

Where are the Women in Haiti's Reconstruction?

Huirou Commission

April 7th, 2010 - Women and gender issues were glaring in their absence from the March 31st Haiti International Donors' Conference held in New York when billions of dollars were pledged to finance Haiti's reconstruction. Haiti's National Plan of Action, the blueprint guiding reconstruction efforts and resource allocation, was based on a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA). The PDNA resulted from a two month process led by the Government of Haiti and involving more than 250 people from the United Nations, the World Bank, the European Union and the Inter-American Development Bank. Despite this large scale effort, the resulting PDNA failed to address gender dimensions of Haiti's proposed strategies for reconstructing macroeconomic, social, environmental policies, as well as infrastructure and governance.

To amplify Haitian women's voices, a collective effort involving more than 100 international women's organizations and networks held a press conference and parallel event across the street from the Donors' Conference on March 31st 2010. At the event, they released a Gender Shadow Report (<http://tinyurl.com/ycke9h2>) that provides a gender analysis of and response to the PDNA. The report is introduced by an open letter to donors demanding the inclusion of Haitian women's voices in the reconstruction process and attention to gender issues in all policies and budget allocations.

Describing the Gender Shadow Report as an instrument for putting words into action, Kathy Mangones, UNIFEM's Haiti country program coordinator, declared that "women's leadership and participation in Haiti's reconstruction" is the only way to "create more stable, inclusive and democratic societies." Acclaimed Haitian-American writer, Edwidge Danticat called the Gender Report "vital for transparency, equality and women's and girls' rights" and a significant step toward "ensuring that women's voices and grassroots' voices are part of the reconstruction conversation." Marie St-Cyr, a Haitian human rights advocate, criticized the PDNA: "We are concerned that even though it talks about cross-cutting issues, it is a lot of rhetoric. We want commitment from the Haitian government and the international community to genuinely integrate women and women's organisations in all processes."

Nigel Fisher, the UN's Senior Representative for the PDNA and President & CEO of UNICEF Canada deemed the PDNA's attention to gender as 'insufficient' and consultations with civil society, human rights advocates and women's networks as "incomplete." Echoing Fisher's concerns, Winnie Byanyima, Director of the Gender Team, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP stated that "the enemy of equality is urgency that prevents a serious analysis of how to bridge inequality."

The most pressing questions focused on implementation. Fisher gave assurances that recommendations made in the Gender Shadow Report would be acted upon and that a gender analysis would be incorporated into planning and implementation strategies. Mr. Fisher emphasized the importance of sex disaggregated data and gender responsive budgeting (GSB) for ensuring accountability to women and gender issues in Haiti's reconstruction.

It is lamentable that now, ten years after the United Nations Security Council adopted its first Resolution (S/RES/1325) on women, peace and security, that core commitments to increase women's participation in peace-building and ensure their protection have yet to be translated into programs, instruments and policies in Haiti. The Gender Shadow Report calls for urgent actions to remedy these transgressions, including:

- The allocation of dedicated funds, which promote and protect women's human rights and strengthen gender equality. This includes support for rebuilding and strengthening the capacity of key gender equality actors in Haiti, including the Ministry of Women's Condition and Rights, the women's movement and networks;
- The dedication of special measures to ensure women and particularly heads of households (30 % of all household are held by women) are driving and benefiting from private sector and livelihood initiatives as well as infrastructure support, which include as well women's priorities for schools, housing, markets, and shelters that increase the security and safety of women;

- The participation of gender equality experts and advocates in all sectors from sanitation to agriculture and assurances that the priorities, needs and voices of women are visible and supported in all sectors;
- The introduction of gender equality markers and other gender responsive budgeting tools.

"We need to continue making a lot of noise as it fades from the general conversation. Business as usual is not an option" Danticat said. "Haitian women and women's organisations ought to be at the center of Haiti's reconstruction."

To read the Gender Shadow Report visit: <http://tinyurl.com/ycke9h2>

To read the open letter to the donors visit:

http://org2.democracyinaction.org/o/5095/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=2402

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