IASC WORKING GROUP

XXXVI Meeting

Rome, 22-23 April 1999

Final Draft

Background Paper
MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE
TO EMERGENCIES

One of the purposes of the UN is "promoting and encouraging respect for
human rights and for the fundamental freedoms for all without
distinction as to race, sex, language or religion."
UN Charter

A.   Background

During the 1998 humanitarian segment meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Agreed Conclusions requested the Emergency Relief Coordinator, in co-operation with the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), to ensure the integration of a gender perspective into all aspects of humanitarian policy. This builds on the concerns and commitment expressed during the follow-up to the Beijing Conference of 1995 when the Economic and Social Council in 1997 adopted a series of conclusions and recommendations on the mainstreaming of gender concerns into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system. In particular, it urged the combined system to adopt the conclusions and framework for action as proposed by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) into all aspects of UN work and operational activities such as poverty eradication, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and peace and security.

In addition, the specialised agencies of the UN have been encouraged to monitor the ways in which funds and programmes are used to implement gender mainstreaming; establish accountability of senior managers for gender mainstreaming; appoint senior level focal points for gender mainstreaming; and adopt, where necessary, additional protocols or MOUs with internal and external partners to enhance this process in all aspects of agency sectors and activities.

At the same time, the recent resolution (AI/RES/51/77) on Children in Armed Conflict, following the Graça Machel report, contains a number of recommendations to the UN system and the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to ensure a gender-sensitive orientation in all aspects of protection and humanitarian activities involving children and conflict, recovery and rehabilitation.

Finally, this focus accords very well with the terms of reference for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Working Group (WG) on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), which ask the WG to "recommend ways and means to address obstacles in the provision of assistance to and protection of IDPs, with particular attention paid to the special needs of vulnerable groups among them, including *women…*"

B. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary overview of the differential impact of emergencies and crisis situations on women and girls, men and boys. It will also discuss the policy issues and implications of a gender perspective. It will present options for the application of humanitarian principles as well as the appropriate responses needed to address the specific needs of women and girls in pre-conflict, emergency, natural disaster, and post-crisis settings.

The principal object is to facilitate discussion within the IASC in order to identify a coordinated programme of action to enhance the qualities of gender-based assessment, planning, programme implementation, training, monitoring, evaluating and reporting at headquarters and field levels.

C. The Challenges of Gender Analysis

The changing nature of emergencies and the increasing number of armed conflicts are raising serious ethical, analytical and operational challenges for donors, NGO and UN agency personnel. One of the most important challenges is responding in a gender-sensitive manner to these crises.

In particular, the dramatic social changes resulting from conflicts in many parts of the world have profound effects on social relations, especially for women and girls. Eighty percent (80%) of the internally displaced persons and refugees around the world are women and children. Women are in flight, adapting to life in camps, or are directly caught up in the midst of conflict. In many cases, women and teenage girls in conflict zones are the sole providers and protectors for their families, as wives, mothers and sisters, since their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers have either been exiled or killed or are away on combat duty. They are also the most affected by the violence of conflict and displacement through rape, torture, brutality and murder, and fear of destruction of homes and livelihoods.

Paying attention to the specific problems that IDP women face has been a component of the work of the Representative of the Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons (RSG) for several years. As noted, the overwhelming majority of IDPs are women and children. Displacement tends to increase the number of

households headed by women, particularly by widows, and change gender roles. Moreover, displacement has different gender impacts in each phase of displacement: from the cause of flight, to considerations of protection and assistance while displaced, to specific problems arising in the resettlement and reintegration phase. In all cases, fundamental rights are put at risk. Greater attention to these gender dimensions of internal displacement is a key component of the RSG's agenda for research for the coming year.

D.   What is Gender Analysis?

Recognising the key trends and characteristics of current conflicts and violence is a fundamental ingredient in understanding the issue of gender relations in emergencies and conflict situations. Gender analysis can serve as a basis for understanding the impact of conflict on different groups within society.

Gender analysis is a tool to provide an understanding of how people are socialised from birth to hold certain attitudes and values about what is appropriate behaviour for men and women. These societal expectations are gender constructs, or socially constructed roles, capacities and expectations of men and women, as opposed to their specific biological characteristics based on sexual differences.

Almost invariably, gender constructs function in a way that subordinates and discriminates against women. This discrimination is not only reflected in individual relationships but also permeates all institutions. The issue of gender bias, and the subsequent impact on human rights entitlements, is thus a political and an institutional matter. This issue is particularly important in conflict and crisis situations where conflict and militarisation lead to redefining female and male roles and to differing responsibilities for men and women.

Gender analysis can help illuminate the various ways in which men and women are accorded **power** and resources through their different identities, access and entitlements. In the context of emergency and crisis situations, a gender framework enables the examination of the differential impact of crisis on men and women and enables the examination of the impact of interventions on gender relations, as follows:

(a)   Gender analysis highlights both men's and women's capacities and indicates where opportunities are missed by humanitarian agencies for targeting effective strategies to support and enhance women's skills and capacities.

(b)   Gender analysis can identify the division of labour within the household and domestic economy as well as identify the burden of reproductive labour which women bear and highlight the way this intensifies during periods of rapid and violent social change.

(c) Gender analysis can reveal the socio-cultural constraints facing women who, as bearers of culture and the social reproduction of norms and values, become subject to new forms of control and victimisation during emergencies.

(d) Gender analysis points out that men's experiences and identity in times of emergency are also impacted and that the 'gender' question is not just a woman's issue. The ways in which violence has helped restructure 'masculinity' in poverty-affected and marginalised societies is an important factor when considering boys and men's involvement in armed militias and their acts of violence against women. This is particularly important when considering the post-conflict phase where men and boys are re-socialised.

E.   Gender Relations in the Context of Violent Social Change

Conflict and instability are, for many, part of daily reality. Conflict and violence have to be seen, therefore, as part of the nature of social change itself. As such, they have important effects on changes in social relations and gender relations in particular.

The causes and characteristics of this instability are many, varied, and complex: they may be structural systemic crises, unresolved tensions between state and minority groups, continual underdevelopment, and combinations of environmental and economic crises. Development processes and projects have themselves fuelled conflicts as new tensions over resource allocations and sharing are created.

The concepts of equality and discrimination lie at the heart of all gender-sensitive perspectives. The challenge to equality is fundamental to the very notion of human rights, which postulates that all human beings have human rights inherent to their condition as human beings. However, equality means much more than treating all persons in the same way. There are some aspects of life that are common to women and men, and clearly women should be accorded equal opportunity in those areas, and therefore need to be made visible.

Current research and analysis identifies five major areas in which the issue of gender-based rights in crisis situations is important. All of these aspects are particularly relevant to societies emerging from conflict situations where not only is the physical and economic infrastructure of the society in the process of being restructured, but also the legislative and political institutions. Each of these in turn has important consequences and implications for relief and development work**.**

(1) <u>Violence against Women</u>: Violence against women in emergencies is a major violation of rights. The deliberate use of rape and other forms of violence and brutality against women and girls have to be recognised as crimes of violence, and appropriate legislation enacted. The recent international recognition of rape as a crime of genocide acknowledges the

gravity of such actions in conflict situations. Such clearer definitions of women's experience of gender crimes and persecution will also contribute towards a redefinition of determinations of refugee status for women.

For young girls and youth, this research and advocacy to recognise gender-based violence has specific relevance. Teenage and young girls differently experience specific forms of violence. Their rights as a minority group, and the specific kinds of strategies they need to reintegrate with society, are important for policy planners and programme implementers alike.

(2)   Evolution of New Nationalisms and Fundamentalisms: A second area of relevance is the relationship between gender relations and the evolution of new forms of nationalism or fundamentalism. These new ideologies use and redefine women's roles and status which has important ramifications for their rights and access to services and definitions of citizenship in those societies. The example of the Taliban Movement in Afghanistan, which has abrogated the most fundamental of women's human rights, is a case in point. It becomes very important in such situations to ensure the protection of women's rights as well as their persons.

The challenge lies in agencies being able to monitor the situation of the rights of women and girls and to act in a co-ordinated and coherent way to ensure the implementation and application of the various human rights legislation and humanitarian principles which apply to the specific context. In situations of internal displacement, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are instructive in this regard. Because there is no one agency with an express mandate to provide protection to the internally displaced, special mechanisms are required to ensure that their specific needs and rights are addressed.

(3)   Access to Health Care: A third area of concern is the right to health. For women, access to quality health care providers (especially women) is critical to their ability to meet obligations and carry out their responsibilities. Their psychological, reproductive, and nutritional well being is often severely impacted during crises and conflict.

The whole community and its resources are affected by emergencies. Hospitals, clinics, schools and community structures and essential services are disrupted, supplies looted or withheld, and outside help denied or slowed down. Women's physical vulnerability is higher than men's because of their sexual and reproductive roles. Complications of pregnancy and birth remain untreated in the absence of medical services, including lack of access to reproductive health services. The menstrual needs of women, particularly in shelters, often go unaddressed.

Due to discrimination in the allocation of resources and food, women become the first to suffer extensive anaemia and famine with implications for their babies and unborn children. In addition, injuries caused by landmines, cross fire, beatings, and so on, cause disabilities, loss of limbs, eyesight, and associated illnesses, which further impair their ability to function, a problem faced by both women and men.

At the same time, conflict increases women's vulnerability to sexual violence and rape. Conflicts also exacerbate levels of domestic violence and other forms of sexual harassment, consistently putting women in fear for their personal safety and integrity. Rape and sexual harassment increase the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies.

This fear of harassment and rape in turn forces women into forming alliances with soldiers and other men in power as a means of safety and escape. This causes other problems such as exposure to HIV/AIDS, more abuse and eventual abandonment and potential expulsion from their own communities. Physical and sexual violence is also instrumental in affecting the levels of psychological stress and trauma experienced by women. Rape as a personal and social attack results in loss of self-worth, and may carry the additional stigma of marginalisation from the community.

Linked to the issue of trauma is the effect of crises on women's personal identity and interpretation of self-worth. Women's identity is culturally defined and is affected by violence in complex ways. Changes in gender roles, family status and livelihood systems caused by conflicts and crises can affect women's identity in a number of ways, both negative and positive. On the other hand, roles and duties change and many women may find a forced change in roles actually to their advantage. Indeed, international involvement in crisis and post-crisis situations can be an opportunity to promote positive social change.

(4)   <u>Stress on Livelihood Strategies and Survival Coping Mechanisms</u>: Livelihood and production strategies and the effectiveness of coping mechanisms and strategies for survival are severely strained during crises. Conflict destroys the ability to earn an income, and grow food. Marketing and transportation systems are destroyed and often people are deliberately kept on the move in order to prevent resumption of economic activities.

Crisis usually increases the economic burdens of women. At the same time, discrimination in the allocation of economic and social resources is exacerbated during crisis situations. The increased burden on women for finding food, shelter, and so on, is often matched by ever decreasing access to resources, whether credit, relief commodities, seeds, tools or

access to productive land. The division of labour within households is also affected. In many cases, formerly strict divisions break down and the household has to be flexible in order to adapt.

Women are most often portrayed as helpless victims and emphasis is placed on their need for assistance. However, too often in the rush to provide such assistance, little or no account is taken of what they have already achieved for themselves - and women have often developed flexible and creative coping mechanisms and strategies - and some forms of assistance can distort or disrupt the mechanisms they have already set up or are utilising.

Furthermore, the loss of husband and children may also cause a loss of identity, if a woman's status is defined solely as a mother and wife. Loss of cultural adornments, clothes, head coverings and other forms of traditional dress during crises can, in some societies, also affect women's identity and restrict their mobility, and ability to take part in relief programmes, attend food distributions, and so on.

(5) <u>Participation of Women in Programme Planning and Decision-Making</u>: A fifth area of importance concerns the participation of women in programme planning and decision making<u>.</u> Relief operations may overlook the importance of consulting with women and getting alternative perceptions and information on their needs and strategies. For example, registering only male household heads in refugee or IDP camps or for food distribution can directly reduce women's influence over the production and provision of food within the family and undermine their position within the household.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement call for special efforts to be made to promote the full participation of IDP women in the planning and management of relocation, assistance, return or resettlement and reintegration efforts.

Similarly, the efforts of women as mediators, their roles in trying to access communication between warring groups, and so on, are often ignored in official peace mediating initiatives. In the post-conflict phase, the emphasis on the more formal levels of establishing systems of 'governance' through political parties leaves out the role and voices of women who, at the 'informal' and community level, have much to contribute in helping define terms for peace and security.

In doing so, there is failure to comply with Article 7 of CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women), which calls upon States Parties to ensure that women, on equal terms with men, participate in the formulation of government policy, and in

non-governmental organisations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

G.   Operational Implications for Humanitarian Agencies

This section will focus primarily on the impact of conflict on women and girls as the main perspective or lens through which to consider the gender issue. The objective, here stated, of developing and mainstreaming a gender perspective is to highlight human rights' violations especially for women and girls, and to facilitate the more effective promotion and protection of their human rights. Women's rights can be abused both in their own right and through the males with whom they are involved and to whom they are related.

There are opportunities for change created by crisis situations, which may lead to the re-making of roles and opportunities for women. Women have served as soldiers in liberation armies and have taken on many roles normally reserved for men. In an effort to survive, they have engaged in trade and other economic activities which may have given them more control, autonomy and status at both household and community level. The issue here is how agencies can help enhance and protect these opportunities and gains, particularly in the post-conflict phase where there may be a tendency to revert to tradition and new constraints imposed

The operational implications of the issues outlined in this paper can be summed up under the following broad areas of concern and activities:

Protection and Prevention of Violence

Monitoring and reporting all forms of violence against women and girls, and setting up mechanisms for addressing needs created by violence, including counselling, legal, medical and other forms of material support, may help protect women against violence and prevent it.

In setting up refugee and IDP camps and other settlements, safe havens, and so on, consultation is needed with women in planning camp layout and securing safe access to fuel and water supplies. Special monitoring systems need to be put in place in situations where there is a military peacekeeping operation.

Special training is needed for the armed forces as well as mechanisms set up to deal with any violations committed by them. Advocacy at local and international levels is needed to raise awareness about issues of women's rights and ensure training and sensitisation of local police, legal and other authorities to these rights.

On issues of registration, separate registration of men and women is recommended to help refugees and displaced persons deal with the specific problems

they are facing in seeking protection, asylum, services, and so on. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement affirm that women and men have equal rights to obtain documentation and have the right to such documentation in their own names.

A number of agencies have already developed special guidelines and policies on protection issues. UNHCR has special materials on protection of refugee and displaced women. UNICEF has guidelines on protection of children and displaced women and is also developing a training manual for Peacekeepers. Human Rights Watch has a manual on monitoring and reporting of violations. WFP has its own set of Commitments to Women, which include attention to women in emergency situations.

There is also the UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on Violence against Women, which deals with protection and prevention of violence and what various UN actors are doing. Her role is to approach the problem of violence against women from a human rights perspective, receiving allegations from victims globally and intervening systematically in response to cases of individual violations. She also seeks to study different aspects of the broader problem and, in this regard, has reported to the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women in situations of armed conflict. Another approach that she uses is to study 'best practices' of States on questions of violence against women, such as policy and legislation.

Targeting and Relief Distribution

Attention needs to be paid to the ways in which aid is distributed to ensure the appropriateness of what is being distributed. Special assessment techniques can be used to identify needs amongst different populations to ensure their participation in planning and relief allocation.

WFP has specific policies and gender guidelines on relief food distribution, requiring that 80% of relief food should go directly to women, especially when they are heads of household. Distribution directly to women increases the likelihood of food aid being directly consumed by the most vulnerable. OXFAM and CARE are among many NGOs who have developed guidelines for gender sensitive assessment and community participation. INTERACTION has produced a resource book identifying generic frameworks for gender sensitive planning approaches.

Health and Reproductive Health

Ensuring adequate response to the physical, mental and reproductive needs of women and adolescent girls should include provision of comprehensive integrated reproductive health care services, comprising family planning, maternal and infant care, safe motherhood services, and services related to sexual violence, STDs and HIV/AIDS.

WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNHCR have developed guidelines and best practices on a number of themes related to health care issues. For example, UNFPA has established a policy on emergency relief operations in the field of humanitarian assistance. This policy was developed considering reproductive health and family planning as basic human rights. In addition, they have come together with key partner NGOs to form a special interagency task force on health care needs in emergency situations.

Nutrition and Household Food Security

Provision of appropriate and adequate food, seeds, tools and micronutrients is essential for good nutrition and household food security.   It is also important to ensure access to markets. This can be best accomplished through an analysis using household food economy models, to understand the specific needs of communities and the role of gender relations within families. Provision of health and other inputs must be made to protect and enhance livelihoods of both rural and urban populations affected and displaced by crises.

SCF/UK, OXFAM, and CARE are among many NGOs, which have a long developed tradition and guidelines on these issues. In addition, research institutions such as IDS in Britain have extensive documentation, case studies and analytical research examining various aspects of nutrition, food security and conflict on a country-by-country basis.

FAO, WFP and UNICEF also have specific policies and guidelines in this sector. WFP, for example, in the choice of commodities, strives to distribute food commodities with energy-saving cooking properties. The benefits achieved are environmental, as the preparation time of food decreases, and a reduced workload for women. WFP also has a commitment to improve the micronutrient content of the food it distributes, especially to women, and always strives to provide adequate packaging for rations, in an effort to decrease women's load.

Income Generation and Skill Training

Ensuring vocational training and access to educational institutions is important, especially for girls and children. Opportunities need to be provided in refugee camps and other emergency settlements for equitable access to training. The existing skills of women refugees and displaced persons themselves, i.e., as teachers, nurses, social workers, and so on, can be used to set up training and skill enhancement opportunities. It is equally important to ensure that women have opportunities for involvement in development and reconstruction projects, and access to credit.

ILO, WFP and IOM have specific guidelines on gender and development of employment opportunities. ILO has also focused on gender and post-conflict issues and

examined practices in a number of countries. WFP has a commitment to expend at least 25% of its food-for-work and food-for-training resources on women and to ensure that women also benefit from long-term asset creation from these programs. WFP also has a commitment to spend 50% of its education resources on girls, which often means taking proactive steps to enable parents to send their girls to school. UNIFEM and the African Women in Crisis Programme also have guidelines, lessons learnt and case histories of successful strategies and initiatives in this sector.

Disaggregated Data, Information and Advocacy Materials

All agencies should ensure the proper compilation of data in their respective fields and sectors broken down by gender, age, and other appropriate categories. It is important to underscore the specific and differential impact of the particular crisis situation on the various groups in the community.

At the same time, in monitoring and evaluation, it is important to highlight the impact of intervention strategies themselves at different levels. In budgeting, program planning and reporting, it is also important to indicate the amount of expenditure, the type of relief commodities, and so on, that have been distributed to and utilised by different sections of the community.

H. Co-ordinating What Agencies are Doing in Mainstreaming Gender into the Humanitarian Response System

Within the United Nations, the term "gender mainstreaming" was defined in the ECOSOC resolution passed in July 1997, as follows:

"Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women can benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."

Following this, the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, called upon heads of all UN departments and agencies to mainstream gender throughout their entire programmes, developing policies, mechanisms and evaluation techniques. The gender mainstreaming process is thus all-encompassing, referring to both the UN-supported programmatic initiatives for beneficiary communities and policies involving UN personnel.

In November 1998, the Working Group of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee created a Sub-Working Group on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance to develop these concepts for humanitarian assistance. At the SWG's first meeting in Geneva in January 1999, it developed the following Terms of Reference, with lead organisations noted in parentheses:

- Finalise the background paper on Mainstreaming Gender in the Humanitarian Response to Emergencies (WFP).

- Prepare an IASC policy statement on gender and humanitarian assistance for IASC approval (OCHA).

- Review existing training and sensitisation materials on gender and humanitarian assistance with a view to developing a resource package and user's guide (UNICEF).

- Develop tools and mechanisms for integrating gender analysis into assessment and strategic planning and evaluation (UNICEF).

- Review periodically progress made by IASC members in implementing gender equality in staffing at all levels (all members).

The second meeting was held in New York in March; and a third meeting will be held in Rome. WFP and UNICEF are co-chairs of the SWG.

This process is deemed essential because attention to gender has received much less attention in humanitarian spheres than in development activities.

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