

## **A Haiti Fit for Children and Youth**

Partner organisations of the Latin America and Caribbean Chapter of the Global Movement for Children<sup>1</sup> have operated in Haiti for decades, promoting a common pro-child and pro-poor agenda for the country's development. After the January 12<sup>th</sup> earthquake, we believe that our common vision for a **Haiti fit for Children and Youth** and our collective efforts in partnership with the Haitian people are all the more important. Having joined forces on the ground and internationally, our organisations are determined to ensure that Haiti's children and youth are prioritized both in the short-term emergency response and in the longer term reconstruction program.

### **Our Vision: A Haiti Fit for Children and Youth**

Our collective vision is a Haiti where:

1. Children and youth are put first. In all actions related to children, the rights and the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration.
2. The cycle of extreme poverty is broken. Investment in children and upholding children's rights are increased as the two most effective ways to eradicate poverty.
3. Children are protected from harm and exploitation. The economic and social conditions that encourage child labour and violence against children must be addressed.
4. All children are included and encouraged to reach their full potential. Discrimination against girls, boys, children with disabilities and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds must end.
5. All children are provided the best possible start in life. Their survival, protection, growth and development in good health and with proper nutrition are essential to their full development. The major causes of child and maternal mortality are fully addressed.
6. All children have access to and complete basic education that is free, compulsory and of good quality. Youth are provided with chances to return to education and complete vocational and life-skills education.
7. The participation of children and youth is prioritised in all matters affecting them. Their voices must be listened to as resourceful citizens capable of and necessary in building a better future for all.
8. The natural environment of Haiti is protected and nourished to create a safe and healthy environment for children. The impacts of natural disasters and environmental degradation on children must be minimised.

This Vision will be achieved through:

- The leadership of the Haitian people, with a sustained focus on developing human capital from resilience to emergencies to long-term strengthened capacity.
- Prioritizing and including children and youth in this process, recognizing their crucial nature as agents of change and protagonists in their own development.
- Building a consensus between all relevant social actors, including the State, CSOs and the private sector.
- Supported and strengthened national and local State institutions with the capacity to articulate pro-child legal, policy and budgetary frameworks, and implement child-focused programs containing accountability mechanisms to monitor effectiveness and enforce compliance.
- Enhanced and decentralized child focused service delivery programs that address the key services for child care, protection and development. These programs must contain mechanisms for meaningful and on-going community participation in decision making, implementation and monitoring.

This vision requires the support and long-term partnership of the international community: a support that respects the sovereignty of the Haitian Government; builds upon and strengthens the existing capacity, achievements and resilience of the Haitian people; and respects and celebrates their culture and history.

## **Context:**

Children and adolescents constitute 43% of the population in Haiti and youth (aged 15 -24) up to one-fifth. Even before the earthquake, their situation was stark. 50 percent of all Haitian children did not attend primary school and less than a quarter attended pre-school. More than four in ten children lived in absolute poverty, and seven out of ten experienced at least one form of deprivation (food, health, education, water, sanitation, shelter, information). One in seven children did not live to see their fifth birthday; children who survived were afflicted by high rates of acute and chronic malnutrition (affecting 10% and 22% of all under-fives respectively). More than half of 20-year-olds had not completed secondary education and nearly half of youth in the labor market were unemployed. A lack of health services, information, education and family counseling were negatively affecting the health of youth: contraceptive use was the lowest in the Western Hemisphere and in some areas up to 44% of girls had had a child before the age of twenty. Violence was for many a part of everyday life and sexual abuse of girls was highly prevalent.

***But at the same time we have seen promising developments in Haiti, including a growing commitment by the Government to prioritize children and youth, and a movement made of up children and youth themselves to transform their country.*** The Government of Haiti has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and is also party to the ILO Convention 138 on minimum age for child labor and Convention 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. Corporal punishment of children was outlawed in 2001. The 2006-2011 National Protection Plan for Vulnerable Children addresses the situation of children living in special circumstances, victims of trafficking, children within the judicial system, children impacted by disasters and children living with special needs. The priorities expressed in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper adopted in 2007 also reflect the government's will to ensure the well-being of children, by addressing access to quality education, basic health care services and the economic viability of families. Finally, in the face of the January 12 earthquake, the government had been proactive on many fronts, including declaring a moratorium on adoptions in line with international protocols.

The earthquake has dramatically complicated the already difficult task of assuring the well-being of Haiti's youngest citizens. All of them, whether living in earthquake affected zones or not, will be impacted by this disaster. The total number of children affected by the earthquake is estimated to be 1.26 million. Approximately 700,000 are primary school age children between 6 to 12 years old. There were approximately 200,000 children with disabilities prior to the earthquake, with an additional 194,000 to 250,000 people injured in the earthquake. It is estimated that 450,000 children are displaced as a result of the earthquake, both within Haiti and in border areas of the Dominican Republic.<sup>1</sup> These children, many of whom were already in vulnerable positions, now face even greater perils due to the loss, separation from, or displacement of their families and are at particularly significant risk of malnutrition, illness, psychological trauma, sexual abuse and other violence and exploitation.

Yet, we know from firsthand experience that these children and youth are bright and gifted, and that they remain hopeful and confident about their future. They have enormous contributions to make to society, with many already working to support their communities recovery . These children and youth will continue in their efforts to transform their country. .

## **Overarching Goals for Children and Youth:**

Based on the changing situation of children following the earthquake the Global Movement for Children is determined to see the achievement of the following goals:

- 1. Highest priority is given to the development of a free, inclusive and high quality education system, that guarantees opportunities for learning and development from early childhood to primary school age and adolescence, where the state has the capacity to perform its normative and regulatory role vis-a-vis all types of education providers.**
- 2. Strengthened child protection systems and mechanisms are enforced across all relevant public and private entities and address the needs of all children and youth, especially those made more vulnerable by the earthquake.**
- 3. Universal access to primary health care for all children, youth and their families, including maternal and child health and nutrition, sexual and reproductive health and HIV.**
- 4. Children and youth participate in and contribute to the planning and reconstruction of the present and future of Haiti.**

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<sup>1</sup> INEE Situation of Education in Haiti Update, 16 February 2010.

While these guiding principles and overarching goals are ambitious, they reflect global aspirations embodied in the MDGs and human rights frameworks, towards which Haiti is already committed. Other factors in the global and Haitian development agenda, including ensuring favourable terms of trade, strengthened economic and fiscal policies, the underwriting of institutional reforms through direct budgetary support and sector-wide investment, security, justice and rule of law will have an impact on the well-being of Haitian children. These need to be accounted for in all the initiatives supported by the international community, respecting the central role of the Haitian state and Haitian society in all decisions and initiatives. A key indicator of the successful outcome of any policy and initiative should be improved child-well being. **A Haiti fit for children and youth, is a country fit for all its citizens.**

### **A Transformative Agenda: Reaching these Goals**

While the earthquake has created unprecedented devastation and challenges to the situation of children, it has also created an unprecedented opportunity to build a Haiti fit for children and youth. In this context, the concept of “building back better” is not up to the task. Haitian children need and deserve a *transformation* of their lives and that of their families, of their communities and their local and national government. This is a moral imperative and a commitment to universal human rights, but is also an investment that will provide high and sustainable outcomes for the entire Haitian society.

In building a transformed Haiti, that reaches this vision for a Haiti Fit for Children, the international community will need to partner with the Government of Haiti, committing to a significant, holistic and sustained response to Haiti’s chronic underdevelopment and structural dysfunction. The response must:

- Strengthen the accountability of national and local institutions and deliver basic social services
- Invest in increasing the productivity and income and food security of the poorest households
- Reinforce the resilience of communities to disasters
- Strengthen inclusive social and democratic governance structures, and
- Empower families to care for and protect their children

### ***Guiding Principles for the International Community:***

- A legitimate participatory process for children and youth should be established to identify immediate and longer-term priorities.
- Emergency response and reconstruction activities should be driven by a pro-child agenda both in terms of their particular needs and participation, and should ensure as an integral element disaster risk reduction.
- Citizens should be supported to engage with their government in a transparent process to jointly define the emergency response and long-term development; special provisions should be made to ensure women are included in this process.
- State institutions at the central and local levels should be strengthened and enabled to perform their core functions: to oversee and direct investments in community regeneration and core social services for children and their families; to ensure the adoption and enforcement of a legal framework in accordance with the CRC and to establish regulatory bodies and accountability mechanisms.
- A social protection floor should be put into place, guaranteeing access to basic services and social transfers to support minimum family income and livelihood security to every Haitian child.
- The promotion of gender equality, girls’ and women’s empowerment and rights should be ensured in all response and reconstruction activities.

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<sup>i</sup> The Global Movement for Children (GMC) was established as a result of the Special Session on Children of the UN in 2002. The Latin American and Caribbean Chapter (GMC-CLAC) is made of up organizations, networks, and institutions operating at the regional level for the promotion and protection of the human rights of children and adolescents within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Current members include ACJ-YMCA, Defence for Children International, Inter-American Children’s Institute, Plan International, REDLAMYC, Save the Children, SOS Kinderdorf International, UNICEF, and World Vision.