



Gender in Humanitarian Emergencies

Armed conflict, natural disasters and climate change often have the greatest impact on the poorest countries, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable, including women and girls. Global estimates indicate that 68.5 million people are currently displaced around the world, and we are experiencing the largest refugee crisis in recorded history.

CARE's 74 years of experience has taught us that crises tend to impact men and women as well as boys and girls differently, particularly as dynamics change in homes and communities as a result of the emergency. Within these contexts, women and girls face increased difficulty accessing food, shelter, medical care and other necessary resources.

Conditions in refugee camps and other displacement settings often expose women and girls to greater security risks due to issues such as inadequate lighting, lack of gender-appropriate sanitation facilities, and needing to travel long distances to access firewood, water or other basic commodities. Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel has also become a well-recognized concern, prompting action by the international community.

In humanitarian emergencies, women and girls face:

- An increase in **gender-based violence**, where at least 1 in 5 women report experiencing sexual violence and the number of women and girls forced into early marriages, human trafficking and survival sex rises;
- A heightened risk of **maternal mortality**, where nearly 3/5 of maternal deaths worldwide occur in countries affected by crises and women and girls overall suffer from poor access to lifesaving health services;

- Poor access to **education and livelihoods**, with girls disproportionately pulled from school and women often unable to access economic opportunities because they have been denied national identification cards; and
- An increase in **food shortage and malnutrition** amongst females when men and boys receive priority for food and nutrition and women and girls often eat last and eat the least.

Despite the acute impacts emergencies have on women and girls, they are often excluded from leadership and decision-making roles when it comes to humanitarian responses. Without their voices included in the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions, responses risk ignoring or exacerbating the needs of women and girls in emergencies.

Women are Part of the Solution

Although women and girls in emergency settings face an increased risk of violence and discrimination, they also hold the potential for creating meaningful change in their own lives, as well as those of their children, families and communities. The involvement of women and girls can lead to results such as more equitable food distribution, safer latrines and sanitation facilities, innovative solutions for increased reporting of violence and resumption of education and livelihoods activities.

Women are active in responding to the emergencies that affect them. Their understanding of their own needs and capabilities can bring practical and effective solutions to light.

They have access and reach within their communities, allowing them to speak up for the needs of even the most marginalized. Their ability to organize collective action fosters protection and solidarity in their communities.

How does CARE address girls' and women's needs and involve them in emergency response?

CARE implements programs that improve women and girls' opportunities as well as their access to education, health, housing and other essential services. When disaster strikes, CARE and our local partners provide humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs while also working to support long-term efforts to rebuild after the emergency has subsided. In carrying out these activities, CARE takes a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the perspectives of women and girls, including:

- Prior to the start of emergencies, CARE works with communities to increase their **resilience, preparedness and capacity** to mitigate the effect of disasters when they occur;
- CARE routinely conducts **gender analyses** to understand the ways in which gender roles are impacted by emergencies. Throughout the crisis, the gender analyses inform our program design and implementation. We monitor the different impacts of our responses on women, men, boys and girls so that we can quickly course-correct when needed;
- CARE works with **local partners** who are committed to empowering women and girls and provide training and guidance to strengthen approaches to advancing gender equality;
- We put forward the **voice and priorities of women and girls** in emergency response, recovery planning and decision-making; and
- As communities start to emerge from crises, CARE **works with survivors**, especially women and children, to help them recover and rebuild after the emergency has passed.

Our approaches support practical and lifesaving solutions by helping to ensure girls go to school; working to prevent gender-based violence; supporting access to family planning, reproductive and maternal health care; providing livelihoods opportunities such as savings groups and skills training; and working closely with men and boys to address harmful social norms.

Amunazo Charly is an internally displaced woman who works as a community mobilizer in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Amunazo says, **“On our arrival in this camp, the men on the management committee or [those] who had power abused vulnerable women. They even sexually abused women and girls, telling them that if they did not give themselves, they would not receive humanitarian assistance. ... Today, I am the chair of our camp management committee and things have changed. Women are organized in small committees where they can talk freely, participate in decisions and exchange experiences and ideas about how to generate income for the survival of our families.”**

Does it Work?

While the evidence base is growing regarding the impact of humanitarian programming, CARE's experience suggests that when women and girls in crises have opportunities to engage in decision-making and access protection and other essential services, they hold the potential to discover new strengths and skills, forge stronger relationships within their community for gender equality, and experience improved resilience and security.

CARE advocates for stronger U.S. policies and resources to address women and girls' unique needs during emergencies by:

- Advancing legislation and policy to address gender-based violence and systemic discrimination against women in emergencies, including prevention of violence and responses that help survivors meet basic medical, psychosocial and livelihoods needs;
- Advancing legislation and policies that integrate family planning, reproductive and maternal health services into emergency response plans and investing in international family planning programming in humanitarian and development settings, including by funding the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA);
- Promoting program design that integrates women, including local women's organizations, into decision-making and governance, as well as service provision within humanitarian settings, such as distribution of food, shelter, and other supplies; and
- Supporting a robust international affairs budget that promotes resilience, humanitarian assistance and development opportunities in communities emerging from emergencies.

The U.S. has long been a leader in humanitarian assistance. Meeting the needs of people in crises is a strongly held American value and in America's best interest. A world where all people are secure, stable and productive members of their society is a safer world for us all.

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