

# Foreign Aid, the Diaspora, and the Role of Women in Post-Earthquake Haiti

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**Abstract:** *This paper offers practical perspectives on ways to address interrelated issues of immediate urgencies facing Haiti. More specifically, it discusses the problem with how foreign aid weakens institutions in Haiti, and prescribes ways international assistance should be targeted to help sustainable economic development by contributing to strengthening institutions, promoting good governance, reinforcing the judiciary, and fostering job creation. Next, the paper highlights two groups that play a crucial role in the Haitian economy: Haitians living abroad and women living in Haiti. It points out to ways professionals in the Diaspora leverage their capital (human and physical) to serve Haiti, and assesses the special role, as well as challenges and perspectives of women in rebuilding post-earthquake Haiti.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the immediate aftermath of the 7.0 earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12, 2010, the country was on an emergency mode and needed urgent aid flows. In the medium term following a disaster of such magnitude, aid must be coordinated to be effective. It must be carried out in ways that does not perpetuate dependency. Effective foreign aid can be thought of as a subsidy aimed to provide temporary financial assistance in order to encourage desired long-term behaviors. The latter are likely to come about as a result of the establishment of the institutions of a developmental state that is endowed with the legitimacy and capacity to implement specific policies geared toward job creation and economic growth, and with a government capable of increasing revenue collection to invest in physical and human capital.

There have been cases where aid-as-subsidy has played a constructive role. Examples are South Korea and Botswana, where foreign assistance supported local efforts in such ways that countries gradually weaned off aid. With financial and technical support from the International Development Association, Tanzania managed to increase government revenue collection from US \$1.1 billion in fiscal year 2002-03 to 1.7 billion in 2005-06, thus making significant inroads toward budgetary self-sufficiency (IDA, 2012). Such a performance demonstrated the ability of a developing nation to rely on its own revenue, which can arguably imply a gradual reduction of dependence on foreign aid. Sadly, this has not been the case in Haiti.

This paper begins by offering some remarks on foreign aid in Haiti. It points out to problematic ways foreign aid has operated in the country, creating dependency and further weakening already feeble institutions. It offers a few directions international donors could adopt to help strengthen institutions in Haiti, including reinforcing good governance as well as the judicial system.

The analysis goes on considering the importance for Haiti of its massive Diaspora, which is believed to represent the economic backbone of the country and to count up to four million expatriates, particularly in North America, other Caribbean nations and Europe. In a survey of international migration and the brain drain that ranked the top-30 skilled emigration countries, Haiti came out 5th, just after Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (World Bank, 2006). Specifically, the emigration rate, in proportion of the educated labor force, was 83.6 % for Haiti.

What role professional Haitians leaving abroad can play in Haiti? This part of the argument turns the lens on expatriate Haitian professionals, and discusses ways they can assist post-earthquake Haiti, particularly through leveraging their human capital to the benefit of their country.

Finally, the paper highlights the particular role and challenges faced by women in Haiti. The economy of Haiti has been largely sustained by women. Women's activities, such as farming and commerce, contribute more than 75 % of the country's prevalent informal economy (Kambou, 2010). There is a strong correlation between a country with ►

better women rights and more equal treatment of women, and economic performance (Ajai-Lowo, 2011). This complementary part of the paper argues that, for effective recovery effort and long-term sustainability in Haiti to actually happen, the needs and capabilities of women in Haiti must be taken into consideration in all sectors, including economic opportunities, education, and health.

## 2. FOREIGN AID

Even before the earthquake that struck an almost fatal blow to Haiti, aid was crucial for the country to sustain itself. Measured as a percentage of gross national income (GNI), foreign aid amounted to 12.4 % in 1996 and 4.5 % in 2002. By comparison these figures were on average 6.2 % and 3.9 %, respectively, for the Caribbean. Over 80 percent of development investments come from external sources in Haiti. And even for its operating budget, the government has been heavily relying on foreign aid. According to the U.S. Department of State, Haiti received more than \$4 billion in aid from 1990 to 2003 from bilateral and multilateral sources. The U.S. contributed to 1.5 billion from 1990 to 2005 (NAPA, 2006). According to the U.S. Department of State, U.S. foreign aid covered development assistance and children's health, economic support fund (ESF), U.S. food program, and international military education and training.

On April 14, 2009, delegates from 28 countries held a donor conference in Washington, D.C., to address the terrible damages caused by the 2008 devastating hurricane season. They agreed to pledge \$324 million in additional aid over the next two years. At the meeting, which was hosted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), contributors promised \$15 million in emergency food assistance, \$20 million to improve infrastructure, and \$2 million to help fight drug trafficking through the U.S.-backed Merida Initiative. Additionally, the recovery plan was to target creating an estimated 150,000 jobs in the country—a stimulus scenario that was hoped to considerably reduce the country's dependence on foreign assistance in the years ahead (IDB, 2009).

After the earthquake there was renewed vigor from the international community to give aid to Haiti. On March 31, 2010, an *International Donors' Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti* was held at the United Nations in New York. The goal was “to mobilize international support for the development needs of Haiti in an effort to lay the foundation for Haiti's long-term recovery” (UN, 2010). While Haiti had appealed for \$3.8 billion for the next two

years, nearly 50 countries and international organizations pledged \$9.9 billion, including pledges of \$5.3 billion from governments and international partners for the first 24 months of reconstruction (CBSI, 2010).

One cannot consider the issue of foreign aid in Haiti without mentioning nongovernment organizations (NGOs). Believed to number in the thousands today, NGOs have been playing a pervasive and, in some aspects, controversial role in the country for years. To be sure, the work of many of them is useful in Haiti. It represents a good contribution to improving people's lives in communities and helping citizens become more engaged and empowered.

Following a period of sociopolitical instability in the early to the mid-2000s, there've been some 9,000 peacekeeping personnel from the Brazil-led *United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti* (MINUSTAH) on the ground in the country.

But the central question remains: Will those projects by NGOs and other community capacity building efforts develop the country? Not likely. Small- or even medium-scale projects cannot address big picture economic, social, institutional, structural, and human issues.

Substantive foreign aid has the potential to work. However, in the case of Haiti, bilateral and multilateral actors, and even regional and charitable organizations, all seemed to have failed to some extent. Picard et al. (2008) reported a 2002 evaluation of World Bank programs in Haiti by the director of the Bank's Operations Evaluation Department. That official qualified “... the outcome of assistance programs [in Haiti from 1986 to 2002 as being] unsatisfactory (if not highly so), the institutional development impact, negligible, and the sustainability of the few benefits that have accrued, unlikely.” This opinion is echoed among other donors, such as the Canadian International Development Agency, which have actually qualified foreign aid in Haiti a “failure.”

### *Why had foreign aid failed in Haiti?*

According to observers, this failure is driven from both the Haitian side and the donor side. Aid is likely to work best in environments with high quality public institutions. But, in the case of Haiti, it is evident that the institutions are weak and corruption, rampant. The Haitian government has admitted in several instances to serious aid management problems. With widespread dissention between the President and Parliament, and with human capital shortage, the country has, over the course of recent history, ended up with a government lacking the capacity to absorb aid. ►

The Donor-Driven-Projects have become pervasive as a model in Haiti. Donors address capacity issues either by offering programs by-passing the Haitian government altogether to work with NGOs, or to manage projects themselves or through contractors. However, donor-managed programs have very large “overhead” costs, and projects have low impact per actual aid-dollar spent.

However, aid has been ineffective on a more fundamental level, on the donor side. For instance, in case of the U.S., Haiti's main assistance provider, it is often enmeshed under the general framework of U.S. foreign policies, which in various instances have contributed directly to the impoverishment Haiti. To name a few such incidences that occurred in recent history:

- The first Bush administration's embargo of Haiti, imposed from 1991 to 1994 at the insistence of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide following a military coup, precipitated one of the worst depressions in the history of Haiti.
- In 2001, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bush administration cited persistent government blockage under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aristide administration to enforce an economic aid embargo on Haiti, yet another one.

The above are only a few of the instances that served to further cripple Haiti's already downtrodden economic and financial system. In the midst of all these, aid would wax and wane as donors act collectively, under U.S. pressure.

An insidious aspect of foreign aid in Haiti is the fact that it is often tied to certain conditions, deemed by multilateral donors as the new model to follow. In the past couple of decades, trade liberalization has been one such disastrous condition. While in theory trade liberalization can help achieve efficiency as countries focus on specializing in the production processes in which they have a comparative advantage, in practice, such experiments in Haiti have left the country opened to strong vulnerabilities. An example in many, the production of rice in the Artibonite Valley in Haiti, then a potent lifeline for hundreds of thousands of rice farmers and their families, got essentially wiped out starting in the late 1980s as a result of indiscriminate liberalization.

### ***What will constitute effective aid in Haiti?***

After billions in foreign aid just over these last three decades, and hundreds of millions of dollars specifically for governance and democratization programs, not to mention significant funding for other programs, it is evident that Haiti remains politically dysfunctional and more

impoverished than never before. One might ask: What type of aid would work?

Foreign aid will need to operate within a new era of U.S.-Haitian relations, one that is fundamentally changed and based on respect and compassion for the Haitian people. Diaspora remittances are one of the most important sources of money for Haiti's self-sufficiency. This lifeline is undermined by U.S. immigration policy, which has been at best discriminatory in its handling of Haitians, compared to much friendlier treatment of expatriates from neighboring islands like Cuba. In what may be one step in the right direction, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton indicated a desire to break with these U.S. immigration practices. If accomplished, this would go a long way toward helping secure and increase Haiti's remittances. Moreover, granting Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Haitians living in the U.S. on expired visas would help achieve the same goal.

For sustainable development and break from *assistanat* (foreign aid dependency) to happen in Haiti, especially as it relates to trade, aid should not be tied to conditions that magnify the country's vulnerable position in world trade. Past ills can be redressed by giving Haiti preferential treatments. A good development in that respect is found in a recent U.S. trade legislation, known as the HOPE II Act, which offers Haiti duty free trade opportunities with the U.S. for a number of years. The act will likely provide a significant boost to the apparel industry, which is presently Haiti's primary export--in 2007, apparel accounted for over 80 percent of Haiti's entire exports and 93 percent of the country's exports to the United States. Ongoing efforts to put Haiti's world-class art on world scenes, particularly in U.S. major retail stores, are very viable ways to help the country projects a more positive image.

Other channels donors can utilize to foster sustainable development in Haiti is to promote massive, skill-building job creation programs, particularly in reconstruction projects, in the development of a manufacturing sector and in the revival of agriculture. Of equal importance would be efforts to strengthen the Haitian state by building its capacity and reinforcing and modernizing its institutions, instead of further weakening it through bypassing its agencies. The goal here would be to achieve a state of affairs that is focused on upholding property rights and the rule of law, on reforming and consolidating the nation's judiciary and security apparatus, and on promoting working institutions, political stability and good governance. These all would be positive signals to potential investors, and also prerequisites for a developing economy to perform and emerge. ►

### 3. HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE HAITIAN DIASPORA

If effective institutions and governance as well as the prevalence of the rule of law are prerequisites for a country's longer term economic growth and development, human capital development comes in very close as another crucial determinant. What is remarkable in that respect is the failure from both the international community and Haiti itself to seize on what might be the country's single most valuable asset: its large numbers of competent professionals from all domains, living overseas. Haiti does, in fact, have much of the expertise and talent it needs to start changing the country's trajectory for the better. Those people just happen to be living abroad. However, with the rejection of dual citizenship by the current Haitian Constitution, many may feel they would be neither genuinely welcome nor fully reintegrated if they return.

Nonetheless, a powerful feature of Haiti's Diaspora is its unwavering commitment to the motherland. After a disaster of the scale of Haiti's earthquake, many Haitians in the Diaspora, across all lines of professions, across all socioeconomic statuses, and this time joined by many citizens all over the world, gathered and reached even deeper into their pocketbook to come to the rescue. But even before the seism Haitians overseas have been substantially, and increasingly, helping Haiti with their remittances. The latter are now estimated to hover around \$2 billion annually when both formal and informal inflows are accounted for.

Figure 1 shows that the volume of formal inflows trebled in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, growing from less than half of a billion dollars at the onset of the 2000s to about \$1.5 billion at the end of the decade. The informal inflows would account for the difference, to justify the \$2 billion yearly estimate.

With Haiti's significant illiteracy rate—officially 45 percent but believed to be more around 70 percent—professional Haitians living abroad could be useful to contribute to education and help develop Haiti's human capital. This is all the more needed as there has been a proliferation of private schools of dubious quality in urban areas while, in the countryside, entire districts lack schools. Moreover, getting an education beyond the primary level is impossible for most. Universities are in terrible shape, too, and in most there is no full-time faculty.

Well-educated Haitians living abroad could lead a remake of the educational system by lending their direct services to the country. This would be a good area for international

funding support, one that will not foster dependency. The fund could support the presence of returnees from abroad in small towns and villages across the country for fixed terms of perhaps two or three years, during which time they would staff local schools and train local teachers, thus spreading opportunity throughout society while building capacity for future years.

The economy is another area where the contribution of Haitians overseas can be harnessed to spur development in the country. Haitian authorities must seek to bring Diaspora financial involvement to a new level, way beyond the mainly nonproductive, consumption-bound current uses of remittances. The latter must be leveraged in local development, with focus on areas such as health and education, rural finance, agriculture, and trade and tourism. Mechanisms must be found to link the consumptive uses of remittances to the productive base of local economies in order to supply goods and services demanded by remittance recipients (Orozco, 2006).

The importance of new policies to harness the full potential of Diaspora financial involvement in Haiti cannot be stressed enough. For instance, remittances flows constitute an important source of foreign exchange for developing economies. Figure 2 provides evidence of that fact by comparing remittances to other financial inflows in order to display the extent to which remittances contribute to Haiti's inflow of foreign exchange.

It is very important for Haiti to have Haitian experts who are thinking about its situation, who know about Haiti, and who are prescribing ways to get Haiti out of its impasse with the proper historical, cultural and human perspectives. After the earthquake, there was renewed efforts by Haitians living abroad to unify and intervene on the motherland. Countless organizations emerged in the weeks following the tragedy, holding countless conferences and symposia.

On March 21-23, 2010, a 400-strong worldwide Diaspora delegation, hosted by the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, D.C., held a Haitian Diaspora Forum (HDF) which deliberated in six workshops<sup>1</sup> to come up with a set of 51 Consolidated Recommendations, across all six workshop topics (HDF, 2010). These recommendations, which represented the Diaspora's formal input into a reconstruction and development ►

1. Workshops' topics were: Urgent humanitarian needs, Ensuring a transparent reconstruction process, Economic development, Strengthening governance, Sustainable development, and Social development.

plan for Haiti, was presented by a Diaspora representative at the above mentioned *International Donors' Conference Towards a New Future for Haiti* held on March 31, 2010, at the United Nations in New York.

Arguably, for all the success Haitians living abroad have achieved as individuals, they still fall short on several dimensions of effective networking. Yet, networking is the hallmark of immigrant communities that are more successful in helping their countries of origin. The painful shock from the earthquake may have contributed to the first steps toward redressing such shortcomings. Two initiatives are worth mentioning. First, the creation of the Haitian Diaspora Federation at the end of the OAS-held, March 2010 Haitian Diaspora Forum. Its goal was to constitute an umbrella of expatriate organizations for the purpose of better coordination and efficiency in advocating for Haiti. Second, two months prior, the *Groupe de réflexion et d'action pour une Haïti nouvelle* (GRAHN) emerged in Montreal, Canada.

Functioning today as GRAHN-Monde (GRAHN-World), the group succeeded in two years and a half in amassing a considerable and unprecedented capital of credibility and record of achievements. As a think-tank and action group, it is represented in seven countries through nearly two dozen chapters.

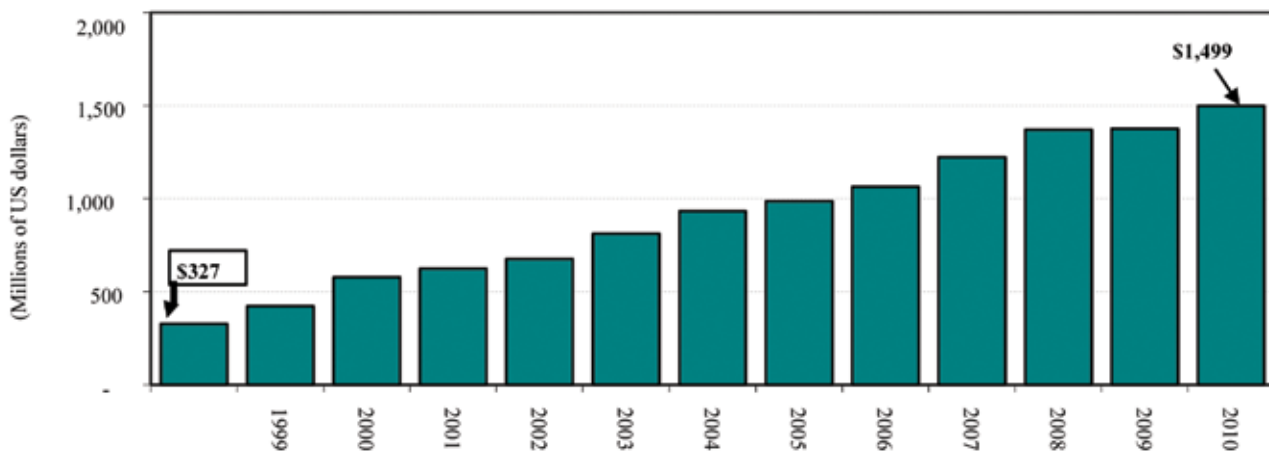
Functioning today as GRAHN-Monde (GRAHN-World), the group succeeded in two years and a half in amassing a considerable and unprecedented capital of credibility and record of achievements. As a think-tank and action group, it is represented in seven countries through nearly two dozen chapters. GRAHN-Monde offers an emerging potent complementary alternative for Haitians to work for

Haiti, and to provide a unified model that embrace a pragmatic and holistic vision to rebuild Haiti by Haitians for Haitians, including direct ways to leverage on their human resources for the service of the native land.

#### 4. HAITIAN WOMEN ROLE, CHALLENGES, AND PERSPECTIVES

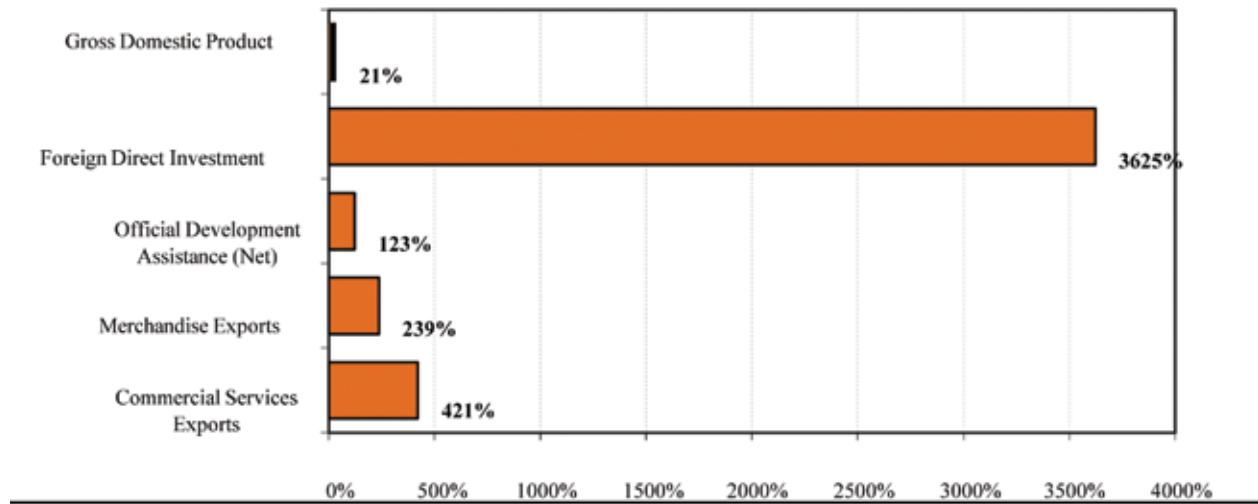
The economy of Haiti has been largely sustained by women. Haitian women are omnipresent in all public markets, which they reach braving terrible roads on donkey-back, and at times by foot, carrying their merchandise on their heads. The majority of struggling Haitian women try to make a livelihood in the informal sector, but the precarious nature of undertakings in the latter, and other activities that women are engaged in, still does not afford them true financial autonomy.

Poverty among women is pervasive across the whole territory of Haiti, in rural as well as urban areas. 41 percent of Haitian women live in rural areas in dismal situations. Scarcities in the countryside have reinforced internal migration by women. It is estimated that women from rural areas have contributed to a 37 % increase in urbanization. They come to cities, but mainly to Port-au-Prince, in search of jobs in factories. Haiti's few industries are concentrated on assembly of clothing, and jobs in the industrial sector are mainly given to young women. But, for the very few who are lucky enough to get these jobs, the daily minimum wage of 70 Haitian gourdes (less than US \$2) is barely enough to cover the cost of transportation to and from the factory each day. A woman with a factory job would be lucky to return home with half the pay at the end of the day. ►



Source : Migration Policy Institute, from the World Bank's Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011.

Figure 1 Haiti : Formal remittance inflow



Source : Migration Policy Institute, 2011, from the following sources : [International Trade Statistics, World Trade Organization, 2010](#) [World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2011](#) [Remittances data, Development Prospects Group, World Bank, 2011](#)

**Figure 2 Haiti Remittances Inflows as a Share of Selected Financial Flows and GDP, 2009**

This is not enough to feed her family more than once or twice each week. According to data available from Haiti's government agency for statistical research (IHSI), almost one third of working women become beggars after 70 years of age—that is, when they reach such age, and there is no social security system at all to help them.

Although every one suffered as a result of the earthquake, that disaster was not gender neutral. It disproportionately affected women. This is part of a wider, well documented phenomenon: natural disasters tend to have an unequal impact on the disadvantaged and the more vulnerable (Chew and Ramdas, 2005). A look at the demographics will drive the point home in the case of Haiti. On January 12, 2010, there was already an imbalance in the male-to-female ratio. Haitian women are estimated to represent 52 percent of the population. The life expectancy for women is 56 years, while it is 54 years for men. The imbalance in the male-to-female and survival ratios triggered several gender-specific problems when the disaster hit.

Data collected before the quake shows that over 40 percent of households in Haiti are headed by single women, all playing a key role in providing for their families and caring for dependents. The birth index per woman is 4.4. Further, they take care of many more people besides their own children.

According to the *Institut Haïtien de Statistique et d'Informatique* (IHSI)'s Survey on Mortality and Morbidity and the use of Services in 2005-2006, approximately 62 percent of Haitian women are responsible for an average of no less than eight dependents. Hence, the bigger impact on their post-quake ability to care for others.<sup>2</sup> ►

2. The earthquake exacerbated a situation that Haitian women have been facing forever, that of sexual abuses, particularly in the camps. The United Nations Population Fund estimated that as many as 125,000 women lived in just seven camps. The earth-quake exposed them further to all sorts of exploitation and abuses, and poses urgent issues of more sexual and domestic violence related to their temporary, privacy lacking housing conditions. Just between January and February 2010, SOFA (*Solidarite Fanm Ayisyen* or Haitian Women Solidarity) reported that there was up to 30 cases of rapes per day. The Haitian national police also reported 534 arrests for sexual violence in the weeks after January 12. This fits a general pattern: a 1996 report found that 7 out of 10 Haitian women said that they have been victims of violence, with the most common form being sexual assault. Again in 2009, according to the country report for Haiti presented to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2009, 70 percent of Haitian women and girls surveyed claimed to have experienced physical, sexual, political or psychological violence, the majority being adolescent girls between the ages of 10 and 18. In the same survey, the men interviewed claimed never to have used violence against women, but 80 percent of them believed it was sometimes justified to hit women when they fail to obey or they act uppity.

### What is the perspective for Haitian women going forward?

The crucial issue for Haiti is how to achieve sustainable development. To that effect, women needs must be central to all related strategies. Main issues are:

- **Education:** The social benefits from women's education range from fostering economic growth (through enhanced market productivity and reduction in the education gender gap) to extending the average life expectancy in the population, as part of well-documented beneficial effects on social well-being.
- **Health:** Urgent actions to remedy the dismal health-care issues just cannot be further postponed. Haiti can no longer afford having the most productive members of the population sick. Health problems faced by women (and children) are multiple and daunting: high maternal mortality rate; very limited access to family planning; HIV prevalence; etc.
- **Economic:** What is the prospect of foreign aid from women's perspectives? When it comes to international assistance, and especially to supporting community-driven development projects, perspectives are actually very good for women in Haiti. In general, community development assistance and workforce development training programs seem to work mostly for women, and this is true even in the United States. Even in emergency situations, when women are given food, it seems like they are more likely to share it and give it to their children in a more equitable manner. There is evidence that when women are trained, they are the group most likely to implement income-generating projects. Funds for microcredit seem to work best for women in terms of opening small businesses and paying back those loans. Consequently, if the opportunities are there in Haiti, those community-driven development projects can help women become economically empowered, and should be viewed as a very good start on the road to economic recovery.

## 5. CONCLUSION

For sustained and very high level of economic growth to occur, Haiti must have some key long-term behaviors that include, first and foremost, government's ability to raise public revenue, establish credible institutions, and have a true commitment to develop the country. The scope of this paper did not allow going into details on how these difficult

tasks can be achieved, but it focused on important, but often overlooked prospects for the country, namely, how to reorient foreign aid to make a lasting difference, how to leverage Diaspora resources to lift the country up, and how to empower women to better carry out their vital role. ■

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