

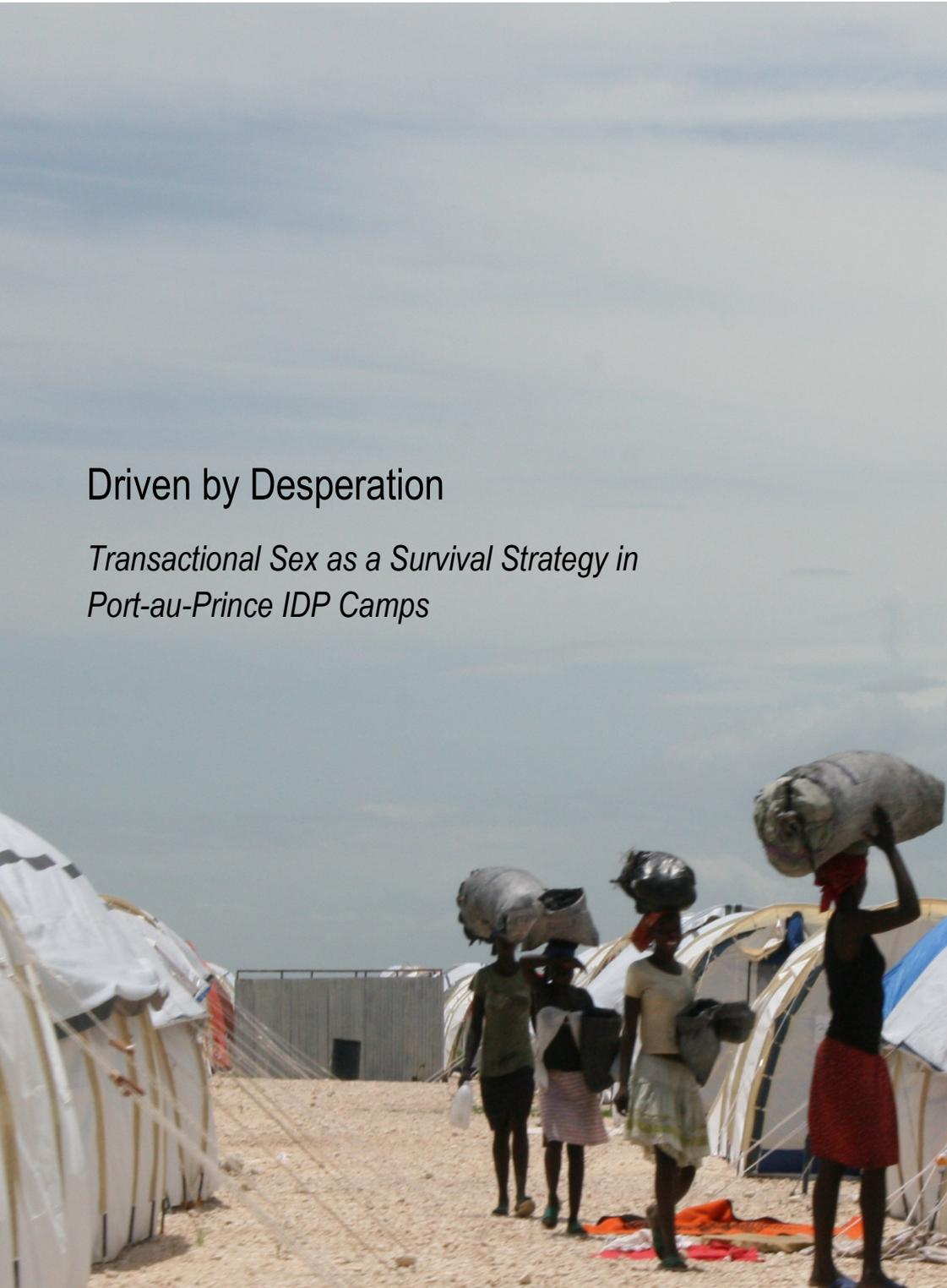


**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

## Driven by Desperation

*Transactional Sex as a Survival Strategy in  
Port-au-Prince IDP Camps*



May 2011

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## *I. Acknowledgements*

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**May, 2011**

**Port-au-Prince, Haiti**

## *II. Executive Summary*

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In spite of an absence of quantitative data, it is generally accepted that sexual and gender based violence against women and girls in the camps are widespread in Haiti. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is on the rise due to increased economic and social vulnerabilities of persons living in camps. While SGBV was prevalent in Haiti prior to the earthquake, living conditions of 800,000 Haitians (particularly in more than 1,000 Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps and spontaneous settlements) have exacerbated these existing vulnerabilities. At the time of the study there was no quantitative data from an exhaustive study to shed light on this issue. Following the earthquake in January 2010, the primary and secondary displacements and subsequent loss of traditional community, family structures and mechanisms, combined with the loss of livelihoods and impunity for perpetrators have increased the vulnerability of many women and girls.<sup>1</sup>

In January 2011, UNHCR decided to undertake a field study to hear directly from women believed to be at risk of undertaking sexual exchanges in order to survive in IDP camps following the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The main objective of the survey was to analyze the link between food insecurity of vulnerable categories of women and girls, and the prevalence of sexual transactions among them.

In partnership with international and national consultant teams and 11 community mobilizers, UNHCR conducted the study and organized focus group discussions located in five different Communes of the Port-au-Prince metropolis: Acra Sud (Adoquin neighborhood), Delmas Sud; Terrain Toto (Benediction), Port-au-Prince; Caravelle (Solino), Croix des Bouquets; St. Bernadette, Cite Soleil and Ti Source, Carrefour. The focus groups did not take place on site in order to ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants. There were a total of 15 focus groups conducted over a 15 day period in February 2011. Each of the five sites had three focus groups comprised of two female groups and one male group. There were a total of 174 participants comprised of 124 women and 50 men. The women ranged in age from 15 to 60 years old, with an average age of 30. The men ranged in age from 18 to 57 years old, with an average age of 27.

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<sup>1</sup> Boys and young men are vulnerable to transactional sex as well, but this is not the focus of the study.

Key findings from the study demonstrate that:

1. The testimonies and stories of the focus group participants demonstrate that the phenomenon of women and adolescent girls engaging in transactional sex within IDP camps in Port-au-Prince is widespread and exemplifies the exacerbation of their precarious and vulnerable conditions. They are facing insurmountable obstacles to accessing humanitarian aid and support from national authorities, local and international actors.
2. The women in the focus groups stated that their primary motivation to engage in transactional sex was not only for their own personal survival, but also for the survival of their children. Findings indicate that 100% of the participants had been directly involved in or witnessed transactional sex.
3. An increase in vulnerability can be correlated to the sudden loss of traditional family and community protection mechanisms. Many women who are now IDPs became disabled, orphaned, widowed, divorced or separated during or after the displacement. Very often, family units were re-composed with women suddenly finding themselves responsible for children of close family members who died in the earthquake.
4. The study shows a correlation between food insecurity and survival sex: the more food insecure the women and girls are, the more they are inclined to engage in extreme coping mechanisms, including survival sex. Transactional sex appears to be a common method for women to feed their families in the absence of gainful employment, informal income generating activity, or free access to any type of aid distribution.
5. The women in the focus groups reported an absence of community participation and consultation in the design and implementation of humanitarian aid programs, including food distribution. Their testimonies described a “disconnect” between humanitarian actors and IDP committees, particularly during the aid distribution phases. Members of the focus group described the IDP committees as non representative actors that often did not disperse the resources and instead used them for their own benefit.

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<sup>2</sup> More key findings are to be found on page 15.

### III. Methodology

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#### A. Introduction

In January 2011, due to the lack of quantitative data on SGBV in Haiti, UNHCR decided to undertake a rapid field study. The purpose of the study was to hear directly from women in the IDP camps and communities believed to be at risk of undertaking sexual exchanges in order to survive the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The main objective of the study was to determine and analyze whether there is a relationship between food insecurity of vulnerable categories of women and girls, and the prevalence of sexual transactions among IDP communities.

Sexual exploitation and transactional sex<sup>3</sup> are characterized by the power relationship between survivor and perpetrator.

A better understanding of the correlation between access to assistance and coping mechanisms (such as transactional sex) can help guide humanitarian actors in order to adapt their policies and procedures, review their priorities, identify omissions in vulnerability assessments or criteria, and reorient protection monitoring strategies. These actions can have a direct and positive impact on the protection of specific vulnerable groups, especially female heads of household, their adolescent and young children, disabled and elderly women.

The highly-sensitive nature of sex-for-money transactions remains poorly understood in Haiti, although it is generally assumed and perceived as “very probable” given the humanitarian context. The study assumes that distinctions must be made between (1) the phenomenon of transactional sex that pre-dated the earthquake, (2) the fact that many women and girls engaging in the practice now did not do so before, and (3) the factors within the humanitarian context that make the strategy more viable.

Some sources document transactional sex as a practice embedded in the social fabric of the poorest sectors of pre-earthquake Haiti, particularly in urban areas. It was perceived as a common survival mechanism for women in poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince during volatile time periods<sup>4</sup>. However, the practice appears to have propagated after the earthquake particularly in the camp environment. It is likely that many women and girls currently engaged in the practice may not have done so in the past. This study is amongst the first to explore this trend in post earthquake IDP camps, and seeks to

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<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this study, transactional sex is defined as the exchange of sex and sexual favors for gifts, services, humanitarian goods, et cetera. Transactional sex differs from prostitution in that it does not provide for the entire income of a person.

<sup>4</sup> See in particular the medical anthropologist investigations on Cite Soleil by Catherine Maternowska.

demonstrate that this phenomenon is occurring in significant numbers, regardless of whether it happened before.

## **B. Sampling methodology**

### *Sites of the sample*

The participating sites were located in five different Communes of the Port-au-Prince metropolis: Acra Sud (Adoquin neighborhood), Delmas Sud; Terrain Toto (Benediction), Port-au-Prince; Caravelle (Solino), Croix des Bouquets; St. Bernadette (Cite Soleil) and Ti Source (Carrefour). These sites provided a diverse, representative sample based on the socio-economic and urban dynamics of each area. The focus groups did not take place on site in order to ensure the safety and confidentiality for participants.

Survival sex and its relationship to food security is a sensitive subject in any community. The research team was aware of the existing dynamics between victims and perpetrators, where perpetrators were likely to be part of the camp population, camp power structure and/or possibly local police or humanitarian staff.

The IDP sites that are known for organized prostitution activities (i.e. Champs de Mars, Place Boyer, et cetera) and other IDP sites registered as “high risk” in terms of security (according to CCCM /OCHA security camps list, December 2010), were voluntarily excluded in order to achieve the most representative sample. The IDP sites selected also vary in size and structure, from 350 to 18,000 families, in order to be able to extract key findings applicable to different types of spontaneous or planned sites and camps. Also, several sites included in the sample had a camp management agency (CMA), while others did not.

### *Population sample*

There were 15 focus groups in total; two female and one male focus group for each of the five sites, with 174 participants interviewed over a period of fifteen days, including 124 women and 50 men. The participants were chosen in each site via 11 IDP community mobilizers and community leaders who helped to identify and mobilize persons corresponding to vulnerable categories (women heads of households, elderly, widow, separated adolescents), especially persons exposed to food insecurity (see part iii). The women ranged in age from 15 to 60 years old, with an average age of 30. The men ranged in age from 18 to 57 years old, with an average age of 27. In both the male and female groups, the average level of education was an incomplete level of primary

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<sup>5</sup> CCCM: Camp Coordination and Camp Management in Haiti

<sup>6</sup> OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

education. Only one of the 124 women participants and three of the 50 male participants had attended university (not completed).

### **C. Focus group methodology**

#### *Female focus groups*

Vulnerability can be attributed to the sudden loss of traditional family and community support mechanisms compounded with pre-existing gender inequalities. Difficulties in obtaining sensitive information, due to factors such as self-disclosure and recall bias, were minimized by using both focus groups and some semi-structured key informant interviews. Community mobilizers in each of the five sites had pre-existing knowledge and understanding of SGBV and affected vulnerable individuals which facilitated data collection by the study team .

Standardized vulnerability criteria were used to identify female participants at a higher risk of food insecurity: women heads of households; women who were primary caretakers of household members; unemployed women; widows and widows with children that are minors; single mothers; disabled women, older women; and women suffering from chronic or mental illnesses. Young mothers or visibly pregnant women, between 15 – 19 years old, were also identified as potentially vulnerable groups.

#### *Male focus groups*

The aim of the male focus groups was to gather information from male camp residents that were likely engaging in transactional sex as “clients”, based on criteria<sup>8</sup> chosen from literature about this phenomenon. The men chosen were over 18 year old ; living in the camps/settlements; employed or with a source of income; and/or members of committees or structures of power, such as associations.

#### *Carrying out the focus group discussions*

All female focus group discussions were conducted in Creole and were tape recorded with the informed consent of the participants. In addition, the community mobilizer responsible for each site took notes, while the Haitian research team observed all of the groups. Female participants that had child-rearing responsibilities were encouraged to

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<sup>7</sup> An international consultant with professional expertise in the area of SGBV coordinated the study. In addition, the focus group discussions were coordinated and guided by a national consultant, a psychologist with a solid experience in social sciences and social work with Haitian population, including IDPs, together with 11 Haitian community facilitators. UNHCR staff in Haiti also participated in the study.

<sup>8</sup> Boys under 18 were not included for practical reasons, not because the study team assumed that they would not be vulnerable to the same resource/transaction issues or participate as “clients”. This phenomenon might be a specific issue but it remained outside the scope of this present study.

<sup>9</sup> Under the guidance of a National Consultant, Haitian psychologist.

bring their small children with them, in order to ensure maximum inclusion. Children were involved in games and recreational activities in order to relieve the parents of distractions and so that they would feel more inclined to express themselves freely.

Focus group discussions varied in length between one and a half to two and a half hours. A community approach was adopted, (instead of an individual needs based approach, although some complementary interviews were also conducted in order to aggregate to the findings) using a structured discussion guide<sup>10</sup>, which was modified or clarified as the research team saw appropriate.

Each discussion began with a general introduction in Creole.<sup>11</sup> Women were asked about their lives in the camp, how they occupied their time, and how their lives and activities had changed since moving into the camp. This allowed the women to “set the scene” of each camp, share their frustrations, and relay information about NGO and humanitarian support before moving on to more intimate discussions about sexual exchanges and violence. The male focus group discussions were facilitated by two male consultants and the same methodology of informed consent, note taking and observation was applied.

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<sup>10</sup> UNHCR SGBV handbook and the UNHCR Participatory Assessment tool, May 2006

<sup>11</sup>The purpose of the discussion was explained and each participant signed the confidentiality agreement.

<sup>12</sup> By either two facilitators, in Creole

## IV. Background and Introduction

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### A. Country context

Before the 2010 earthquake, Haiti had a population of about 9.3 million people with an average life expectancy of 52 years. Approximately 80% of the population lived on less than US\$ 2.00 a day. Haiti's health statistics were the worst in the Americas. Poor health conditions include lack of clean water and sanitation, poor housing, the absence of adequate health care and recurrent environmental disasters. Furthermore, half of the population was categorised as "food insecure".

These existing vulnerabilities were further exacerbated by the earthquake. In April 2011, 680,000 of the people that were forcibly displaced still lived in highly precarious and insecure conditions in more than 1,000 IDP camps and spontaneous settlements. In addition, there were about 170,000 people living as "invisible IDPs" in vulnerable host communities and families. The conditions in the camps are extremely basic with an increasingly limited access to fundamental services. Due to lack of funding, IDPs live in inadequate shelters (deteriorated tents; only 90,000 persons in Temporary shelters<sup>13</sup>) and many field services are phasing out. Furthermore, people are becoming more susceptible to disease and infections because there is little food, limited drinking water, and an unsanitary environment (both latrines and dirty water).<sup>14</sup>

In such difficult conditions and following such a highly traumatic event, it is common that women, in particular heads of households, are exposed to a high risk of SGBV<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> As of February 2011, Shelter Cluster.

<sup>14</sup> Sources of this chapter are mainly: World Vision, OXFAM, Amnesty International reports and UNHCR informal reports.

<sup>15</sup> Confirmed by the following reports: *The Amnesty International report "Aftershocks: women speak out against sexual violence in Haiti camps"- Amnesty International, January 2011. "Our bodies are shaking now: Rape follows earthquake in Haiti", Beverly Bell, Huffington Post, 25 March 2010; see also: "Sexual assaults add to miseries of Haiti's camps", Deborah Sontag, N.Y. Times. 23 June 2010 and "Our bodies are still trembling: Haitian women's fight against rape", 2010, MADRE, IJDH, January 2011 update report on pre-earthquake SGBV, see: "Don't turn your back on girls: sexual violence against girls in Haiti", Amnesty International, November 2008; "Violence envers les femmes et les jeunes filles", Kay Fanm, Rapport Bilan, 2006; "Sexual violence against girls between 2003 and June 2008, Rapport Bilan", SOFA, 2008 ;"Human rights abuse and other criminal violations in Port-au-Prince, Haiti : a random survey of households", Athena R. Kolbe and Royce A. Houston, The Lancet, Volume 368, 2006; " Une réponse à la violence faite aux femmes, Etude sur la violence domestique et sexuelle en Haiti, Ministère de la Condition Féminine et aux Droits de la Femme, 2007, <http://www/mcfdgouv.ht/pdf/violence/pdf>*

## **B. Gender inequality and sexual gender based violence (SGBV)**

### *Context and data*

Prior to the 2010 earthquake, sexual violence was already a serious problem in Haiti. However, the circumstances following the earthquake in January 2010 resulted in several factors that exacerbated the vulnerability of women and girls, and subsequently led to an increase in SGBV. These factors include secondary displacement, the loss of livelihoods for many Haitian men and women, and an increased impunity due to the lack of state infrastructure<sup>16</sup>.

### *Major trends*

According to field assessments by CCCM members, camp managers and UNHCR in different camps, there are tents and areas designated for prostitution activities where “services” are given in exchange for goods. Often times, either some camp committees or other groups composed of young men exert their influence to get sex in exchange for basic services such as food and/or other goods.

Sexual crimes are largely under reported because perpetrators threaten the survivors and their relatives. The few women that do have the courage to report their crime are frequently met with indifference by the authorities.<sup>17</sup> Contributing factors could be the rapid deterioration of the social fabric and community network in the camps as well as a weak legal framework and easy accessibility to small arms.<sup>18</sup>

In its March 16, 2011 briefing paper “Sexual Violence in Haiti’s IDP Camps”, the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ) – based in New York University School of Law- also reported that an alarmingly high proportion of households surveyed by CHRGJ in Haiti’s camps have been victimized by sexual violence since the earthquake. The paper made public the preliminary findings of a household survey on gender-based violence and access to food and water, conducted in January 2011 in several IDP camps in Port-au-Prince. These findings added weight to what human rights and victims

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, 30% of women in Haiti suffer physical, emotional or sexual violence from their partners, according to a study by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Women’s Rights in Haiti (2005). In October 2010, UNFPA conducted a survey of 2,391 women and girls; this study indicated that 1% has been subjected to sexual violence. However, this same survey reported an increase of pregnancy in the camps by three fold during the last 10 months and two thirds of the respondents indicated that these were undesired pregnancies. It is unknown how many of these undesired pregnancies may have been caused by sexual violence.

<sup>17</sup> “Our bodies are shaking now: Rape follows earthquake in Haiti”, Beverly Bell, Huffington Post, 25 March 2010; see also: “Sexual assaults add to miseries of Haiti’s camps”, Deborah Sontag, N.Y. Times. 23 June 2010 and “Our bodies are still trembling: Haitian women’s fight against rape”, 2010, MADRE, IJDH , January 2011 update report

<sup>18</sup> Small Arms Survey report on Haiti commissioned in 2005 found at the following web link: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/B-Occasional-papers/SAS-OP14-Haiti-EN.pdf>

groups have been saying for many months since the earthquake: that sexual violence and the fear of sexual violence are common in the camps and that significant changes in security and access to basic resources are required.<sup>19</sup>

### *Prevention and referral*

On the prevention side, joint United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) - Haitian National Police (HNP) patrols have established a permanent presence in six IDP camps<sup>20</sup> (out of the 1,300 registered camps by International Organization for Migration (IOM)). While mobilizing night foot patrols is a first step, in practice significant problems still arise from it as aid may come too late for the survivors; additionally, police reporting mechanisms and follow-up remain largely deficient.

In some camps, communities have organized a community watch system or so-called “security brigades,” but many complain they do not have adequate training and lack basic equipment such as flashlights. In some instances, “security brigades” have taken on the aspect of self-defense groups and there are reasons to believe that a number of them have been infiltrated by criminal gangs<sup>21</sup>. As a result, community based patrolling of IDP camps is problematic and is currently not responding to the protection needs of the vulnerable IDP population.

It is also acknowledged that many of the basic recommendations for prevention, such as those set out in the IASC Guidelines for GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Settings, can not be implemented in Haiti<sup>22</sup>. Comparatively little attention has been paid to effective interventions concerning transactional sex among IDP populations.

Furthermore, in many IDP camps, there is a limited referral pathway for medical and psycho-social care<sup>23</sup>. Legal assistance to report crimes to the police is extremely limited in Haiti. The *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux* (BAI) and *Asosyasyon Fanm Soley d’Ayiti* (AFSDA) have launched support programs in a few locations; however, due to resource constraints they are not reaching many survivors. It is extremely difficult for

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<sup>19</sup> Final survey is expected to be released in June 2011; these findings are based on a preliminary report.

<sup>20</sup> At the time of the study, the six camps were: Parc Jean Marie Vincent, Camp Petionville Golf Club, Camp Carradeux, Camp Corail, Camp Acra and Camp Tabarre Issa.

<sup>21</sup> “Human Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons in Haiti: memorandum based on a working visit to Port-au-Prince, 12-16 October 2010”, Walter Kaelin, Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human rights of the Internally displaced Persons at page 10. See also: “Unstable Foundations: Impact of NGOs on Human Rights for Port-au-Prince Internally Displaced persons, Marc Schuller, 4 October 2010.

<sup>22</sup> i.e. bathing facilities should have doors with locks on the inside.

<sup>23</sup> “Aftershocks - Women Speak out Against Sexual Violence in Haiti’s Camps”, Amnesty International, January 2011, p.6.

survivors to have their cases heard by the police<sup>24</sup>; obtaining a medical certificate necessary for prosecution is yet another obstacle for those willing to pursue legal action.

### *Security and physical protection*

Impunity for the perpetrators of SGBV remains a critical issue<sup>25</sup>. In a majority of the camps, SGBV survivors have little choice but to return to the same tents usually within reach of their perpetrators and are left without protection. Their condition is aggravated because they are often ostracized by their relatives and neighbors in the camp.

Few relocations have taken place because the immediate physical protection of survivors does not seem to be a priority for agencies that encounter a lack of viable options. In addition, no system has been set up (mapping of available options, priority criteria, logistical arrangements) to ensure that the most vulnerable cases receive immediate physical protection.

UNHCR is aware that at times survivors are referred to the two available safe houses which are located in the capital and are managed by two national NGOs: SOFA and Kay Fanm. These safe houses have limited capacity and cater to minors: in the Kay Fanm safe house, there is room for a dozen girls while financial support and vocational training is available for 40 girls (only minors)<sup>26 27</sup>. All of the aforementioned safe houses have very limited capacity; they solely offer temporary shelter, varying from a few days to a few weeks. Furthermore, an estimated 170 individuals (survivors and their families) can be accommodated in these houses. Due to financial constraints safe houses do not provide sustainable solutions for victims of SGBV.

### **C. Food insecurity**

At the World Food Summit in 1996, food security was defined to exist, “...*when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs, and food preferences for an active and healthy life.*” In

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<sup>24</sup> “Fighting back”, Lisa Armstrong, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, December 2010, also available at [http://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/Essence\\_Fighting%20Back.pdf](http://pulitzercenter.org/sites/default/files/Essence_Fighting%20Back.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> “Cas de violences accueillis et accompagnés dans les 21 centres Douvanjou de la SOFA de janvier à juin 2010 », SOFA, Solidarité Fanm Ayisyen, Novembre 2010 ; see also : “After Haiti’s quake, another form of horror”, Linda Basch, New York Times, 1 July 2010 ; “Haiti: After the earthquake, initial mission findings” , Amnesty International, 8 March 2010.

<sup>26</sup> “There’s a lot of sexual violence against little girls and adolescents (...). Men are using violence to bring girls to bed, or trading rice for sex. “The situation in the camps has exacerbated the problem. “They arrive pregnant and give birth here,” Kay Fanm coordinator Yolette Jeanty, Radio Metropole interview, 6 January 2011.

<sup>27</sup> A third safe house run by KAY FANM was severely damaged by the earthquake and is no longer in use. Another strategy has been placing minor survivors with host families, like national NGO Zanmi Timoun has done for 27 minors at the southern border with the Dominican Republic. There are also other informal structures that can shelter survivors for a limited period of time including religious institutions.

an EFSA (emergency food security assessments) or through the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) Guidelines<sup>28</sup>, the analysis of food security is based on three pillars: (i) food availability; (ii) food access; (iii) and food utilization.

The main point is that food may be *available* but not *accessible* to certain households if they cannot acquire a sufficient quantity or diversity of food through these mechanisms. Food access encompasses a household's ability to acquire adequate amounts of food, through own home production and stocks, purchases, barter, gifts, borrowing and/or food aid. The study does not seek to determine levels of food insecurity, but aims to evaluate how access to food may be an overriding factor in the engagement of transactional sex practice.

The *Centre National pour la Sécurité Alimentaire* (CNSA), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) conducted several surveys<sup>29</sup> in 2010, which report no significant malnutrition among the general Haitian population. However, it is clear that these surveys do not specifically look at the situation at the IDP camp level, at differential levels of nutrition and food security in different types of camps or informal settlements. These surveys also do not capture sufficient detail at specific sub-sections of the camp population (such as particularly vulnerable groups, or differentiated approaches by age or gender, a gap observed during distributions by many actors, such as the national human rights network RNDDH<sup>30</sup>).

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<sup>28</sup> These guidelines and handbook define WFP's approaches to food security analysis. They are meant to strengthen and standardize food security and vulnerability analyses, allowing for comparisons across countries and over time. They assist food security analysts in conducting refined analyses and to facilitate a better understanding of increasingly complex food security situations.

<sup>29</sup> For instance « RAPPORT SPÉCIAL - MISSION FAO/PAM D'ÉVALUATION DE LA RÉCOLTE ET DE LA SÉCURITÉ ALIMENTAIRE EN HAÏTI - 21 septembre 2010 »  
<http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/ak353f/ak353f00.htm>

<sup>30</sup> RNDDH, Réseau National des Droits Humains d'Haïti, March 2010 and April 2010 monthly reports.

## ***V. Key Findings, Observations and Testimonies***

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### **A. Key findings:**

1. The phenomenon of women and adolescent girls engaging in transactional sex within IDP camps in Port-au-Prince is widespread and exemplifies the exacerbation of their precarious and vulnerable conditions. 100% of the 15 focus groups consulted reported survival sex in their camps, portraying it as an invisible but common (and mainly as a new, post earthquake) practice. This behavior can be understood as an imposed survival strategy to face a basic physical need (hunger/food insecurity) and as a coping mechanism to respond to the various levels of physical suffering endured in these new living conditions in the camps. The immense psychological trauma suffered by these women also plays a role in this equation.
2. Nearly all women interviewed mentioned the need to feed their children as their first priority. It can be argued that women's primary motivation for engaging in transactional sex is not just their personal survival but the survival of their children. Based on the feedback from the participants, transactional sex appears to be a common means practiced by women to feed their family in the absence of gainful employment and/or any informal income generating activity. They face insurmountable obstacles to accessing humanitarian aid and support from local and national authorities and international actors.
3. The study revealed that there is a nexus between food insecurity and survival sex in the IDP camps selected. The more food insecure these vulnerable IDPs are, the more inclined they are to engage in extreme coping mechanisms, including survival sex. In a humanitarian crisis, it is acknowledged that levels of food insecurity have an impact on the SGBV pattern, especially for vulnerable groups. This study does not intend to establish causation between food insecurity and transactional sex; rather it seeks to examine the correlation between these two factors.
4. The women's testimonies describe a "disconnect" (more precisely information and communication problems, diversion, abuses of power and "rerouting" of the humanitarian resources by the IDP committees) between humanitarian actors and the IDP communities, particularly during aid distribution. This exacerbates the entrenched gender inequality in post-earthquake living context, particularly in light of social upheaval, absence of the State (rule of law) and lack of economic opportunities. In many cases, NGO activities were not in accordance with SPHERE standards or other international codes, such as the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Guidelines. The camps surveyed had neither camp management organizations in charge, nor authorities present (DPC/Civilian Protection, local authorities), but received some assistance through sporadic interventions.
5. There are inadequate preventive healthcare and medical services available for survivors of sexual violence and abuse. This is indicative that available support is

not reaching the groups in need because of the lack of service coverage, physical locations and access.

6. The method, size, sample and type of study conducted, along with the short timeframe (two months), makes it impossible to accurately quantify how much repeated exposure to trauma and stress has influenced these women to adopt economically motivated sexual behaviors. It is highly likely, however, that there is also a correlation between the impact of repeated negative psychological experiences and engagement in transactional sex. In an environment where: *“It’s everyone for themselves. Even for water, if you don’t fight for it, you won’t get it”*, women have insufficient emotional reserves to fight for survival every day<sup>31</sup>.

## **B. Transactional sex**

Women are exchanging sexual favors - transactional sex - to receive food and benefits, whether coupons (even if most of these women did not precisely know what the coupons were for or what type of commodity they would give access to), direct access to distributions, a place on Cash for Work schemes, money or simply a plate of spaghetti in all of the five camps we surveyed. 100% of the 15 groups had persons directly involved in this extreme survival mechanism and presented testimonies of it .

The women the team talked to had not resorted to transactional sex before the earthquake and repeatedly articulated their despair at their ‘invisibility’, in terms of receiving assistance, especially in the reconstitution of their livelihoods, within the camps. For the women interviewed, it is a new coping mechanism.

The women did not identify themselves as “occasional commercial sex workers” whilst describing their lives and how they resorted to transactional sex and did not ascribe any judgment -more resignation - to their coping strategies, although all expressed distaste for what they were doing.

As is the case of other IDP settlements, vulnerability can be linked to the sudden loss of traditional, family and community, protection mechanisms. Many of these IDP women have become disabled, orphaned, widowed, divorced, or separated, during or after the displacement. Very often, these family units have been re-composed (for instance, with the collapse of the family structure, women find themselves suddenly responsible for children of close family members who died).

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<sup>31</sup> The national consultant that coordinated the focus groups is an experienced Haitian psychologist. The negative psychological impact of repeated exposure to trauma and stress is extremely difficult to quantify, yet likely to be an important influencing factor in the behaviors and attitudes demonstrated by these affected IDP women.

<sup>32</sup> Only in 1 group, the phenomenon was not shared in the dynamics of the discussion as a risky practice involving some of the present participants, but the group testified of the existence of it in their camp.

The women repeated certain trends and themes, including giving sexual favors - engaging in transactional sex - to receive benefits, coupons or access to direct distributions, Cash for Work schemes or money (cash grants and others mechanisms); the existence of sexual violence in the environments in which these women were living; food insecurity in the form of basic hunger; overt corruption in the committees through which NGOs and humanitarian actors were channeling resources.

The stories recounted were made all the more harrowing by the realization that the women assessed their daily needs at a meager 10 – 25 Haitian gourdes (US\$ 0,25 - US\$ 0,60) a day – a far cry from the legal minimum daily wage of 200 Haitian gourdes (US\$ 5,00).

#### *Voices of the women*

*“Sometimes we find ourselves obliged to have sex for 50 [Haitian] gourdes [US\$ 1,10]<sup>33</sup>; usually coming out of it with a baby that adds to our misery. Even if you have a problem, you can’t go back to the father who doesn’t want to know anything about the child, which he sees as the fruit of the “transaction”; you have to resign yourself to bring him into the world, since you can’t abort. It is sad, but he is a baby “second hand”, a baby “bought on sale”. Who knows what the future will bring him...”*

*“ Many women exchange sexual favors for distribution cards, kits. Me, I do it, too - if not, how would I feed my children?”*

*“ Some women don’t learn from their mistakes because if I already have two ‘misereries’ from my previous transactions [the act, itself and an unwanted pregnancy], I don’t see the point of doing it again, only to repeat the miseries.”*

*“With nine children there is no way I could survive without having a ‘friend’ helping me; before I had a lucrative business. At home, I was even able to afford to have a nanny who took care of the kids when I was away, but I lost everything after the earthquake.”*

*“ Men often offer you distribution cards in exchange for sex.”*

*“ I’m a nursing mother, I can go some days without eating anything, and I have to feed my child. I have an 8 year old handicapped son. I don’t have any help. I don’t have a husband or family to help me. If I don’t go out to hustle, how would I take care of my kids?”*

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<sup>33</sup> At the time of the study: US\$ 1,00 = 40 Haitian gourdes.

*“If you want the card, you have to accept to sleep with the guy. The young women who get the cards are the boss’s mistresses.”*

*“I am young, I prefer to work instead of having someone give me 10, 25 [Haitian] gourdes. I don’t like relying on anyone. There are job opportunities in the camps but those who can do the job are never selected. Those who benefit, if they are women, are generally those who agree to give sexual favors or 50% of their pay to a middle man.”*

*“We don’t always have the means to feed the household; our husbands don’t always have well paid jobs. Me, I was a business woman but I lost everything after the earthquake.... at least my husband is working, but look at those young women who don’t have a father and only have their mother to help them. If those young women and young men could find the opportunity to learn something, so they don’t get into drugs, that would help them make better choices and stay away from prostitution and even worse things.”*

### **C. Sexual violence surrounding the transaction**

One of the biggest threats to the physical safety of the women and girls within the settlements was the lack of employment both for themselves and for men. When women have jobs or informal income generating activities, it gives them confidence and an income. As a result, they become less vulnerable and less exposed to SGBV and other risks. A significant number of women clearly said that if they had a job, even in the informal sector, they would not need to be involved in transactional sex.

Research conducted in other emergency contexts has found that aggravated conditions of poverty may increase sexual violence (although SGBV in itself is obviously not a “low class” phenomenon). In this sense, focus group participants frequently referred to the lack of employment opportunities for the men that led them to boredom, depression and an increase in alcohol consumption - which may in turn lead to increased domestic violence and rape incidents.

Few rapes were ever reported to the authorities, partly out of fear of retaliation but also due to a total absence of reliable law enforcement and justice institutions. With no one to stand up for them, single women were particularly vulnerable and several women spoke about how men cut into their tents, raped them and then left.

#### *Voices of the women*

*“This young woman does not say anything because she is hungry. She lives by herself in a tent. The men do whatever they want with her. Sometimes at night we hear her scream. We get up to see what is happening to her, they mistreat her so much but they just stop short of killing her. When you live alone you are subject to every form of violence. The men don’t have any respect for you.”*

*“There are rapists and thieves who come from other areas at night ransacking people. Some people from the camp also raped a young woman and fled only to return later, in front of an indifferent committee.”*

*“In the cases of rape, you can’t provide any support because those who are the victims prefer not to talk about it, so they won’t be further humiliated. If two, three or five men rape you, you are not going to say anything because you are afraid of being humiliated and losing dignity. If we, who are not directly involved, try to talk about it, you are good to die, they will kill you.”*

*“About security, the national police never intervene in the camps, and if you make a complaint, they don’t take you seriously. Rapes are frequent and affect both sexes, men/women, women/women, men/men. We are afraid to talk openly about it and most of the victims don’t get medical treatment.”*

*“Gang members from inside and outside the camps extort money and sexual favors. Many people are afraid to press charges because of the consequences. Some members of committees are in direct contact with local gang members, in order to keep the NGO donations for themselves.”*

*“Sometimes the young women push the men to rape them by accepting their money, refusing to sleep with them and at the same time having relations with other men.”*

*“The committee members aren’t even aware of rapes taking place in the camps. Most members don’t sleep in the camps whilst the rapists do nothing but stay in the camps at night. Sometimes the members take the victims to MCFDF<sup>34</sup> but what do they do? Just take her to the hospital, give her a few pills and what else? Nothing, they don’t take any responsibility to help the victims.”*

*“They slashed my tent the day before yesterday. A man asked me to sleep with him but when I refused he covered my mouth. He raped me and slashed my tent. Now when it’s raining I am exposed and I have to keep this to myself because if I go to the police and try to file a complaint, he will kill me.”*

#### **D. IDP committees**

Most of the camp committees operating in the surveyed camps were created spontaneously in the very early days following the earthquake and do not necessarily represent the communities and their needs. Given that Haiti has experienced decades of authoritative rule and periods of civil disorder, it is also not surprising that many of these

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<sup>34</sup> MCFDF - Ministère de la Condition Féminine et aux Droits des Femmes – Ministry of Women’s Affairs.

structures (that arose without proper elections processes, as admitted by most of the CCCM members) struggle to operate in a democratic, legitimate, representative and transparent manner.

HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) as early as May 2010 and then in August 2010, investigated and found that the structure and function of camp committees are a major accountability challenge for the humanitarian response. Rather than these governance structures serving as effective accountability mechanisms for camp management agencies in terms of participation, complaints handling and information dissemination, they are means by which victims of Haiti's recent earthquake are subject to unaccountable and corrupt practices.

By channeling resources directly through the committees without any form of monitoring and reporting mechanism, support structure or capacity-building initiatives, the NGOs and humanitarian agencies are de facto complicit in perpetuating the exclusion of women and minority groups from important service provision. Committees were all described in the focus groups as non representative and illegitimate of the IDP interests and as an actor rerouting the humanitarian resources.

In addition, community leaders in separate individual interviews described favoritism of humanitarian actors in emergency and food distribution towards some self-proclaimed IDP committees, which were created without input from existing neighborhood leaders. These self-proclaimed IDP committees played a key role in the lack of transparent redistribution of resources.

#### *Voices of the women*

*"...the distributors offer cards to women in exchange for sexual benefits, to those known as "personal friends" and when there is a distribution, these are the first to benefit. If you respect yourself, you refuse these conditions and have to accept to suffer."*

*"I am afraid of being deceived ; they push each other around, they curse at each other but to tell you the truth, when they find something interesting (sarcastic laughter) they manage it internally. But when it comes to spoiled flour, they mobilize everyone. It's because of us that the committee was created and without us, everything is gone. They should be there to help people in the camps when in fact people in the camp don't participate, only when there is spoiled flour! So, people who are responsible in the committee come around and take 2, 3 bags to resell whilst you stand in line, swallowing the dust. You don't have access; you can't even find a shovel to clean your zone. At the same time, if you go to their place, you will find dozens of wheelbarrows, whilst you live in the filth with nothing."*

*" The majority of the camp committee members are men, the rare women are usually allies [family members, friends, mistresses]. These committees play a management role: security, food distribution, hygiene kit distribution, and control of the latrines, water, Cash for Work and Food*

*for Work. However, those women think that the committees own the camps and usually use their authority in an abusive manner. They don't have to answer to anyone. "*

*"Usually the cards are distributed to the beneficiaries late at night (11pm or midnight) in a partisan way [family, friends, mistresses or women agreeing to sleep with them in return for a card]. Without the card it is impossible to access distribution sessions. The last one was in September 2010."*

*"Cash for Work is happening in just one block of the camp and is being organised the same way as the other aid distributions [dry food, hygiene and kitchen kits]. The committee is the only interface between the NGOs and the potential beneficiaries, who are chosen according to their relationships with the committee members. Most of the time they are family, friends, girlfriends, mistresses and sexual partners."*

*"They say we are too old, so they don't even give us [aid] coupons »« They tell the old people that they are too old."*

*"People come from outside the camp to work in Cash for Work. If a young woman is enrolled, don't worry, she's the Boss's girlfriend. If you refuse the general terms of the contract, you're not eligible."*

*"The high energy biscuits distributed are being sold at 5 [Haitian] gourdes each. We don't know where they get them from. At the beginning we used to give them to kids with peanut butter but now you have to buy them."*

*"Sometimes even people with badges don't get anything from those distribution sessions, whilst others without badges get multiple rations. It's frustrating. Sometimes they come with two different kinds of products, one good quality and the other damaged, which isn't good. When you are giving something, you should do it with all your heart."*

*"In the dry ration distribution, they give you a small amount of black beans which has already started to germinate and needs a lot of cooking. Even if you use a bag of charcoal, it doesn't change in the cooking process. The rice given is covered with insects and the corn is spoiled. It's awful."*

*"To participate in Cash for Work, they [an NGO] established vulnerability criteria: poor, very poor, not poor. Some people found these categories offensive, saying they were not beggars. But finally, they agreed to sign up as 'very poor' when they realized that wealthier people were also in that category."*

*"To start with, [the NGO] thought of giving money to the oldest people and Cash For Work to the others. But they did not keep their promise to the old people."*

## E. More voices of the women

*“No hope. I cannot meet the needs of my children. I am so lost that I tried to kill myself with a sharp object. Someone close intervened and stopped me.” (NB: large scar visible on the woman’s arm)*

*“Me, my situation is worse. I live with my father and brother. My father works as a mason. When he can, he helps me with my 5 month old baby that I can’t feed. If I rarely eat, how can I breastfeed him? I thought about giving him bleach to drink to end this misery.”*

*“Me, sometimes all I do is cry, because my parents died. I do not have any support, no husband. I can find a man who offers me money, but I have to sleep with him to get it. If my mother were here, things would be different for me. I have two children. I do not have a business. I cannot continue like this. I am not okay.”*

*“ Sometimes we don’t even have money to buy bread so how can we pay the charges to use the latrines? “*

*“Me, I was obliged to sell the ration [cooking pot] given to me by the Red Cross so I could feed my 4 children. When I lost my arm, my husband just left me, pregnant at the hospital. I cannot send my kids to school. I’m waiting in vain for a better life to come. What else can I do other than prostitute myself for money, cards or kits?”*

*“ Often we are hungry. We don’t always have a single gourde to buy bread for our kids. We stay there with nothing to do. The strongest of us have lost weight since then. We are facing a lot of problems in the camp.”*

*“People [consumers] want to buy food from you, but they can’t. Sometimes they approach you and you can see that they are hungry...in this case we pray God will help them, because we don’t have options like New York, France or Canada. We only have God.”*

## VI. Recommendations

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1. More funding in support of women to directly address their basic needs and the needs of their children should be made available. All forms of support should be provided in a manner that is respectful and enables women to fully participate in decision-making. Practical programming which builds on previously successful initiatives should be updated and reintroduced over a longer timeframe. Women should be targeted for inclusion in all training programs, vocational skills, and other educational programs.
2. Greater efforts should be made to improve the organization and implementation of services and distributions which are supposed to reach vulnerable camp residents and women in particular. Vulnerability is so widespread that a more comprehensive approach to community programming needs to be adopted (including the direct or coupon based food distribution). Program monitoring needs to be given greater prioritization and programs should be designed based on accurate information disaggregated by gender and age .
3. Continue advocacy work with the Government of Haiti to invest in quality public service provision, particularly around community health work, psychosocial support services and community police initiatives which directly benefit women and their children.
4. Increase job creation activities, and especially more income generating activities targeting the poor and needy in and around camps. More interventions are needed to increase the income-generating capacity of displaced women, including schemes combining vocational training and simple community based microfinance mechanisms (not only individualized), in order to counteract the “need” for survival and/or transactional sex.
5. More prevention programs, as well as increased availability and access to health services, are much needed for displaced and other vulnerable groups. In addition, mental health and psychosocial programs should be reactivated. There is still an enormous need for psychosocial counseling to which few people have had access.
6. Interventions combating rape and sexual violence are urgently needed in IDP and returnee settings, through the set-up of monitoring, reporting and case management systems.

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<sup>35</sup> Some basic steps in terms of access and participation are described in the HANDBOOK FOR COORDINATING GBV INTERVENTIONS IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS, Participation. 1. Women and men take part equally (in numbers and consistency) in decision making, planning, implementation and management of food aid programmes. 2. Committees with equal representation of women and men are formed for targeting, monitoring and distributing of food items and for determining the needs of vulnerable/marginalized groups.”

## VII. Annex: Glossary

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For the purpose of the study the following definitions are used<sup>36</sup> :

*Abuse:*

The misuse of power through which the perpetrator gains control or advantage of the abused, using and causing physical or psychological harm or inciting fear of that harm. Abuse prevents persons from making free decisions and forces them to behave against their will.

*Assistance:*

Aid provided to address the physical and material needs of persons of concern. This may include food items, medical supplies, clothing, shelter, seeds and tools, as well as the provision of infrastructure such as schools and roads. Humanitarian assistance refers to assistance provided by humanitarian organizations for humanitarian purposes (i.e. non-political, non-commercial and non-military purposes).

*Camps:*

Newly erected sites with non-permanent shelters (e.g. tents) used for the collective and communal accommodation of evacuated/displaced persons in the event of a disaster. Camps can be planned (i.e. purposely-built sites, completed before or during the influx) or self-settled (i.e. set up spontaneously without the support of the government or the humanitarian community). Camps are a type of collective shelter.

*Coercion:*

Forcing or attempting to force, another person to engage in behaviors against her will by using threats, verbal insistence, manipulation, deception, cultural expectations or economic power.

*Community mobilizer:*

A community mobilizer works voluntarily (or through different types of resources) within a community (in this case, IDP camp community) to ensure this community has a voice in the way it is run. Community mobilizer should make sure that as many people from the community as possible get involved in activities, volunteer, receive relevant training, orientation, receive proper information and join local groups and decision making bodies, including IDP Committees.

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<sup>36</sup> Sources include: 1) Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on the protection of persons in situations of natural disasters, January 2011; 2) Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons, Guidelines for Prevention and Response, UNHCR, May 2003; or 3) Protecting Refugees, A Field Guide for NGOs, Produced jointly by UNHCR and its NGO partners, August 2003.

*Disaster:*

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

*Discrimination:*

Disadvantageous distinctions that are based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, age, disability or other status of a person.

*Food security:*

At the World Food Summit in 1996, food security was defined to exist, “...when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs, and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

*Gender based violence* <sup>37</sup> :

Violence “that is directed at a person on the basis of their gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other arbitrary deprivation of liberty. It includes physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned within the family, the general community or by the State and its institutions”.

*Internally displaced persons:*

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border.

*Protection:*

A concept that encompasses all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of international human rights (where applicable), refugee and humanitarian law. Protection involves creating an environment conducive to respect for human beings, preventing and/or alleviating the immediate effects of a specific pattern of abuse, and restoring dignified conditions of life through repatriation, restitution and rehabilitation.

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<sup>37</sup> Gender - Based Violence has been defined by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee.

*Rape :*

The perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body.

The invasion was committed by force or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, against such a person or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or the invasion was committed against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.

*Sexual abuse:*

Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature (not including rape), including inappropriate touching, by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

*Sexual exploitation:*

Any abuse of a position of vulnerability differential power, or trust for sexual purposes; this includes profiling momentarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (IASC): sexual exploitation is one of the purposes of trafficking in persons (performing in a sexual manner, forced undressing and/or nakedness, coerced marriage, forced childbearing, engagement in pornography, or prostitution, sexual extortion for the granting of goods, services, assistance benefits, sexual slavery).

*Forced prostitution (also referred to as sexual exploitation):*

Forced/coerced sex trade in exchange for material resources, services and assistance, usually targeting highly vulnerable women or girls unable to meet basic human needs for themselves and/or their children.

*Sexual harassment:*

Any unwelcome, usually repeated and unreciprocated sexual advance, unsolicited sexual attention, demand for sexual access or favors, sexual innuendo or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or display of pornographic material, when it interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

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<sup>38</sup> Rape definition in the elements of Crimes for the Iraqi High Tribunal and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

*Sexual violence:*

Sexual violence, including exploitation and abuse, refers to any act attempt or threat of a sexual nature that results, or is likely to result in physical, psychological and emotional harm. Sexual violence is a form of gender-based violence.

*Transactional sex:*

Transactional sex includes exchanges of gifts or money for sex.

*Victim (s)/survivor (s):*

The term refers to individuals or groups who have suffered sexual and gender-based violence.