

## UN Women and Humanitarian Action

### Gender in Humanitarian Action

According to UNISDR, globally in 2015 98.6 million people were affected by 346 disasters, causing the death of 22,773 people<sup>1</sup>. Of these, research shows that in most disaster cases, mortality amongst women is significantly higher than men. For example, *the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)* estimates that women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men during natural disasters, whilst a 2007 statistical analysis on the outcomes of natural disasters in 141 countries found that women were more likely to die, or die sooner, than men in disasters<sup>2</sup>.

In most crisis prone countries women are at a life-threatening disadvantage when it comes to their disaster preparedness and ability to survive and recover from shocks. The reasons why are expansive and include:

- They occupy subordinate positions in society and have less access to information on how to protect themselves from disasters: for example, girls are less often taught how to swim, a fatal disadvantage in floods.
- They are more likely to be engaged in the insecure and informal economy, which is the first to go in a crisis.
- They are more vulnerable to sexual violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking after a disaster.
- They have more limited freedom of movement,
- They have less educational attainment and limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes
- They even have unequal access to food compared to men.

However, when given the chance, women prove time and again that they can be in the front line of preparing for disaster, whether in the home, the community or at the highest levels of government, if only they are afforded the opportunity.

And yet still our disaster planning and response has not caught up with this basic reality.

We know the main reasons for this. First, we lack the data and knowledge to allow us to understand the issue and thereby address it properly. For example, when countries were asked to report on one international disaster management framework, 62 of the 70 (a little under 90 percent) that did so said that they had not collected proper sex-disaggregated data.

Further, UN Women's review of the 26 strategic response plans developed for the world's major humanitarian crises in 2015, showed that only 6 of them (23%) showed any evidence of a proper gender analysis of the crisis context so that a clear understanding could be reached on what the differing needs of women, girls, men and boys were that needed to be addressed.

Second, there's little political attention to ensuring that disaster risk management policies take into account the gender inequality of risk. Institutions and organisations that work on disaster risk

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<sup>1</sup> UNISDR. 2016. "[2015 Disasters in Numbers](#)."

<sup>2</sup> Neumayer, Eric and Pluemper, Thomas (2007) [The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002](#). Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 97 (3). pp. 551-566

management don't talk to institutions and organisations that work on gender equality because they don't see what gender has to do with their work.

Third, there's too little money for addressing the gender inequality of risk. Women need investment in things like social protection and affordable insurance, but the importance of that investment just isn't appreciated.

Fourth, women aren't given the opportunity to have their say and represent their own interests in disaster risk management. Particularly at the local level, when plans are drawn up and investments made, women aren't even in the room. Contributing to this is the lack of effective representation for women and girls, hampered by a lack of investment - with women's empowerment organisations and institutions receiving just 0.4% of gender equality focused aid provided to fragile states in 2012-2013.

In the last decade disasters have claimed some 700,000 lives. Ever lengthening protracted conflict and unfolding climate change have the potential to drive that number ever higher. If we are to avoid and even reverse that we need to recognize that women and girls are not only bearing the heaviest burden of disaster risk, but are also our greatest asset in managing that risk and responding to its consequences.

In these times of limited funding but increasing crisis frequency, the cost-effectiveness of humanitarian spending is of paramount importance. Through the inclusion of women as participants, informants and decision makers in the planning and implementation of humanitarian and preparedness strategies, there are multiplier effects where positive outcomes are amplified for not only the individuals targeted, but also their households and the wider community. UN Women's research shows that improving the self-reliance of at-risk women through programming based on gender equality and women's empowerment leads to more effective outcomes, improving the quality of life and resilience of all household and community members, as well as decreasing gender inequality (UN Women 2015).

### **UN Women and Humanitarian Action**

To address these issues, UN Women is committed to ensuring equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of humanitarian action and sustainable development. Our work is guided by a series of international commitments, including the Sendai Framework Agreement, the commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit and its Grand Bargain and their overlap with the SDGs and the updated Women in Peace and Security Resolution 2242. These global agreements demonstrate a shift towards the recognition of gender equality and women's empowerment as being integral to ensuring global development and prosperity for all, by breaking the cycle of poverty caused by conflict, recurring natural disasters and a lack of resilience and preparedness.

To this end, UN Women's engagement in humanitarian action, crisis preparedness and resilience is to promote consistency and sustainability in addressing gender equality concerns across the humanitarian-peace and security and development continuum. UN Women is working to address the gender equality gap in the provision of adequate humanitarian services. We are striving to make sure that:

- Data and evidence is there for to ensure response, recovery and risk management are gender sensitive;
- Governments have the capacity to develop gender-sensitive response and risk management policies and plans;
- Properly dedicated budgets are set aside for gender-sensitive response, recovery and risk management;
- Women can access the humanitarian services, social protection and insurance they need;
- And women get the opportunity to be active participants in disaster response planning and programming, as well as risk management. An outcome which benefits not only women, but their entire communities.

To this end, UN Women's role rests upon the three pillars of its overall mandate: normative, coordination and operational. We facilitate interagency coordination and inter-governmental engagement, providing country level coordination, technical capacity and service delivery, and support and leverage women's leadership and amplify women's voices to inform humanitarian response, recovery and disaster risk reduction interventions.

#### **A. Global Coordination and Accountability**

At the global level, UN Women works in line with its coordination mandate, supporting other UN organizations to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are integrated into their crisis, preparedness and response and humanitarian efforts, including through sharing evidence-based best practices, minimum standards and guidance tools. Key actions include:

- **Normative Framework** - Updating and contributing to core gender-in-humanitarian-action and DRR normative frameworks so that they reflect the current humanitarian landscape and its nexus within the development and peace and security agenda.
- **Accountability** - Developing formal accountability mechanisms to monitor the realization of commitments to gender in DRR and humanitarian action.
- **Humanitarian Architecture** – Being active in and contributing to key coordination mechanisms such as the Interagency Standing Committee and the Grand Bargain.

#### **B. Country Presence and Operational Brand**

To ensure a consistent engagement in humanitarian contexts by providing a uniform, recognizable and visible operational brand, UN Women has identified four core actions for its effective engagement in humanitarian action:

- **Coordination and Leadership** – UN Women provides technical capacity to ensure that the planning and implementation of humanitarian response and DRR adequately integrates gender equality and women's empowerment so that the needs and vulnerabilities of all women, girls, men and boys in crisis-affected populations are identified and addressed.
- **Capacity Building: Leveraging women's leadership, agency and voice** – UN Women supports the capacity of national gender authorities, civil society organizations and other relevant local stakeholders to engage with, and contribute to, the planning and implementation of gender-integrated humanitarian action, including in disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding. UN Women also emphasizes empowering women and girls to participate as decision makers in the formulation of the plans and programmes that will have a direct impact on their own survival and recovery prospects, as well as those of their communities.
- **Evidence-based Response** – UN Women supports disaster management bodies and humanitarian actors by ensuring that they have access to and are informed by gender-focused assessments, based on sex and age disaggregated data and contextualized gender analysis, of the response and recovery needs and potential capacities of crisis-affected populations.
- **Targeted Programming** – Where programming gaps are identified, UN Women responds operationally in crisis contexts. UN Women provides crisis-affected women with the protection, empowerment and livelihood services they need not only to survive but also to recover and develop their resilience and that of their families and communities to crisis risk in the future. UN Women also engages with DRR programming to bridge key gaps.

Based on these core actions, UN Women has developed two flagship programme initiatives to achieve transformative results through gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action. These initiatives are:

**Women’s Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) in Crisis Response** – Improving the gender responsiveness of coordinated humanitarian action by:

- Ensuring humanitarian planning and programming are informed by gender analysis and assessment.
- Increasing access to protection and economic opportunities for women affected by crises.
- Bridging the humanitarian/development divide in protracted crises by promoting sustainable livelihoods.

**Gender Inequality of Risk** – Addressing the gender inequality of risk and promoting community resilience to natural hazards through:

- Ensuring disaster risk assessments adequately consider the needs of women and girls and that women have the capacity and opportunity to engage in assessments.
- Supporting national authorities to develop gender responsive disaster mitigation plans.
- Ensuring adequate levels of financing are available for gender-responsive disaster mitigation strategies.
- Strengthening women’s capacity to prevent, prepare for and recover from natural hazards.

**Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action** - In addition to its flagship programming, UN Women has established the *Global Acceleration Instrument* aimed at funding local women’s organizations, in order to enhance their capacity and engagement in peace-building and humanitarian planning and programming in fragile contexts. As a pooled funding mechanism, the GAI is a direct response to the commitments of the World Humanitarian Summit, facilitating the localization of the humanitarian response, to ensure national ownership, as well as increasing investment in civil society organizations and in gender equality.

**UN Women’s Current Operational Humanitarian Presence:**

Over 2015 and 2016, UN Women has had ongoing humanitarian programming in 32 countries worldwide (see map below). These have included response to the sudden onset disasters in Haiti, Nepal, Fiji, Vanuatu and Ecuador.

