

Gender and humanitarian issues



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2014



A wealth of academic research and UN, INGO, NGO and CSO publications document the differences between the needs, capacities and perceptions of women and men and boys and girls on the types of humanitarian assistance needed in a natural or man-made disaster. When these different perspectives are not taken into account interventions are not effective and assistance can actually be harmful. For example, boys and young men go hungry even when food is provided directly to them because they do not know how to prepare it. Or water and fuel are only made available in remote poorly lit areas, increasing the risks of women and girls experiencing sexual violence. Or housing construction materials are given to men, while this is considered a women's job. Or households are assumed to be nuclear with a husband, wife and children, which, when benefits are allocated at the household level, excludes other types of households such as female-headed or same-sex households.

Since the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action in 1995, the commitment to incorporate gender perspectives in peace and security issues has been established in many declarations and platforms. The importance of promoting gender equality – equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys – is also widely accepted by governments and international organisations, and incorporated in international and national laws.

The importance of incorporating gender perspectives and needs in all humanitarian responses is explained in detail in the 2011 Sphere Project Handbook and the Inter-agency Standing Committee 2006 Gender Handbook. Incorporating gender perspectives is closely linked to proportionality and impartiality, and the principle that humanitarian actions should be needs-driven. Because there are never enough resources to meet all needs, a selection has to be made to allocate

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Suggested citation: Oosterhoff, P. (2014) Gender and Humanitarian Issues. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham and Institute of Development Studies.

resources to those in most urgent need. In order to develop proportional and impartial interventions, one has to identify the most urgent among many kinds of needs. This is why sex and age disaggregated data (SADD) – both quantitative and qualitative – are important in developing an effective and impartial response.

Virtually all sectoral or agency-specific guidance notes require SADD. However in practice populations are rarely consulted to collect these data, and interventions are developed and implemented based on guesstimates that cannot be monitored for positive or harmful impacts and outcomes. Taking gender perspectives into account is therefore of practical, strategic and moral relevance in humanitarian action.

This reading pack provides a quick introduction to the literature on humanitarian action and gender. It has been divided in three sections. The *Gender 101* section contains practical guidelines and examples from the general literature on key sectors such as agriculture and food security, housing, education, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The second section on evidence and disaggregated data provides guidance and examples on how and why to collect SADD. The third section on gender based violence contains articles on sexual violence against both men and women which allow the reader to critically reflect on the term ‘gender based violence’.

Gender 101

IASC (2006) *Women, girls, boys and men – different needs, equal opportunities: gender handbook in humanitarian action*. Geneva: Inter-Agency Standing Committee
http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-subsidi-tf_gender-genderh

van Dijkhorst, H., and Vonhof, S. (2005) *Gender and humanitarian aid: a literature review of policy and practice*. Wageningen University and CORDAID.
<https://wageningenur.nl/web/file?uuid=7a2d6d95-41b4-472d-bac1-53395db9d0bd&owner=66a64431-b533-423c-853e-4daf8a29eec7>

IGLHRC and SEROVie (2011) *The impact of the earthquake, and relief and recovery programs on Haitian LGBT people*. International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission and SEROVie.
<http://iglhrc.org/sites/default/files/505-1.pdf>

The Sphere Project (2011) *Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in humanitarian response*. Geneva: The Sphere Project
<http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook>

Evidence and disaggregated data

Mazurana, D., Benelli, P., and Walker, P. (2013) How sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender and generational analyses can improve humanitarian response, *Disasters* 37(s1): S68-S82.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/disa.12013>

Ormhaug, C., Meier, P., and Hernes, H. (2009) *Armed conflict deaths disaggregated by gender*. PRIO Paper no. 23, Oslo: International Peace Research Institute.
http://file.prio.no/Publication_files/Prio/Armed%20Conflict%20Deaths%20Disaggregated%20by%20Gender.pdf

Gender based violence

Oosterhoff, P., Mills, E. and Oosterom, M. (2014) *Addressing sexual violence in and beyond the 'warzone'*. IDS Rapid Response Briefing 7. Brighton: IDS
<http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/addressing-sexual-violence-in-and-beyond-the-warzone>

Johnson, K., Scott, J., Rughita, B., Kisielewski, M., Asher, J., Ong, R., and Lawry, L. (2010) Association of sexual violence and human rights violations with physical and mental health in territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 304(5): 553-562. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/jama.2010.1086>

Oosterhoff P., Zwaniken, P., Ketting, E. (2004) Sexual torture of men in Croatia and other conflict situations: an open secret, *Reproductive Health Matters* 12(23): 68-77
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(04\)23115-9](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(04)23115-9)

Carpenter, R. C. (2006) Recognizing gender-based violence against civilian men and boys in conflict situations, *Security Dialogue*, 37(1): 83-103.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0967010606064139>

Farr, K. (2009) Extreme war rape in today's civil-war-torn states: a contextual and comparative analysis, *Gender Issues*, 26(1): 1-41.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12147-009-9068-x>

Discussion questions

- How is a gendered analysis linked to concepts of impartiality and responses that are driven by an analysis of needs?
- How robust is the evidence that sex/gender and age affect how people experience natural disasters and armed conflict? Based on the literature can you now give specific examples from relevant sectors, including food/cash; wash; protection; and health?
- Why are data not disaggregated by sex and age when virtually all of the guidance notes, both targeting general audiences (such as the Sphere Handbook) and sectorial or agency specific ones require this for planning?
- How can SADD and gender and generational analyses enable operational agencies to deliver assistance more effectively and efficiently?
- How can humanitarian interventions be opportunities to work on greater gender equity? Can you give some examples?
- Should sexual orientation be part of the discussion on gender equity given that registration for benefits is often for nuclear families which can disadvantage same-sex households?
- Does wartime rape need explicit treatment under international criminal law? How can we prevent the creation of problematic rape hierarchies that marginalises rape within domestic and familial contexts?
- What do we mean by evidence-based and what do we mean by expertise? How do definitions of expertise advance or disadvantage women and men?
- What does a gendered response look like across the humanitarian cycle from assessment to recovery?

- What could be possible negative gender effects of focusing on mobilising and registering women for food programmes? Should food distribution programmes target women?