



**EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN**

# HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND CRISIS RESPONSE

**COVER**

*Rohingya refugee camp Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, March 2018.*

*Photo: UN Women/Allison Joyce*

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# FOREWORD

As global needs grow, the humanitarian community continues to look for ways to do more with what it has. 2018 was another difficult year, with humanitarian crises ever more intractable and increasingly frequent disasters linked to climate change. The humanitarian community had to reflect on how to do better in preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by its own staff. This consistent ratcheting up of demands and pressures on the humanitarian community is now our normal.

Despite this, for UN Women 2018 was an encouraging year for gender equality in humanitarian action. The case for change grew ever louder, and the consensus for that change ever wider.

We believe that women and girls are more than beneficiaries whose interests must be mainstreamed. They are part of the answer to how we can do more with the resources we have to provide more effective, rights-driven humanitarian assistance and mitigation. Time and again around the world UN Women's programmes, working closely with a wide range of partners, demonstrated how empowering women, from giving voice to generating income to supporting women-led local organisations, delivered huge returns not only for women and girls themselves, but also for those that depend on them, their communities, their societies and all of us.

UN Women exists to promote and enable. In spaces such as the Grand Bargain we helped bring humanitarian actors together to strengthen standards, guidance and norms. In spaces like the Interagency Standing Committee and in crises on the ground we led and co-led gender coordination efforts, like the IASC's Accountability Framework for its Gender Policy. On the ground hundreds of thousands of women and girls accessed our services, delivered in collaboration



*UN Women's Executive Director visits Multi-Purpose Centre in Rohingya Camp, Cox Bazaar, Bangladesh.*

with our partners, to build their resilience, engage in disaster preparedness, gain skills, an income and more. We worked with men and boys also, ensuring that they can become allies in achieving gender equality for their communities because they understand that everyone wins when the potential and strength of women and girls are brought to bear in responding to crisis. Through the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund we were able to facilitate provision of support to women's organisations around the world.

This report reflects what we were able to make possible, while recognizing that it is always through others that we seek and realise our biggest impacts. 2018 saw new and strengthened partnerships, including in areas of innovation and research. Through everything we did we were fortunate to receive the support of our largest number of funding partners ever in 2018. These donors, like all our stakeholders, recognise the imperative of gender in humanitarian action. They believe that humanitarian actors must be held accountable in this regard, and that empowering women and girls needs to be at the heart of everything we do. We are grateful to them for their support and partnership, as we are grateful to the wide range of partners, including the sister agencies of the United Nations, with whom we have worked and continue to work.

**Dan Seymour**

Director Humanitarian Action and Crisis Response  
UN WOMEN

# INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian needs continue to grow with nearly 132 million people in need of assistance in 2018, due to conflict, persecution and natural disasters. The average humanitarian crisis now lasts more than nine years,<sup>1</sup> and periods of forced displacement over seventeen.<sup>2</sup> The impacts on those affected are indelible, as they seek to survive and recover, depriving them, and us all, of their futures and potential.

Many of the women and girls who make up approximately half of this 132 million face daily discrimination and violence. The breakdown of protection mechanisms and destruction of essential services and economic structures in crises hits the already marginalized hardest. They see their situation further diminished due to their lack of rights and access to and control of the resources and viable coping strategies they need.



Photo: UN Women/Rahel Steinbach

*UN Women facilitated a meeting of Somali Women's Organizations to develop a Women's Charter of Demands for gender-responsive disaster resilience and drought recovery; and to contribute to the country's Drought Impacts Needs Assessment.*

This is not a new observation. Yet our evidence and experience from 2018 suggests that humanitarian response, resilience and risk-reduction strategies continue to inadequately identify and address the rights and specific needs of women, girls, men and boys. In addition, the capacity and potential of women and girls to inform and contribute to the formulation and provision of the services and long-term solutions that they, their families and wider communities need to not only survive, but to prosper remains grossly undervalued. This is the basic reality underpinning UN Women's role in humanitarian action, based on its mandate from the General Assembly as a catalyst for gender equality, including across the work of the United Nations system as a whole.

Traditional strategies to crisis response have proven inadequate in the face of ever-increasing numbers affected by crisis and their protracted nature. Increasingly, humanitarian actors recognize the need to situate humanitarian action within the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, understanding and responding to the ways humanitarian responses can dictate the long-term trajectory for an affected population. Services for crisis-affected populations must look beyond immediate assistance, but also offer viable long-term solutions that protect their rights and maintain their dignity. This remains at the heart of UN Women's work.

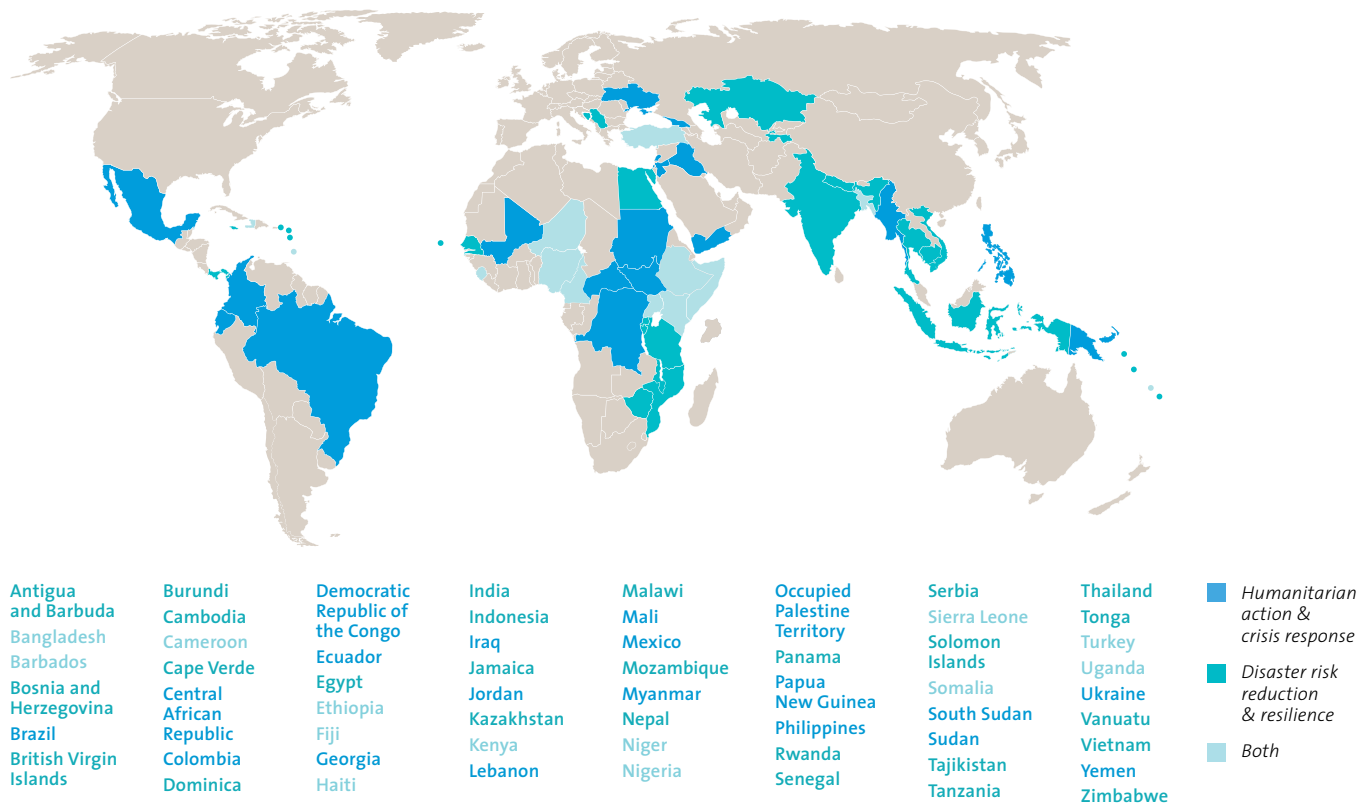
Similarly, preparedness, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and resilience strategies in advance of crisis need to consider the additional risk-vulnerabilities caused by gender inequality. Women and girls face greater economic vulnerability from disasters, including those driven by climate change, as their livelihoods are more often linked to fragile economic sectors, and land prone to devastation in even low-scale crisis events.

1. OCHA – Global Humanitarian Overview 2019

2. UNHCR (2018) Figures at a Glance – Statistical Yearbooks.



## IN 2018, UN WOMEN ENGAGED IN 58 COUNTRIES WITH HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND RESILIENCE ACTIVITIES



These include selling products gathered from global commons, subsistence agriculture or informal market activity.

UN Women believes that women's and girls' self-reliance and empowerment is key. It allows them to build a future of their own choosing, freeing them from dependence and vulnerability. It leads to positive social and economic outcomes not only for themselves, but for their families, communities and host countries as well, meaning more effective and cost-efficient service delivery. For example, studies show that when women work, they

invest 90 percent of their income back into their families, compared with 35 percent for men.<sup>3</sup> It is the foundation of resilience, and the best, most cost-effective and smartest way to meet humanitarian needs with a long-term lens and break free of harmful, and costly, repeated cycles of crisis and suffering. This provides the underlying rationale for everything UN Women does in the humanitarian space, through its normative, coordination and operational roles. It is the thread running through its work with partners through 2018 and the basis for everything contained in this report.

3. Clinton Global Initiative – *Empowering Girls and Women*

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# OVERVIEW

## UN Women's Approach – Coordination, Accountability and Empowerment

UN Women works to promote equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of all efforts across the humanitarian development peace nexus. We emphasise empowerment for women and girls as a life-saving intervention to ensure their survival, protection, recovery and the sustainable improvement of their, and their communities, long-term prospects through preparedness, resilience and transformative change.

UN Women's action is based on and guided by a series of international commitments, including the World Humanitarian Summit's Agenda for Humanity, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the Sustainable Development Goals.

UN Women supports and enables the UN and the wider humanitarian system to integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout all aspects of humanitarian, DRR and resilience planning and programming.

- At the global level, through its inter-agency leadership and coordination role, UN Women supports other UN organizations in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in their humanitarian efforts, including through sharing evidence-based good practices, minimum standards and guidance tools.
- UN Women leads on accountability and monitoring of the delivery by global humanitarian coordination systems on their commitments to gender in humanitarian action.
- In the field, UN Women assists UN coordinated humanitarian mechanisms to identify and address the specific rights and needs of crisis-affected and/or at-risk women and girls in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of crisis-response, DRR and resilience policies and strategies.
- In disaster risk reduction and resilience, UN Women works with local authorities and local stakeholders to build a comprehensive package that focuses on rendering prevention, preparedness and response systems, plans and tools gender-responsive and provides targeted action enabling women and girls to withstand natural hazards, recover fully from disasters and increase their resilience to future natural hazards. Where needed, UN Women offers specific service delivery initiatives consistent with its approach of enhancing gender equality and women's empowerment, promoting self-reliance, resilience, and providing immediate lifesaving solutions to crisis affected women and girls, their families and affected communities, including host communities.
- UN Women promotes the voices, agency and capacity of women's civil society organizations and national women's machineries in humanitarian and DRR efforts to ensure their equal representation and contribution to the decisions that directly affect their lives and the lives of those that depend upon them.
- With its Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, UN Women manages a global pooled funding mechanism designed to support women's participation, leadership and empowerment in humanitarian response, as well as peace and security settings. It provides funding and capacity



*Shunaxi Martínez Santiago  
at the Bonafont Race for  
a Cause 2019.*

## MOVING FORWARD EQUALITY: MEXICAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

**THE 2017 EARTHQUAKES** in Mexico destroyed livelihoods and communities throughout Mexico City and Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca. For women like Shunaxi Martínez Santiago, 31-years-old and a mother of 2, she lost her house and had to relocate to another town.

Before the earthquakes, Shunaxi left a stable job to pursue the dream of launching an online business. She says “It was very difficult to quit my job and dare to do something new, as I had a secure income, but I also thought of my children, of being able to spend time with them”.

Following the earthquakes Shunaxi participated in “Avancemos por la igualdad”.<sup>1</sup> The goal of the programme is to foster the economic reactivation of earthquake-impacted areas through innovative business initiatives, including training

*1. Also known as the Moving Forward Equality Programme*

*2. Translates to Craftswomen of Juchitán*

*3. (a Grupo Danone Business Unit)*



courses focused on strengthening entrepreneurial and leadership abilities. For Shunaxi, she states “I learned all about organizational skills and costs, to value my work and what it represents. I learned how to become organized, as well as to keep control of my expenses”.

In due course, she launched a cooperative called Mujeres Artesanas de Juchitán<sup>2</sup> that sells crafts through a Facebook page. The cooperative sponsors and raises funds for people suffering from illness and for individuals with disabilities.

UN Women in partnership with Bonafont<sup>3</sup> were able to create the opportunity for women like Shunaxi, and 152 other women who graduated and launched their own businesses with another 102 women who participated in gender-responsive psychological care and risk management.

development for local, women led civil society organizations working on these issues. To date 41 projects have been supported by the WPHF in 7 countries.

- Through its LEAP (Leadership, Empowerment, Access and Protection) worldwide flagship initiative for humanitarian action and crisis response, in 2018, UN Women:
  - Increased leadership and engagement by crisis affected and host community women and girls

in relief efforts and decision-making, including through participation in refugee camp management structures and humanitarian planning processes working with women’s civil society and advocating for links between humanitarian actors, women’s rights organizations and national authorities;

- Established women’s empowerment centers and safe spaces allowing women and girls access to UN Women’s humanitarian services,

- as well as information and referral networks to humanitarian and protection/GBV services, including sexual and reproductive health care, provided by other specialized agencies.
- Helped address the GBV protection needs of women and girls through the provision of psycho-social care, referring GBV survivors to specialized professionals and preventing GBV through training, sensitizing men and boys and promoting gender equality and positive gender norms.
  - Increased crisis-affected women's access to income from economic opportunities through livelihood programming, integrating various components and services for crisis affected and vulnerable women, including cash for work, cash-based transfers, vocational training, skills development and access to resources for agricultural production and business.
  - Contributed to gender equality by addressing gender norms in communities as well as among humanitarian actors; coordinating and facilitating norm setting and gender transformative humanitarian approaches.
- Through its disaster risk reduction and resilience initiatives and programmes in 39 countries in Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Asia and Pacific and Eastern Europe, UN Women has been able to:
    - Achieve policy change and increase national budget allocations for gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience.
    - Empower women as leaders in DRR decision-making and in preventing, preparing for and recovering from disasters at local, national and international levels.
    - Build women's and girl's resilience to disasters through targeted action, including climate resili-

## Partnerships

UN Women works closely with partners to achieve the maximum impact for women and girls. Across all of its operational humanitarian, DRR and resilience country contexts, UN Women partnered with 9 international NGOs and Red Cross/Crescent Societies and with 16 UN agencies, including UNFPA, OCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNDRR and WFP. Furthermore, in line with international commitments to localization and promoting women's leadership in humanitarian contexts, UN Women supported through provision of financial and/or technical support 498 women's organizations in humanitarian and crisis settings. This strengthened their capacities to effectively engage in humanitarian and crisis response and influence strategic prioritization and resource allocation.

## SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN 2018

# 498

women's organizations supported

by UN Women to play a role in humanitarian response and recovery

# 100

women's organizations supported

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