



IMPACT STORY



AS HAITI BATTLES COVID-19, SERVICES TO PROTECT WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES ARE CRITICAL

Photo: Courtesy of Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyè yo

“Based on what we hear from our communities and partners, the situation of women and girls with disabilities in Haiti has become more complicated and difficult due to COVID-19. They are experiencing problems accessing transportation and obtaining assistance to get food, supplies and water, as well as protecting themselves from the virus,” said Emanuela Paul, coordinator of the Rethinking Power programme with Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyè yo, a grantee of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF), a fund managed by UN Women on behalf of the UN system.

The programme focuses on preventing violence against women and girls, including women and girls with disabilities in Haiti, through a process of community-based activism to generate behavior change and ensure that women and girls living with disabilities enjoy greater social inclusion. In light of COVID-19, the organization adapted its approach by focusing on creating dialogues in the community to respond to their needs.

For women and girls with disabilities, the “risk of contracting the virus may be higher since they count on others for care and even if they protect themselves, their caregivers may not. We know that isolation—especially with family and caregivers who may not always understand girls’ rights, women’s rights or disability rights—tends to increase violence,” explained Paul.

Photo above: Marie Isnise Romelus, Beyond Borders/ Depase Fwontyè yo staff folding informational brochures for a social distance awareness-raising campaign related to COVID-19.

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE



Managed by UN Women, the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women** became more critical than ever as the COVID-19 crisis took off. As evidence mounted that the pandemic was fanning

gender-based violence, and as emergency services were quickly overwhelmed by health-care demands, the Trust Fund reached out to its **144** civil society grantees in **69** countries and territories to help them sustain essential services for violence survivors.

In 2019, the UN Trust Fund doubled its grant-giving target, awarding grants worth **USD 35 million** to **79** organizations, including **35** projects in Africa and Latin America under the **Spotlight Initiative**, a partnership between the **European Union** and the **United Nations**.

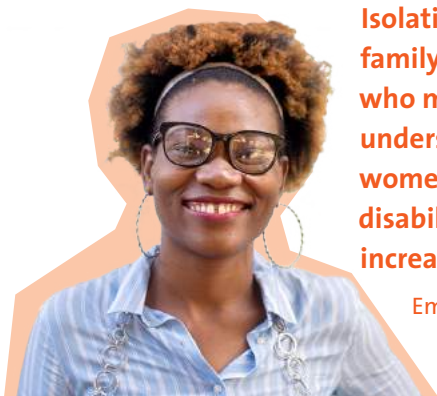
For more information on the UN Trust Fund’s work, see the [Annual Report 2019](#).

In May 2020, the Haitian Secretary of State on Disability, Soinette Désir, reported that COVID-19 had worsened the situation of women and girls with disabilities who were experiencing sexual violence at greater rates and suffering economic hardship. As the practice of sheltering in place spreads in Haiti, an increase in intimate partner and sexual violence is anticipated, as has been seen in other parts of the world.

In normal times, Beyond Borders uses 'Safe and Capable', a UNTF-funded complementary resource pack to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities, along with the 'SASA!' methodology from Raising Voices and Beyond Borders' own 'Power to Girls' methodology for community mobilization. To respond to the COVID-19 emergency, Paul notes, "we are using our close relationships and strong networks in communities for alternate activities to support women and girls with disabilities, and all women and girls in our communities and beyond."

Beyond Borders created a series of communication materials, including self-filmed videos, radio spots, social media memes, and quick chat conversation guides—all of which are adapted to provoke thinking and conversation on violence against women and girls during COVID-19. These will be used by staff, community networks, girls' group members, and partner organizations and social networks across Haiti.

In addition, several community network members, school focal points, and girls' group mentors will be trained in dialogue-style megaphone campaigns using quick-chat conversation guides. One guide specifically speaks to issues that women and girls with disabilities are facing. A mix of audio and visual materials allows for maximum accessibility, and, pending funding availability, the organization will ensure videos are available in sign language.



“ Isolation, especially with family and caregivers who may not always understand girls’ rights, women’s rights or disability rights, tends to increase violence. ”

Emanuela Paul



Photo: Courtesy of Beyond Borders/Depase Fwontyé yo

LEAVE NO WOMAN WITH DISABILITIES BEHIND IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

- COVID-19 and its socio-economic impact is deepening existing inequalities and is likely creating new ones, especially for women and girls in all their diversity. In this context, it is critical that all new public policies emphasize the importance of undertaking gender and disability analysis with an intersectional lens in all programme planning and implementation to ensure that no woman and girl is left behind.
- Access to COVID-related information regarding public health, restriction and lockdown plans, lockdown plans, and social protection measures should be made available in accessible formats, including easy to read formats, plain language and sign language.
- Women with disabilities and their representative organizations can play a key role in decision-making related to COVID-19 and therefore must be a part of the development of response and recovery plans.

The Port-au-Prince Mayor's office, which partners with Beyond Borders' initiatives, has agreed to prioritize women and girls with disabilities in the community for the distribution of hygiene kits, and has engaged in discussions on measures to prevent sexual exploitation. Beyond Borders is also sharing prevention messages from the Ministry of Health and others via WhatsApp groups, text messages and phone calls. In addition, a communications committee has also been formed, which will be responsible for vetting these messages to ensure the validity and appropriateness of content and clear communication channels.

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