



ENHANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION, CRISIS RESPONSE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: UN WOMEN'S APPROACH

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What's the Issue?

Women and women's rights organisations play an important role in humanitarian action, crisis response and disaster risk reduction (DRR).

- Women are often first responders in disasters and humanitarian crises;
- Women are key in delivering humanitarian response, especially in hard-to-reach areas;
- Women play a key role in refugee and IDP communities;
- Women play critical roles in disaster preparedness and recovery at the individual, household, community, and national levels, making life-saving contributions and building resilience.

In 2018, 132 million people were in need of assistance due to conflict, persecution and natural disasters. Humanitarian crises are becoming increasingly complex and protracted, with displacement lasting on average between 17 and 26 years. Women and children constitute more than 75 per cent of the refugees and displaced persons at risk of war, famine, persecution and disasters. In 2018 alone, over 68 million people were affected, and 18.8 million people were newly displaced by disasters, with women and girls often bearing the brunt of the impact due to exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities.

However, women and girls are not helpless victims and humanitarian and DRR efforts must recognise that women and girls - like men and boys - have much to contribute in preparing for and responding to crises. Not enough is done to highlight the role of women and girls as agents of change in crisis situations and in resilience building.

Evidence and experience show that the meaningful involvement of women in the design and implementation of humanitarian action, crisis response and DRR render interventions more gender-responsive and inclusive. UN Women facilitates opportunities and develops capacities for women and women's organisations to lead and participate in humanitarian, crisis response, DRR, and recovery activities, including in promoting positive gender norms and behaviours of men and boys to support women's economic and political participation and combat gender-based violence. It is also important to strengthen social cohesion and conflict prevention, particularly between displaced groups and host communities, as the growing number of displaced persons can place a strain on communal resources in often already impoverished communities.

It is further important that women are involved in the preparation of Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO), Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) and national and local disaster risk reduction strategies. A gender and protection perspective must be ensured, and adequate resources are allocated to serve the needs of women and girls in humanitarian and crisis settings in line with Grand Bargain localisation commitments and to enhance accountability to affected populations. Engaging women as leaders in policy making for disaster risk reduction also contributes to ensuring that gender-specific needs are taken into account in planning for disasters.

Women’s Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP)

UN Women is committed to playing its role in humanitarian action and crisis response by implementing the global flagship programme initiative, Women’s Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection (LEAP) in various country contexts. The focus is on close collaboration with women’s rights organisations and national authorities. Women’s and women-led organisations represent women’s collective voices in humanitarian settings, and, whilst often under-resourced, they provide a wealth of knowledge regarding the state of affairs in humanitarian crises and the needs of women and their communities.

Women are often the first responders in crises and their role deserves visibility and support. Therefore, their voices must be amplified in humanitarian planning both nationally and internationally. In 2018, UN Women provided capacity-building support to more than 300 Women’s organisations and by engaging with them directly, UN Women shapes its own programming to best fit the given context together with local women. UN Women directly supports the leadership of IDP, refugee and host community women and girls, including in camp management committees and in humanitarian planning. UN Women also advocates for inclusive and participative leadership overall. In 2018, UN Women implemented humanitarian action in more than 35 countries.

BOX 1

UN Women’s Humanitarian Action and Crisis Response: LEAP

LEAP makes gender equality and women’s empowerment central for coordinated, effective humanitarian action and crisis response. UN Women works along the humanitarian-peace-development nexus to increase individual and collective resilience. The following outcomes have been identified as essential:

1. Humanitarian action and crisis response planning and programming are gender-responsive and inclusive
2. Economic self-reliance: women benefit from livelihood and economic opportunities, which include skills development and second chance education as a basis
3. Women have access to protection mechanisms, including those that prevent and address Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
4. Leadership and participation of displaced women in community mobilisation, decision-making and social cohesion are increased, including through engagement of men and boys towards gender equality.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience

Women are disproportionately affected by disasters and have different and uneven levels of resilience and capacity to recover, due to the gender inequality of risk. Yet, women’s actual and potential contributions to disaster risk reduction (DRR), their leadership and their central roles in community resilience are underestimated assets in effective DRR and resilience building strategies.

In DRR and resilience building, UN Women works to empower women as leaders, leveraging their full potential for disaster prevention, preparedness and response to break down the gender-specific barriers which increase women’s disaster vulnerability and hamper women’s and their communities’ recovery after disasters. UN Women promotes gender-responsive DRR and resilience building through technical and policy support, provision of gender expertise to DRR mechanisms and processes, and by implementing programmes and projects for gender-responsive DRR and resilience building, including the *Global Programme on Women’s Resilience to Disasters* and the *Gender Inequality of Risk Programme*.

In 2018, UN Women implemented DRR activities in over 39 countries, and supported over 100 women’s organisations to engage in local, national, and regional disaster risk reduction planning and policy-making.

The Grand Bargain – UN Women commitment to Localisation

During the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the largest donors and humanitarian aid organisations agreed to increase the resources for people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action through 51 commitments across 10 thematic workstreams. In the context of the Grand Bargain, UN Women focuses on the localisation, comprehensive needs assessment, participation revolution and cash workstreams with a particular focus on advocating for direct funding to local women’s organisations.

As part of LEAP programming, local women’s organisations have been engaged to inform UN Women leadership in Humanitarian Country Teams for Humanitarian Needs Overviews, Humanitarian Response Plans, IASC cluster coordination and other normative processes. The priority has been channelling and prioritising humanitarian funding to strengthen institutional capacities of local women’s organisations and the quality and sustainability of partnerships, whilst acknowledging the challenges faced by local women’s organisations.

Lesson Learned on Meaningful Women’s Leadership

- It is key to shift from women’s participation and consultation only to leadership and decision-making by women and girls, and analyses of intersectional power relations should be conducted in the context of crises and recovery;
- Humanitarian actors must invest in promoting social norms on leadership towards inclusion and gender equality in order to promote inclusive leadership for all, not just women;
- Women’s leadership must be high on the international agenda, including through appropriate funding allocations and continued advocacy;
- Women’s leadership is different in every context and it is possible to build on and expand existing cultural notions of women and girls’ leadership roles, particularly as gender roles tend to shift in crisis contexts;
- Recovery from disasters presents key opportunities for gender-responsive reconstruction and capturing gender-specific needs, capabilities, and priorities in Post-Disaster Needs Assessments is critical to ensuring that recovery strategies allocate specific resources to meeting the needs of women and girls and promoting their leadership;
- Focusing on economic empowerment and livelihood interventions, including support to diversified and climate-resilient livelihoods in disaster-prone areas, provides an effective basis for women’s leadership roles more broadly;
- Advocating for and supporting individual women leaders as part of comprehensive leadership programmes; building support for women’s leadership in communities and organisations; promoting women’s self-organisation and links between women’s rights organisations and humanitarian actors are effective tools to enhance women’s leadership;
- The sustainability of women’s leadership in humanitarian crises and recovery can be ensured by supporting women led and women’s rights organisations;
- Humanitarian actors – including senior leadership - must be held accountable for gender equality and women’s leadership and this should be an integral part of staff performance appraisals in Humanitarian Country Teams.



*Women mediators in Minawao Refugee Camp, Cameroon.
Photographer: Alice Tatah, UN Women Cameroon*

BOX 2

Cameroon: Training Women Conflict Mediators

In Cameroon’s Minawao refugee camp, UN Women and its implementing partner ALVF supported the training of women as conflict mediators. Building on Security Council resolution 1325 and the Grand Bargain principle of localisation, UN Women trained 100 women (10 refugee, 20 IDP, and 70 host community women) from five communities in mediation and negotiation. The women work as volunteer mediators and can be called upon to resolve different kinds of conflicts in the refugee camp setting. With the assistance of ALVF, the women formed a committee that regularly meets with traditional and religious leaders and advocates for the needs of women, proposing solutions to potential or ongoing conflicts. To date, the women mediators have addressed at least 125 conflicts.

Key Recommendations for International Partners

- Build strong partnerships with UN Women and women's rights organisations and ensure that the localisation agenda is framed in terms of gender equality and women's leadership;
- Ensure humanitarian action contains objectives and indicators for gender equality and the participation of local women leaders, including by incorporating such tools in the terms of reference for senior humanitarians;
- Increase resources for organisational change in the humanitarian system and track the allocation of funding to women's organisations;
- Invest in capacities, systems, and tools for the collection and use of sex, age, and disability disaggregated data (SADDD) across the humanitarian- peace-development-nexus, including the disaster loss and damage;
- Address root causes and structural barriers limiting women's participation in disaster risk reduction decision-making and humanitarian response, including to address the burden of unpaid care work;
- Adopt specific quotas for women's participation in humanitarian and disaster risk reduction platforms at community, national, and international levels; and
- Adopt policies related to humanitarian action and DRR that explicitly reference the leadership and participation of women.

BOX 3

Viet Nam: Supporting the Viet Nam Women's Union in increasing women's leadership in DRR decision-making

Through concerted advocacy supported by UN Women and partners, the leadership of women in disaster management and risk reduction is now recognised and promoted in Viet Nam. This advocacy resulted in a nationwide increase in women members of the Committee for Disaster Prevention and Control. UN Women further supported the development of 700 household disaster preparedness plans in eight of the most vulnerable municipalities.

BOX 4

Yemen: Opening International Opportunities for Women first Responders

In February 2019, UN Women teamed up with various international partners to organise an event in Geneva, where Yemeni women's rights leaders led discussion groups on women's leadership in humanitarian response and other crisis contexts and highlighted their roles as first responders. The event provided a public platform for Yemeni women leaders to discuss important issues with Member States, international NGOs and UN officials involved in humanitarian action in Yemen. The women noted that it was challenging for women to access international funding even though they had the best knowledge of the local situation. They also committed to peacebuilding in order to end the humanitarian crisis in Yemen.



"It is key to support women's leadership, by recognizing their roles and supporting local women's organizations," says Yemeni women's rights leader, Suha Basharen. Photo: WILPF/ Charlotte Hooij



Ms. Ton Thi Diem, Ca Mau provincial Women's Union, providing a training on disaster risk reduction for women's and farmers groups in Ca Mau province, Viet Nam. Photo: Hoang Hiep/UN Women