



WOMEN'S
REFUGEE
COMMISSION

LIVELIHOODS AND THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN HAITI

KEY MESSAGES AND GUIDANCE FOR ACTION

Women's Refugee Commission

Before the January 12, 2010 Haitian earthquake, more than half of the Haitian population lived on less than one dollar a day and 78% on less than two.¹ With an estimated \$3.6 billion lost in economic productivity,² increasing numbers of Haitians find themselves slipping under the poverty line. Haitians trying to survive are engaging in ad hoc businesses, migrating to rural areas and leveraging remittances. With few livelihood options, women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse as they engage in unsafe activities, such as prostitution or traveling in unsafe areas to find work. To date, humanitarian assistance has been focused, by necessity, on life saving assistance, attention should also prioritize re-starting people's economic lives.

This document highlights general action and specific recommendations for humanitarian assistance practitioners engaged in livelihood programs, such as cash-for-work programming, agrarian interventions and financial sector support. This document is based on the Women's Refugee Commission's *Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings*, the first-ever comprehensive guide to help field-based programmers and practitioners design and implement more effective economic interventions for displaced people.

General

- **Have a good understanding of critical local market systems**, which supply critical goods and services to ensure survival and protect livelihoods. The Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis (EMMA) Assessment identifies six critical market systems: beans, corrugated iron sheets, construction, timber and water suppliers. The Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET) identifies imported rice, local black beans, local milled corn, and oil (Alberto) as foodstuff staples in Port-au-Prince.
- **Support the informal sector**, which constitutes 70-80% of non-agricultural workers,³ by supporting market linkages, access to finance/grants, integration in local procurement mechanisms and/or entrepreneurship programs. Recognizing women's predominance in the informal sector, support should ensure elimination of gender biases in market access.
- **Understand household needs and economic coping strategies**, including how households respond when their sources of income are disrupted and the increase in roles and responsibilities for women after a crisis, by conducting participatory assessments with the target communities.
- **Support local capacity, markets and socioeconomic structures** to ensure long-term recovery. This can be done by channeling basic relief through local businesses in the formal and informal sectors, using local procurement, distributing agricultural inputs through local traders (e.g., seed-fairs) and working with local nongovernmental partners, including women partners and businesses.
- **Identify specific protection risks**, including sexual abuse, exploitation and exclusion of women, people with disabilities and youth. Ensure program design mitigates these risks. Reference *Peril or Protection: The Link Between Livelihoods and Gender-based Violence in Displacement Settings*.

Cash-for-Work Programs

- **Conduct careful market analysis** to ensure that programs don't cause inflation or undermine agricultural

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production by drawing farmers away with the offer of higher wages. Continue to monitor the impact of programs on labor and goods markets to be adaptive and responsive.

- **Ensure community involvement in selecting projects and participants** that ensure relevance, buy-in, transparency and fair access. Both women and men should be involved in decision-making.
- **Be gender, age and ability-aware** to reach the most vulnerable. Establish minimum age limits for youth, non-labor intensive jobs for the elderly and disabled, and recognize Haitian women's already-heavy household responsibilities by providing time-flexible jobs and child-care support.
- **Determine cash transfer mechanisms that ensure safety of laborers**, particularly women, who are at risk of gender-based violence over control of income earned. Women should be consulted on their preferences for payment methods.
- **Put in place an exit strategy** for cash-for-work programs early, as sudden loss of an income source may damage participants' long-term livelihood strategies.

Agrarian Interventions

- **Support diversification of livelihoods.** The majority of farmers are reliant on markets to meet their food needs. Programs should support multiple agricultural value chains to diversify farmers' livelihoods and meet market demands. Support should take into account implicit gender divisions of labor in agricultural value chains.
- **Address decrease in household purchasing power** and how these affect demand for goods and services. This is possible through cash-assistance/voucher and cash-for-work programs.
- **Consider food aid *only if* local market-systems are unable to meet demands.** If food aid is necessary, it should support local procurement from the formal and informal sector when possible.
- **Conduct value chain analyses to understand agriculture market systems and interventions.** Given the decrease in household purchasing power and demand for local produce, re-establishing credit systems, market security or repairing infrastructure may be of greater importance than increasing agricultural productivity, in the short-term.
- **Reference USAID's *Environmental Vulnerability in Haiti, Findings and Recommendations***, which addresses the severe environmental fragility associated with traditional agricultural practices, in order to design interventions that reduce environmental degradation.

Financial Services

- **Coordinate efforts with the Early Recovery Cluster, Cash Coordination Working Group**, so that interventions lead to comprehensive improvement of the financial service systems and infrastructure as a whole.
- **Understand existing financial mechanisms** to support and recapitalize local microfinance institutions, which need to rebuild their delivery systems and loan portfolios. Understand how existing mechanisms reach out to and support women-owned businesses and heads of household.
- **Adapt financial products to needs of formal and informal businesses and households** to avoid further debt. Products should recognize the varied needs of women-headed businesses and households.
- **Have a clear strategy for the use of grants verses loans.** Provide clear messages and branding about credit verses grant activities.
- **Ensure that women participate in decisions**, especially about loans, as registration of a loan in a woman's name does not necessarily mean she has control over decisions on how the loan is spent.

For more detailed guidance on the necessary steps to implement cash-for-work, agrarian or financial sector interventions in displacement settings, please reference the respective chapters in the *Building Livelihoods: A Field Manual for Practitioners in Humanitarian Settings*.

Notes

- 1 World Bank. "US\$ 100 Million in Grant Money for Recovery and Reconstruction of Haiti in Wake of Earthquake." January 13, 2010. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/0,,contentMDK:22440566~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258554,00.html>.
- 2 Gouvernement de la Republique d'Haiti. Plan d'Action pour Le Relevement et Le Developpement National, Les Grands Chantiers pour L'Avenir. Draft (March 2010). p.4.
- 3 Nathaniel Whittemore. "In Haiti are Informal Markets a Hope or Hindrance?" February 5, 2010. <http://socialentrepreneurship.change.org/blog/view/in-haiti-are-informal-markets-a-hope-or-hindrance>.