



Claire Lauterbach

Consultant, Gender Action
November 5, 2013

Building Back, But by Half? Donor Haiti Earthquake Response Still Struggles to Address Women's Needs

Haitian women were [disproportionately affected by the earthquake](#) that shook Haiti almost four years ago and its aftermath. The estimated [US\\$ 8 billion in damages](#) does not capture how the crisis worsened women's and girls' homelessness, insecurity, poverty and food insecurity. Donors from [United Nations agencies](#) to the [World Bank](#) to [USAID](#) recognize that women -- their experiences, needs and voices - must be central to Haiti's reconstruction. But do they walk the talk? Women's concerns are still fractionally addressed in post-earthquake aid to Haiti. Nor do women themselves actively participate as project 'beneficiaries'. Nearly gender-blind development and reconstruction aid in Haiti (and everywhere) is neither effective nor equitable.

This is the conclusion of Gender Action's new report "[Building Back by Half? Gender Issues in IFI Investments in Post-earthquake Haiti](#)" that analyzes Haitian aid operations of two key donors, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank (WB). In total these donors have committed over US\$ 1.7 billion in over 170 Haiti projects between January 2010 and August of this year. While over half the 24 projects in the sample reviewed mentioned women's roles, only four explicitly conducted consultations with women during planning and implementation, only 12 targeted women as participants, and only 7 collected sex-disaggregated data essential for monitoring.

What does this mean concretely? Consider the following two very different projects. A May 2010 [WB project](#) to provide energy and lighting using solar lamps misses opportunities to respond to women's unique needs. The project's mandatory [environmental and social safeguards analysis](#) acknowledges that solar lanterns could improve personal security and aid night-time care of vulnerable groups, specifically naming small children, the elderly and the injured. But it completely ignores how the lamps would benefit women suffering from a [high incidence of rape](#) exacerbated by poor lighting in displacement camps. Since the project does not target women, we cannot even tell if women benefited at all from the project.

By contrast a June 2010 [IDB project](#) to promote mango production for sale to Coca-Cola is relatively gender sensitive. The project clearly aims to increase by 20 percent women's representation in Producer Business Groups from a baseline of zero and ensures that 50 percent of processing plant employees be women, including in senior roles, laudable considering how Haiti's lucrative export-oriented crop industries are [typically dominated by men](#). The project budget allocates funding for gender sensitivity training and, importantly, collects sex-disaggregated indicators by which to monitor its potentially different impact for men and women. While laudably gender sensitive, it nevertheless begs the larger question of whether a corporate-driven export-crop development strategy compounds donors' and the Haitian government's [historical neglect of agriculture](#) for domestic consumption, though [around 85](#)

[percent](#) of rural Haitians ([around half of Haiti's total population](#) according to the World Bank) practice agriculture and farming.

The bottom line is that every humanitarian and reconstruction project in Haiti (as everywhere) must take gender issues into account at all project stages, from planning through implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Beyond inserting 'gender' here and there into project plans and documents, Haitian women themselves must be involved in building a more equitable and more resilient Haiti.