



Placing Women and Girls at the Centre of Humanitarian Action in South and Central Asia

World Humanitarian Summit | Regional Consultation, Dushanbe, Tajikistan | 28-30 July, 2015

In humanitarian response - whether in the context of natural disaster, protracted crisis or conflict - the needs of women, men, girls and boys are different and distinct. Crises exacerbate pre-existing gender based discrimination and inequalities thereby blocking access for women and girls to basic services and rights, economic livelihoods, meaningful representation in planning and decision-making processes, also increasing risks to gender based violence. At the same time women and men are equipped with different knowledge, skills and capacities to deal with crisis which need to be adequately utilized. Ignoring gender considerations in humanitarian action in South and Central Asia will risk exacerbating inequalities, diminish the effectiveness of response and recovery efforts, and undermine communities' resilience.

In order to address gender issues and achieve gender equality before and during a humanitarian crisis, it is crucial to keep women and girls at the center of the planning and response to maximize the impact of humanitarian action, reduce further risks, and promote gender equality.

Humanitarian assistance and protection should consider the experiences, needs, vulnerabilities, abilities and priorities of all populations from a gender sensitive approach, promoting meaningful representation of women and girls in the decision-making processes and ensuring availability of essential services, including sexual and reproductive health and multi-sectoral prevention and response to gender based violence. A gender-integrated approach that empowers women and girls, while also engaging men and boys, will be crucial for achieving long-term positive change, transforming deeply entrenched inequality, and strengthening resilience.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Evidence from recent disasters in the region strongly indicates these concerns are justified. For instance, during the 2015 Nepal earthquake 55% of deaths were women and girls. During 2011 Pakistan floods, a protection assessment highlighted the main concerns for displaced women were the lack of safe, private spaces; together with access to services, and increased domestic violence. A similar scenario was experienced during the 2014 Tajikistan floods. And, in 2010 a rapid post-conflict needs assessment in the south of Kyrgyzstan found that almost 50% of women interviewed did not feel safe in public spaces and almost 37% of them experienced violence from members of the other major ethnic group in the area.

In 2015 over **82.5 million people** are in need of humanitarian assistance



were women and children, the majority of whom were deeply impoverished

60 per cent of maternal deaths



occur in **conflict, displacement and natural disaster**

Vulnerability to natural disasters is increasing, exacerbated by poverty and environmental destruction

At least **90** per cent



of the victims of natural disasters live in developing countries

At any time, approximately



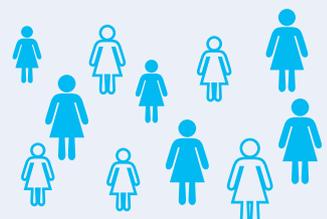
4% of any displaced or disaster affected population will be pregnant

15% of those will experience pregnancy-related complications

In emergencies, women and adolescent girls confront exclusion, marginalization and exploitation including gender-based violence



Adolescents - especially girls - face higher risks during an emergency (early pregnancy, child labour, children out of school).



KEY PRIORITIES

- Include women and girls' meaningful participation and representation in all phases of humanitarian action.
- Collect, analyse and disseminate sex and age-disaggregated data on disaster and conflict impacts and losses at all levels.
- Ensure systems are in place to protect women and girls from any form of gender based violence before and during crisis, promoting availability and safe access to services for survivors.

To increase effectiveness of the response in conflict and disaster prone areas:

Humanitarian effectiveness



Provide access to relevant, accessible and appropriate information to women and girls before and during a humanitarian crisis.

Ensure that women and girls' diverse knowledge and experiences are fully integrated into all political and transitional processes including peace-building, peacemaking and recovery.

Invest in information management systems to document best practices and lessons learned in addressing gender equality in humanitarian contexts.

Invest in gender capacity building for first responders and decision makers to promote effective gender sensitive response.

Affirmative action to recruit and retain female staffs to interface with women and girls in humanitarian action.

To reduce gender related vulnerability and manage risk:

Reducing vulnerability and managing risk



Establish mechanisms such as gender analyses and early warning systems before the onset of a crisis, to promote protection of women and girls from any form of gender based violence and other rights violations, and to minimize associated risks.

Prepare for and provide sexual and reproductive health, including maternal health services as part of preparedness, disaster risk reduction and response.

Adopt comprehensive gender-sensitive and rights-based migration and security policies which ensure that women and girls affected by disasters and conflicts are protected from trafficking and violence.

Establish accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender equality and protection of women and girls are embedded in all humanitarian response planning and implementation.

To best serve the needs and protect the rights of women and girls:



Serving the needs and protecting the rights

Ensure all national, sub-national and community disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery plans address women and girls' specific needs, with a particular focus on participation, protection and livelihood support.

Promote and prioritize empowerment of women, through economic and livelihood programmes, particularly for female headed households and other vulnerable groups.

Establish dedicated funding mechanisms to provide long term support for local and national women's groups to facilitate adequate gender sensitive service delivery, advocacy, and capacity building.

Ensure access to justice for women and girls including free legal aid and representation, and psycho-social support especially for victims of conflict related gender based violence.

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