

# Women's Economic Empowerment

## Welcome

To **'SQUAT'** – where women in construction broke stereotypes and poverty cycles.



### What is the Project about?

#### Background

In the fall of 2021, *Parameters*, together with the King Henry Christophe University in Cap-Haitien, set up an educational initiative to increase the participation of girls and women in Haitian training and professional environments, especially to address the low representation of women in male-dominated trades. For a long time, women were excluded from the construction trades. The Swiss embassy set up the *SQUAT* project to improve the living conditions of women and men professionals in the construction sector by facilitating the improvement of skills, employability and in turn their income.

This programme operated in several departments: the south, the south-east, the Nippes and the West (swisscontact and Caritas Switzerland Consortium, 2022).

#### Context

Women are the cornerstone of the family and play a fundamental role in the Haitian economy. However, they often live in poverty and work in low-paid jobs in the informal sector, both in rural and urban areas. In Haiti, women work in various sectors of activity, such as administration, education, and trade, in both the informal and formal sectors. Women are often oriented towards traditional gender fields such as nursing or teaching. There are various factors contributing to gender disparity from school (domestic chores, school dropout, premature pregnancy, gender stereotypes) to academia (leaky pipeline phenomena, Tripple Glass Effect, masculine culture of power and hierarchy). The fragile and socio-economic and political context in Haiti, further challenges women's economic empowerment and right to live in security.

### Summary

#### Theory of change

If construction professionals and young people (m/f) have better access to the labour market (integration: jobs and self-employment) in connection with quality, inclusive and women-friendly introductory and continuing training, which is demand-driven and complemented by a system of certification of prior experience, and the OPCs contribute to the improvement of the labour market in the construction sector at the local level (more inclusive with a better acceptance of women and a better valuation of the skills of the people trained), then women in construction can benefit from more job and income security in Haiti.

#### Overall goal

The construction sector experiences more gender equality through increased opportunities for women.

#### Specific objective(s)

- Strengthen the effective participation of women in technical construction professions, which are traditionally considered to be men's professions.
- Combat occupational stereotyping and to balance the training participation rates of young men and women.

#### Expected results

- Construction professionals and young people (m/f) have better access to the labour market (integration: employment and self-employment), which is inclusive and open to women.
- Professional organisations in the residential construction sector (OPCs) improve the labour market in the construction sector at the local level (more inclusive with better acceptance of women).
- Collaborations between public, private and associative partners strengthen Technical and Vocational Training sector in the Great South and West of Haiti.

## Stakeholders

### Partners

swisscontact <https://www.swisscontact.org/en> and Caritas Switzerland <https://www.caritas.ch/en/>

### Primary stakeholders (priority target group(s))

Women and young women and men interested or working in the construction sector, in rural and urban areas.

### Secondary and boundary stakeholders (system actors, duty bearers, service providers etc.)

MTPTC: Ministry of Public Work, Transport and Communications  
MCFDF: Ministry of Women's Affairs and Women's Rights  
Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training  
National Council of Haitian Engineers  
National Vocational Training Institute  
National Federation of Woman Mayors  
Centers for vocational training  
Professional organizations for the construction industry  
CMAH: Chamber of Trades and Crafts of Haiti



### Some key reflections:

- In fact, finding work is not easy. People trust only when they see the woman at work. In addition, site managers want to have romantic relationships with women. When they finally accept the woman on the site, they do not respect the daily rate agreed upon before.
- The dual approach (combined training and internship) boosts women's confidence in their technical abilities
- Customers tend to trust men. A woman who works in the construction industry, in addition to being competent, must be highly motivated, tenacious, rigorous, have self-confidence and even be ready to impose herself.
- Raising awareness is key to the participation and integration of women on construction sites, as it helps to deconstruct stereotypes and cultural norms.

## What did the project do and learn?

### Design and Implementation

#### Key design and implementation features, included:

- Working based on three types of capital and 'empowerment', namely human capital, 'power within'; financial/physical capital, 'power to'; and social/political capital, 'power with'.
- Including women from the outset in shorter term trainings as part of their initiation into the construction sector.
- Awareness raising campaigns on both the main and sub-professions of the construction sector.
- Engaging women's networks and local groups to promote the campaign and the opportunities.
- Engaging 'model' women as part of the campaigns and as trainers to both champion while also breaking gender stereotypes about women in construction.
- Dual training approach, training in tandem with apprenticeships.
- Public private partnership development and networking.
- Contingency planning and adaptation during COVID, when and where the construction sector declined, focusing on re-skilling and transferable skills in artisanal and craft work, focusing on 'entrepreneurship'.

The partners chosen for the implementation of the SQUAT project were all sensitized and/or already sensitive to gender equality and recruited women professionals as trainers for the training sessions and also for the internships.

## Key Achievements and Good Practices

- 2,495 women were trained and certified in main and sub professions of the construction sector, including plumbing, tiling, ironwork, painting, solar panel installation.
- 1,220 women, meaning 49% of those trained and certified, found employment, informally or formally, as wage labour or self-employed, within 6 months of the training.
- 10 micro-enterprises were launched post entrepreneurship training with follow up support.
- Over 15,000 women were sensitized in preventive measures against COVID-19.
- SQUAT encouraged actors to increase the quota of women required by law, from 30% to 60-70%.
- Integration of professional women as trainers: These women serve as role models by working in pairs, they could help deconstruct gender stereotypes through their example.
- All the partners involved in training and professional integration benefited from training in gender equality and women's rights provided by the CMAH.
- Establishment of solidarity mutuals as a structure for the long-term mobilization of women in more and certain remote areas, particularly in Nippes and the South.
- Advocacy on gender issues in vocational training and construction sites to enable women to take their place and to counteract gender and sexist stereotypes in the workplace. And sensitization in their communities for the integration in the trainings
- 'Success Journals' which showcase the stories of nine women. These both value and can help promote the experiences of women in the construction sector.



SQUAT project video testimonies:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjZSSp90BB8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyqsh5VLadk>



For more on the project, and SDC Gender in LAC experiences

- <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/PGE/Gender/Pages/Toolbox/Knowledge%20sharing/Gender-experiences-from-Latin-America.aspx>

## Key Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- In a fragile context, it is important to have contingency plans and be able to adapt through re-skilling, transferable skills appropriate for alternative income generation in times of shock or protracted crisis.
- Additional investments need to be made to prevent and respond to workplace harassment and gender-based violence.
- Additional measures need to be supported and promoted to value the legitimacy, professionalism, and capability of women in the construction sector, so they are seen as able as their male counterparts.
- Emphasis on supporting primary stakeholders through the identification and analysis of their needs, and the establishment and financing of capacity-building plans.
- Additional investments need to be made in the insertion period but also employment period, to enhance probability of more stable and durable employment.
- SQUAT's partners being both service providers (training and support), and beneficiaries of capacity building services and grants contributed to the success.
- The three areas that both women and men will have to prepare for soon: having the skills they are looking for being mobile and adaptable, and mastering automation and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.