Summary Document and Analysis
Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Intervention in the Aftermath of Conflict:
The Humanitarian-Development Continuum

Introduction

Through the tenets laid out in UNSCR 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security (WPS), women must play an active and meaningful role in decision-making over priority areas of action and the allocation of resources in humanitarian crises. This includes strengthening women’s machineries, women’s organizations, and civil society organizations through capacity building in humanitarian action and early recovery efforts. In addition to building capacities, tapping their coping capacities and indigenous knowledge on early warning, resilience, and early recovery should be a large part of how humanitarian actors strengthen the role of women in preparedness and response. It is crucial that women participate in the design, delivery, and implementation of policies and programs, and that interventions prioritize gender mainstreaming.

Understanding differences, gender relations, and inequalities can help to identify needs, target assistance, and ensure that the needs of the most disadvantaged are met. It can also highlight opportunities to draw on women and men as resources based on their particular capacities, which can improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. It is imperative to strengthen the link between immediate humanitarian response and the consequential early recovery actions, in order to strengthen the fabric of governance, participation, ownership and address the gender inequality of risk.

On May 5, 2015, the UAE Mission to the United Nations, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), UN Women, and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) hosted a panel discussion on the importance of gender-responsive humanitarian preparedness and responses, with an emphasis on ensuring that humanitarian inputs translate into development assets, particularly in relation to the women, peace and security agenda. This panel discussion was the fifth installment in a Panel Series on Women, Peace and Security, launched in partnership with UN Women in their capacity as the Secretariat.
of the Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), and GIWPS. H.E. Lana Zaki Nusseibeh, Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, provided welcoming remarks. Ms. Kyung-Wha Kang, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, gave the keynote address and moderated the discussion.

A combination of experts and advocates comprised the four-member panel: Mr. Yannick Glemarec, Assistant Secretary-General, Deputy Executive Director for Policy and Programme, UN Women; Rt. Hon. David Miliband, President and CEO, International Rescue Committee; Her Royal Highness Princess Sarah Zeid, Princess of Jordan, Maternal and Newborn Health Advocate; and Mrs. Julie Lafrenière, Head, Gender-Based Violence and Conflict Initiative, Oxfam Canada. The panelists focused their remarks on the ways in which women and girls are especially vulnerable in the context of modern humanitarian crises, the role that women and girls can play in improving humanitarian programs, the linkages between humanitarian action and sustainable development, and the importance of consistent funding and accountability mechanisms to ensure effective programming.

The experts emphasized the protracted nature of current humanitarian crises, and underscored the need for gender-sensitive preparedness measures and responses. Ms. Kang articulated how forced displacement exacerbates existing inequalities, stressing that “humanitarian action, while crucial is only a short-term measure to assist people in need.” Further Ms. Kang noted that conflicts can only be solved through political processes and longer-term solutions that must include justice, reconciliation, and the restoration of the rule of law. Women and girls must be enabled to play a full part in such longer term processes too. Mr. Glemarec noted the widespread evidence demonstrating that robust engagement by women in peace and security efforts can enhance humanitarian efforts, bolster economic revitalization, and prevent a relapse into violence. Despite this evidence, Mr. Glemarec noted that structural funding gaps persist, where less than 2% of peace and security investments target women. Rt. Hon. David Miliband emphasized the voice and agency of women, noting that, “services only work when women and girls are agents of their own change, and not passive recipients.” Her Royal Highness Princess Sarah Zeid advocated for the health of women and children, stressing that “we cannot be serious about lasting peace and security unless we prioritize the health of women, adolescent girls, and young people.” Mrs. Julie Lafrenière underlined that our focus must be on women’s empowerment and gender equality both in times of crisis, and in times of peace.

To address the different risk factors and impacts of conflict on women, men, girls, and boys, and to promote the potential for positive transformation of gender norms, humanitarian actors must systematically analyze, plan, and respond to crises in ways that address both the practical and
strategic gender needs and promote women’s rights. In this way, gender-responsive humanitarian programming can have a transformative impact through the institutionalization of programming that focuses on women as agents of change, strengthens gender-responsive governance, prioritizes women's protection needs, bolsters women’s economic security, and advances women’s rights. This has the potential to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and can provide a link between such assistance and longer-term development goals.

**Gender and Complex Humanitarian Crises**

Approximately 75% of the world’s 52 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are women and children. With the majority of refugees and IDPs residing outside of refugee camps – many of which live in urban centers – displacement has become more diverse and complex. However, in the rush to provide humanitarian assistance, gender considerations are often ignored, which makes women invisible and marginalized in humanitarian assistance efforts. These current humanitarian response mechanisms often fail to be gender responsive—starting from their design and implementation, throughout the transition to long-term development—which can result in unequal access to humanitarian support, lack of protection against sexual and gender-based violence, and inadequate engagement of women in decision-making processes.

It is well documented that women and girls are disproportionately affected during conflict and crisis in general. Sexual exploitation, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, and forced marriages increase significantly in crisis contexts due to profound vulnerabilities, increased exposure to risk, weak or absent rule of law, and a lack of adequate prevention and response services. Understanding these gender-based vulnerabilities and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in the creation of humanitarian programs is essential to both protecting women and girls, and empowering them as agents of change.

Displacement can produce opportunities for women and girls to take on new roles in society, but it also deepens existing inequality. Failing to integrate gender in humanitarian actions has serious implications, such as increasing opportunities for gender-based violence, and impeding the effectiveness of the entire relief effort. It is therefore necessary that women participate in the design, delivery, and implementation of policies and programs, and that interventions prioritize gender mainstreaming. Involving women throughout the entirety of humanitarian programming will significantly reduce their exposure to risk.

Ms. Kang highlighted a three-pronged approach to ensure that women and girls were prioritized and that there was improved accountability to gender equality in humanitarian programming. First, all parties should emphasize the participation of women and girls by tapping their social
mobilizing power and knowledge. Second, donors must play a critical role in demanding that aid agencies base their programming on a comprehensive gender analysis and utilization of tracking and monitoring tools such as the gender marker. Third, humanitarian and development organizations must work together under a risk-management approach that shifts programming to ensure prevention, anticipation, and preparedness. The panelists underscored that unwavering political will, consistent sources of funding, and stalwart accountability mechanisms are needed to bring this goal to fruition.

Humanitarian Action and Sustainable Development

Rt. Hon. Miliband observed that the world is currently experiencing an unprecedented overload on the international humanitarian system. Not only are there more people in need of services, but also the nature of conflict and displacement has become more complex. While the number of wars between states is at a record low, the size of the refugee and displaced person population is at an all-time high due to the dramatic increase in the prevalence of civil wars. Furthermore, unlike the archetypal image of refugees residing in refugee camps, 80% of the people in need of aid at present are not in refugee camps, many of which are in urban centers. Finally, the current system of delivering humanitarian relief was built for short-term displacement, even though today we are dealing with protracted humanitarian crises where the average duration of displacement is approaching 20 years.

While issues surrounding humanitarian action are certainly complex, there are a host of basic needs demanded by displaced women and girls—such as safe access to latrines and food distribution, secure transportation to schools, and other necessities that must be met. Rather than rush to set up systems that discount unique vulnerabilities that women face in post-conflict settings, humanitarian actors must consult with these populations and understand their concerns. Needs must be met in ways that enable women and girls to feel safe accessing services and pave the way to sustainable, long-term development.

H.R.H. Princess Zeid continued in this spirit, acknowledging that the international community must let go of the outdated concept that “needs” trump “rights” and the false binary opposites of “humanitarian” and “development.” She continued by noting that to be more relevant, we must tear down the old and dysfunctional separations between development and humanitarian efforts, and redesign our interventions at national and global levels for risk management, investing in people’s personal resilience, preparedness, response, and recovery. Additionally, Mrs. Lafrenière stressed that women’s rights organizations and movements must be galvanized—they are often forgotten actors who can bridge this divide between development and humanitarian action.
Interestingly, while Goal Five of the draft Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is devoted to “attain gender equality, empower women and girls everywhere,” Rt. Hon. Miliband underscored a striking inadequacy: There is not a single target under this goal that references women and girls in conflict situations. Unless we have a goal that clearly demarcates the importance of understanding and meeting women and girls’ needs in this context, the international system will not prioritize the issue.

There is time, however, to imbue the SDGs with increased attention to women and girls in conflict settings leading up to the UN summit on SDGs this September. Some Member States caution against re-opening the SDG-debate, fearing that the more progressive goals and targets on gender equality could be jeopardized. However, re-writing the current draft is not the only possible solution. For example, there is space to entertain these concerns when Member States delineate indicators for each goal and series of targets, notably: Target 5.1 “end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere”; Target 5.2 “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”; Target 5.3 “eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilations”; and Target 5.5 “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life,” to cite a few relevant targets. There is also a potential entry-point when drafting indicators under Goal 16, which includes general targets on eliminating violence and could enable real progress if broken down by gender.

Funding

Another area that requires the attention of the international community is how to improve current funding mechanisms and funding decisions to meet policy frameworks that uphold the promotion of gender equality and empower women. Mr. Glemarec underscored that the humanitarian sector is suffering from a huge structural funding gap, particularly due to the instance of protracted crises. The average duration of displacement is approaching 20 years, which not only creates generational impacts within communities, but also places a huge stress on financial resources. Mr. Glemarec emphasized that inadequate financing is one of the key reasons for the lack of progress on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda— in fact, less than 2% of overall investment in peace and security targets women. Mr. Glemarec spoke to the need for bridge funding that would allow rapid, flexible financing to key actors to ensure in particular women’s participation and protection needs. He noted that it is for this reason that UN Women and member state and civil society partners have initiated the Global Acceleration Instrument on Women, Peace and Security, to galvanize new sources of funding, alongside expertise, knowledge
generation and action. Ms. Kang concurred, and further emphasized existing missed opportunities for synergy: There is humanitarian financing, peacebuilding financing, and development financing, but these discussions are happening in separate tracks—the international community must bring them together to better utilize limited and diminishing resources.

Finally, identifying consistent funding is crucial to the success of interventions, otherwise it will be impossible to link humanitarian programming to early recovery and development strategies—which should be a prime objective in protracted humanitarian crises. One possible approach to eliminate fragmented funding and ensure sustainability is to create of a UN trust fund that would combine both development and humanitarian assets in a single stream of funding.

**Accountability**

While the international community has made significant steps, evaluations of humanitarian effectiveness show that gender equality results are still weak, and the majority of the interventions are still gender blind. There is a need to develop better methods and hold all accountable to the commitments made in normative frameworks, including UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

Ms. Kang underlined that the international community must first bring clarity to what is meant by “accountability”: she underscored the importance of accountability at various levels: accountability of member states vis-à-vis their people; accountability of humanitarian actors’ vis-à-vis donors, and accountability to affected populations. Whatever definition is decided upon, it will require political will to see that accountability becomes reality. Providing insight from the field, Mrs. Lafrenière noted that the application of gender-responsive strategies is inconsistent at best, and often highly dependent on individuals. Member States must energize each other and require individual leaders and actors to hold themselves to account.

There is a need to develop formal mechanisms to ensure responsibility in the implementation of normative frameworks that position gender equality as part and parcel of gender-responsive humanitarian action. The use of the IASC Gender Marker can help ensure humanitarian action is gender responsive from design to evaluation. The Gender Marker is a coding tool that determines whether a humanitarian project is designed in a way that will benefit women and men, and girls and boys equally, or advance gender equality. Humanitarian actors applied the Gender Marker to over 2,000 projects in 2013, and continue to utilize this tool in all the financing mechanisms. To strengthen this as an accountability mechanism, OCHA and partners are working towards linking the gender marker to the monitoring systems as part of the humanitarian
programming cycle. The European Union also strongly supports the Gender Marker and made it compulsory since 2014 for all EU partners.

In the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit, which will take place in May 2016, the international community must seriously consider making the Gender Marker compulsory for all parties to enable consistent tracking of results and allocations of funds for gender equality. Furthermore, donors should demand that humanitarian actors collect and report sex-disaggregated data so that needs will be concretely assessed, programs will be efficiently designed, and progress towards gender goals will be firmly monitored. After all, as Rt. Hon. Miliband reminded the audience: If we do not measure, we will never make progress.

Conclusions and Recommendations

**Increase gender-responsive humanitarian action.** This will ensure that gender differentials in needs, responsibilities, vulnerabilities, and capacities of women, men, girls, and boys are taken into account. Humanitarian action is the first step in addressing the needs of the displaced, and if it fails to meet the distinct needs of women and girls in crisis, it can entrench inequality and impede sustainable development for years to come. In fact, gender-responsive humanitarian action can potentially be transformative in nature through the institutionalization of programming that can strengthen gender-responsive governance, bolster women’s economic security, and advance women’s rights.

**Ensure accountability for gender-responsive humanitarian action.** Member states, humanitarian actors, donors, and the affected population must hold one another to account and require that humanitarian responses institute gender-informed programming. Formal mechanisms should also be developed to ensure accountability for the implementation of normative frameworks that position gender equality as an essential component of humanitarian response.

**Enable the effective participation of women in the design, delivery and implementation of humanitarian programming.** Engaging women in humanitarian action at all levels will help to ensure that the specific needs and capacities of women are addressed. Women’s traditional roles as carers and providers for families means they are well placed to advise agencies on appropriate sanitation, water, feeding, and health care services, and advocating for effective and appropriate security. Services and programs will only work when women and girls are actively involved in humanitarian programming – from planning to evaluation – not just passive recipients.
Strengthen the link between the humanitarian and development sectors through risk programming and resilience building. Today, the average duration of displacement is approaching twenty years. Addressing basic needs must be integrated with longer-term development goals in order to address the full range of needs of the affected population. In turn, creating this link has the potential to strengthen the fabric of governance, participation, and equality.

Prioritize women’s empowerment and gender equality in times of crisis. Noting the nature of today’s protracted humanitarian crises and the ever-increasing duration of displacement, humanitarian action must address gender inequalities and work to prevent gender-based violence. This can be done by supporting local women’s rights organizations, who have the potential to bridge the divide between humanitarian and development actors.

Address structural funding gaps. Just 2% of peace and security investments target women. Yet, there is widespread evidence demonstrating that robust engagement by women in peace and security efforts can enhance humanitarian efforts, bolster economic revitalization, and prevent a relapse into violence. Funding through dedicated mechanisms, such as the Global Acceleration Instrument and others, as outlined in Security Council resolution 2122 (2013), can support in addressing some of these gaps.

Encourage consistent implementation of the Gender Marker. Monitoring and evaluation is key to measuring the effectiveness of programming. By standardizing the way in which humanitarians measure gender-specific programming, we can more consistently track results and allocate funding for programs that support and advance gender equality. The Gender Marker should be embedded in donor’s funding policies as well so commitments are recorded at the resource level.

Collect and utilize sex and age-disaggregated data. This data is still not consistently collected, and there is an acute failure to document the vulnerabilities of women and girls and crises. Humanitarian actors must collect disaggregated data in order to concretely assess needs, design programs efficiently, and monitor progress towards gender equality goals. This data will not only improve the effectiveness of humanitarian programming, but also can provide additional evidence for gender equality programming, more broadly.
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