



THEMATIC KNOWLEDGE SERIES

Session 2: Women's Leadership and Equal Participation in the Planning and Implementation of Humanitarian Response

February 21, 2023

The Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) Compact Thematic Knowledge Sessions (TKS) are conducted under Chatham House Rule and give signatories the opportunity to come together to share learnings, highlight gaps, and find potential partnerships with other signatories. Each session explores one of the Compact's five pillars or another thematic area relevant to signatories with the aim of highlighting new ideas and creative approaches, identifying missteps that can be avoided, and ways to replicate and scale up high-impact interventions.

Context overview:

We're living in a world of escalating humanitarian crises and we're seeing record numbers of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The impact of protracted armed conflicts, violent extremism, and disasters has doubled the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in just four years. In 2023, an estimated 103 million people are expected to be displaced due to conflict and crisis and 339 million people will need humanitarian assistance, half of which are women and girls. Increasing humanitarian needs often aggravate the existing vulnerabilities of women and girls and their negative consequences, including higher levels of gender-based violence, child and forced marriages, trafficking, and a lack of access to life-saving services and formal education.

However, it is crucial that women and girls are not just seen as victims in crisis settings. In most locations, they are amongst the first to respond when a crisis hits. Therefore, it is critical to include the voices of crisis-affected women in the decision-making, planning, and implementation to ensure effective humanitarian action. Despite commitments to do so, gaps remain in the delivery, with 35% of humanitarian leadership reporting no consultations with local women's organizations in the planning process in 2022. Despite commitments, significant gaps and challenges remain for local women's organizations and their access to sustained financing. No effective monitoring mechanism for financial support to local women's organizations exists as of yet, making it difficult to estimate how much funding is reaching these organizations.

During the session, participants highlighted that an increasing numbers of women briefers in the Security Council are being accused of spying and sedition, and as a consequence having





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their devices confiscated and their property searched. “This is unacceptable, nobody should have fear and be silenced for speaking the truth,” one participant said. It was also highlighted that it’s important to understand that engagement in crisis contexts can often be a long and sometimes even slow process. Women-led organizations and female aid workers are key for ensuring women can access humanitarian relief and benefit from projects. Participants also discussed the importance of continuously getting feedback from women benefitting from programs to ensure they really cater to their needs and don’t excluding certain groups.

Stakeholder commitments and investments in this area:

At the time of this session, investment in engaging with and supporting non-traditional humanitarian actors in conflict and crisis settings were the highest in programmatic and advocacy related actions, in line with the overall WPS-HA Compact trend for other pillars. The majority of investments related to humanitarian response were directed towards finance or leadership, followed by protection and economic security. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and Member States have signed up to the most specific actions in this thematic area.

Principles of transformation:

The Compact has taken an intentional approach through its methodology and six principles of transformation to support signatories to develop and implement effective and comprehensive strategies for promoting durable peace and stability with the greatest positive impact on women and girls and local communities. These include:

1. Humanitarian-development-peace-nexus
2. Intersectional
3. Localized
4. Intergenerational
5. Resourced and sustainable
6. Inclusive and multistakeholder

Recommendations:

Humanitarian-development-peace-nexus

- **The humanitarian system should continue to reflect on its delivery of localization commitments** and the associated process of accountability to effective populations.
- **Ensure women-led organizations can meaningfully input into, influence, and participate** in the decision-making and coordination spaces that guide humanitarian responses.



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- **Establish more gender working groups in humanitarian action** dedicated to advancing gender priorities – especially at the local level – and link them to the humanitarian coordination space.

Intersectional

- **The greatest challenge is to engage women, in all their diversity, in the design of programs** and not just one-off consultations, their voices should be included throughout programs from start to monitoring and evaluation.
- **Include the voices of women with disabilities** and those from minority groups to ensure that humanitarian response is adapted to their needs. Women with disabilities face higher rates of gender-based violence and they often lack services and information in accessible formats.
- **Engage LGBTI communities to make sure humanitarian action takes a non-binary broad-based approach** to gender inclusivity, especially when violence targets LGBTI individuals and refugees.

Localized

- **Tracking progress on commitments is needed.** Despite commitments for 25% of funding to go to local organizations in crisis settings, evidence shows that large gaps remain, particularly for local women-led organizations, which only receive 1% of funding destined for fragile contexts.
- **Monitoring and evaluation** needs to effectively track how much of financial support is reaching local organizations.
- **Donors and international organizations should evaluate their efforts and conduct self-evaluations** on participation to understand how they are engaging with local women-led organizations.

Intergenerational

- **Listen to adolescent girls, in all their diversity,** to develop programs specifically targeting their unique needs, which are different from those of girls and those of women.

Resourced and sustainable

- **More needs to be done to ensure women's access to finance and to decision-making processes,** which remains the biggest barriers for women-led organizations effectively participating in humanitarian action.





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- **Redesign international partnerships** to require less paperwork from local, women-led organizations that often lack the time and resources to comply with complex reporting processes and funding applications.

Inclusive and multistakeholder

- **Achieve meaningful participation, not just representation**, to ensure women's voices are heard and actively influencing programs and humanitarian action.
- **Recognize that social norm change is required** and create spaces for women leaders to effectively guide the work of humanitarian action by removing social, cultural, and economic obstacles. This includes addressing the patriarchal attitudes and norms that restrict women's participation in the public sphere and undermine their contributions as leaders.
- **Support and fund women human rights defenders to actually have leadership roles** and be physically present when and where peace negotiations and peace processes are taking place.
- **Recognize the role of and engage with non-traditional actors, especially refugee-led organizations.** In some very complex contexts such as in Afghanistan, traditional humanitarian actors such as UN agencies and INGOs can only play a limited role, and it's crucial for non-traditional actors to be included in the response to serve the needs of affected populations.

Speakers

The TKS brought together a wide range of speakers, including several signatories as well as speakers from UN Women and the WPS-HA Compact Secretariat:

- **David Coffey**, Global Humanitarian Coordination and Policy Lead, UN Women
- **Arpita Varghese**, Partnerships and Resource Mobilization Specialist, UN Women
- **Amani Aruri**, YPS/WPS Ambassador, Karama Network
- **Negina Yari**, Chair of Afghanistan Women Advisory Group
- **Ruwaydah Matete**, Accountability and Affected Populations Gender Specialist in East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes region, UNHCR
- **Rahel Beigel**, UN Representative and Senior Advocacy Officer, Women's Refugee Commission
- **Sweta Kannan**, Division for International Humanitarian Organisations and Multilateral Policy on Humanitarian Assistance, German Federal Foreign Office
- **Facia Boyenoh Harris**, Member, Feminist Humanitarian Fund
- **Natasha Lea Lamoreux**, Coordination Specialist, UN Women
- **Harriette Williams Bright**, WPS-HA Compact Lead, UN Women
- **Roya Murphy**, WPS-HA Compact Monitoring and Reporting Consultant, UN Women

