

Towards gender equality in humanitarian response:
**Addressing the needs of
women & men in Gaza**

A guidebook for the humanitarian sector



The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programs and strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. Placing the advancement of women's human rights at the centre of all of its efforts, UNIFEM focuses its activities on three strategic areas: (1) economic security and rights aimed at reducing feminized poverty, (2) women's rights, particularly focused on the fight to ending violence against women, and (3) achieving gender equality in democratic governance in times of peace as well as war.

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UNIFEM occupied Palestinian territory

FOREWORD

Conflict and violence today spare no one, but it is important to remember that they affect men, women, boys and girls in different ways. The population of the Gaza Strip is suffering from a long, drawn-out conflict, interspersed with periods of intense internal violence and exacerbated by the ongoing blockade of goods into the Strip. All these factors have resulted in a state of deep deprivation which has had devastating effects on large segments of the civilian population.

Whether the violence is internal or cross-border, civilians are all too often caught in the firing line, directly targeted or endangered by the proximity of the fighting. Both men and women are vulnerable to conflict, but they are often exposed to different risks and therefore have different needs.

Throughout the history of conflict in the Gaza Strip, the multiple roles women play have come to form the lifeline of their communities: heading households, raising children, sustaining subsistence livelihoods, and caring for the sick, wounded, and elderly. Women have been at the forefront of developing day-to-day survival strategies for their families. Insufficient access to basic services, along with high levels of unemployment and poverty, are factors which lead to despair and frustration and which strain women's coping mechanisms.

As professional humanitarian workers, including field practitioners, team leaders and policy-makers, our primary responsibility lies in ensuring that the assistance and protection we provide meets the needs of all the population equally, that their rights are protected and that those most affected by the crisis receive the support they need. It is our responsibility to respect them, as well as help restore their confidence and dignity which is often destroyed by crisis. Above all, we must not exacerbate their situation, cause more stress or expose them to new threats. In conclusion, the provision of humanitarian assistance should ensure equal opportunities for all so that our assistance is properly targeted.

Having gained experience all over the world, the UN System recognizes the importance and the absolute need to take into consideration the gender dimensions in delivering emergency and humanitarian response.

This guidebook is the outcome of integrating a product as well as a process oriented approach, based on UN Inter-Agency and NGO community collaboration. The outcome is based on the IASC gender handbook, the UN Inter-Agency gender needs survey conducted in the aftermath of the 23-day Israeli military operations in Gaza during December, 2008 and January, 2009, followed by focus group discussions carried out by UNIFEM in cooperation with GenCap Adviser deployed in the oPt. It has been a consultative exercise undertaken jointly by OCHA and UNIFEM with the cooperation of humanitarian sector representatives.

This guidebook offers real and practical guidance for identifying and addressing the differing needs and situations of women, girls, boys and men for the humanitarian sectors operating in the Gaza Strip. Understanding gender differences, inequalities and capacities improves aid effectiveness and ensures that the assistance corresponds to the international legal framework for humanitarian response.



Maxwell Gaylard

UN Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territory

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The production of this guidebook was a collective effort, and we owe sincere thanks to the many people who participated and contributed in countless ways. Special thanks go to Rema Hammami, Research Associate, who lead the research process; the GenCap Advisor, Sinta Dewi, who has continuously been a source of authoritative guidance on various fundamental and applied aspects of this guidebook; Amal Syam, the Women's Affairs Center Executive Director, for her professionalism and enthusiasm in conducting the focus group discussions; UNIFEM oPt, both in Jerusalem and in Gaza, who devoted uncountable hours of support to make this publication possible.

Special thanks go to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), whose involvement was crucial to producing the guidebook in a participatory manner, involving the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) sector/clusters* leadership in improving the questionnaire for the focus group discussions and revising the draft of the guidebook, making valuable technical contributions.

The following sector/clusters have contributed to the development of this guidebook: Agriculture, Protection, Child Protection, Education, Food Security and Nutrition, Health (including Disability), Early Recovery (Livelihoods), Shelter and Non-Food Items, Mental Health, and Water and Sanitation.

In addition to the following agencies and organizations

Association for Development of Palm and Dates (ASDPD), Care International, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), CHF International, Handicap International, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Mercy Corps, OXFAM, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR), Palestine Tomorrow, Right to Live Society, Save the Children Sweden, Society of Friends, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), USAID, Women's Affairs Center (WAC), Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), World Food Programme (WFP), and World Health Organization (WHO).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT:

All of UNIFEM's generous supporters have played their part insofar as funding for this guidebook and its publication was drawn from the core budget to which they contribute.

OTHER FORMS OF SUPPORT:

Our gratitude goes out to Shareef Sarhan in Gaza for allowing the use of his photographs for the purpose of this publication.

Lastly, the publication of this guidebook would not have been possible without the participation of the population of Gaza. Special thanks are justly afforded to them for their willingness and participation in the focus group discussions.

* The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) led by the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), with the support of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has the overall responsibility for response coordination in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The HCT is comprised of UN agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and NGO representatives.

INTRODUCTION

The already grave humanitarian situation caused by the 18-month-long blockade of the Gaza Strip was compounded by Israel's 23-day military offensive in December, 2008 and January, 2009. The war led to the displacement of an estimated 100,000 people at the height of the conflict, the death of 1,366 people, amongst them 430 children and 111 women, and the injury of over 5,380 people, including 1,870 children and 800 women. The large-scale internal displacement of civilians was made more traumatic by the fact that civilians could neither leave the field of war, nor find secure and safe haven from aerial bombardment, even in United Nations installations. Public infrastructure and essential services already strained as a result of the blockade have worsened due to the damage resulting from the war. The dramatic deterioration of the Gaza Strip has further worsened conditions for its inhabitants, both in terms of material losses and psychological distress caused by the violence.

The social and economic repercussions of this state of crisis are spread across all sectors of Gazan society, but are also mediated by men and women's gender roles and identities. Paying attention to gender issues or putting on a gender lens means recognizing the different needs, capacities and contributions of women, girls, boys and men, shaped by their different gender roles and responsibilities. Ignoring or being blind to these differences can mean that the specific needs of some segments of the population are overlooked or that issues that have implications for the whole society are ignored, sometimes with destructive consequences. In the rush to provide humanitarian assistance, the appeal to pay attention to gender issues may seem irrelevant. However, it is crucial to ensure that the most necessary and appropriate assistance is offered across the population and to the population as a whole.

The main framework for this guidebook is built on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook on Humanitarian Action: Women, Girls, Boys and Men - Different Needs, Equal Opportunities.* Main concepts and relevant frameworks from the IASC handbook were adapted to the context of the Gaza emergency using two main bodies of data. The first is the findings of the gender needs assessment survey, *Voicing the Needs of Women and Men in Gaza*, conducted by the UN Inter-Agency Gender Task Force in March, 2009. Main issues that arose from that survey were subsequently fleshed out in a series of focus group discussions with men, women, boys and girls in various communities in Gaza in April and May, 2009, organized by UNIFEM. The findings of the focus groups form the core of the data addressed in this guidebook. The guidebook sets forth standards for the integration of gender issues from the outset of a complex emergency. It aims to enable humanitarian services to reach their target audience with the maximum positive effect while minimizing exacerbation or inadvertent exposure to risk.

Purpose

This guidebook aims to provide actors in Gaza with guidance on gender analysis, planning and actions to ensure that the needs, contributions and capacities of women, girls, boys and men are considered in all aspects of humanitarian response. It also offers checklists to assist in monitoring gender equality programming. The guidelines focus on major cross-cutting issues and areas of work in the early response phase of emergencies. The guidebook is also a useful tool to make sure gender issues are included in needs assessments, contingency planning and evaluations. It can be used as a tool to mainstream gender as a cross-cutting issue within sectors/clusters. If used correctly, this guidebook will help promote the ultimate goal of protecting and promoting the human rights of women, girls, boys and men in the context of humanitarian action as well as advance the goal of gender equality. **The phrase “women, girls, boys and men” as used throughout this guidebook refers to young and old across the life cycle.**

Audience

The target audience for this guidebook are field practitioners responding to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. In particular, the guidebook targets sector/cluster actors. The Humanitarian Country Team, Humanitarian Coordinator and others in leadership positions will also benefit from the handbook as it provides guidance on how to analyze the situation from a gender perspective, implement gender-sensitive activities and measure effectiveness. The guidebook will also assist donors in holding humanitarian actors accountable for integrating gender perspectives and promoting equality in all aspects of their work.

Structure

This guidebook is divided into two main sections:

The first section includes the Basics of Gender in Crisis and sets forth the overarching framework of gender equality programming in humanitarian action. It defines terms and explains the relevance of gender equality in crisis situations.

The second section provides sector- and cluster-specific guidance. UNIFEM, OCHA and GenCap Adviser in the oPt have organized consultative meetings with the humanitarian sector/clusters, international NGOs and the UN Gender Task Force in Jerusalem and Gaza to comment on the draft of these chapters. Each was also asked to develop the specific actions proposed to ensure gender equality programming in their sectoral area of responsibility.

Each chapter is divided into the following parts:

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