

## **Briefing Note: Gender Assessment of the Response to the Kunduz Offensive**

### **Background**

This briefing note presents some of the successes, challenges and recommendations from a gender assessment of the response to the 2015 Kunduz offensive, commissioned by the Gender in Humanitarian Action Task Force. The objectives of the assessment were to analyze the gender dynamics within the humanitarian response in Kunduz and neighboring provinces, highlight challenges, successes and gaps in gender programming, and identify areas for improvement in future humanitarian responses. The assessment included a desk review of existing assessments of the emergency response, complemented by 12 interviews with 16 key informants involved in the response in Kunduz, Mazar-e Sharif (Balkh), Taloqan (Takhar) and Faizabad (Badakhshan).

After compiling the findings of the desk review and key informant interviews in a draft report, the GiHA Taskforce facilitated a workshop with 27 key stakeholders on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 in order to present the preliminary findings of the study, receive feedback on the findings and recommendations, and build on existing data. The stakeholders included gender and humanitarian focal points from a range of organizations, including the government, UN agencies, and local and international NGOs. The workshop was divided into four key parts: a presentation of the research findings (followed by Q&A), a break out session in small groups to discuss how to address challenges in gender responsive programming identified in the study (followed by feedback one small group discussions in plenary), a presentation of the cluster 'tip sheets' for gender mainstreaming, and a plenary discussion on the study recommendations and practical ways to take these forward.

### **Successes**

Early detection of how WASH and shelter concerns intersected with protection risks in some IDP sites led to the improved distribution of aid and IDP site infrastructure (e.g. more tents and better lighting around latrines and WASH facilities at night) to assist more vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. One of the key factors of success was the implementation of pre-needs assessment data collection, including qualitative and participatory methodologies to enable more immediate response to humanitarian needs.

Good practice interventions included child friendly spaces to enhance psychosocial support for girls and boys, mobile services to reach vulnerable women at risk of GBV and the implementation of programming directed towards women's economic and other forms of empowerment in order to build their resilience and enhance protective factors in times of emergencies.

### **Challenges**

Some humanitarian actors reproduce assumptions that all people are equal in the face of emergencies, male recipients of aid will accurately report the needs of female household members

if different to the overall needs of the household, and that GBV is not a significant problem in emergencies in Afghanistan due to Islamic customs that segregate men and women.

There is a continuing tendency to reduce gender equality programming to specific activities that focuses on addressing practical needs of women and/or girls (girl's education, reproductive health, hygiene kits, GBV, nutrition for lactating mothers etc.). The intersection of gender with broader humanitarian sectors like WASH, Shelter and Aid distribution is not consistently mainstreamed and integrated. More importantly, the strategic gender needs (participation, access, decision-making etc.) based on socially constructed roles, capacities, vulnerabilities of women, girls, boys and men are not analyzed and addressed. This gap is exacerbated by lack of ownership of global guidelines and toolkits on mainstreaming gender in humanitarian response, and lack of translated resources for field staff.

Although the collection of sex and age disaggregated data is improving, there is a shortage of human and financial resources and technical capacity to compile, analyse and report this data from a gender perspective. Large gaps also exist in the mobilization of trained protection partners or gender advisors and female needs assessment staff to collect data from women and girls in emergencies.

Aid distribution does reach the most vulnerable groups (e.g. widows, female-headed households, elderly and disabled); however, aid is still largely distributed to men, who may not recognize the needs of women, children and other vulnerable household members, and who do not always distribute aid (including cash transfers) equitably within the household.

## **Recommendations**

More human and financial resources need to be channeled into compiling, analyzing and reporting sex and age disaggregated data, and more capacity has to be built in relation to the interpretation of this data from a gender perspective. More attention needs to be paid to ensuring the right methodologies are used for the right purpose.

More efforts need to be put into pre-emergency planning, including situational analyses and planning for known hotspots such as Kunduz. Such pre-planning needs to include the development of stronger standby partner networks trained in needs assessment data collection and gender and protection issues. Local women's CSOs should not be excluded from these planning efforts and should be recognized as potential protection focal points and supported in this role.

Humanitarian organizations need to pay more attention to post-emergency management, including measuring how gender is implicated in different phases of emergencies and ensuring that post-aid follow up tracks IDPs and responds to longer-term needs of vulnerable groups.

Although planning for gender-sensitive humanitarian response to conflict and disaster induced displacement is vital, efforts should continue to be mobilized towards preventive programming, including building the livelihoods and economic resilience of vulnerable groups. There are

possibilities in this regard in relation to linking development and humanitarian assistance, which have traditionally operated in silos.

Although global gender guidelines and toolkits can be useful in assisting field staff to implement gender-sensitive humanitarian response, more attention needs to be paid to adapting these resources to local contexts, building ownership of their use and making them more accessible through translation into local languages.

Given the lack of female staff in many humanitarian organizations, and consequent challenges in mobilizing trained female staff in emergencies, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring HR policies identify and support opportunities for female staff to build relevant capacity. HR policies could also encourage positive discrimination practice to enhance opportunities for women. Humanitarian organizations should also be focusing on implementing gender-responsive field practices and policies, such as hiring teams consisting of couples or family members to facilitate women's easier access to the field, or ensuring *mahram* policies are in place.<sup>1</sup>

Humanitarian actors should posit women as the recipients of aid rather than immediately distributing aid to men. More evidence needs to be collected in relation to the potential positive or negative impacts of direct distribute to women, including on whether cash transfers to women increase or decrease GBV, and how effective they are in strengthening women's economic empowerment and decision making in the household. Humanitarian organizations should also ensure that aid distribution sites are adequately set up to enable women's participation, including ensuring separate queues for men and women. The location of distribution sites should also be designed with the needs and restrictions of vulnerable groups (e.g. women, children, elderly, disabled) in mind.

There needs to be more conceptual clarity among humanitarian actors in relation to what constitutes GBV. There appears to be a strong focus in the field on GBV consisting of physical or sexual violence, with less attention to other types of violence, including early and forced marriage, and denial of resources and opportunities. Field staff, particularly those contributing to needs assessments and protection monitoring, should understand these dimensions of GBV.

More awareness needs to be built to counter negative discourses and assumptions about the role of gender in humanitarian action. Evidence-based advocacy can play an important role in doing this, particularly in light of assumptions being largely at odds with existing evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> A *mahram* is a male relative who is often required to accompany women when traveling or moving outside the home.