

Gender in Humanitarian Action

Brief No. 2



Rohingya Refugee Crisis Response
Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
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Developed by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group co-chaired by UN Women and UNHCR

Why is inclusion of gender equality important for disaster preparedness activities?

- Natural disasters do not affect everyone in the same way. Pre-existing societal structures, customs and gender roles create or contribute to heightened risks for some members of the community—such as women, children, persons with disabilities, LGTBIQ persons, and others.
- To be most effective, disaster plans must be developed with, agreed to, and understood by everyone they purport to protect.

Sectors	Gender equality checklist for monsoon and cyclone season
 <p>Site Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the strengths of different gender groups. For example, older people may have useful knowledge of natural disaster actions and recovery strategies. Women have indigenous knowledge to mitigate and respond to disasters. • Consider where people are coming from. Refugees in the megacamp came from rural areas, which may affect their understanding of drainage and water contamination in an urban setting. They also came from mostly flatlands and are therefore not familiar with landslides. • Be aware that the time poverty of women-headed households is significantly greater due to the care burden (i.e. the combination of feeding the family, caring for the injured and traumatised family members in addition to recovery actions such as repairing the shelter and securing assistance). This care burden can leave women with less time to engage in economic activities or to access resources, including information and education, which are necessary for recovery and adaptation. • Women, children, people with disabilities, LGTBIQ persons, survivors of violence should be engaged at every stage of development of community disaster plans, as they each have a unique perspective on disaster preparedness, mitigation and response. • Ensure gender balance in the recruitment of volunteers and trainers. Diversity of all kinds helps ensure that the response benefits from a range of perspectives, and gender parity can help women feel confident to speak up and present their views. Women volunteers can support each other to voice women's concerns. • Conduct active consultations with women, men, girls and boys across age groups and backgrounds, especially hard-to-reach and marginalized groups to ensure effective actions for preparedness and assistance. • Ensure access to safe and secure living spaces for women and girls. The safety and dignity of women and adolescent girls is non-negotiable in shelter homes. To operationalize this idea, staff and volunteers must be properly trained and have appropriate security checklists.
 <p>Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure books and educational materials—for both girls and boys—in watertight folders/bags. • Awareness materials and communication strategies should target and reach everyone equally. For example, girls and women may have lower levels of literacy than boys and men, and may prefer to receive the information orally rather than in written form. • Learning centres should teach girls and boys how they can prepare for the moonsoon and cyclone seasons at the household level. Early warning messaging should be explained to them. • Prepare child-sensitive behavior guidelines for volunteers and staff working on the disaster response. • Ensure that when learning facilities have been closed due to disasters, steps are taken upon re-opening to offer education to both boys and girls.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make provisions for psychosocial counselling for young children and adolescent girls after disasters and ensure female teachers have received first aid counselling. • Create/review/revise confidential access to sexual abuse and exploitation reporting mechanisms.
 <p>Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and address health needs and the unique reproductive and sexual health needs of pregnant women and adolescent girls. • Preposition hygiene and wash kits and water purification tablets to ensure access to safe drinking water and prioritise distribution to women. • Ensure appropriate messaging on water borne diseases, and particularly to women. • Keep in mind the particular vulnerabilities of the elderly and women and girls with disabilities • Organize mobile health teams and ensure that men, boys, women and girls take first aid training prior to an emergency. • Ensure the availability of clinical management of rape services in clinics including the availability of rape kits.
 <p>Food Security</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a common practice for boys to be sent to collect assistance, putting them at higher risk of getting lost or trying to carry heavy packages in bare feet over muddy ground. Instead, recommend that families collect assistance together according to physical capacity.
 <p>Nutrition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different groups are more vulnerable to disease and malnutrition, such as small children, pregnant and lactating women, older people, and people with chronic illnesses. Older people and women may forego eating in order for children to eat, and this can make their malnutrition worse. This dynamic should be considered in nutrition interventions. • Provide regular distribution of food fortified with iron, vitamins and other micronutrients for high-risk groups, including women of childbearing age and pregnant and lactating women. • Provide special and additional food and drinking water allocation for pregnant and lactating women, since they need additional nourishment. • Ensure privacy for breast feeding corners. • Multisector mobile teams should include nutrition actors to address needs of the elderly and women.
 <p>Protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preposition dignity kits for women and girls. • Ensure families have watertight folders/bags to secure their documentation/entitlement documents. • Heavy reliance on informal evacuation centres (especially within extended family) can pose particular protection risks for women and children. There is often an assumption that family obligations and community ties automatically ensure that these environments are safe from violence. • Plan for psycho-social first aid, trauma counselling for survivors of violence, women separated from families and children, and children separated from parents. • Rohingya men may have less mental health help-seeking behavior, which can translate into problems for others. Targeted psychological first aid for men may be required. • Establish safe spaces for children and adolescent girls and women friendly spaces. • Establish teams to regularly monitor distribution and shelter sites to ensure protection against gender-based violence (GBV). • Measures should be taken to prevent human trafficking and provide re-unification services. • Implement a code of conduct to combat sexual abuse and exploitation for members and partners working in the protection field.
 <p>Water, Sanitation & Hygiene</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick impact projects (QIPs) such as drainage/debris clearance may tend to go to male participants but women should equally participate in these efforts. These can also include women participants who mind the children of others while they work. • Preparedness for dehydration is critical especially for women in purdah. • Provide separate toilets for women with adequate lighting that provide privacy, have locks on the inside and are located in sites. • Distribute behavior change messaging for men and boys to ensure and maintain separate toilet facilities for girls and women.



Shelter & Non-Food Items

- Be mindful of intersectionality, and the compounded risks it creates for some individuals. For example, women with disabilities may face compounded challenges to accessing relief and relocating from shelters. They may be abandoned by families during disasters and be entirely reliant upon external support.
- Women may remain in shelters due to trauma or until they have men's consent to leave. To reduce mortality, prior messaging and agreement with communities is essential.
- Train women-headed households in securing and re-enforcing their shelters with ropes and bamboo.
- Rohingya women's clothing can make it more difficult to move in flooded areas or areas full of debris, and this can result in higher risks during and after disasters. Ensure adequate supply of appropriate clothes for women and girls and the provision of torches, batteries, solar lamps—especially for adolescent girls, pregnant women and the elderly.
- In the initial rapid response phase, avoid relying only on “majhis” for assessment as they are mostly men. Women's voices must be integral to all phases of the response. Consult with established committees (e.g. women's watch group and female volunteers of CPP) with more representative compositions.
- Organize routine spot checks and community consultations as part of efforts to prevent GBV.



Logistics

- Allocate female logisticians, where available, to perform their functions in situations in which Rohingya cultural factors inhibit male staff from directly exploring and meeting women's needs.
- Consider the most appropriate time and location for distribution of relief items to ensure no beneficiaries are inhibited from attending a distribution event.
- Ensure separate lines for women and men respecting local culture, as well as priority lines for vulnerable groups or home delivery voluntary services in case of extreme vulnerability (persons with disabilities, single women, elderly, children and women in advance stages of pregnancy).
- Follow PSEA best practices and guidance during distribution of relief material.
- Ensure compensation is included in the porter system to be used across sectors to lower risks of exploitation of the elderly and women-headed households.



Communicating with Communities

- Messaging on safety (including storing food/essential non-food items/documentation) to be prepared and directed to men, women and children to raise awareness regarding the anticipated elements of flood and landslide risks.
- Early warning messaging should be tailored to the needs of women, girls, boys and men, and other disadvantaged groups ensuring gender sensitivity and inclusion.
- Provide information in a variety of ways to ensure greater outreach. Men are more likely to have access to phones, radio access is mixed, and other gender groups rely upon different information pathways.
- Different gender groups trust different sources of information. Sectors must keep this in mind and engage with a broad range of relevant stakeholders to provide information.
- Where multiple modes of communication are impossible, work with different gender groups in advance to ensure they all understand the trustworthiness and value of the particular mode of communication to be used.
- In addition to the established listeners groups, distribute radios to women and youth groups to disseminate information widely.
- Create volunteer groups that are gender balanced and inclusive for messaging on emergency issues.
- Establish information desks/centers for women that help women seek necessary support and find lost family members.



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