



# PROMOTING THE RIGHTS, NEEDS AND AGENCY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION



*With continued population growth, urbanization, stretched natural resources, protracted conflict and the impact of climate change becoming more apparent, the number of humanitarian crises continues to grow, as does the number of communities requiring humanitarian assistance.*

*Within these communities, women and girls are often disproportionately at risk to the effects of these crises. They are more likely to lose their means of livelihood and are exposed to a heightened risk of gender-based violence. Further, in the aftermath of disasters, their specific humanitarian needs are often neither adequately identified nor addressed in the ensuing response by governments and humanitarian agencies alike.*

*To address this omission, UN Women is committed to ensuring equality amongst all women, men, girls and boys affected by disasters both as beneficiaries of humanitarian action and as contributors to its planning and implementation. This brochure provides an overview and examples of how UN Women promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in its humanitarian work around the world.*

## World Humanitarian Summit Gender Commitments

Building on the recent international community's consolidated commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment formulated in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals and Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women's Peace and Security, the World Humanitarian Summit developed five core commitments to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into the future architecture and policies of humanitarian action.

### WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT COMMITMENTS TO CATALYZE ACTION TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

**Commitment 1:** Empower Women and Girls as change agents and leaders, including by increasing support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action.

**Commitment 2:** Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome documents of their review conferences for all women and adolescent girls in crisis settings.

**Commitment 3:** Implement a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in crisis contexts, including through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies.

**Commitment 4:** Ensure that humanitarian programming is gender responsive.

**Commitment 5:** Fully comply with humanitarian policies, frameworks and legally binding documents related to gender equality, women's empowerment, and women's rights.

UN Women calls on the global community to create a more effective humanitarian system by endorsing these commitments and putting in place an accountability framework to closely monitor progress towards their realization.

## Gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action

Crises impact women, girls, boys and men of all ages differently. Their needs and interests vary, as do their resources, capacities and coping strategies. Women and girls are disproportionately exposed to the effects of disasters. One woman in five is likely to experience sexual violence in humanitarian settings, girls are more likely to be pulled out of school and less likely to return than boys, and 60% of preventable maternal deaths take place in crisis settings. Further, natural disasters are known to kill more women than men, and at an earlier age (WHO 2011).

At the same time, women and girls are neither exclusively nor solely the victims of crisis. Experience and research show that when women are included in humanitarian action their entire community benefits (UN Women 2015). Women are often the first responders to a crisis and play a central role in the survival and resilience of families and communities. Local women's groups are also often best placed to mobilize change, identify solutions and spontaneously respond to crises.

Despite their critical contributions, women and girls are often excluded from the decision-making processes that shape response strategies to crisis. The lack of funding for the needs and representation of crisis-affected women underscores this absence. For example, in 2012–2013 only 2% or USD 439 million out of USD 10 billion in DAC funding directed to economic and productive sectors in fragile states actually targeted gender-equality as a primary objective. Women's empowerment organizations and institutions received just 0.4% or USD 130 million of gender equality focused aid to fragile states (OECD 2015).

As an urgent matter both of principle and effectiveness, humanitarian efforts must recognize the rights, roles and agency of women and girls. It is critical that their needs and vulnerabilities are prioritized and their voices included in decision-making regarding the forms of assistance, means of delivery, and the protection and economic and social empowerment opportunities they require.

# 60

**per cent of preventable maternal deaths** take place in settings of conflict, displacement and natural disaster.





In refugee camps across Cameroon, UN Women supports dialogue committees and other activities to promote social cohesion among community members.

## UN Women's core actions to address the needs of women and girls in humanitarian settings

UN Women is committed to ensuring equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of humanitarian action. Our work in humanitarian action is guided by a series of international commitments. Our mandate is to support and enable the UN and the wider humanitarian system to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment throughout all aspects of humanitarian planning and programming. Through our inter-agency leadership and coordination role, we support other UN organizations in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in their humanitarian efforts, including through sharing evidence-based best practice, minimum standards and guidance tools. We assist Member States in developing and implementing policies and commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian action. We also promote the voices, agency and capacity of women's civil society organizations and national women's machineries in humanitarian efforts.

## UN WOMEN HAS IDENTIFIED FOUR CORE ACTIONS FOR ITS EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION:

- **Coordination and leadership** – UN Women provides technical capacity to ensure planning and implementation of humanitarian response integrates gender equality and women’s empowerment. In this way the needs and vulnerabilities of all women, girls, men and boys in crisis-affected populations are identified and addressed.
- **Capacity building** – 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 humanitarian coordinators to identify and address the response and recovery needs of crisis-affected populations by undertaking gender-focused assessments, based on sex and age disaggregated data and contextualized gender analysis.
- **Targeted programming** – Where programming gaps are identified, UN Women responds operationally in humanitarian contexts. UN Women provides crisis-affected women with the protection, empowerment and livelihood services they need to not only survive but also recover and develop their resilience to crisis risk in the future.

## 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 INCLUDE:

- **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.



refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings is estimated to have experienced sexual violence — likely an underestimation given the barriers associated with disclosure.

# CASE STUDIES

*Through its Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) flagship programme, UN Women's core humanitarian actions are intended to provide specific outcomes in sudden onset and protracted crises contexts as well as in the transition to recovery and resilience. These outcomes ensure that the rights, needs and agency of crisis-affected women and girls are central to any humanitarian assistance. The following case studies highlight successful efforts by UN Women and its partners to respond effectively to those most vulnerable in crisis contexts around the world.*

## OUTCOME 1

*Coordinated humanitarian assessment, planning and programming are gender inclusive and responsive.*

*Liberia/Sierra Leone, Uganda, Palestine*

## OUTCOME 2

*Women and girls affected by sudden onset emergencies are provided with the protection and economic opportunities they need.*

*Fiji/Vanuatu, Nepal*

## OUTCOME 3

*Women and girls in protracted crises have access to the services they need to ensure their recovery and develop their resilience to future crisis events.*

*Colombia, DRC, Jordan, South Sudan*



OUTCOME 1 | LIBERIA/SIERRA LEONE CASE STUDY

## Placing women and girls at the heart of an emergency response strategy

*In early 2014, the outbreak of the Ebola virus in Sierra Leone and Liberia devastated the development gains made in both countries over the past decade. The majority of the deceased were women due to their roles as caregivers in the home and as nurses and traditional birth attendants looking after infected patients.*

### ACCOUNTING FOR GENDER IN THE EBOLA CRISIS RESPONSE AND PREVENTION

*“I am doing this for the love of my country, the love of my people. If we do not try to save our own people—who will? And anyway, what is the point of being the only one alive?”*

*– Ms Jatu Kaneh, one of the 29,000 volunteers in UN Women’s Ebola Response Community Mobilization programme*

In Sierra Leone, UN Women undertook gender-focused needs assessment and collected gender-disaggregated data at the community level and at government health facilities to better target affected people. For instance, our findings revealed that quarantined women received food but neither water nor firewood thus increasing the risk of infection when they left their quarters to fetch both for food preparation.

In Liberia, UN Women’s campaign of community mobilization focused on spreading the word on Ebola prevention and reducing stigmatization through community awareness-raising activities. The campaign featured women speaking to other women and made use of different media, including radio and text messaging.

UN Women helped ensure the integration of gender throughout the UN and government strategies for Ebola response in Sierra Leone, including developing specific protocols for infection prevention in hospital maternity wards. Similarly, in Liberia UN Women developed a gender-focused strategy for the Ebola response to provide guidance and training to UN implementing agencies. In recognition of its important role in the Ebola Response in Sierra Leone, UN Women was presented the Presidential Award for Ebola in December of 2015.

UN Women supported the women of Sierra Leone in leading the “Getting Ebola to Zero and Staying Zero” campaign, launched in May 2015.



Women performing local dance at UNSCR 15th Anniversary event in Northern Uganda, 2015.



OUTCOME 1 | UGANDA CASE STUDY

## Ensuring humanitarian planning and monitoring are gender inclusive

*Since December 2013, Uganda has hosted a rapidly rising number of South Sudanese refugees following the eruption of crisis in their country. Today Uganda hosts 525,968 refugees – 79% of whom are women and children. The sudden influx has escalated violence between newcomers and the host community due to limited resources. Among refugees, there is almost no access to emergency services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.*

### PROVIDING EMERGENCY SERVICES TO SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEES

“Before, men refused to allow women to participate in community mediations. After receiving leadership training, we women have resolved many disputes within the refugee settlement. When we return to South Sudan we hope to use these skills to bring peace to our country.”

– South Sudanese refugee woman in Mireye settlement, Adjumani

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