

Overview of Underlying Causes of Girls' Marginalization in the Haitian Education System

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Introduction

At first glance, Haiti is a model of gender equity in education, at least as relates to parity. According to the Haitian Ministry of Education, 49.3% and 50.34% of primary and secondary school children, respectively, are girls¹. However, this is only one side of the story as nearly 23% of all school-aged primary children are out of school.² By assessing the reality of these out-of-school girls and boys and analyzing the overall context more closely, the inequity in education becomes clear. From May-June 2012, Jane Kellum, Education & Gender Advisor for CARE in Haiti, researched the complexity of gender equity within the Haitian education system by analyzing the underlying causes of girls' marginalization in the Haitian educational system. While the results themselves have been valuable for programming decisions, the lessons learned during the process also provide valuable insight into how we can make our work in education more gender transformative.

Methodology

Haiti presents a unique context in that it continuously vacillates between an emergency and long-term development context. Thus, challenges of time, monetary resources, and relevancy of interventions - given rapidly changing contexts - are always present. Given these obstacles, the Education sector used a simple methodology to better understand these factors:

- Desk review of existing studies on related topics.
- Half-day "Underlying Causes of Girls' Marginalization in Education" workshops with a diversity of stakeholders in two of our program operating zones. Participants included representatives from student committees, parents, teachers, school directors, and local Ministry of Education staff.
- Individual key informant interviews with CARE Haiti's local education field staff.
- Analysis of primary data collection by CARE Haiti's health sector on commercial sexual exploitation of minors, a phenomenon called *Plim Ti Kit* in Haitian Créole (literally meaning small soft feather).

Key Findings

The key findings of the inquiry include information around intermediate and underlying causes of girls' marginalization in education. They also help paint a picture of what gender inequitable education in Haiti looks like. There was a great deal of debate and discussion by the various stakeholders around the extent to which each factor was a symptom/manifestation/characteristic of girls' marginalization as well as what constitutes an intermediate or underlying cause³. Therefore, space for adjustments still exists; however, the following provides a solid overview of how the Haitian education system remains gender inequitable in a variety of ways.

¹ National Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. 2013. *L'éducation en Haïti: La nécessaire marche vers la qualité et l'équité*.

² Institute Haïtienne de Statistique et d'Information. 2012. *EMMUS V (DHS)*, p. 10-11

³ Immediate causes of marginalization have been left out for the purpose of this study and are largely covered under the symptoms/characteristics/manifestations of inequitable education in Haiti.

Characteristics of Gender Inequitable Education in Haiti

Through participatory workshops and interviews, the Education team was able to begin outlining what gender inequitable education in Haiti looks like it. It is a system and society that finds:

- Male and female teachers commonly reinforce gender stereotypes in the classroom.
- Gender-based biases towards boys are validated in school books approved by the Ministry of Education.
- Directors maintain strict school schedules and rules on tardiness that often exclude girls from attending school regularly due to higher number of time-consuming household chores than boys.
- Girls infrequently respond to questions in the classroom and ask fewer questions than their male counterparts when needed.
- Girls are disproportionally assigned non-education tasks at school, including cleaning classrooms and serving school meals.
- Lower self-esteem among girls than among boys.
- Girls are often unable to attend school when menstruating because of inadequate WASH facilities.
- Inappropriate, exploitive, and abusive behavior of mostly male teachers towards girls, particularly those who are over-age. (The over-age student phenomenon is a serious issue in Haiti; approximately 72% of children in grades 1-6 are older by two years to their respective grade level⁴). These behaviors range from flirting to engaging in sexually abusive relationships.
- Girls are victims of the pervasive practice of *restavèk*, literally meaning “stay with”, a practice of domestic servitude whereby a family with less economic means will send their children, generally girls, to live with another with higher economic means (not always significantly higher) to work as a domestic servant. Girls in these situations are at high risk of sexual and other abuse/exploitation, irregular school attendance at best, and vulnerable to entering into street situations (living or spending almost all waking time in the streets involved in prostitution, drugs, and other at-risk activities) when old enough to leave the *restavèk* homes.
- High levels of drop-out rates among over-aged girls in the system.
- Girls are out-of-school from early pregnancy, the co-responsible boy or man unaffected, and little or no support given to the girl to continue her studies.
- Girls are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS/other STDs.
- Girls are often forced into commercial sexual exploitation either through direct coercion, force or sheer survival.

The study provided valuable insight into what girls’ marginalization in the system looks like in Haiti. While some of the characteristics of gender inequitable education system were already known to us (i.e. gender stereotyping by teachers in the classroom and boy-biased school textbooks), others were not. One notable surprise was the existence of inappropriate, exploitive, and abusive behavior of mostly male teachers towards girls, particularly those who are over-age. These behaviors range from flirting to engaging in sexually abusive relationships. The over-age student phenomenon is a serious issue in Haiti; approximately 72% of children in grades 1-6 are older by two years to their respective grade level⁵.

What makes the latter issue so pressing and meriting further study is its intersection with another manifestation of girls’ marginalization in education and society overall: the pervasive practice of

⁴ Ministère de l’Education Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle. Plan Opérationnel Annuel 2011-2012. 2011, p. 7.

⁵ Ministère de l’Education Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle. Plan Opérationnel Annuel 2011-2012. 2011, p. 7.

restavèk, literally meaning “stay with”, a practice of domestic servitude whereby a family with less economic means will send their children, generally girls, to live with another with higher economic means (not always significantly higher) to work as a domestic servant. These girls attend school irregularly, at best, and make up a significant number of the over-age girls in school. Restavèk girls are already at high risk for sexual abuse and exploitation at the household level. Being over-age in school makes them doubly vulnerable as seen in the above example.

Intermediate Causes

- Lack of adequate Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) education to adolescent girls and boys.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) at school and home.
- Education priority of boys over girls at the household level.
- Exclusionary practices by teachers and directors in the school setting.
- Inadequate WASH Facilities for girls in schools.
- Limited leadership opportunities and extra-curricular activities for girls.
- Lack of training on gender equity for teachers and directors.
- Lack of sensitization/transformation work with girls and boys on gender roles and power dynamics.

Underlying Causes

- Deeply rooted and pervasive discriminatory norms, practices, and views in society, including within the Haitian Creole language, towards women and girls. Discrimination towards girls and women is quickly evident when analyzing the native Haitian language. Girls and women are frequently seen as being born with “ses richesses” (her riches) which is “sa fortune” (her fortune). Girls and women are largely defined in very limited terms of their sexual, domestic, and/or economic value. These norms and views manifest in practices such as exploitive situations disproportionately affecting girls, particularly the restavèk phenomenon, commercial sexual exploitation of girls and women, and trading of food for sexual favors among others.
- Gendered poverty. Poverty in Haiti disproportionately affects women. A relevant element of this poverty is female “time poverty”. When the woman of the household is unable to fulfill all time-consuming household duties, the girls of the household generally take on these roles. Poverty also determines how many children will be sent to school. Generally, when a decision must be made between sending a male child or a female child, priority is given to the male child (see above-mentioned underlying cause).
- Gender equity and equality is not prioritized in Government of Haiti (GoH) Policies, Strategies, and Financing as evidenced by the case of the Ministry of Education (MoE). The GoH completed a draft version of a National Gender Equality Policy in April 2008. It was only in December 2012 that the “finalization process” was launched. To date, finalization has not been completed. The Ministry for the Status of Women and Women’s Rights (MCFDF) receives only approximately 0.15% of the GoH budget, one of three lowest funded among the more than 21 Ministries of the Haitian government. Despite limited funds, it is charged with the monumental task of integrating gender into all other Ministries. Upon analyzing the MoE’s Operational Plan for 2010-2015, which guides the preliminary implementation of a 20 to 25 year strategy for education reform, one is struck by the almost complete absence of gender. The topic of gender equity in education only recently surfaced in a MoE prepared document for its upcoming participation in the Global Partnership for Education-organized Inter-Ministerial Education Meeting in Washington, D.C. in April 2013. Overall, the MoE has not made gender equitable

education a priority, evidenced by its absence in principal strategic documents, funds not allocated to this area, and no staff dedicated to gender integration.

Other

- Boys in street situations, those principally in urban/semi-urban settings, are most vulnerable to being marginalized within the education system. While the focus of the study is girls' marginalization, participants in the workshops and interviews identified boys living and/or "working the streets" were the most vulnerable to being out-of-school, engaging in behaviors that include criminal activities such as theft and drug running, drug abuse, and prostitution, and becoming victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. An opportunity exists to make education more gender equitable by addressing this gender-specific vulnerability.
- Little research exists on inequitable education/marginalization of girls in the system. In the process of the desk review, it became evident that a gap exists regarding sex-disaggregated studies on risks, vulnerabilities, and marginalization in education. Research on the Haitian context often use children as the focus of study without consistently outlining specific risks, vulnerabilities, and marginalization for girls, boys, and even more defined sub-groups such as girls and boys living with HIV/AIDS, orphaned girls and boys, etc. An opportunity exists to conduct this type of gendered research.

Lessons Learned

The inquiry process itself also offered an opportunity to learn more about how gender-based marginalization happens within Haitian society and how CARE as an organization can contribute to gender transformative change.

- Preparation of staff and participants before the analysis process begins is essential. During workshops and individual interviews, it became apparent that concepts of gender, marginalization based on gender, gender equity, and gender equality were new to our local staff. Additionally, the concept of underlying vs. intermediate causes posed challenges for participants to go deeper into their own analysis. As a result, a great deal of time was spent on group reflection on what it means to be a woman, man, girl, and boy in Haitian society. This type of reflective work needs to be done prior to the workshop in order to be as productive as possible. See below on how the education team is exploring ways to adapt CARE's Social Action Analysis (SAA) methodology to the education sector in order to conduct this important preparation work with our own staff.
- Analysis of the underlying opportunities to mitigate girls' marginalization is necessary. An important and useful point that Haitians consistently make in workshops is that NGOs principally focus on the negative and do not look at the positive of Haiti. The lesson in this insight is that much work can be done to identify the existing opportunities that Haiti presents for mitigating marginalization of girls' in education and, in turn, strengthening gender equitable education in Haiti. While a specific exercise to identify opportunities has not been conducted, some examples of opportunities could be Haitian people's strong value placed on education and existence of strong local women rights organizations that could potentially work on girls' rights as well.

Conclusion and Ways Forward

Based on the study, the CARE's Education sector has taken steps to address many identified and explored issues. Firstly, a participatory training module for teachers and directors was created and tested on child rights and gender equity in the school setting. The Education team is in the process of updating the module and incorporating adapted activities from the SAA methodology developed by

CARE USA's Health Equity Unit. Secondly, the team has developed a unique pedagogical coaching methodology that seeks to provide a more personalized way for building capacity and awareness on issues of gender equity among teachers and school directors. Thirdly, the long-term strategy for CARE's education programming in Haiti now integrally includes links with CARE Haiti's women and children protection and gender program, the VSLA/economic development program, and neighborhood development program. Lastly, the Education team has included a specially-adapted accelerated learning initiative for boys in street situations in the design of an upcoming program.

Additional areas that the Education team is currently exploring to address both intermediate and underlying causes of poverty are: the launching of a gender working group within the National Education Commission (co-initiated and developed by CARE post-2010 earthquake as a long-term education development body), linking to local partner health programming, and facilitating the collaboration of the MCFDF with the MoE to make education more gender equitable in Haiti.

In conclusion, this preliminary study acts as the initiator of a longer process that CARE Haiti is taking to identify the underlying causes of gender inequities in the education sector. Future studies will take place to further understand the dynamics between factors which create an inequitable educational environment for girls and boys in Haiti.