overtly discriminatory, women have traditionally enjoyed less access to land ownership than men. Lack of access to credit and sustainable income as well as uneven power dynamics between men and women make it difficult for women to acquire land and legal documentation. Granting women access to land can be associated with increasing their negotiating power in intra-household decision making, which tends to lead to positive well-being outcomes, particularly for children. Among other positive consequences, enabling women to access land rights can lead to their economic empowerment, as land can be used as productive asset or as collateral for credit. In Haiti, 71% of women do not own housing or land, 20% jointly hold land or house titles with another person, and 9% own land or house titles individually. Regarding urban-rural differences, rural women are slightly favored; 11% of them as opposed to 6% of urban women own land or housing. Poor women and less educated women tend to have a greater probability of ownership; 18.7% of women without any education, as opposed to 16% of women with at least secondary education own land or housing. Similarly, 11% women of the lowest income quintile own land and 12% own houses, as opposed to women that belong to the highest wealth quintile (5% and 6%, respectively).<sup>20</sup>

**Infrastructure coverage, already weak prior to the 2010 earthquake, worsened significantly in the disaster's aftermath.** According to a 2001 household survey, only 14.4% of households had access to safe drinking water in their homes and 31.5% had electricity (with lower coverage in rural areas). Housing represents the sector most affected by the earthquake, with \$2.3 billion in damages, comprising approximately 40% of the post-disaster effects.<sup>21</sup> Nearly 1 million Haitians lost their homes and were relocated to temporary shelters, camps and, in some cases, insufficient rentals.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ibid. <sup>18</sup> WB (2014d)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> PDNA (2010b)

Anecdotally, housing costs have greatly limited women's disposable income and savings, made them more dependent on male providers and heightened their vulnerability to domestic violence.

**Infrastructure investments in Haiti have traditionally ignored the specific needs of women and have widened the economic gap between women and men.** Men have more often been the beneficiaries of training and income opportunities generated by infrastructure projects during post-earthquake reconstruction. Many projects proceed without consultations with women's groups. In some circumstances, the exclusion of women in project design has resulted in direct negative consequences for women and girls, including insecure means of transport, unsafe drinking sources, waste systems and sanitary resources and impediments to education, training or income generation.<sup>22</sup>

## Agency

### **Violence against Women**

Gender-based violence continues to be a major challenge to gender equality in Haiti, with equal vulnerability across educational or income divides. In 2012, 24.9% of all women aged 15 to 49 reported having experienced intimate partner violence throughout their lives. Whereas physical violence has decreased by 6%, psychological violence has increased from 11% to 17%. Regarding differences among women, income does not seem to make a great difference; those from the fourth and fifth income quintile report 18.9% and 13.9% physical intimate-partner, whereas 14.2% of the second and 11.4% of the lowest quintile report incidence of physical violence. Similarly, women's educational level does not tend to have a great impact, although women with primary education report slightly higher incidence (32.8%) than their counterparts without any education (27.6%) or with secondary education and beyond (26.7%).<sup>23</sup> When drawing conclusions, it has to be taken into consideration, that numbers can vary not only according to actual incidences of violence, but also depending on differences between groups of women in the probability to report experiences of violence and/or classify incidences of violence as such.<sup>24</sup> The normalization of violence might affect reporting, as certain types of behaviors might not be considered as rights violations. UNICEF estimates female justification of wife-beating to be at 16.7% among women which compares to a slightly lower share among men (14.9%). 35.8% of adolescent girls felt that wife beating is justified under certain conditions.<sup>25</sup>

Sociologically, gender-based violence can be interpreted a societal mechanism to sanction deviances from heteronormative and heterosexual norms, thereby restricting people's agency regarding expressions and identities of gender, sex and sexuality. Gender-based violence not only affects women, but also people that do not comply with normative configuration of sex, gender and sexuality. Human rights organizations have expressed concerns about violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people. Despite the fact that the Haitian government condemned this kind of violence openly, progress on investigation and persecution remains slow.<sup>26</sup>

### **GBV and Disasters**

**Peoples' behavior changes during emergencies, as do the ways in which they express their emotions and cope with the stress and psychological impacts of disaster.** Studies show that men and women employ different coping mechanisms. While women are more likely to express grief and seek support from other women, men tend to repress grief and express frustration through aggression, violence and alcoholism.<sup>27</sup> Economic hardship can increase tension and lead to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> PDNA (2010a)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> UNDP (2014a)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> UNICEF (2014)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> HRW (2014), pp.3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Delaney and Shrader (2000)

conflict and domestic violence. It can also make women more susceptible to sexual exploitation, sometimes by men in positions of authority such as the police, the military, and even humanitarian workers. Overcrowded camps and poorly designed humanitarian interventions can increase women's' vulnerability to sexual violence. Furthermore, the application of customary measures of law and order is usually irregular, and dislocation disrupts traditional community support and protection mechanisms.<sup>28</sup>

### **Teenage Pregnancy and Freedom of Reproductive Choices**

**Percentages of teenage pregnancy and data on prevalence of contraception suggest that women enjoy limited agency regarding their choices related to sexuality and reproduction.** Among women age 25 to 49, the median age of entry in a first union is 20.4 years and the median age of first sex is 18.1. In Haiti, 24.2% of adolescent girls (between15 and 24) reported that their first sexual experience was forced. An estimated 17% of girls aged 15 to 19 are currently married or in union and 15% of women age 20-24 gave birth before age 18.<sup>29</sup> Men on the other hand tend to have their first sex (age 16.6) about 10 years prior to their entry into a first marriage (26.3 years). This implies that generally older men are pairing with younger women, which might lead to or be based on power differentials between male and female partners, and higher rates of unwanted first sexual experiences for young women. The legal framework supports this age gap—the legal age for a woman to get married is 15, compared to 18 for men.<sup>30</sup> Regarding reproductive choices, there are significant limitations for women's agency in terms of delaying reproduction. In 2012, only 31% of all women report usage of modern contraception. Women in Haiti have no access to safe abortions, due to the criminalization of both women and practitioners, which leads to severe health risks. Only 42% of women that have had an abortion report the presence of health professionals during the abortion.<sup>31</sup>

### **Political participation**

Haiti's amended constitution stipulates a women quota of 30% in all public offices, but implementation of this legislation at all levels of formal politics remains low. Only 4.2% of all parliamentary seats in Haiti are held by women, placing Haiti 136<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries.<sup>32</sup> In the senate, the participation of women has been decreasing steadily since 2006; since 2012 no woman has held a seat in the Senate. In the Representative Chamber, the percentage of women has increased from 3.6% in 1995 to 5.2% in 2012. Currently, there are five women in this chamber of parliament. Regarding access to cabinet positions, as of April 2014, eight out of 23 ministers and three out of 20 secretaries of state are women. The underrepresentation of women in formal politics is perpetuated at the subnational level. In 2013, there were no female city council delegates and only 7% of all vice-delegates were women. At the local level, women constitute only 12% of all mayors and 17% of all temporary executive agents.<sup>33</sup>

# **Concluding Remarks**

Haiti is the poorest country in Latin America. Poverty and high levels of inequality based on gender, age and geographic location shape the context of gender equality in Haiti. The country has successfully integrated principles of gender equality and women's rights into national institutions and legislation, but significant challenges remain in the implementation of policies.

In terms of endowments of **health**, women face significant risks regarding reproductive and maternal health, which are exacerbated by inequalities of income, geographic location and education, leaving rural, poor and less educated women

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> UN Security Council (2011)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> UNICEF (2014)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> PDNA (2010a)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> RH MSPP (2013)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> UN Women and IPU (2014)

<sup>33</sup> CEPAL (2014)

particularly disadvantaged. Chronic malnutrition is an intergenerational challenge, as nutritional level of mothers affects their children's development. Haiti is the country with the highest percentage of HIV/AIDS infections in the region. Regarding impacts of health, the health status of family or household members tends to affect women disproportionally due to gender roles that delegate care work primarily to women.

Regarding **education** there is evidence that post-earthquake conditions have greatly impeded Haitian girls' and boys' ability to attend school; supply side constraints persist and households have fewer resources to finance school expenses. In rural areas, primary enrollment favors boys, whereas in urban areas, gender parity exists. Literacy rates exemplify that differences between women and men depend on the age cohort; whereas in older cohorts, more men than women can read and write this correlation is reversed in younger cohorts.

Lack of access to **economic opportunities** and the low involvement in economic activity are great challenges to both men and women in the country. Gender and age determine dynamics of labor market participation, with an increased share of young male participation in recent years. Gender gaps in labor market participation are closely related to traditional gender roles that assign a greater responsibility for household chores on women. Women face greater barriers in accessing high quality jobs, in terms of formality, security and decent wage levels. Unemployment particularly affects women and the youth. Further disaggregation of data is needed, particularly narrowing down age groups, to specify the intersection of child labor and gender inequalities.

Gender-based violence and gender relations limit Haitian women's **agency**. Unlike in other LAC countries, vulnerability to gender-based violence does not depend on educational or income differences, and all groups of Haitian women are relatively equally affected. In Haiti, gender-based violence is also used to sanction deviances from heteronormative and heterosexual norms, which restricts people's agency regarding expressions and identities of gender, sex and sexuality. Examples include recent attacks and discrimination towards LGBTQI activists. Percentages of teenage pregnancy and data on prevalence of contraception might be used as proxies for women's ability to make effective reproductive choices. In Haiti, related data suggests that women enjoy limited agency related to sexuality and reproduction. Regarding women's participation in formal policies, Haiti's amended constitution stipulates a quota of 30% women in all public offices. Despite this affirmative action women's participation continues to be low at all political levels.

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