

Jennifer Buffett who co-leads the NoVo Foundation sent out the following message with regards to how the aid heading to Haiti would benefit from focusing on women and girls.

Building a Better Post-Earthquake Future for Haiti: Inclusion of Girls & Women

In areas hit by natural disasters and the following clean up, the unique vulnerability of girls & women are often overlooked. Natural disasters can exacerbate situations in which girls & women already face exclusion within communities, where here are often the last to have access to food, resources and basic social networks.

As leaders discuss how to rebuild Haiti, girls & women must remain a core part of rebuilding strategies and ensure humanitarian efforts take their safety and well being in account.

Rebuilding strategies in Haiti must take into account the following:

Preventing Violence against Girls and Women:

Sexual and physical violence against girls and women in Haiti was already considered a significant issue before the earthquake. The total destruction of infrastructure, death toll and shaky rule of law all increase girl's and women's vulnerability to violence. Strategies should:

- Ensure girls and women have access to safe spaces and shelter while displaced.
- Employ experts in gender and gender-based violence to examine makeshift or planned camp organization. Consult experts in the design of aid projects to ensure they benefit, and in no way harm, girls and women.

Ensure Adolescent Girls Continue To Go To School:

- Rebuild schools to be girl friendly; include separate toilet facilities for girls and boys.
- Provide appropriate opportunities to provide adolescent girls with assets other than their bodies – job training that leads to future employment or access to micro loans that promote entrepreneurship and a source of income.
- If girls are not in school, ensure they have access to equivalent literacy training.

Ensure Aid Reaches and Benefits Girls and Women:

When goods and services are scarce, girls' and women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation skyrockets. Aid projects should be designed to ensure their basic needs are met.

- Services to minimize the consequences of such violence against girls and women must be established and every effort made to prevent it through the execution of relief and reconstruction efforts.
- Information about the availability of goods and services must reach girls and women.
- Goods should be disseminated and services made available in a way that ensures women and girls can access them safely.
- Ensure distributions of food and other essential goods go directly into the hands of girls and women.

- Ensure girls' and women's reproductive health needs are met (i.e. health services and sanitary kits).

Women need Livelihoods:

Because women are often the primary income earner and largely responsible for ensuring the well being of their family and children, an immediate aid priority should be helping women pursue a livelihood.

- Aid programs aimed at women should focus on restoring income, protecting assets, ensuring livelihoods, rebuilding and supporting local market-systems and stabilizing prices.
- Programs should be also considered that get income into the hands of girls not in school.

Listen to Her Voices:

Girls can be the greatest untapped resource in times of disaster. Girls will be the future leaders of Haiti. Leaders must talk to them to during the reconstruction face to ensure their needs are met.

- Support local civil society and the Haitian women's movement to rebuild infrastructure that is critical for girls and women.
- Support the ability of these organizations to advocate on behalf of girls and women.

Leaders Must Ask:

Insist that aid implementers meet and talk with Haitian girls and women. Leaders should repeatedly ask, "Have you consulted with girls and women in the design of this project?"

Leaders Must Act:

This is the time to place girls and women at the center of rebuilding efforts to build a better future for Haiti.

1. Ensure Haiti's infrastructure is rebuilt, so that girls and women do not become the infrastructure where none exists.
2. Don't assume girls and women are being specifically and uniquely addressed in relief efforts. We must make sure services and relief aid specifically addresses them.
3. Count girls – make sure they are directly getting access to services – water, food, healthcare, etc.
4. Don't focus on changing strategies, just make sure girls are include in everything you are doing.
5. Enforce laws or implement interim solutions to minimize violence against girls and women.
6. Encourage men and boys to be champions of girls and women. Make them part of the solution.
7. As Haiti is rebuilt, infrastructures are designed for the most vulnerable. If infrastructure benefits girls and women, it will benefit everyone.