



UNICEF/NYHQ2010-0260/Shehzad Noorani

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH UNICEF-SUPPORTED PROGRAMMING: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

UNICEF's Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action include explicit commitments to advance gender equality in the context of emergency preparedness and response, including early recovery. Gender equality is above all a human right, and mainstreaming a gender perspective in all UNICEF policies, programmes and operations in order to achieve gender equality forms an important aspect of UNICEF's humanitarian responsibilities (see UNICEF's 2010 Gender Policy). For further details on promoting gender equality as a critical part of UNICEF's core mandate, see *Promoting Gender Equality: An Equity-Focused Approach to Programming (Operational Guidance Overview)*, and for further humanitarian-specific guidance, see *IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*.

Key issues

Humanitarian crises have different impacts on the vulnerabilities of girls, boys, women and men, as well as on their abilities to respond. Emergencies can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, leading to increased discrimination, greater exclusion and disproportionate risks. At the same time, humanitarian crises may lead to shifts in traditional gender roles and can, in certain situations, create openings for greater gender equality.

Yet in the rush to provide humanitarian assistance, gender inequalities and the different needs of girls, boys, women and men are often not taken into account. As a result, humanitarian assistance may fail to reach the most vulnerable and, in some cases, may actually lead to further harm. For example, if sanitation facilities or water points are poorly lit or situated in an out-of-the-way location, the vulnerability of girls and women to sexual violence could increase, and if food distribution systems do not have a provision for unaccompanied adolescent boys, who may not have cooking skills, these boys may not get enough to eat.

During emergencies, gender interacts with other social markers, such as ethnicity, age group, social class and culture, to shape the different vulnerabilities and capacities of girls, boys, women and men to respond to and survive crises. As such, not all internally displaced women are affected in the same way – a middle-class professional woman displaced from one urban area to another who finds a new job will have different needs and opportunities from an internally displaced rural farmer whose livelihood vanished when an armed group took over her land.

Unique operational challenges and opportunities in humanitarian action

Specific challenges to promoting gender equality in the context of humanitarian crises include: overall instability and insecurity; forced displacement; restricted access to populations; an increase in the number of non-state armed actors; diminished national capacity; and an increase in the range and extent of human rights abuses. Addressing gender-based violence, among other protection challenges, becomes particularly vital during emergencies, when formal and informal protection mechanisms break down and human rights abuses increase.¹

Responding to and recovering from humanitarian crises may create new opportunities for gender equality. Humanitarian actors typically work to rebuild infrastructure, social services and livelihood programmes. Addressing gender-equality considerations in such initiatives can ensure that the practical needs as well as the strategic interests of girls, boys, women and men are met. For example, in Afghanistan, where gender disparities in education are among the greatest in the world, humanitarian responses created a more enabling environment for girls' education by increasing protection mechanisms in schools, constructing community-based and outreach schools, and providing incentives for female teachers.

Entry points for promoting gender equality in humanitarian action

Specific opportunities to further gender-equality objectives within humanitarian action include:

- **Gender-sensitive humanitarian assessments:** Ensure that emergency assessment tools, such as rapid assessments and post-conflict and post-disaster needs assessments, are gender sensitive, that they identify the differential impact of crises on different groups, that women and men are equally represented on assessment teams, and that they allow for consultation with crisis-affected girls, boys, women and men (together and separately).
- **Gender-sensitive analysis and monitoring:** Analyse gender differences when designing and monitoring the impact of humanitarian programmes, including a focus on vulnerabilities and capacities; develop gender-sensitive indicators; systematically collect, analyse and report on sex- and age-disaggregated data; and develop a gender results framework and related gender indicators to help monitor the impact of programmes.
- **Gender-responsive programme design:** Ensure that the range of humanitarian action (emergency preparedness and response, including early recovery) is designed to meet the different needs of girls, boys, women and men, and also ensure their equal access to relevant services. Develop targeted assistance

to be carried out in a way that does not stigmatize or isolate particular groups.

- **Gender-responsive financing:** Ensure that the Consolidated Appeals Process, Flash Appeals, Central Emergency Response Fund appeals and Common Humanitarian Action Plans consider and respond to the different vulnerabilities and capacities of girls, boys, women and men in the common analysis, needs assessment and monitoring frameworks. In addition, apply gender markers to track budget allocations for gender-equality interventions.

During emergencies, participatory processes are vital. Humanitarian actors should encourage equal participation by girls, boys, women and men at all stages of programming. It is also necessary to ensure that women and men (and, where relevant, adolescent girls and boys) benefit equally from training opportunities, and to consult with girls, boys, women and men (together and separately) about their concerns, protection risks, opinions and solutions to key issues. Given the increased instability characterizing emergency contexts, however, staff should make sure that increased participation does not expose individuals to undue risks. Opportunities to facilitate the participation of women and adolescent girls in peace negotiations and peace-building should also be promoted, in line with key international commitments.²

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action* offers a framework for action in humanitarian situations, and is a valuable resource that offers specific, concrete guidance for UNICEF focus areas, as well as numerous other areas in which UNICEF is involved in emergency contexts. The handbook provides detailed sector-specific guidance, including gender checklists, to guide programme action. The IASC's *Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings* details minimum interventions for prevention and response to sexual violence to be undertaken in the early stages of an emergency, while the *Handbook for Coordinating Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings* is a quick-reference tool that provides practical guidance on leadership roles, key responsibilities and specific actions to be taken when establishing and maintaining gender-based violence coordination mechanisms in humanitarian settings.

¹ In conflict settings, it is especially important that actions to address sexual violence are in line with key Security Council Resolutions including: 1820, 1888, and 1960.

² See Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1889 on women, peace and security.