

Guidance Note – Recommendations for meaningful collaboration with women responders in protection programming

Guiding principles

Given the diversity in humanitarian response, the following principles are designed to guide approaches towards all different forms of engagement with women responders in protection programming

<p>Principle One: See women as the experts in their situation</p>	<p>Recognise that women responders, whether individual leaders, grassroots groups or national organisations, have a nuanced and intimate understanding of their needs, including the protection risks that affect them and other women in their circumstances. This, and the actions women responders take to support themselves and others, may not always sit neatly with humanitarian and development divides or with sector definitions. Humanitarian actors should intentionally and systematically listen to and consider women’s voices and be flexible in working outside sector definitions and divides when required.</p>
<p>Principle Two: Respect the priorities of women-led groups and organisations</p>	<p>Women-led organisations may wish to become involved in humanitarian response, but face barriers. Equally, as a women’s rights organisation with a longer-term agenda in a country, an organisation may not wish to become involved for fear of it detracting from that work. At the grassroots level, women responders can face too many time pressures to take on additional roles. Collaborating with women responders necessitates asking about an individual, a group or an organisation’s wishes and priorities for participation and then respecting these.</p>
<p>Principle Three: Compensate for women’s time and remove barriers to access</p>	<p>Women responders are often highly motivated and give their time freely. Although the principle of volunteerism is important, it should be implemented realistically, with women compensated appropriately, recognising that they often have unpaid caring responsibilities. Actively consider barriers to access and participation for different women responders at all levels and actions that can be taken to reduce these. Wherever possible, consult women-led organisations and groups on barriers, potential actions and the resources required.</p>

Collaborating with grassroots women responders

<p>Ask ‘How do women organise here?’ and ‘What do women do to protect themselves and others?’</p> <p>Whether in a camp, host community or other setting, in any assessment identify formal and informal women’s groups. Often these will be involved in some basic income generating activity. Ask ‘Who are the trusted women or women leaders’ and ‘How do women organise here?’ Identify existing locally-led protection actions.</p>	<p>Example: CARE is piloting a process called ‘Women Lead’, which identifies the ways in which women are involved in humanitarian response and how their leadership can be supported. The pilot was developed in recognition of the fact that Rapid Gender Analyses undertaken by CARE in previous responses should have focused more on women’s existing and potential participation.</p>	<p>Assessment</p>
<p>Consider how different protection interventions can engage with and support grassroots women responders</p> <p>This includes supporting safe spaces, where women can come together. Ensure that a risk analysis is incorporated into protection activities to mitigate and manage risks women may face in supporting others and challenging social norms.</p>	<p>Example: In the Democratic Republic of Congo, IRC trained women’s community-based organisations (CBOs) to provide case management services. A 2017 assessment found that CBOs that had not received support from IRC since 2012 were still able to provide these services with no external support.</p>	<p>Design</p>

<p>Remove barriers to participation</p> <p>Ask the question ‘What do we need to do to ensure women can participate meaningfully?’ Consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical barriers: e.g. location, access, time (length of meeting, time of day), language (spoken language, use of jargon); • Structural barriers: e.g. social norms that limit women’s attendance and participation; and • Specific barriers for marginalised individuals, including access for women and girls with disabilities. 	<p>Example: ActionAid’s research in four countries identified recommendations from women to enable their participation in humanitarian leadership. These included building an enabling environment for lactating mothers to enable them to participate and providing functional literacy programmes alongside emergency relief efforts.¹²⁹</p>	Setup
<p>Facilitate engagement with wider community members</p> <p>Collaborating with women responders not only entails engaging with women; indeed, there is the risk that women alone may be seen as ‘responsible’ for mitigating the protection risks women and girls face. Engage therefore with different groups and leaders, while ensuring that space is retained for women’s voices and experiences.</p>	<p>Example: In the DRC, Oxfam establishes Women’s Forums alongside Community Protection Committees to provide a separate space where women consider protection risks that affect them and identify actions they wish to take. These are then discussed with the mixed-sex Community Protection Committees and included in Community Protection Plans.¹³⁰</p>	
<p>Don’t limit collaboration with women responders to focusing only on the protection risks women and girls face</p> <p>Recognise also that women responders may be taking actions on wider issues and protection risks that affect others.</p>	<p>Example: Members of the DRC’s Women’s Forums (outlined above) advocated with local authorities on protection risks affecting different groups, from arbitrary arrest to illegal taxation.¹³¹ The women’s rights organisations Rasan and Women’s Rehabilitation Organisation have tailored their services to also support LGBTIQ and male survivors of violence.¹³²</p>	
<p>Facilitate connections</p> <p>Humanitarian actors can play a facilitating role in supporting sometimes challenging connections between women responders and others. This includes, for example, connections between grassroots women’s groups and national women-led organisations, and with key stakeholders, such as authorities or other international actors.</p>	<p>Example: In Gaza, in the aftermath of the conflict in 2014, action researchers supported by Oxfam saw the needs of women with disabilities were not being met. Oxfam supported the formation of a coalition of four women’s sector organisations and four disabled people’s organisations to assess gaps in services and design an emergencies preparedness plan.¹³³</p>	
<p>Partnering with women-led organisations</p>		
<p>Recognising value</p> <p>Senior management should take the lead in recognising the value of collaborating with women-led organisations. They should communicate with staff, specifying that such partnerships be included in emergency response, not just in longer-term programmes. Formalise these commitments in partnership strategies (whether for a country/ regional office or an organisation’s humanitarian strategy).</p>	<p>Example: As part of CARE’s Regional Middle East and North Africa Road Map, each country office is required to partner with one new women-led organisation per year. This could be built upon to track key metrics – such as the amount of funding women-led organisations receive and length and quality of these partnerships.</p>	Strategies

<p>Mapping and understanding the context</p> <p>Draw from different sources to informally identify different women-led organisations and find out about the dynamics of the women’s movement in a country. Bring staff working in development into these conversations.</p>	<p>Example: In mapping organisations, it is important to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal groupings and organisations; • The political affiliations of organisations; • Organisations that may be more conservative; • Alliances and divisions between organisations; • Urban versus rural organisations; and • Who may be excluded. 	Ways of working
<p>Selection criteria</p> <p>In deciding partner selection criteria, do not only consider organisational capacity to deliver and comply with project requirements, but also experience in gender and protection, contextual knowledge, and relationships with key stakeholders including community members.</p>	<p>Example: CARE’s study on gender sensitive partnerships revealed that it tends to select partners for their emergency response experience and compliance capacity, rather than their expertise in protection or gender equality.¹³⁴</p>	Policies & Procedures
<p>Invest in organisations</p> <p>Women-led organisations often have weaker organisational procedures and systems. Budget for organisational support, drawing on good practice such as mentoring and secondments, rather than one-off training sessions. Ensure an organisation’s own priorities are the starting point for a two-way conversation. Coordinate with other organisations in the development of support plans and investment to avoid duplication.</p>	<p>Example: The START Network ‘Shifting the Power’ project developed the SHAPE Framework,¹³⁵ which aims to support organisations to assess their capacity to manage humanitarian programmes and influence response. The ‘Protection in Practice’ project provided flexible grants to organisations to strengthen protection capacity and trialled WhatsApp reporting to reduce the reporting burden.</p>	Funding
<p>Funding and projects</p> <p>Budget and share funding for core organisational costs fairly with partners. In developing a project, do not come with a pre-set agenda; rather, develop a plan jointly. Consider what emergency funding may be needed (e.g. for transport, accommodation for those at risk) and budget accordingly.</p>	<p>Example: CARE used a £20,000 corporate funding grant to develop a partnership with Lebanese women’s rights organisation, RDFL. RDFL commented that the project was developed according to what it needed, eventually focusing on support for social workers in self-care techniques.</p>	Funding
<p>Flexibility in partnership</p> <p>Retain flexibility in the partnership agreement. If the context changes, or a partner is not willing to take the risk of operating in a specific area, work together with the partner to develop a different strategy. This may include shifting a partnership from direct project implementation to focusing on skills strengthening for a period of time.</p>	<p>Example: Trocaire signs memoranda of understanding with organisations that go beyond the lifetime of a project. Core funding is used to support a partner’s minimum operating costs between projects.</p>	Policies & Procedures
<p>Participation and visibility</p> <p>Actively support the participation of women-led organisations in decision making and coordination spaces, according to their priorities. Raise the visibility of these groups and support the development of their networks – for example, with donors.</p>	<p>Example: As part of the ‘Safe from the Start’ project,¹³⁶ CARE facilitated women-led organisations, including Hope Restoration South Sudan, to participate in a global UN High Commissioner for Refugees consultation meeting on localisation of gender-based violence interventions and the ECHO annual meeting of partners for the Call to Action on GBV in emergencies.</p>	Ways of working

Facilitating engagement with minority groups		
<p>Recognise that LGBTIQ organisations and groups may not be involved in humanitarian response, but are able to provide important input and recommendations on how to mitigate the risks LGBTIQ individuals face in crises. In engagement, prioritise the safety of such individuals and reach out to national organisations and networks for their advice before looking for or engaging any local groups. Consider what role an international actor can play in facilitating the wider engagement of LGBTIQ organisations in humanitarian preparedness.</p>	<p>Example: At the Pacific Humanitarian Partnership meeting in Fiji in October 2017, UN Women and Diverse Voices and Action for Equality led a session on local and diverse humanitarian actors, including speakers from the Rainbow Pride Foundation and Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network, examining the specific needs of diverse groups and benefits of inclusion.¹³⁷</p>	
<p>Actively engage organisations and groups of women and girls with disabilities in preparedness and response, building upon existing activism.¹³⁸ Remove barriers to participation at all levels, considering both mental and physical disability. Recognise that barriers for women and girls are not only physical, but may include lack of confidence, stigmatisation and lower levels of education.</p>	<p>Example: The Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi is leading a project to identify innovative ways to involve persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response, tackling challenges such as how to ensure people who are visually impaired or have hearing difficulties can be alerted and supported if there is a risk of flooding. Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls with a Disability and Disabled Women in Development establish groups for women and girls with disabilities to facilitate local advocacy.</p>	
Overall approaches to emergency response		
<p>Emergency preparedness</p> <p>Invest in the emergency preparedness of women-led organisations, so that they are positioned to respond in the event of a crisis. These groups may not identify as humanitarian organisations; this should not preclude collaboration if they are interested in humanitarian response.</p>	<p>Example: IRC is engaging with regional gender-based violence and women’s rights networks to train a network of national women-led organisations in emergency GBV preparedness and response.</p>	Preparedness
<p>Surge support</p> <p>Consider how surge staff support can be better used and resourced to facilitate collaboration with women-led organisations. This may include allocating time to development of partnerships and considering during recruitment what qualities are needed in staff to facilitate these ways of working.</p>	<p>Example: In Fiji, CARE mounted a joint response to Cyclone Winston with Live and Learn, in which surge staff were embedded within their organisation. In Bangladesh, IRC piloted deploying two coordinators, one of whom focused on developing collaboration with CSOs.</p>	Response
<p>Alternative means of engagement</p> <p>Where full partnerships aren’t possible, or in parallel, consider different means of collaboration. These could include inviting partners to co-facilitate staff training sessions, developing a consortium where a women-led organisation provides technical support to other mainstream partners, or fundraising from non-institutional donors to establish small, flexible pots of funding for specific initiatives.</p>	<p>Example: A Bangladeshi disability rights organisation saw that there were no facilities for persons with disabilities in the Kutupalong camp in Cox’s Bazar camp. They received a small amount of funding from Mama Cash’s Opportunity Fund to work with local authorities to improve disability access.</p>	Ways of working

What donors should do

Promote women-led partnerships

Donors can play a key role in communicating the value of women-led partnerships and pushing collaboration forward. They also need to hold international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) accountable for the quality of partnerships. Donors should therefore consider evaluating INGOs who partner with woman-led organisations on criteria such as:

- Whether core costs are reasonably shared with the women-led organisation;
- Whether capacity-building support is budgeted for;
- Whether the INGO has a strategy for meaningful capacity building, such as through accompaniment rather than one-off training;
- Whether the INGO budgets for contingency funds to support women-led organisations and their staff in event of an emergency; and
- Whether provision is included for staff care, to prevent and support those affected by secondary trauma and burn out.

Make deliberate efforts to reach women-led groups and organisations in humanitarian crises

Donors should take an intentional approach in how their funding mechanisms are structured and not assume that funding will reach women-led groups and organisations. Learning from research by the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality,¹³⁹ donors should:

- Ensure that women-led organisations are not competing with international humanitarian actors in the same funding windows;
- Earmark a percentage of funding for women-led organisations;
- Use a mix of funding mechanisms to reach different sized organisations, from grassroots groups to national and regional women-led organisations; and
- Strengthen internal monitoring systems to track the percentage and type of funding in crises reaching women-led groups and organisations.

Balance humanitarian response and social justice funding

- While recognising that humanitarian response needs to be prioritised in a crisis, donors should avoid putting women-led organisations in a position where they are unable to mobilise around the opportunities for positive social change that crises can provide.
- Donors should support women-led organisations to continue longer-term work according to their own priorities and adapt to the changing context, including by retaining funding pots for such work.