

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE

Policy Statement

Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action

20 June 2008

Approved by the IASC Working Group

A. PURPOSE

This Policy Statement sets out actions to be taken by the IASC to ensure gender equality, including through women's empowerment, is fully incorporated in all IASC work towards more effective and coherent humanitarian action. This policy statement builds on the IASC 1999 *Policy Statement for the Integration of a Gender Perspective in Humanitarian Assistance*.

B. SCOPE

This Policy Statement is for IASC coordination mechanisms (structures or bodies). It also sets out responsibilities for the IASC coordination mechanism at country level. The Policy describes specific actions each body or effort of the IASC should take to ensure gender equality is fully mainstreamed into humanitarian programmes¹. It calls on members of the IASC to work in an inter-agency fashion towards the goal of gender equality in all aspects of humanitarian response. It also urges individual members to strengthen their own actions to ensure that the human rights of women, girls, boys and men are equally promoted and protected, and their different needs and responsibilities addressed. The Policy builds on existing mandates as referenced in section Annex 1, as well as individual IASC members' gender equality policies. It does not go beyond the scope of those mandates and policies.

C. RATIONALE

There are a variety of international norms and standards that lay the foundation for gender equality in all areas of humanitarian action. International humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law share a common goal in aiming to prevent and relieve suffering, and to protect the rights and freedoms of women, girls, boys and men. As such, they complement and reinforce each other, thus providing a comprehensive framework for the protection of the equal rights of women, girls, boys and men. (See Annex A)

While there has been emphasis by the IASC on promoting gender equality in all aspects of its work, real-time evaluations conducted in 2005-2006 of the crises in Darfur, the Tsunami and Pakistan earthquake point to clear gaps in promoting gender equality. To address this gap, the IASC issued in 2006 *The IASC Gender Handbook, Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs – Equal Opportunities* which provides field-

¹ ICRC, standing invitee to the IASC, consistent with its unique mandate to protect and assist all victims of armed conflict, strives to address specifically the needs of women in all its programs, however, does not have a policy of transforming gender relations in the contexts it works in.

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friendly guidance on how to deliver humanitarian protection and assistance based on the different needs, capacities and vulnerabilities of women, girls, boys and men.

Gender equality should be taken into consideration at all programme levels, from contingency planning prior to the onset of an emergency, to all stages of humanitarian response from the immediate response to early recovery and to reconstruction and transition. This:

- enables us to meet the needs and priorities of the population in a more targeted manner, based on how underlying gender norms and inequalities contribute to the different effects of the crisis on women, girls, boys and men;
- ensures that all people affected by a crisis are acknowledged and that all their needs and vulnerabilities are taken into account; and
- facilitates the design of more appropriate and effective responses to ensure equitable access and equal opportunities for women, girls, boys and men.

This policy statement therefore strives to make our collective humanitarian response more effective, reiterates commitments made in the 1999 Policy Statement and reflects subsequent developments in gender equality policies of humanitarian actors working within the IASC system. It thereby, sets the stage for increased accountability.

D. POLICY

The IASC is committed to achieving gender equality, ensuring the human rights of women, girls, boys and men are equally promoted and protected in humanitarian action, and ensuring that women, girls, boys and men have equitable and safe access to services provided.

To achieve this, all components of gender equality programming need to be included in the humanitarian action:

- gender mainstreaming across all sectors;
- empowerment of women and girls;
- a human rights-based approach to programming;
- prevention and response to gender-based violence;
- targeted actions based on gender analysis;
- mechanisms to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel; and
- promotion of gender balance in the workplace.

The IASC strategy to achieve gender equality is based on the following principles

1. Routine collection and reporting of key data by sex and age to allow analysis of the different needs and capacities of women, girls, boys and men of all ages.
2. Designing services to be accessible and meet the needs of all: Basing programme design on gender analysis of sex-and age-disaggregated data, with an aim to designing services which are safely and equitably accessible for all members of the target population.
3. Participation: Using participatory methods to access and incorporate gender equality and age perspectives in all aspects of information gathering, reporting and assessment, including needs assessments, research and policy development. Ensure the participation of women, girls, boys and men in all aspects of programme design, delivery and assessment, taking into account that individuals within these broad categories have diverse experiences and capabilities, and therefore different

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needs. Also ensure that women and girls are provided with equal opportunities for capacity building and employment to boys and men.

4. Use and promotion of common standards in capacity building and assessment for programme implementation and policy development on gender equality in humanitarian action.
5. Actively involving boys and men as allies in the promotion of gender equality.
6. Engaging and coordinating with all humanitarian partners and setting up networks to ensure information sharing and gap filling on gender equality across programmes and sectors.
7. Ensure sufficient funding for activities to enhance capacity for integrating gender equality into policies and programmes; and to targeted programmes to address gender inequalities such as activities to empower women and girls.

Please see the **IASC Gender Handbook Women, Girls, Boys and Men – Different Needs, Equal Opportunities** for further guidance on implementation of these principles.

The IASC shall undertake the following actions to promote gender equality in humanitarian action.

A. Global Level

1. IASC Members and Standing Invitees

IASC Members and Standing Invitees will promote gender equality in their representation to the IASC including as Principals, in Sub-Working Groups, Taskforces, and other working mechanisms of the IASC. Where necessary, members shall provide staff appropriate training and knowledge for meaningful contributions to inclusion of gender equality programming in IASC decision-making.

- (i) Ensure gender equality is systematically incorporated into IASC policy development and operational guidance.
- (ii) Ensure that IASC policy and guidance concerning gender equality programming is effectively communicated to the field level and field operations held accountable for their implementation.

2. IASC Principals and Working Group

The IASC Principals will ensure that gender equality is addressed adequately in all aspects of the IASC's work, including in approving policies and direction of the IASC overall coordination and norm setting functions.

The IASC Working Group will:

- (i) Ensure that gender equality programming is incorporated in the development and implementation of IASC policies and operational guidelines and operational guidelines, and an accountability framework will be developed by the Sub-working Group on Gender for this.

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- (ii) Hold specific discussions on the effectiveness the IASC gender equality policy and actions to ensure women, girls, boys and men have equitable access to and benefit from humanitarian protection and assistance response.

3. IASC Subsidiary Bodies

- a) The Sub-Working Group on Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action will:
 - (i) develop an annual plan to support implementation of this policy statement. The Gender SWG will provide guidance and support to all bodies and structures of the IASC to be able to incorporate gender equality into relevant aspects of their work.
 - (ii) Develop an accountability framework for monitoring the implementation of this statement.
- b) All other IASC subsidiary bodies will:
 - (i) Integrate gender equality into their annual work plans to demonstrate their commitments and actions to routinely incorporate gender equality into their areas of work.
 - (ii) Nominate a focal point to be responsible for inclusion of gender equality programming into the SWG annual work plans and maintain contact with the IASC SWG on Gender in Humanitarian Action.

4. Global Cluster Leads will:

- (i) Provide guidance to clusters at country level on how to integrate gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in accordance with the country level cluster leads generic terms of reference.
- (ii) Work with all members of the global cluster working groups, as well as cluster actors at the country level, to strengthen their capacities to incorporate gender equality in cluster programmes and other efforts.

B. Field-Level

In accordance with their Terms of Reference, Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinators will, through the Cluster/ Sector Leads and the IASC Humanitarian Country Teams, incorporate gender analysis and actions into programming, assessment and policy development through the actions listed below. Cluster leads are accountable to the RC/HC for ensuring that the needs, contributions and capacities of women and girls as well as men and boys are addressed. Other IASC Members and Standing Invitees will promote these gender equality strategies in their work as members of the Humanitarian Country Team. They are further encouraged to share and promote IASC materials and resources, including as related to work on conflict prevention, early warning, disaster risk reduction, and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Country level actions to ensure gender equality programming

- (i) Ensure multi-sectoral needs assessments and the identification of humanitarian priorities are based on sex and age- disaggregated data and gender analysis of these data.
- (ii) Facilitate intra- and inter-cluster/ sector coordination and information management on gender equality issues.
- (iii) Support a robust inter-agency working group or network on gender equality in humanitarian response,, and appoint and support focals point on gender equality and diversity to facilitate coordination and

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information sharing between and within different agencies and sectors/ clusters as well as between the field and headquarters

(iv) Ensure that a gender analysis informs the planning processes, including Humanitarian Action Plans and CAPs.

(v) Actively support the implementation of the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on Sexual Abuse and Exploitation by UN staff and related personnel and honour the humanitarian community's obligations to provide support to victims of SEA.

(vi) Carry out effective advocacy for women's, girls' boys' and men's full and equal enjoyment of their human rights.

(vii) Promote consultation with and engagement and support of local women, youth, as well as the active involvement of groups representing specific needs or capabilities in the definition of priorities for humanitarian assistance and the design, delivery and monitoring of assistance programmes. Gender, age and diversity participatory assessments will reveal the specific needs of women, girls, boys and men.

ix) Conduct systematic monitoring and evaluation of programmes using a gender lens and sharing findings at intra and inter-agency meetings

E. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

The IASC Working Group is, through the co-chairs of the IASC Sub-working Group on Gender in Humanitarian Action, responsible for developing an accountability framework for monitoring the implementation of this policy and reviews its contents every 5 years.

ANNEXES

A. KEY REFERENCES FOR GENDER EQUALITY PROGRAMMING IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

- The United Nations Charter reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is considered an international bill of rights for women and sets up an agenda for national action to end discrimination against women and girls. More than 90% of members of the United Nations have signed the convention.
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BFPA, 1995) provides a blueprint for gender equality and women's empowerment through an analysis of the gender specific challenges and opportunities in the 12 critical areas of concern. One of the critical areas of concern highlighted in the BFPA is the effects of armed conflict on women.
- The Economic and Social Council decision of 1997 (E/1997/66) calls on entities of the United Nations to undertake gender mainstreaming which is defined as a process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.
- Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000 calls on all parties to respect the human rights of women and girls, respect the humanitarian nature of camps and settlements, to take account of the particular needs of women and girls, to adopt a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, and to increase representation of women at all levels.
- The Sphere Handbook (2004 revised edition) stresses the equal rights of women, girls, boys and men in all aspects of humanitarian action.
- The Hyogo Framework for Action provides a tool for integrating a gender perspective in all disaster-risk management, including in risk assessments and early warning mechanisms.

Normative References

- a. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) 1979.
- b. Convention on the Rights of the Child
- c. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BFPA, 1995)
- d. Agreed Conclusions of ECOSOC Coordination Segment on Gender Mainstreaming 1997 and Reiterated 2006.
- e. Security Council Resolutions on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict.
- f. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security 2000.
- g. Security Council Resolutions on Children and Armed Conflict.
- h. Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998)

IASC Operational Guidance

- i. Gender Handbook: *Women, Girls, Boys and Men – Different Needs, Equal Opportunities*
- j. Guidelines for Gender Based Violence In Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies: 2005
- k. Guidelines for HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency settings: 2003 (currently under revision)

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B. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Gender Equality Programming is an umbrella term encompassing all strategies to achieve gender equality. Important examples include gender mainstreaming, gender analysis, prevention and response to GBV and SEA, promotion and protection of human rights, empowerment of women and girls, and gender balance in the workplace.

Gender refers to the social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures. “Gender,” along with class and race, determines the roles, power and resources for females and males in any culture. Historically, attention to gender relations has been driven by the need to address women’s needs and circumstances as they are typically more disadvantaged than men. Increasingly, however, the humanitarian community is recognizing the need to know more about what men and boys face in crisis situations.

Gender equality, or equality between women and men, refers to the equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life chances are not governed or limited by whether they were born female or male.

Gender mainstreaming is a globally recognized strategy for achieving gender equality. The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations defined gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

Women’s Empowerment: The concept of empowerment is related to gender equality but distinct from it. The core of empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny. This implies that to be empowered women must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment) but they must also have the agency to use these rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions (such as is provided through leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions. (MDG Taskforce 2005)

Gender analysis examines the relationships between females and males and their access to and control of resources, their roles and the constraints they face relative to each other. A gender analysis should be integrated into the humanitarian needs assessment and in all sector assessments or situational analyses to ensure that gender-based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated by humanitarian interventions and that where possible greater equality and justice in gender relations are promoted.

Gender balance is a human resource issue. It is about the equal participation of women and men in all areas of work (international and national staff at all levels, including at senior positions) and in programmes that agencies initiate or support (e.g. food distribution programmes). Achieving a balance in staffing patterns and creating a working environment that is conducive to a diverse workforce improves the overall effectiveness of our policies and programmes, and will enhance agencies’ capacity to better serve the entire population.

Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between females and males. The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include sexual violence, including sexual exploitation/abuse and forced prostitution; domestic violence; trafficking; forced/early marriage; harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation; honour killings; and widow inheritance.