

Security and Empowerment for Women and their families: Ensuring a Gender-Responsive Humanitarianism and Early Recovery Response in Haiti

Script for PowerPoint Updated December 2010

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This program responds to the urgent humanitarian and early recovery needs in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti. It also builds on the foundation of the current UNIFEM programming around gender responsive governance, economic security and advancing women's rights. The scope of the proposed program builds on the:

1. Emergency plan of action agreed to between the Ministry of Women's Condition and Rights and UNIFEM; and the
2. UNIFEM component of the UN Flash Appeal which was launched on the 15th January 2010.

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The most affected cities are Port-au-Prince, Léogane, Petite Goave and Jacmel because the epicenter of the earthquake was 15 km from Port-au-Prince. According to preliminary estimates, a million people were affected; 250,000 needing urgent assistance. The authorities estimate that more than 50,000 people died, and more than 3 million people live in the most affected zones.

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Port au Prince and the other affected areas are characterized by widespread destruction of the infrastructure and the consequential disruption of already limited basic services. The population is mainly without shelter, electricity, water, food, health care, and means of transport and security services. The most affected populations, in districts most physically damaged, lost all their tangible properties including their papers of civil identification. In addition, survivors can barely access financial resources and many sectors are paralyzed – health, education, energy, or being reactivated too slowly - banking and markets.

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Violence against women increases when countries are in crisis.

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These two factors also explain the high levels of poverty of women's households. Yet communities depend on women's social and reproductive work as a central component of wellbeing. Apart from their differential experience of poverty, rigid gender roles and inequalities make women vulnerable to gender-based violence, and to exclusion from political decision making. In time of emergency, whether

political or natural disaster-related, Haitian women and girls have experienced heightened exposure to acts of violence and in particular sexual violence.

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Some reports state that 42% of Haitian households are headed by women.

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In the aftermath of the earthquake, this responsibility will increase as women seek out the most basic of services to keep their families intact and to assist their communities in making the hardest of adjustments, to the loss of loved ones, and to the loss of the security of the known. In both the humanitarian and early recovery efforts, attention must be given to ensuring, that those who carry the responsibility of the care for others, are given the needed resources and opportunities.

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The devastating January 12th earthquake hit hard at the Haitian women's movement, taking the lives of a number of leading activists.

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Some significant progress has been made towards these goals since 2004. And, so in the midst of the earthquake tragedy, UNIFEM with its partners have prioritized processes that will ensure that women both contribute to, and benefit from in equitable measure, the humanitarian response. They must be certain, that the gains that have been made to eliminate the culture of acceptance of harm against women, are not reversed.

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The principles which guide the UNIFEM program include:

1. The need for a gender-responsive humanitarian response that takes into account gender differentials in need, responsibilities, vulnerabilities and strengths;
2. The requirement for women, women's organizations and civil society; to participate in decision-making over priority areas of action; and in the allocation of resources;
3. The importance of strengthening the Ministry of Women's Condition and Rights, and women's organizations and civil society institutions, through support for ownership of the humanitarian and early recovery efforts;
4. The link between immediate humanitarian response, and the consequential early recovery actions, in order to strengthen the fabric of democratic governance, participation and equality.

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UNIFEM will establish a basket fund to ensure the flow of resources to civil society organizations and women's groups who are working with women producers. This fund will be complemented by restoring, strengthening or imparting new livelihood and entrepreneurial skills for women, linked to market access. Workshops, trainings and seminars will be provided on management, small business administration, community organizing and networking, as well as trainings on non-traditional skills, which will be needed during reconstruction process.

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Presently only three formalized shelters exist in Port au Prince. It is very likely that these shelters will experience a dramatic increase in demand for their services, not only in relation to the violence response, but also just as shelters.

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This is a photo of Nicole Kidman, UNIFEM's Goodwill Ambassador, during her visit to Haiti. Kidman has lent her support as the spokesperson to UNIFEM's "Say No –Unite to End Violence Against Women" initiative.

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Since 2004, UNIFEM has prioritized programming in Haiti, in response to the demands of both state and non-state participants, to address the challenges of gender equality and women's empowerment. In collaboration with key national partners, including the Ministry on the Status of Women and Women's Rights (MCFDF), and key organizations within the women's movement, UNIFEM is contributing to building institutional capacity around gender mainstreaming and the promotion of women's human rights. In addition UNIFEM is supporting processes which focus on women's political participation. However, the main thrust of the work to date has been in the area of gender justice and security, given the importance of addressing systematic violations of women's security rights as well as the prevalence of gender-based violence exacerbated in times of crisis.