Empowering Women and Girls with Disabilities

Esther Louis, Executive Director of L’Union des Femmes à Mobilité Réduite d’Haiti, a DRF grantee since 2015, participated in this year’s annual Haiti Funders Conference, thanks to the generous support of the Haiti Development Institute. She spoke with passion about the rights and challenges women and girls with disabilities face in Haiti in the panel, “SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls.” She started her talk by saying, “Women and girls with disabilities face multiple layers of discrimination often resulting in violence and abuse, with little access to justice.”

She educated the audience that women with disabilities are often left out of the women’s rights agenda. National policies on gender equity and gender-based violence do not consistently address the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Harmful stigma and myths about women and girls with disabilities that dehumanize them are pervasive in the country. They are often believed to be a curse from God, hyper sexual, and in some cases, people believe Deaf women turn into werewolves at night.

Destructive beliefs continue to disempower women and perpetuate acts of violence as was the case in April of the lynching of three Deaf women murdered for using Sign Language.

Hurricanes in My Backyard

Les Cayes, Emilio Neas’ home in Haiti, was rich in agriculture and beautiful sand beaches. Then the devastating hurricane hit. Emilio, who is a lawyer and coordinator of the RANIPH Sud (National Association Network for the Integration of Disabled Persons) shared his impressions in DRF’s blog series, “Hurricanes in My Backyard” cross posted on the Center for Disaster Philanthropy. www.disabilityrightsfund.org/news/blog

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Esther Louis believes that in order for change to happen, “Empowerment must begin in the home. Many families keep their daughters with disabilities hidden from the community and do not allow them to attend school or look for work.”

Esther was fortunate to have her family’s supportive attitude, she was able to finish a law degree and go on to work for the Ministry of the Environment, meet and marry her husband and have a family of her own. These experiences are unfortunately not typical for many women with disabilities in Haiti.

Esther hopes that her participation will lead to future collaborations with the Global Fund for Women and the UN Population Fund for Haiti who are both eager to include women and girls with disabilities in their programs in Haiti.

Including Children with Disabilities in our Communities

Girls and boys with learning disabilities don’t go to school because education is not inclusive of children with disabilities. In Haiti, special education is only available in private schools that many families cannot afford.

The Organisation des Enfants Demunis et Handicapes d’Haiti (OEDDH) is a new DRF grantee that is educating children and young persons with disabilities about the importance of self-advocacy to end exclusion and discrimination against them in line with Article 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Children will meet with the Mayor of Pétion Ville and the Parliament to advocate for accessible community programs and services in the arts, culture, sports, and recreation sectors.