

# **ActionAid Women's Rights in Emergencies Meta-evaluation**

**Final Report  
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**All evaluations considered in this meta-evaluation are available at:**  
<https://hive.actionaid.org/IHART/Emergencies%20evaluations/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

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## List of abbreviations

AA	ActionAid
AAI	ActionAid International
AAIK	ActionAid International in Kenya
AAN	ActionAid Nepal
AAP	ActionAid Palestine
ANCP	Australian NGO Cooperation Programme
APS	Alianza por la solidaridad
CBHA	Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies
CPC	Community Protection Committee
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee (UK)
DPRF	Disasters and Preparedness Response Fund
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EFAST	AA Emergency Deployment Roster
EPRH	AA Emergency Preparedness and Response Handbook
GBV	Gender based violence
GBV Aor	Gender Based Violence Area of Responsibility (protection sub-cluster)
GiE	Gender in Emergencies
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
iHART	International Humanitarian Action and Resilience Team
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KCP	Key Change Promise
LRP	Local Rights Programmes
PARC	Palestinian Agricultural Development Organization
PKKK	Pambansang Koalisyon Ng Kababaihan Sa
PNGO	Palestinian NGO Network
SADD	Sex and Age Disaggregated Data
VAW	Violence against women
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
VAWC	Violence against women and children
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## Executive summary

ActionAid (AA) is an international agency working to promote the rights of women and men in 45 countries. AA sees emergencies as part of the cycle of rights denial that causes poverty. It seeks to respond to immediate needs while also using these crises to shift power relationships in favour of the poorest and most excluded – especially women. Advancing women’s rights in emergencies, and specifically advancing women’s leadership in preparedness, response and recovery is a core policy commitment for AA and a signature of its emergency response approach.

The purpose of this review is to identify good practices, challenges and areas for further learning to improve AA’s work to promote women’s rights and protection in emergencies. The review, designed by AA as a meta-evaluation, examines the women’s rights aspects of AA’s emergency response programs as documented in evaluations over the period 2008 to 2015, complemented by additional data analysis, case study review and key stakeholder interviews. The review follows an appreciative enquiry approach to identifying good practices and areas for further development. An evaluation framework based on criteria drawn from the draft AA document ‘Defining our Difference: Women’s rights, leadership, and protection in emergencies (2015)’ (Annex 9) was used to assess good practice. As a meta-evaluation, the review was limited to the evidence documented in evaluations.

The review found many examples of where AA’s emergency responses are driving forward an agenda to advance women’s rights, including stand out cases studies such as the Kenya drought response (2011-2), Philippines Typhoon Haiyan (2013-4) response and the Gaza response to Operation Protective Edge (2014). Detailed case studies have been developed and are included at Annex 1 of this report. A number of emerging good practices were also identified in recent and ongoing responses such as Vanuatu and Greece (2015), which provide valuable ideas for the future directions of AA’s approaches. There were also evaluations that provided important lessons for where AA can do better in terms of advancing women’s rights. These were often (though not exclusively) older responses, and the good news is that the meta-evaluation showed improvements over time, suggesting AA’s investment in the women’s rights in emergencies agenda is gaining traction.

A number of other broad trends, discussed in section 4 of the report, were identified through the meta-evaluation. In almost all of the evaluations, AA’s focus on advancing women’s rights increased over time, ramping up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and later phases of the emergency response. There were persistent challenges in addressing women’s rights and protection in the immediate phase of the response. This is where the emerging good practices of Greece and Vanuatu offer promise. While an evaluation for Greece is not yet available and the evaluation for Vanuatu is being drafted, the available evidence suggests they show how AA can fill an important niche by implementing specific women’s rights programming from the very beginning of a response. The other persistent challenge identified in the meta-evaluation was integration of women’s rights considerations into broader response programming such as a shelter programs, which is interlinked with the first phase response. There is an opportunity for AA to review how it mainstreams women’s rights as well as how it delivers standalone women’s rights work in the early response phase. The meta-analysis also showed that the context of AA’s programme matters, and AA’s operational strategies may need to vary depending on whether it’s a new programme, a young programme or a well established program.

The ten guiding principles set out in ‘Defining our Difference: Women’s rights, leadership, and

protection in emergencies', 2015 (Draft) provided a useful framework for identifying, assessing and exploring the ways in which AA is advancing women's rights consistent with its aspirations, and where further investment could strengthen implementation. The various practical examples set out in this report, such as the strategies AA uses to support women's leadership or the ways in which AA provides safe spaces for women, start to build a picture of a distinctive, rights based response which can be further developed to provide replicable models for future responses.

Across all evaluations there were standout examples of good practices as well as responses that didn't meet AA's commitments, but looking at the overall trends across the 13 evaluations there was clear evidence of women's rights approaches which are consistently being delivered with positive results. These include focusing on women's rights as non-negotiables, building on the existing capacities of women and their organisations, ensuring women's equal participation in decision making, creating safe spaces for women, and strengthening access to resources.

For some criteria, evaluation results showed a mix of successes and challenges, such as addressing barriers to leadership and taking sides with the poor. AA is working hard to promote women's leadership and in many cases is doing so extremely successfully through multiple strategies such as empowering women and making relief conditional on their engagement as leaders, but deep structural and relational barriers to leadership, including but not limited to cultural norms, men's attitudes and the burden of unpaid care pose ongoing challenges. For 'taking sides with the poor', AA demonstrates a strong commitment to prioritizing women and their needs, however evaluations also found that analysis of poverty and exclusion could be deepened. AA will also need to reflect on how it best leverages its strategy of working with women leaders, usually not the most marginalized in the community, to open doors for the most marginalized women in the community. The criteria of 'campaigning against structural causes' by involving women and their organizations in policy work and 'driving a transformative agenda' were difficult to assess due to a lack of specific evidence in the evaluations.

AA is committed to embedding community based, women-led protection mechanisms in its responses, and it has many of the building blocks in place for strong, niche protection approaches. However, the meta-evaluation results suggest that further work on protection is needed to deliver strong results. This includes building understanding of what 'embedded, community based, women-led protection mechanisms' (alongside or as part of HRBA) require in practice, ensuring responses are based on context specific analysis of protection risks including do no harm considerations, and designing responses which take a comprehensive view of those risks in partnership with other actors.

The review used key stakeholder interviews, case studies and analysis of response documentation to identify the factors helping to drive successful women's rights programming and areas for further investment. This analysis focused on the internal capacities, specifically considering: political leadership and commitment; people; programming and processes; policies guidelines and tools; and partnerships. Key strengths and drivers of success include:

- Strong political commitment and leadership, in particular from iHART and ActionAid Australia, combined with leaders with women's rights expertise and commitment at the country programme level
- Programming which places women's rights front and centre of response objectives, supported by long term country strategies focused on advancing women's rights and commitment of budget to women's rights.
- Extensive practical experience in implementing women's rights work through supporting

women's groups such as REFLECT processes, safe spaces for women and children, women's rights training and awareness, women-led disaster preparedness and strengthening women's access to resources

- Policies and guidelines which clearly communicate the importance of women's rights and tools which include attention to women's rights help draw attention to women's rights in assessments, sitreps and reports
- Partnerships with local women's organisations which have been the essential ingredient in reaching women, building on their capacities, promoting women's leadership and engaging women in policy work.

These impressive strengths provide a strong foundation for AA's women's rights in emergencies signature approach. The following areas of investment could add further value:

- Continuing to deepen and widen buy in across the organization for humanitarian response and women's rights within that
- Increasing the available technical expertise on women's rights and protection, prioritizing women's rights expertise in recruitments and building the capacity of senior emergency managers to lead a women's rights focused response in practice
- Prioritising fundraising and budget allocations for women's rights and protection, reviewing and prioritizing a strengthened focus on women's rights in the immediate phase of the response including in other sectors, and further articulating and documenting AA's program approaches and models for response, building on the good practice examples
- Reviewing, rationalizing and simplifying guidelines and tools for emergency response, especially on women's rights analysis and protection
- Strengthening the quality and documentation of women's rights analysis
- Continuing to prioritise and build partnerships with local actors, in particular women's organisations and networks and embed approaches to use their skills strategically in responses, while also considering how AA can use its voice to greater effect by working with peers to influence the humanitarian system to deliver better outcomes for women.

The review looked at the work of three peers (IRC, CARE, Oxfam) that also have a strong focus on women and found that each agency has a clear and unique voice on gender and women's rights, with a lot of complementarities and opportunities to reinforce the message globally about the importance of women's rights in emergencies. Compared to peers, AA has a clear niche in its practical expression of the rights based approach and standalone women's rights programming, as well as its focus on and advocacy for women's leadership in preparedness, response and recovery.

Finally, the meta-evaluation considered the extent to which the 13 evaluations under review had addressed women's rights and whether they provided sufficient evidence to tell the story of how AA is advancing women's rights in emergencies. Some suggestions for strengthening the focus on women's rights in evaluation practice are made, including better use of Sex and Age Disaggregated Data (SADD), more specific instructions for evaluators, collecting stories of change and engaging more closely in interagency evaluations.

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## Recommendations

Many practical suggestions have been made throughout this report for AA to consider as it advances its women's rights in emergencies capacity. The following recommendations focus on a small number of high level strategic priorities, which, if implemented, will capture many of the practical suggestions made elsewhere in the report.

1. Use the Defining our Difference document as the framework for the programmatic elements of AA's signature approach and build on the good practice examples to further develop, document and disseminate replicable program models and methodologies. This should include all of the ten elements in the framework, but in particular focus on:
  - a. Consolidating AA's unique approach to women's safe spaces characterized by a strong emphasis on access to information, rights awareness, protection and empowerment
  - b. Reviewing AA's methodologies for supporting women's collective organization in emergencies, considering all of the approaches currently in use but in particular exploring REFLECT methods and how these can be applied in emergency response
  - c. Documenting AA's successful strategies for engaging women as active participants, decision makers and advancing women's leadership in a short, easy to use tool which can help other programs put these strategies in place
  - d. Making clear the standards and approaches for embedding community based protection mechanisms in the response (see Recommendation 2)
  - e. Sharing the Defining our difference document widely and pursue opportunities to build awareness and buy in across the organization.
2. Review AA's approach to protection to ensure a broader understanding of what embedding community based, women-led standalone protection mechanisms looks like in practice and incorporate this into AA's program model. In the immediate term, seek to close 'gaps' in protection nets by strengthening AA's implementation of consistent protection risk analysis, including risks arising from AA's programming ('do no harm'), and working with others on issues like referral mechanisms, and in coordination forums such as the protection cluster and GBV AoR.
3. Invest in strengthening AA's attention to women's rights in the immediate (first 3-6 months) of an emergency by:
  - a. Stronger, documented women's rights analysis about the specific impacts of the emergency and context specific needs
  - b. Bringing forward the implementation of AA's signature standalone women's rights activities into the immediate phase of the response, in particular safe spaces, access to information and rights awareness work alongside urgent shelter, WASH and livelihood responses
  - c. Better incorporating women's rights considerations into all aspects of the response, including shelter, WASH and livelihoods. Recognise these essential life-saving basic rights as necessary enablers to address women's rights more fully if designed and delivered with the right focus on women
  - d. Increasing staff capacity for early responders to implement women's rights work (see recommendation 7 below).

4. Tailor AA's preparedness and response strategies according to the 3 main pre-emergency programming contexts, with explicit attention to the following:
  - a. Where there is a pre-existing AA program with strong women's rights programming, ensure the emergency response directly engages and leverages the pre-existing women's rights programs including technical staff, partners, women's rights networks and approaches such as women's forums and REFLECT circles. Ensure these programs and staff are involved in preparedness planning and women's rights and DRR programs are closely integrated
  - b. Where there is a pre-existing AA program which doesn't already have strong women's rights programming in place, ensure iHART support to the program prioritises early deployment of women's rights expertise and provide close support and oversight on women's rights to the leader of the response. Where possible, support capacity building on women's rights during preparedness planning, and for high risk countries, engage with AA's broader women's empowerment teams to identify opportunities to strengthen the women's rights focus in the long term and connect with national women's rights networks
  - c. In emergency responses in a new location with no pre-existing program, ensure the team deployed, in particular the manager, has strong women's rights expertise. Commit to women's rights as the specific value added that AA can bring and work closely with others to ensure AA's response is integrating with longer term partners.
5. Ensure that fundraising for and allocation of funding to women's rights in emergencies work is prioritized by all AA fundraising affiliates. This includes ensuring appeal funds can be directed to women's rights work including leadership and protection; advocating with donors; working to ensure funding targets for women's rights are met at least at the same level as other sectors; demanding mainstreaming of women's rights in other sector programs funded, in addition to supporting budget allocations for standalone programming.
6. Revise and simplify AA's guidelines and tools for women's rights work in emergencies to provide clear, practical resources which help staff implement the women's rights focus in practice. Top priorities might include guidance on rapid women's rights analysis in emergencies, protection approaches and how to implement the key program elements of AA's programmatic approaches and models.
7. Make strategic, targeted investments in increasing AA's staff capacity to implement women's rights in emergency response, prioritizing the following three actions:
  - a. Increase the available technical expertise on women's rights and protection in emergencies available to provide global leadership and support including by ensuring key women's rights experts are trained in humanitarian response
  - b. Make women's rights expertise a priority in all senior emergency manager recruitments
  - c. Provide capacity building to build the women's rights and protection skills of senior emergency managers focusing on iHART, the EFAST roster and high risk country managers.
8. Consider piloting work in one or two specific contexts around connecting local, national and global policy and campaigning work, specifically involving women and their organisations, to provide more evidence about this aspect of AA's work and to learn more about how to strengthen the women's rights focus and connectedness of campaigning in emergencies.

Given the importance of women's land rights in emergencies, and AA's Key Change Promise to increase women's land rights, consider building a campaign and expertise around this theme. Emerging policy discussions with women's networks in Nepal may provide an opportunity to explore this further. Another opportunity for pursuing a local and global policy campaign might be around the South Asia Women's Resilience Index, building on work to deepen its impact locally in Bangladesh.

9. Strengthen work with other organisations with similar aims for greater impact and influence at the field and global levels, including:
  - a. Coordination bodies and peer NGOs, including participating in the protection cluster and bringing women's specific concerns and rights analysis into other clusters
  - b. Networks of women's organisations
  - c. Partners, including adopting a partnership strategy in emergency responses which plays to the strengths and complementary skills of all partners, using available women's rights expertise where it exists to help build the capacity of other partners.
10. Build a stronger evidence base for AA's women's rights in emergencies work through a stronger focus on women's rights in evaluations, in line with the suggestions made in section 8 of this report. Incorporate these into the AA evaluation guidelines currently being developed (in draft) by AAI.

## 1. Background

ActionAid is an international agency working to promote the rights of women and men in 45 countries. ActionAid sees emergencies as part of the cycle of rights denial that causes poverty. It seeks to respond to immediate needs while also using these crises to shift power relationships in favour of the poorest and most excluded – especially women.

ActionAid (AA) Australia has commissioned this review of ActionAid’s support for women’s rights in emergencies on behalf of the ActionAid Federation in order to identify key themes and lessons relating to ActionAid’s women’s rights work in emergencies. The review has been designed as a meta-evaluation of emergency response evaluations, complemented by additional desk based data collection and analysis (see section 3 below). The work was made possible thanks to funding from DFID through ActionAID UK through their PPA agreement.

The goal of the meta-evaluation, according to the terms of reference, is:

*‘to identify good practices, challenges and areas for further learning to improve ActionAid’s work to support and promote women’s rights and protection in emergencies....A secondary goal of the review is to inform ActionAid’s draft evaluation and emergency evaluation guidelines to ensure inclusion of a strong gender perspective across all components of the response’ (Terms of Reference)*

The review follows an appreciative enquiry approach to identifying good practices and areas for further development. The primary audience is key stakeholders in ActionAid International, including Country Programs, the International Humanitarian Action and Resilience Team (iHART) and ActionAid Australia who is delegated with leading global work on women’s rights in emergencies.

## 2. ActionAid’s commitments to women’s rights

ActionAid has made high level policy commitments to advancing women’s rights. These commitments are outlined in a number of core policy documents, including People’s Action in Practice Handbook, AA’s Emergency Preparedness and Response Handbook, and a new draft document titled ‘Defining our Difference: Women’s Rights, Leadership and Protection in Emergencies’.

AA’s global strategy, People’s Action in Practice provides the framework for AA’s human rights based approach and sets out AA’s key change promises (KCPs) as global priorities. KCP’s 7 and 8 specifically refer to AA’s response to disasters, but it’s also important to note that other priorities, such as women’s land rights, increasing women’s control over their bodies and generating women-centred economic alternatives are also critical issues in emergency response.

### Box 1. Key Change Promises, People’s Action in Practice

1. Securing women’s land rights
2. Promoting sustainable agriculture
3. Holding governments to account on public services
4. Achieving redistributive resourcing of development
5. Transforming education for girls and boys
6. Harnessing youth leadership to end poverty and injustice
7. Building people’s resilience to conflict and disaster
8. Responding to disasters through rights

In its approach to emergencies, AA recognises that women living in poverty and exclusion are the most affected during emergencies while also often the first responders. AA is committed to building women's capacity to lead disaster preparedness, response and recovery, and to ensuring humanitarian assistance and protection efforts promote women's rights and empowerment. Specifically, AA commits to women's rights as one of three core outcome areas, to ensure that:

*Women and women's institutions are sufficiently empowered, mobilised and engaged in decision-making processes from local to national levels to lead emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts* (EPRH, section 1.3, <http://eprhandbook.actionaid.org/section1/what-is-actionaids-approach-to-emergencies/>)

AA's approach to emergency response is guided by AA's overall Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) which includes 8 principles. Advancing women's rights is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of these principles. AA's Emergency Preparedness and Response Handbook sets out a series of minimum standards (17 in total) for advancing women's rights in i) all programming (6), ii) emergency response (6) and iii) disaster preparedness (5)

#### **Box 2. HRBA Principles**

1. Putting the active agency of people living in poverty first – and building their awareness of rights
2. Analysing and confronting unequal power
3. Advancing women's rights
4. Building partnerships
5. Being accountable and transparent
6. Monitoring, evaluating and evidencing our impact

(<http://eprhandbook.actionaid.org/section1/principles-that-guide-actionaids-work-in-emergencies/>).

Further guidance on putting the women's rights principle into practice is also detailed in a later chapter (<http://eprhandbook.actionaid.org/section7/womens-rights-in-emergencies/>) which establishes guiding principles and provides advice on women's rights in needs assessments, participation, immediate response, violence against women, and women's leadership in policy processes.

Finally, a recent document has been developed which aims to provide further guidance on AA's unique women's rights signature. 'Defining our Difference: Women's rights, leadership and protection' (AA 2015) (Annex 9), has been drafted by a group of AA practitioners and leaders on women's rights and emergencies and sets out 10 guiding principles for AA's response to emergencies. These guiding principles, while newly articulated, start to define the key elements of AA's signature for women's rights in emergencies, and for this reason they have been used as the primary framework for this evaluation. See section 5.4 for further discussion and suggestions relating to AA's policies and guidelines.

#### **Box 3. Defining our Difference: Women's Rights, Leadership and Protection, 2015**

1. Women's rights as non-negotiables
2. Taking sides with the poor
3. Building on existing capabilities
4. Addressing barriers to leadership
5. Strengthening access to resources
6. Creating safe spaces for women
7. Promoting women's equal participation
8. Embedding community-based women

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Evaluation questions

The terms of reference (Annex 2) for the meta-evaluation established an initial set of evaluation questions which AA sought to answer through this review. As part of the inception planning process, the evaluations were slightly revised and agreed as below.

#### Box 4. Evaluation Questions

##### Examples of contribution to advancement of women's rights in emergencies

- Based on available evaluations of emergency responses and supporting documentation, are there examples of where ActionAid emergency response actions have supported the advancement of women's rights?
- What stories do these examples tell about how to advance women's rights, in particular women's leadership and role as change agents in their communities, in an emergency context – considering both recurrent themes and standout or innovative cases?
- What challenges and gaps can be identified?
- What AA approaches contributed to positive changes, considering in particular AA's focus on women's leadership and women's rights guidance?
- What key internal drivers (people, processes, policies and tools) support or inhibit effective women's rights in emergencies programming?

##### Women's rights analysis

- To what extent has women's rights analysis been conducted during assessments and program planning?
- Does the women's rights analysis undertaken reflect ActionAid's guidance on women's rights in emergencies?
- To what extent does the response design and implementation utilize and respond to the women's rights analysis conducted?

##### Integration of protection

- Considering selected case studies, how did AA's emergency response programs identify and respond to protection issues faced by women, including GBV and sexual violence?
- Were protection issues identified in the response recommended for longer-term engagement at the policy or program level by AA?

##### AA evaluation guidelines

- To what extent do the evaluations conducted by AA address women's rights issues?
- How can AA evaluations be strengthened to support learning and improvements in women's rights programming? What are the implications and recommendations for AA's draft evaluation guidelines?

##### AA in relation to peers

- How does ActionAid compare to other international humanitarian actors working in this area drawing on publicly available reports for the same/similar emergency

## 3.2 Approach

**Background document review, clarification of scope and inception planning** Background documents were reviewed and initial discussions with key stakeholders took place. The evaluation methodology and matrix were designed and shared in an inception report (Annex 3 and Annex 4).

**Meta evaluation of existing evaluations** A meta-evaluation of the response evaluations supplied by ActionAid (refer Annex 5 for full list) was conducted using the evaluation matrix attached at Annex 4 to: i) Analyse evidence of good practice in women's rights programming and identify trends and case studies; and ii) Assess the evaluations' treatment of women's rights issues.

**Detailed analysis of case studies using an appreciative enquiry approach** Based on the evidence from the meta-evaluation, six examples were identified for further analysis. In addition to the evaluation reports, documentation such as emergency response plans, assessment reports and project reports were analysed and interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. Three examples were developed into full case studies (Annex 1). The analysis took an appreciative enquiry approach to identify strengths, and to investigate the factors which have enabled and supported this. Challenges, gaps and recommendations for improvement were also identified.

**Key stakeholder interviews with global key AA and peer INGO informants** Key stakeholder interviews were conducted with 12 key informants from AA International, AA Australia, AA country programs and humanitarian gender advisors in three peer agencies (CARE, IRC, Oxfam) to explore global trends, priorities and strategies relating to women's rights work in emergencies. The list of stakeholders interviewed and key questions are in the Annexes.

**Analysis, documentation and generation of recommendations** The data from the meta-evaluation, case studies and key stakeholder interviews were analysed and are documented in this report. Priority recommendations have been generated focusing on areas for greatest potential to continue to build its approach to women's rights in emergencies.

## 3.3 Limitations

AA designed this review with meta-evaluation as the primary methodology. A meta-evaluation provides a strong foundation for examining available evidence, but also has a number of limitations. In particular, the dataset is limited to those emergencies where there is an evaluation available, and therefore in depth analysis of some other potentially interesting cases is limited. Examples from other countries (such as Greece and Sierra Leone) have been referenced where information was available. Secondly, the meta-analysis is limited to the evidence available in the evaluation reports. This is influenced by available M&E data, focus of the evaluation and bias of evaluators, noting in particular that five of 13 evaluations were conducted by the same evaluator. Wherever possible and in particular for the case studies, additional documentation was reviewed. In some cases, where evaluations did not provide a reliable assessment, they were discounted from the meta-analysis. The meta-evaluation is also limited in scope to the emergency responses and the results documented in available evaluations. This means conclusions about long term impacts of post emergency programming are not feasible beyond the evaluation period. There are undoubtedly many additional good practice examples in AA's global programs, but the review could only consider those evaluated, documented and shared.

## 4. Meta-analysis: good practice in women’s rights in emergencies

### 4.1 Global trends in good practices

**Table 1. Evaluations including good practice examples of women’s rights programming\***

Positive examples of women’s rights programming	Limited focus on women’s rights or insufficient evidence	Further research required
Kenya Drought 2011-2012	Haiti Earthquake 2010	Nepal Earthquake 2015
Philippines Cyclone 2013-14	Myanmar Cyclone 2008	Vanuatu Cyclone 2015
Gaza Conflict 2014	Gaza Conflict 2010	
Pakistan Floods 2010	DEC evaluations	

\* Dates in this table indicate the year the crisis occurred. References to specific evaluations throughout this report indicate the year of the evaluation: eg Kenya drought 2011-12 covered by mid term evaluation in 2012 and final evaluation in 2015, Philippines 2013 Typhoon evaluated in 2015, Gaza 2014 crisis response evaluated in 2015.

The TOR asks whether the evaluations provide examples of where AA is supporting the advancement of women’s rights and what lessons can be learned from these examples. Four good practice examples were identified (see Table 1), with a further two cases requiring further investigation. Detailed case studies are included at Annex 1. Some general observations can be made about the availability of examples of good practice.

**Evaluations don’t tell the full story of AA’s approach to women’s rights in emergencies** The 2015 evaluations for Gaza, Philippines and Kenya provide positive examples of where some evidence has been documented about the difference AA is making in women’s lives, told through short stories of particular women. In general however, across the other evaluations, there is limited attention to women’s rights. This means that the evidence available doesn’t tell the full story of what AA is doing about women’s rights, what AA has achieved, the difference it is making in the lives of women and why this work is important. Other documentation and key stakeholder interviews were required to piece the story together. Stronger collection and documentation of evidence specifically focused on AA’s women’s rights work will be important to further develop AA’s emerging good practices and to contribute to AA’s policy and influencing objectives (see section 8 on evaluations).

**Improvements over time** The analysis suggests that AA’s focus on women’s rights has strengthened over time, with more recent responses demonstrating stronger performance on women’s rights. Some recent examples demonstrate persistent challenges.

**Challenges in the immediate response phase** AA’s focus on women’s rights appears stronger in evaluations where there has been a longer time frame for the response. Integrating the women’s rights focus in the immediate response (first 3 months) remains challenging across the board. The women’s rights focus begins to come to the fore in the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase. This is most likely the case in Nepal, where the real time evaluation, conducted 3 months into the response, found that the response had not adequately delivered on AA’s women’s rights focus, whereas additional evidence suggests that since then a much a stronger focus on women’s rights has been delivered.

**Good examples in new places, and different approaches needed depending on AA’s presence** The good practice examples from Gaza, the Philippines, potentially Vanuatu and the Syrian refugee response in Greece demonstrate that a strong women’s rights response is possible in places where AA does not have a pre-emergency presence. Where AA is entering a location for the first time,

there is an opportunity for AAI to go in to a response with a clear sense of purpose in terms of adding value on women's rights, and putting the right staff in place to do that.

In places where AA does have a pre-crisis presence, the extent to which the long-term program already has established women's rights programs and capacities and is able to use that expertise in the emergency plays a determining role in the success of the women's rights aspects of the response. A strong, long-term women's rights capacity that is able to be quickly and fully engaged in the response is ideal. The response in Kenya, detailed in a case study at Annex 1, is an example of this. While not covered by an evaluation and therefore not included in the meta-evaluation, stakeholders also suggested that AA's response to the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone (described at Box 5) was also a good example of building a women's rights focused emergency response on the foundation of a strong pre-existing long term women's rights program.

**Box 5. Sierra Leone Ebola Response – building emergency response on a strong foundation of long term women's rights programming**

ActionAid's contribution to contain the disease moved along the restoration of dignity and supporting people through a period of hunger and starvation... We also completed REFLECT-Action training, business training for women and gave grants to 490 women to undertake small businesses in their community – a way of bringing life back into the community... As the Ebola scourge left lots of women and girls vulnerable to violence, AASL supported 210 affected women and girls to be trained on leadership development skills,

The third scenario is the most challenging for good results – ie, where AA has a program in place prior to the emergency but where that program doesn't yet have a strong women's rights programmes (eg Haiti, Myanmar based on evaluations) or where there is a strong women's rights capacity but it is not adequately engaged in the early phase of the response (Nepal according to the RTE). Shifting gears of an established presence to help the program both respond to an emergency quickly and adopt a women's rights focus where it has not done so before is difficult and takes time. The solution to this challenge is twofold and lies in the broader and longer term priorities of the organization. First, the broader women's rights focus and capacities of long term programs should be strengthened in countries which are high risk to disasters. Secondly, where AA supports emergency preparedness of country programs, careful attention should be given to ensuring that women's rights teams and programs are closely engaged and will have a central role in an emergency response.

**Opportunity to influence and engage more on women's rights when participating in joint evaluations (eg DEC)** The three DEC evaluations included in the meta-evaluation don't provide any evidence relating to AA's women's rights programming. While DEC reports intentionally aggregate their evaluation to look at the collective contribution of DEC partners rather than individual agencies, two issues arise for AA to consider. First, the extent to which the DEC evaluators consider women's rights is variable, from completely gender neutral in one to quite good mainstreaming of gender in another. There was little specific analysis of some of the women's rights and protection priorities, such as leadership, which AA focuses on. Secondly, the DEC reports do identify and name agencies that are demonstrating good practices. Several agencies are cited for strong performance on addressing issues affecting women but AA is not included. While its not possible to draw any conclusions from this, AA could consider possible implications and when participating in DEC evaluations actively engage to first ensure women's rights issues are well considered and secondly provide evaluators with a good understanding of AA's good practices on women's rights.

## 4.2 Trends in AA's performance against criteria for women's rights programming

The ten guiding principles for women's rights in emergencies outlined in AA's draft 'Defining our Difference' document were used to assess whether individual responses met AA's commitments and to review consistency of performance across the evaluations. All 13 available evaluations were analysed, however the three joint evaluations and two poor quality evaluations were discounted on the basis that they could not provide a reliable assessment of AA's response and would skew the overall results. Each individual evaluation was assessed against the criteria as: meeting criteria; partially meeting; negative finding; or insufficient evidence and recorded in an evidence matrix. This was used to determine overall trends, as outlined in the table below.

**Table 2 ActionAid commitments based on 'Defining our Difference, 10 guiding principles'**

<p><b>Consistently positive performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's rights as non-negotiables</li> <li>• Building on existing capacities</li> <li>• Strengthening access to resources</li> <li>• Creating safe spaces for women</li> <li>• Promoting women's equal participation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Variable results</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking sides with the poor</li> <li>• Addressing barriers to leadership</li> </ul>
<p><b>Negative findings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding community based, women-led protection mechanisms</li> </ul>	<p><b>Insufficient evidence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaigning against structural causes</li> <li>• Driving a transformative agenda</li> </ul>

### Criteria 1 Women's rights as non-negotiables

- *Is a focus on women's rights an explicit focus of the response plan?*
- *Is there evidence of women's rights being integrated into all areas of the response as a cross cutting issue?*

### Findings Consistent

- Women's rights feature in the objectives of almost all AA responses evaluated and are explicitly prioritized.
- Women's rights as non-negotiable is a message supported by senior leadership.
- There is scope to further this commitment through strengthening the integration of women's rights in other sectors of a response, eg shelter.
- Where there are many objectives and only one which is gender specific, the women's rights focus of the program can be diluted, while other response sectors can be gender-blind.

#### Box 6. Women at the centre

Overall the changes achieved in women status - and therefore in their inclusion as active actors in community (both in terms of appreciation of their role by others as well as in terms of self confidence) - is palpable. Women were put at the center of the action, and action was built around them. Increasing even further the quotas for

## Box 7. Examples of women's rights in objectives

### Vanuatu Emergency Response Plan Objectives

Build safe spaces for women to organise and develop a strong voice to address and strengthen women's leadership on protection issues post Cyclone Pam and future disasters that directly impact women. To deliver this vision, the project will have two key areas of focus:

- Develop leadership and disaster risk management capacity, and deepen understanding of women's rights as human rights to enable long-term sustainable change in Vanuatu through the mobilisation of women through Women's Forums.
- Mobilise women to take collective leadership to monitor and advise on protection issues post-disaster as well as disaster risk reduction work through the development of a National Women's Platform on Disasters

### Nepal Emergency Response Plan Objectives

- 18,585 vulnerable households will have access to immediate and adequate food relief to cover a period of 15 days, in Rasuwa, Kavre, Kathmandu, Dolakha and Sindhupalchok
- 7,104 women have access to essential items in women friendly special kits in all six districts
- 6,000 households have access to safe immediate emergency shelter in all six districts
- 5,450 households have access to safe, culturally appropriate temporary shelter solutions that progressively contribute and promote appropriate long-term self-recovery through cash for work approach in Rasuwa, Kavre, Dolakha, Kathmandu, and Sindhupalchok
- Approx. 7,200 women have access to psychosocial support services, information on GBV and referral

## Criteria 2. Taking sides with the poor

- *Have the material, psychosocial and information needs of women been prioritized?*
- *Is there evidence that AA has analysed power and poverty and prioritized resources towards working with poor and marginalized women?*

### Findings **Variable**

- AA consistently takes sides with women.
- In some cases, despite a commitment to prioritize the needs of women, other factors compromise this (eg focusing livelihoods response on fishing where men are the primary fishers, or lack of attention to women's specific needs in shelter programming).
- Some evaluations suggest that AA is not always successful in reaching the most marginalized women. This is a recurring theme in evaluations conducted by the same

## Box 8. Challenges to taking sides with poor women

'...most interventions were mainly about reverting to the 'status quo', to the conditions and roles that pre-existed in the area. This meant that means of living were given to people in relation to their previous jobs. The fishermen received fishing nets, the farmers - seeds and fertilizers, the carpenters - tools (and it has to be noticed that frequently the roles that received more support were those held by men)'. *Myanmar Evaluation, p29*

'We found that although some categories were targeted (ie women) or made more visible (people with disabilities) local committees and

evaluator (see Box 8 for examples). There are two potential reasons cited. Firstly, analysis of poverty and exclusion may not be deep enough to move beyond prioritizing women to prioritizing poor women. Secondly, AA's focus on women's leadership means that AA often ends up working with women who already have relative power and capacity as leaders in their communities rather than the most marginalized women. This second point needs to be balanced against a justifiable perspective that working with female community leaders who have capacity and potential to open up spaces may be a necessary strategy to break ground for other more marginalised women to also participate in leadership roles.

### Criteria 3. Building on existing capabilities

- *Does the response engage and support women as first responders?*
- *Has AA invested in the capacity of women and their institutions?*

### Findings Consistent

- Evaluations find that AA consistently engages and supports women as first responders in different ways including as participants, organisers and leaders.
- Partnerships with women's organisations are one of the most important ways AA engages women as first responders and helps to build their capacities.
- AA invests in women's capacities by supporting women's organisations and collectives of different forms and routinely provides training for women, particularly on women's rights and leadership skills.
- The number of approaches AA uses to engage women and their organisations and build their capacity is quite wide as

demonstrated by the Kenya case below. While diversity enables a context specific response, it would be useful for AA to consider which approaches are most effective and best for replicating in emergencies. This would help with building capacity to implement those specific approaches in early phase response. This same point applies for strategies for ensuring women's participation, promoting women's leadership and creating safe spaces.

- While key stakeholders suggested that REFLECT Circles are the tried and tested methodology that AA most widely uses to support women working together, it was not evident through the evaluations that REFLECT circles were the dominant approach being used in emergencies, rather they are one of many groups being supported, as listed below. The Kenya 2015 evaluation did however find that REFLECT circles were more effective in providing opportunities for transformative leadership so it would be useful to consider how the REFLECT methodology can be best adapted use in emergency response.

#### Box 9. Investing in women and their organisations

Lorna is now the leader of a local women's organisation called UKTO that was set up in February 2015 to strengthen women's empowerment, prevent violence against women and children and access support from the municipality for their villages....In the early stages, ActionAid and local partner PKKK supported women like those in UKTO with relief items including household items and shelter repair kits. More recently, training has been provided to UKTO

#### Box 10. AA support for women's collective action

The Kenya drought response supported women through the following forms of organisation and collective work: user groups; self help groups; management committees (Disaster Risk Management and Vigilance committees); Cooperatives; Common interest groups; REFLECT circles; Local networks.

'Different groups have been promoted and supported by the programme. We provide a list of the many different groups supported to: 1) show the richness of the programme and 2) suggest the need, for ActionAid, to have an overview of the different modalities of collective action it supports, at different levels.

Some modalities are very well set and tested (for example, REFLECT Circles, women networks). Other

#### Criteria 4. Addressing barriers to leadership

- *How has AA addressed barriers to women's leadership?*
- *Is there evidence that AA has explicitly supported and promoted women's leadership in the response?*

#### Findings **Variable**

- AA is increasingly working to advance women's leadership in emergencies.
- Strategies to support women's leadership include training on women's rights, making relief conditional on women's engagement as leaders, working with women's organisations, providing safe spaces and control of resources to women.
- While AA is putting in place positive strategies to empower women as leaders, there is less evidence showing how some persistent barriers to women's leadership (such as men's engagement, burden of unpaid care etc) are addressed in emergencies. Linking work in emergency response to long term work on women's rights is essential to combat these issues.

#### Box 11. Women's leadership

The committees set by ActionAid required that women were in leading position, and we found impressive changes in their power to participate in decision making. *Kenya final evaluation, 2015, p.89*

'ActionAid has a strong focus on working on women rights. In the context of Gaza this requires to remove barriers for inclusion that are becoming even more ingrained in society. Women had indeed overcome some of the barriers that confine them at home, by participating in psychosocial activities. They reported that it was not too challenging to be allowed to leave the house, as long as they could access some benefits. This emphasis on benefits, however, means that the intervention might not be sustainable in the long term, and other incentives / support need to be provided. Deeper barriers to inclusion, such as social norms, were not tackled, which is fully understandable within a relief programme, but staff are clear about their existence and need to work on them in the long term. *Gaza Mid-term Evaluation, 2015, p.17*

### Criteria 5. Strengthening access to resources

- *Did the AA response contribute to increasing women's access to resources?*

#### Findings **Consistent**

- AA's responses consistently include a strong focus on strengthening women's access to resources
- Most of AA's responses included a large component around cash grants or livelihood programs which increased women's access to resources.
- Directing control of resources for aid and planning activities to women has also proven to be an important strategy to promote women's leadership. In examples in Kenya and the Philippines, it was noted that by AA putting resources into the hands of women, it automatically elevated their status, influence and position of leadership in the community, such as in disaster preparedness planning committees, and they were immediately better able to exercise their leadership and ensure planning reflected women's concerns.

### Criteria 6. Creating safe spaces for women

- *Did the response contribute to creating safe spaces for women?*
- *Did the response support women coming together to build collective agency and solidarity?*

#### Findings **Consistent**

- AA's responses routinely create safe spaces for women its emergency responses. These have taken different forms including formal Women and Child Friendly Spaces, dialogue alongside other activities (eg livelihood training groups, self help groups), information centres, or REFLECT circles.
- While safe spaces for women are common strategies used by many agencies, AA's use of them to explicitly support rights awareness and solidarity provides its distinctiveness. Safe spaces for women are emerging as a key feature of AA's women's rights in emergencies signature. Many of these are new or recent initiatives which are still evolving. To this end safe spaces merit further exploration in terms of what approaches work best, and to develop tools and guidelines to help country programmes implement them quickly and effectively as a key element in AA's response model.

#### Box 12. Strengthening access to resources

In Gaza, AA supported women with cash grants, livelihood assets and training. In the Philippines, AA supported the recovery of economic alternatives for women affected by the crisis. In Kenya, AA transformed women's

#### Box 13. Examples of AA safe spaces

In Greece in response to the refugee crisis, AA has established women and child friendly spaces where women can come for rest and safety, breastfeeding and childcare, access referrals to health services, information about legal rights and receive dignity kits.

In Vanuatu after Cyclone Pam, AA established information centres which provide information on rights for women, especially around relief efforts. The 'blue tents' also provided much needed spaces for women to come together and talk in a way not normally possible.

In Nepal, AA is building women and child friendly spaces that provide information and referrals relating to GBV for earthquake affected women.

In Gaza, a program which provided

## Criteria 7. Promoting women's equal participation

- *Did AA ensure equal participation of women in its response programs?*
- *Did AA promote equal participation of women in the broader humanitarian response?*

### Findings **Consistent**

- Evaluations consistently indicate that AA has ensured equal participation of women and provide qualitative evidence to support this finding.
- The absence of Sex and Age Disaggregated Data (SADD) from AA documentation and evaluations makes it difficult to validate participation. More consistent use of SADD would help better understand the work AA is doing and with who (see section 8.2).
- Based on the qualitative evidence provided in the evaluations, AA uses many different strategies for promoting women's equal participation, and these same strategies can also be used to promote women's leadership. Some examples include: working with local women's networks; specifically targeting women for assistance, making relief assistance conditional on women's engagement as leaders and members in decision making groups; engaging women as facilitators and organisers of relief programs, supporting women's solidarity groups such as reflect circles and self help groups; giving women control of specific resources for planning; making clear that women's participation and leadership is a condition of AA providing support to a community and building women's capacities through training and rights awareness.

#### **Box 14 Women's participation**

Philippines women were strongly represented as leaders, community facilitators, volunteers and recipients of project support across the sites visited', *Philippines evaluation, 2015, p.10*

'It was particularly evident that AAIK has advocated hard for female representation in relief committees and that women were

## Criteria 8. Embedding community based, women-led protection mechanisms

- *Did the response explicitly address protection issues of women and girls, including GBV and sexual violence?*
- *Did the response use standalone community based, women led protection mechanisms?*
- *Was protection also integrated throughout the response?*
- *Did protection analysis address the full range of protection issues faced by women and girls?*
- *Were protection issues addressed through long term programs or policy work?*

### Findings **Poor**

- AA has the building blocks in place for strong protection programming, however there is not evidence to demonstrate how these are being brought together in practice for effective protection.
- The evaluations provided limited attention to protection. Where protection is discussed, evaluators suggested that AA had not reached its intended objectives.
- At times, AA talks about women's rights awareness work interchangeably with 'protection', however rights awareness is not in itself protective unless clearly linked to an analysis of protection risks and other protective mechanisms.
- Similarly, safe spaces, ensuring women's participation and leadership, increasing access to resources are all important protection mechanisms, but they are not protective on their own unless clearly designed with a protection focus based on an analysis of context specific protection risks.

- Further, human rights based work can be risky in itself as women start to challenge power holders, with the potential to exacerbate protection risks if a do no harm approach is not consciously adopted. This is true for all of the above strategies – increasing women’s access to and control over resources, establishing women’s spaces and promoting women’s leadership can all increase women’s risks rather than protect them unless designed based on a strong contextual analysis and with deliberate protection strategies and a do no harm lens in mind.
- A challenge for AA relating to protection seems to be clarity about definition of AA’s approach and niche for protection. AA does not take a clinical care approach to GBV response like IRC does, preferring to focus on community based, women-led protection mechanisms, but there is a need to further define what this means in practice, how to use simple, practical tools to support implementation. For example, in Gaza, while the program quickly established psychosocial and legal protection programs, the many agencies already working in the VAW space made it much more difficult to quickly define a role for AA in addressing VAW.
- AA does have a useful protection manual, Security with Dignity, but this was not referred to in case studies or used much by key informants and may need to be adapted for use in women’s rights in emergencies.
- Stakeholders noted a gap in expertise and understanding of protection across the organization, except in pockets such as the AA Australia women’s rights advisor.
- The strategies available and being used by AA make it well placed to provide effective support to protect women in the midst of crisis, but there is a need for AA to work on ‘closing the loop’ more effectively by ensuring its approach to protection is more clearly defined, that protection responses are design based on a clear risk analysis, and that a comprehensive response is provided through connecting to other protection mechanisms.

### **Box 15. Closing the loop in protection programming**

Through one of its partners, PARC, AA works with local Community Protection Committees which includes women and men and which focuses on community risk analysis. The committees do not specifically focus on women’s rights or protection issues, though could offer a platform for this in the future. In the VAW space, AA has conducted an in depth analysis of VAW, released one year after the crisis, but has been challenged in finding a niche in a crowded space to implement specific programming addressing VAW. *Gaza 2015 case study notes and key informant interview*

In Gaza after Operation Cast Lead in 2010, AA conducted focused protection assessments which had the potential to provide the foundation for a strong protection response. However, the final evaluation found that the assessments were disconnected from the broader response and that after the initial assessments, integration of protection work in the response lost momentum, *Gaza Final Evaluation, 2010, p.12*

In the Philippines, AA and partners provided rights awareness training to women including on issues of VAW, however there were few services or options for other support for women experiencing

## Criteria 9. Campaigning against structural causes

- Did AA engage women and their institutions in policy work?
- Did the AA response address issues faced by women through advocacy and policy work?

### Findings Insufficient evidence

- Core to AA's identity and ways of working is its commitment to work in solidarity with local people to take action against structural causes of rights denial.
- The evaluations contained limited information about AA's campaigning, particularly at the global levels, however there were a number of standout local and national examples of AA supporting campaigning and collective action on specific policy issues.
- In Pakistan women's engagement in campaigning was potentially transformational, with women campaigning in the streets with men for the first time. Recent information from Nepal also provides a strong example of supporting women in policy actions. While other evaluations did explore AA's policy work, they didn't specify what roles women and women's networks were playing in policy work.
- A pervasive issue in all of the emergency responses reviewed is land rights. Given AA's key change promise 1 'securing women's land rights', one obvious opportunity would be for AA to develop its expertise around women's land rights and to build broader capacity on campaigning on land rights in emergencies as part of AA's women's rights signature. This would also help bridge the gap between shelter programming and women's rights.
- AA Australia recently launch the South Asia Women's Resilience Index as a global advocacy tool to help better understand women's vulnerability to disasters. Bangladesh is using this index to deepen local understanding of women's resilience. This area of work could provide another opportunity for expanding local-global policy work in other parts of South Asia.
- AA has also recently been engaged in global advocacy on women's rights in emergencies around the World Humanitarian Summit in partnership with CARE and Oxfam, and again in Bangladesh the three agencies worked at a national level to ensure government commitment to women's rights in emergencies in advance of the summit. This is a model which could be replicated elsewhere.

### Box 16. Supporting women to take local action

In Pakistan, as part of AA's flood response, AA helped mobilise the community to take action for women to be able to access a 'WATAN' card which would allow them to receive financial assistance. The action included awareness raising and campaigning at the local and national level. AA supported rights awareness and the mobilisation of people to demand rights from duty bearers. For the first time women protested with male community members. It was also used as an opportunity to bring women to the forefront in asking for their rights. *Pakistan Evaluation, 2010*

In Nepal, in response to requests from women to bring them together, AA Nepal (AAN) organised a National Women's Forum with 49,998 members from 30 districts. Women from existing REFLECT circles were very active in collecting information for INGOs and government. In response to the demands of the women's groups across all the communities where AAN has been working this work will be continued in 2016-2017 as a forum for women across the country to meet and voice their needs to government and partners. This will include the new women's groups in areas AAN has

## Criteria 10. Driving a transformative agenda

- Did the AA response explicitly analyse power and identify opportunities for transformation?

### Findings **Insufficient evidence**

- AA has a clear commitment to analyzing and transforming power, and to using emergencies as an opportunity to bring about transformational change.
- The Kenya case study (see Annex 1) provides a strong example of how an emergency response program was used to transform the lives of women.
- Other smaller examples, such as mobilizing women in Pakistan and opening up spaces for women to talk in Vanuatu also provide examples of AA using emergencies to open the door to change.
- One challenge in assessing the extent to which AA is driving a transformative agenda lies AA's definition of transformative, specifically in relation to women's rights. A key informant defined a transformative approach as being one which saw emergencies as an opportunity for change in power and which sought to exploit that opportunity for positive transformation. In this respect, many of AA's responses are undoubtedly transformative, stepping into new spaces created by emergencies and working to advance women's rights.
- Another commonly referred to definition relating to gender and women's empowerment is that used in the 'Gender Continuum'<sup>1</sup>:  
*Transformative Gender Programming includes policies and programs that seek to transform gender relations to promote equality and achieve program objectives. This approach attempts to promote gender equality by: 1) fostering critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms and dynamics, 2) recognizing and strengthening positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment, 3) promoting the relative position of women, girls and marginalized groups, and transforming the underlying social structures, policies and broadly held social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities.*
- Based on the available evaluations, using this definition, it is less easy to assess the extent to which response programs have been transformational. An exception is Kenya, as there is strong evidence to support the transformational nature of the project.
- In developing its women's rights approach, it would be useful for AA to articulate its definition of transformational work and what it expects to see in outcomes of women's rights in emergency response programmes.

### Box 17. Think Power

The key lesson from this programme could be summarized as: "considering power from the start can make a difference". The programme managed to "think power" from the start.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.igwg.org/igwg\\_media/Training/FG\\_GendrIntegrContinuum.pdf](http://www.igwg.org/igwg_media/Training/FG_GendrIntegrContinuum.pdf)

## Box 18. Transformational change successes and challenges

Relief does not need to be addressed in ways that make people passive recipients. On the contrary, it can be a formidable opportunity for empowerment and transformational changes, which can also take place in the short term. The LRP we visited all were set up at the same time when the crisis hit. ActionAid was to be there in the long term. From the start the organisation was careful to ensure transformation - rather than strengthening - of existing exploitative power structures. Such transformation actually happened *very quickly* - i.e. within the timeframe of a relief/recovery programme. A case in point are the transformation in the role and self-awareness of women. A long-term presence is not a condition to make them happen, but rather to sustain and build on them. *Kenya Evaluation, 2015, p.77*

All stakeholders interviewed made it clear that there has never been a platform for women to meet together before and that it is highly appreciated. In some cases, women became emotional. *"I am very grateful to ActionAid. Never, since Independence, has anyone given us the chance to come together with other women, and we need it"* *Vanuatu Evaluation Field Notes, 2015*

At community level, most groups were established to coordinate livelihoods or shelter work ie basic needs rather than realising rights through changing power relations. While the evaluation team note strong solidarity and relationships within groups and associations, the program did not appear to be

## 5. Success factors and areas for improvement

The following section of the report reflects on the factors contributing to the success (↗) of AA's women's rights in emergencies programming as well as identifying areas where further development and investment may be needed (↘). These findings draw on the evaluations, case studies and discussions with key stakeholders.

### 5.1 Political leadership and commitment

↗ **High-level political commitment to women's rights across the organization** Political leadership and commitment is an essential ingredient for advancing work on women's rights in any organization and a particular strength in ActionAid. The organization-wide, high level political commitment to focusing on women's rights, reflected in high level policy documents and including AA's commitment to a feminist agenda and to unapologetically taking sides with women clearly distinguishes it from most other peer organisations and provides clear direction for the organization. This strength provides a platform for continuing to build AA's women's rights in emergencies work.

↗ **Strong leadership from iHART and ActionAid Australia on women's rights in emergencies** AA Australia and iHART are providing strong strategic and practical leadership to the organization on women's rights in emergencies which is instrumental in driving this work forward. Both teams are engaging at the leadership and technical levels in a thoughtful way which is helping to define AA's distinctive women's rights in emergencies signature.

↗ **Leadership at the country programme level is a critical element for success** Good practice examples (like Gaza, Kenya and the Philippines) have this in common: leadership at the country programme level is confident in saying women's rights are non-negotiable, possesses enough women's rights expertise to be able to see the opportunities, recognizes the real challenges in implementation and is willing to engage technical support to overcome them.

↗ **High-level oversight and accountability for women's rights** High-level accountability and oversight mechanisms are particularly important in delivering responses which meet organizational standards in the midst of complexity. AA has a high-level management oversight group which is activated for significant humanitarian responses. For recent responses, AA Australia, as the AA partner with the delegation for women's rights in emergencies, has sought to strengthen the attention to women's rights within the management oversight processes. The existence of a mechanism such as this and ensuring it has a strong focus on women's rights significantly contributes to accountability for delivering on women's rights commitments and to lending high-level support to country programs in the midst of a response. A focus on women's rights by the oversight group should be developed and maintained as routine into the future.

↗ **Deepening and widening the leadership and internal buy in for humanitarian response and women's rights** While there is strong leadership and broad commitment across the organization for women's rights, there is scope to both deepen and widen the leadership and buy in to AA's women's leadership in emergencies focus. Deepening buy in means ensuring that all staff involved in emergencies understand, believe in and have the capacity to implement AA's focus on women's leadership in emergencies. This means addressing attitudes and behaviors as much as technical knowledge and skills. Key informants suggest that currently there are still challenges relating to not always having a shared understanding of why women's leadership in emergencies is important and how to implement the approach in practice (see more on staff capacity below).

Widening the support for a focus on women's leadership in emergencies refers to engagement of the broader organization (ie beyond those directly involved in humanitarian work, especially women's empowerment teams) in an agenda which contributes to more effective emergency responses. This has several dimensions to it: i) strengthening the organizational understanding of humanitarian emergencies and their place in the lived experience of the women AA works; ii) strengthening the engagement between humanitarian teams and women's empowerment teams to ensure that when an emergency hits, the response builds on a strong platform for women's rights engagement including strong networks; and iii) ensuring that resourcing and practical support for women's rights in emergencies is owned across the federation.

## 5.2 People

↗ **Availability of technical expertise globally** Specific technical expertise in women's rights and protection in emergencies is located in AA Australia (with one dedicated advisor position) and as part of the skillset of other senior managers in AA Australia, iHART and country programs. Five women's rights experts are included on AA's EFAST roster for women rights deployments (though the EFAST roster lacks expertise in protection). This expertise is an asset to AA and an important factor in successful examples of women's rights programming. In terms of reach however, the available expertise is small in number and represents a limitation to the progress AA can expect to make in advancing its women's rights agenda. As part of investing in women's rights as a signature of its emergency response, increasing dedicated technical capacity for women's rights and protection would be a high priority. In addition, exploring ways to increase the emergency skills of

women's rights and protection experts available in the broader organisation is another way to broaden the available pool of experts able to be engaged in emergency response.

📌 **Making women's rights expertise non-negotiable in recruitment and appointments** As discussed under political leadership above, having leaders in place who are firmly committed to women's rights as non negotiable in an emergency response is a key factor in enabling AA to deliver on its women's rights in emergencies focus. iHART has recognized this and has increasingly sought to ensure prioritization of women's right expertise in recruitment for senior emergency managers, such as for the current Greece and Philippines responses. This has at times been challenged in the recruitment process, however it should be prioritized as a key strategy for AA in delivering on its commitments. Where staff are recruited into emergency management roles without women's rights expertise, they should be targeted for capacity building on AA's approach to women's rights as part of onboarding and orientation.

📌 **Strengthening capacity of emergency teams to implement the women's rights focus** Increasing the capacity of AA's staff at all levels to implement women's rights work in emergencies was consistently identified by key informants as a priority for attention. While the need for capacity building of staff is broad, achieving scale and reach in capacity building programs, particularly through training is challenging and expensive and as such AA will need to be strategic in who it targets for capacity building. An initial focus should be on emergency managers in iHART, on the EFAST roster and senior leaders in high risk countries, with the objective of ensuring that all senior emergency leaders have the practical knowledge and skills to put a women's rights focussed emergency response into place and to guide others in doing so. The forthcoming workshop for senior managers on emergency response is an opportunity to test approaches and this should be done with a view to establishing a replicable training approach. While building staff capacity requires attention to training on women's rights, as AA is aware from its engagement in capacity building initiatives such as the CBHA and START network, humanitarian capacity building at both the individual and organizational levels is a challenging and multidimensional endeavor. Addressing other issues identified in this report such as having practical guidelines and tools available (see below), and having clarity on the approaches AA implements, will also be important elements in building staff capacity.

### 5.3 Programming and processes

📌 **Women's rights central to the objectives in the design of the emergency response program** The good practice examples reviewed all placed women's rights at the centre of the objectives of the emergency response design. The importance of this cannot be overstated, with everything else flowing from this in terms of funding allocation, implementation, right through to evaluation. For example, AA responses that did not have women's rights in the objectives had a corresponding lack of focus on women's rights in the outcomes and evaluations. The IASC gender marker,<sup>2</sup> which has been adopted by many agencies to assess the extent to which agencies are addressing gender in their programmes, explicitly focuses on the integration of gender into objectives as a key indicator of whether a program is gender blind, advances gender mainstreaming or includes targeted gender action for transformational change.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/topics/gender/page/iasc-gender-marker>

It's important to highlight that placing women's rights 'at the centre' of emergency response objectives means ensuring all response objectives are explicit in their support of women's rights. Where women's rights are referenced in only one or two objectives among others, there is a strong risk that the focus on women's rights will be lost among other priorities, and that the responses in other sectors will be gender blind (see examples in Box 7).

↗ **A long range strategy focused on women's rights allows the response to build on opportunities over time** In the good practice case studies, the articulation of a long range strategy which focused on women's rights provided an important framework to support the women's rights elements of the emergency response program (even where this was put in place after the immediate response such as the Philippines). This is the case in Gaza, Philippines and Kenya. The existence of the long range strategy provides the country programs with an early vision for where they could take the program and how to build on the emergency response to advance the women's rights programming. This is a key element in helping AA implement emergency responses that link to AA's longer term resilience building objectives.

↘ **Women's rights need to feature more strongly in AA's immediate phase responses and in essential sectors, in particular shelter** There is a lack of strong evidence about how AA is delivering on its commitments to women's rights in the immediate phase of emergency responses, and a corresponding gap in how AA is integrating its women's rights focus into other areas of response such as emergency shelter. Even in the good practice case studies, stakeholders have acknowledged that the women's rights focus strengthened over time and was a challenge to put into practice in the beginning of the response. AA is not alone in finding this challenging – it is common across the humanitarian sector – but if AA wishes to be a leader in this work and develop women's rights as a signature of its emergency response, it needs to put concerted energy into making a difference for women in the early phase of the response.

There are a number of aspects to consider, but inextricably linked is the issue of how AA integrates its women's rights focus into other core emergency response in sectors such as shelter and NFIs, food and WASH. The needs of the community, in particular women, for immediate assistance such as shelter or food will always be demanded to be met more urgently than standalone women's rights interventions, and indeed need to be met in order to enable women to engage in other rights focused work. This is the reason the humanitarian system continues to 'ignore' women's rights work while delivering on 'urgent' immediate needs. AA's distinction needs to be that it doesn't defer a focus on women's rights but shows how women's rights and protection is integral to meeting women's immediate needs through both standalone and mainstreamed approaches.

#### **Box 19. Gender mainstreaming in sector responses**

In the Philippines, the shelter program focused on getting families shelter as quickly as possible. There was no specific analysis of women's rights issues in shelter programming, it just didn't come up. Women were receivers of the shelter kits. *Key stakeholder interview.*

In Gaza after Operation Protection Edge, AA responded with cash vouchers to support food, non-food items and winterization. Despite the intention to focus on women, AA was challenged by a number of factors relating to the conflict including security and access to be sure the response reached women in this early phase response. *Gaza Case study notes.*

After Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, AA established

The recent work in Vanuatu and Greece (see box 20 below) provide emerging practices which could be further developed on how the standalone women's rights work can be 'brought forward' into the immediate response phase. They also show that an AA response can be exclusively focused on women's rights, and this could be an alternative to mainstreaming women's rights in other sectors. However, if and when AA is going to respond in other sectors such as shelter, livelihoods and WASH, it must mainstream gender and women's rights. A gender-blind response would undo the good work of AA in standalone programming and undermine AA's credibility.

Practical ways that the immediate response phase and other sector responses could be strengthened include:

- Making sure there is a women's rights expert in the team immediately deployed to work with other sector teams to ensure women's rights is integrated into the analysis and design as well as looking at standalone programming (consider having two women's rights experts)
- Explicitly analysing the women's rights context for other sectors in the assessment phase including specific recommendations for how each sector programming should respond to women's rights in the context of the response (supported by a practical tool for doing so)
- More actively engaging in clusters and other coordination mechanisms, including sector based clusters to bring issues about women's rights to the fore
- Ensuring all sector program objectives are gender specific
- Targeting sector specialists or sector program managers(eg shelter managers) for training on women's rights
- Recruiting sector specialists and program managers who have experience in women's rights
- Given the recurrence of issues such as land rights as a key policy issue in AA disaster responses (eg Philippines, Nepal, Kenya) and the particular gender issues around land rights, combined with AA's KCP to address women's land rights, developing AA's expertise around women's rights and land rights and, where there is a shelter response, supporting it with a strong policy response.

#### **Box 20. Targeted women's rights work in the immediate response phase**

In Greece, AA has mobilized a response to the current refugee crisis which focuses on providing safe spaces for women and children as well as providing information and referrals about their rights. This targeted intervention gives AA a very specific women's rights focused niche within the response.

*Greece Emergency Response Plan, 2015*

In Vanuatu, ActionAid, in partnership with the Vanuatu Government's Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), is implementing a women-led community-based protection program to respond to women's protection needs in Vanuatu following Cyclone Pam. The Project has been split into two distinct phases. The focus of the first phase was to set up Women's Information Centres in the most severely affected areas to provide a safe space where women could share their issues and experiences in the

📌 **Prioritising budget allocations and fundraising for women's rights work** Several of the good practice cases examined for this evaluation had included specific budget lines for women's rights and protection work, which is good practice. However, in these same examples the evaluations found that not all of the activities planned for the response were implemented due lack of committed funding. A closer look at the funding commitments showed that the line items that

received relatively less funding were those relating to women’s rights, protection and policy work. For example, in the example from Kenya below, the women’s participation and leadership received only 12% of the target compared to 99% of the target reached for the livelihoods response.

**Box 21. Kenya emergency response budget report 2011-2013**

Objective	3 year budget July 2011 – May 2014	Funding secured July 2011 – May 2013	Remaining funding gap	Proportion of target funded
Immediate needs (food, school feeding, water)	6,434,358	3,067,379	3,366,979	48%
Livelihoods	693,284	684,850	8,434	99%
Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation	287,015	300,058	-13,043	105%
Women’s participation and leadership	319,627	39,642	279,985	12%
Protection and reducing violence against women	266,417	101,276	165,141	38%
Policy/advocacy re improvement of basic services	336,045	12,134	323,911	4%
Total	8,336,746	4,205,339	4,123,056	50%

Another funding related observation made in several cases was that where there was innovative standalone programming focusing on women’s leadership and protection, the source of the funds were ActionAid Australia’s Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) funding.

There was not enough financial data in other cases to fully interrogate trends in fundraising and budget allocations, but these observations raise a number of points for AA’s further consideration. First, if the women’s rights related programming is receiving relatively less funding, to what extent does this reflect: i) difficulties in accessing donor funding for women’s rights work; ii) budget allocation decisions made internally in ActionAid about use of appeal funds; and iii) AA fundraising priorities? Secondly, the trend of ANCP funding being used for women’s leadership and protection work is a positive indicator of AA Australia’s leadership and commitment to women’s rights in emergencies work. ANCP funding is very valuable, highly flexible funding and its use to innovate in women’s rights in emergencies is appropriate, but it will also be important to start to ensure this standout work is also funded from other sources and donors as well.

**Box 22. ANCP funded programmes**

Women-led disaster preparedness in the Philippines

Protection against violence for women and girls in drought affected areas in Kenya

✎ **Further elaborating AA’s emergency response and women’s rights program models** The meta-evaluation highlights the range of approaches that AA is taking to implementing women’s rights in emergencies work. There are some emerging good practices and common approaches which can be identified. In order to strengthen AA’s women’s rights in emergencies approaches in future responses it would be useful for AA to do some further work around: a) identifying which approaches are most impactful; and b) articulating AA’s approach in a way which is easy for staff on the ground to replicate and implement (refer section 5.4 below). The three peers interviewed take

very different approaches to doing this which provide ideas for AA. Oxfam focuses heavily on their minimum standards for gender and ensuring they are implemented in emergency responses. CARE has recently articulated their ‘approach’ to gender in emergencies which outlines the key steps which should be followed and key elements each response should include, while leaving specific program details to each country program. IRC has developed a range of very specific program models which provide the approach and the tools to implement a replicable program in any context (available to peers at the [www.gbvresponders.org](http://www.gbvresponders.org) website). The ten guiding principles in ‘Defining our Difference’ and the examples discussed in this report provide a strong starting point for further articulating AA’s preferred approaches.

#### 5.4 Policies, guidelines and tools

🔗 **ActionAid’s policies clearly indicate that women’s rights are a top priority** ActionAid’s high level policies and guidelines, such as the People’s Action in Practice documents and the Emergency Response and Preparedness Handbook very clearly place women’s rights at the forefront of AA’s priorities and do a good job of mainstreaming the focus on women’s rights throughout.

🔗 **Guidelines and tools need to be refined and simplified** AA’s guidelines and tools need to be refined and simplified so that they can be effective in providing practical guidance for the staff who need to design and implement a women’s rights focused response in practice. The key documents currently referred to by AA relating to women’s rights in emergencies are listed in table 3 below. Policies and guidelines are an essential part of strengthening the organisation’s capacity and building the capacity of staff, which as discussed above is a key need. Where staff are not reached by training, having practical guidelines and tools can help them overcome capacity gaps.

#### Box 23. People’s action in practice

‘We explicitly focus on women’s rights. We understand that the structure of society marginalizes women so they have unequal power. We must work with women and girls to build their power so they can achieve rights. We mainstream women’s rights work

**Table 3 AA women’s rights in emergencies guidance**

Reference	Content
Emergency Preparedness and Response Handbook	S1.2 AA’s approach, 1 <sup>st</sup> ‘core outcome’ (of 3) focuses on WR S1.3 Principle 3 of the HRBA is Advancing Women’s rights – includes 17 AA Minimum standards for programming, for emergency response and for preparedness S7.3 Women’s rights in emergencies provides 7 guiding principles and guidance on themes including needs assessment, participation, response, leadership, VAWG
Defining Difference: Women’s rights, leadership and protection in emergencies	Draft document detailing 10 guiding principles for women’s rights in emergency response. These are different to the 7 guiding principles in the EPRH but there is significant overlap (about 70%) in their content if not wording.
Women’s rights in emergencies training manual 2009	Detailed training manual providing material and training exercises on women’s rights theoretical framework, legal context, programming and policy work.

Security with dignity People's Action in Practice, Parts 1,2,3	Details AA's community based protection approach Details AA's overarching HRBA and key change promises including commitment to women's rights and how it is implemented globally.
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In refining the available guidance, the first step would be to clarify the logic in terms of what guidance staff should follow and how it should be used. As demonstrated in Table 3, the documents between them include women's rights as a core outcome of emergency response and as a principle of the HRBA, a set of 17 minimum standards for programming in emergencies, preparedness and in all work (Section 1.3 of EPRH - though stakeholders suggest these are not used as minimum standards but more guidelines); 2 different sets of guiding principles (Section 7.3 of the EPRH and the Defining Difference document; and a training manual which does not refer to the previous elements of the guidance. There is also a handbook on protection approaches (Safety with Dignity). There is considerable overlap in the content, but also a number of inconsistencies.

As well as refining the logic of AA's guidance, there would be great benefit in simplifying guidelines and tools to help make it easier to understand and more practical to implement for both staff and partners. For example, several evaluations found that while AA's training on women's rights was highly valued, partners and participants commented that it was abstract and difficult to understand. Some of AA's guidelines are simple and practical (eg the EPRH handbook) whereas other areas such as protection and women's rights training materials could benefit from being shorter and more focused on how to put things into practice.

Stakeholders gave varying responses about which resources were known or used. Once refined and simplified, consideration can be given to how a consistent set of guidance is used and promoted in training and in support to emergency responses.

## 5.5 Partnerships

↗ **Strong partnerships with local women's organisations** Strong partnerships with local women's rights organisations have been one of the most important enabling factors for successful women's rights programming in AA's responses. Local partnerships with women's organisations, whether pre-existing or relationships established in the emergency, have provided AA with an entry point to reach and engage women quickly in an emergency response and a platform for that engagement in terms of the programmatic expertise of the partner. Conversely, implementing women's rights programming has been challenging where partners have not shared a commitment to women's rights. Given that working with and supporting local actors is so central to ActionAid's identity and commitments, explicitly prioritizing partnerships with local women's organisations and networks should feature strongly in AA's model for women's rights programming in emergencies and developing these partnerships should be a key priority in preparedness and capacity building.

↗ **View the suite of partnerships in their entirety and leverage complementary skills** Both the Gaza and Philippines case studies highlight a really important lesson about viewing AA's suite of partnerships in their entirety and working strategically to ensure partners skillsets complement each other. In Gaza, the evaluator found that the partners AA was working with had very different skillsets that were highly complementary. There was an opportunity for AA to look at closer integration and alignment between the work it was supporting with different partners to leverage great impact. In the Philippines, one of AA's partners had a particularly strong women's rights

focused organization as a partner, while many of the other partners had less women's rights expertise. AA implemented the early emergency response in different places with each of these partners, and, according to a key informant interview, the women's rights organization struggled with delivering material relief assistance, while other partners struggled with emergency response. According to the key informant, for the women's rights organization, this strain risked undermining their capacity and core business. Later in the response, AA realised that a more strategic approach to working with the partners would be to engage the women's rights network in a different way, building on and supporting their expertise by working with them to help other partners strengthen their understanding of women's rights.

📌 **Strengthening collaboration with like-minded peers and women's rights networks in the humanitarian system** AA's focus on women's leadership provides it with an important and unique voice on how women's rights are addressed by the humanitarian system. Examining how AA engages in the humanitarian system and uses that voice to maximum effect should be a priority for both country-based emergency response programs and global policy work.

At the country level, examples such as the Vanuatu response (evaluation report forthcoming) highlight the important value-add that AA can bring to a response, as well as how the impact and effectiveness of AA's response can be strengthened through greater connectedness to peers working on related programs to support women. This is particularly important where the scale and scope of AA's response is limited. Connecting beneficiaries to complementary programs, and establishing relationships of mutual accountability with other humanitarian responders can help meet needs that are beyond the capacity or mandate of AA to reach.

At the policy level, AA can leverage greater impact by bringing its own unique voice to global discussions around gender and women's rights in the humanitarian system, while doing so in a way that contributes to the critical mass of other voices working to advance this agenda. Peers such as those interviewed for this report (Oxfam, CARE and IRC) all share a commitment to influencing the humanitarian system such that it delivers better results for women, and the more agencies work together to drive this agenda forward, the greater potential for progress. AA has already commenced collaborating with CARE and Oxfam on World Humanitarian Summit advocacy around women's rights globally and in Bangladesh. AA could explore further opportunities to collaborate with others such as through global coordination forums and clusters, on specific policy initiatives, or in regional or country based initiatives (eg Yemen meta-analysis described below in Box 24) and in doing so add significant value in terms of the rights and women's leadership focus.

The evaluations provide limited information about how AA is engaging in women's rights related interagency forums and so conclusions about AA's engagement in mechanisms such as clusters are beyond the scope of the meta-evaluation. However, several key informants suggested that there is a need for AA to have an internal conversation about how it engages in clusters at both the field and global levels, across sectoral areas and in the protection and women's rights spaces (eg Gender Working Group, Protection Cluster and the GBV AoR). Such engagement would provide opportunities for AA to influence the humanitarian sector on rights based issues. Some global leadership and guidance to country programs on how to engage effectively in clusters may be helpful.

## 6. Assessment and women's rights analysis

The ToR asks to what extent women's rights analysis has been conducted during assessments and program planning and how it conforms with AA guidance. There are elements of women's rights analysis embedded throughout AA's key program documents, however, more consistent, documented context specific women's rights analysis, including more focused guidance, is an area which could strengthen AA's overall approaches, in particular the early phase, cross sectoral integration.

AA's minimum standards for women's rights programming commit AA to gender and gender budget analysis, and there is a section on needs assessment which provides key points on considering the needs of women in an assessment. Key programming formats, such as the Rapid Assessment Checklist, DPRF fund application and reporting templates all incorporate questions on the impact of the emergency on how AA is responding to the needs of women. The most comprehensive guidance is found in the detailed rapid assessment checklist which provides advice on the key questions to consider for a women's right's analysis.

(<http://eprhandbook.actionaid.org/annexes/annex-8-detailed-needs-assessment-checklist/>).

AA's guidelines tools do a good job of asking about women, but could go further in terms of promoting and supporting rapid context specific women's rights analysis. Practical guidance which explains how and when to analyse women's rights and how to document and use the analysis to inform programme planning would enhance what is currently available in the assessment checklist. The importance of good quality, rapid gender or women's rights analysis is something which has been recognized by peers, with CARE and Oxfam focusing on context specific rapid gender analysis as the foundation of an effective gender response to emergencies (see section 7 below). CARE has a detailed guidance note on how to conduct a rapid gender analysis and routinely documents and shares its rapid gender analyses as a means of strengthening its program quality but also influencing others. A recent interagency review of rapid gender analysis in assessment reports conducted by CARE, Gencap and OCHA in Yemen highlighted that the quality of rapid gender analysis matters, and there is room for improvement across the sector.

### Box 24. Yemen meta-analysis of gender in assessments

CARE, GenCap and OCHA reviewed all available assessment reports from different agencies to assess the extent to which the aggregated gender analysis available could help understand the impact of the crisis on gender relations. Out of the 26 assessments reviewed, just under a fifth (five out of 26) contained no gender information at all and a further third (eight assessments) included only one gender or generational findings together with limited information about household

The AA response documentation reviewed (assessment reports, sitrep, emergency response plans, DPRF reports) was mixed in terms of its women's rights analysis. Some of the better examples include the Philippines rapid assessment report and the women's rights and protection analysis conducted for Vanuatu. Throughout the documentation reviewed, there was fairly consistent mention of women, however this was often limited to a short paragraph and didn't always provide a clear overview of the impact of the crisis on women's rights, the local context and specific recommendations deriving from the women's rights analysis for the program. In particular, analysis

of sectoral priorities such as shelter, livelihoods and WASH were missing a strong gendered analysis. The long term country strategies reviewed had much stronger women’s rights analysis, which if in place pre-crisis provides a helpful starting point, but a rapid analysis specific to the emergency is essential to inform response planning.

Key stakeholders also mentioned that detailed discussion and analysis of women’s rights forms an important part of the participatory discussions AA uses in designing its response and recovery programs, however without documentation it is difficult to assess this. As discussed in section 4, AA’s focus on women in its program design and objectives is very strong, in line with AA’s political commitment to work with women, but it’s important for AA to be able to demonstrate how the design of its response is based on context specific analysis of the issues facing women in that particular emergency. Several evaluations suggest that stronger context specific analysis is needed in AA’s responses to ensure AA is ‘going beyond the checklist’ and really addressing the situation for the most marginalized women.

## 7. AA in relation to peers

### 7.1 Peer approaches to women’s rights

AA has asked how it compares to others working in this area. The peers being reviewed are IRC, Oxfam and CARE, given all three have a strong focus on gender and women’s rights. Broadly speaking, each agency has a clear niche in terms of its approach and strengths. There are also clear complementarities between the organisations. Most importantly, each aims influence the humanitarian sector to deliver better outcomes for women in emergency response. There is ample scope for collaboration, resource sharing and learning from each other which could help leverage greater impact in terms of improving the humanitarian system on issues relating to women’s rights.

### 7.2 CARE

CARE’s main focus is on gender equality and women’s empowerment. CARE’s global program strategy and its humanitarian strategy both put women and girls at the forefront. A ‘Gender in Emergencies’ (GiE) sub strategy sets out priorities for building CARE’s capacity to advance gender equality and empower women through its emergency response programs, and a new policy note is being drafted to outline CARE’s specific approach to GiE in practice. The key elements of the approach are addressing gender in emergency preparedness, undertaking rapid gender analysis, adapting assistance on the basis of the rapid gender analysis, pursuing outcomes which advance gender equality, and linking emergency response to CARE’s long term development programming.

**Box 25. CARE’s approach to Gender in Emergencies (Draft)**



A key strategy of CARE’s is to implement its gender and women’s empowerment focus through its core emergency response sectors of shelter, WASH, food security, and sexual and reproductive

health. All of CARE's sector technical specialists have received gender training and are responsible for delivering a gendered response, and for advocating on gender issues in forums such as clusters. Some sectoral teams have now adopted the strategy of recruiting 'dual-hatted' technical specialists, that have for example both strong WASH and Gender expertise.

CARE has a number of internal mechanisms in place to ensure accountability for delivering on its gender in emergencies commitments. Access to the internal Emergency Response Fund is contingent on the country program submitting a Gender Action Plan at the start of the response, and technical support and follow up is provided to the country programme to help implement it. CARE has also adopted a whole of program cycle gender marker system, adapted from the IASC gender marker. In practice the gender marker works as an incentive for country programs to ensure they have designed a response which has gender specific objectives front and centre. Use of the marker in monitoring to assess performance is still a work in progress.

CARE has a series of clear and simple guidance notes to help staff put its gender approach into practice in emergencies, as well as gender guidance in its CARE Emergency Pocketbook. Guidance notes cover topics like integrating gender into emergency preparedness planning, conducting a rapid gender analysis, how to ensure a gender balanced team, preparing a Gender Action Plan and gender and partnerships.

CARE prioritises preparing rapid gender analyses in each emergency location, using these both for program design and sharing them widely to encourage others to address rights of women. Recently CARE has been engaged in a number of interagency initiatives, in particular with Oxfam and GenCap. CARE recently conducted a scoping study with GenCap and OCHA for Yemen which involved an interagency meta-analysis of assessment reports to determine if there was adequate information to understand the rights and needs of women and the impact of the crisis on them. CARE has conducted joint rapid gender analysis with Oxfam in Nepal and Iraq. CARE is also engaging in the re-write of the IASC handbook for gender mainstreaming.

In work on GBV, CARE has strong experience in engaging men and boys, though less so in emergency response. CARE participates actively in the GBV AoR (Area of Responsibility) and gender working groups. CARE seeks to influence others in the humanitarian system to address the needs of women and girls, in particular through clusters, and recently collaborated with AA and Oxfam on women's rights focused advocacy in the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit.

CARE has a gender in emergencies team which includes two full time gender in emergencies advisors in the CARE Emergency Group (equivalent of iHART), as well as a number of other gender advisors located in member offices who support emergency response and protection work (eg UK, USA, Australia). There are a further two gender advisors in emergency sector teams (shelter and WASH). This represents a significant increase in technical capacity compared to 3 years ago when there was only one gender in emergencies advisor. The increase represents the prioritization of gender for investment by CARE in line with the adoption of the gender focused humanitarian strategy in 2012. CARE also has a roster for emergency deployment which includes a number of deployable gender advisors (external contractors or country programme staff).

## 7.3 IRC

IRC's focus is on addressing the rights of women and girls who have survived gender based violence. IRC advocates strongly that violence against women and girls is a life-threatening protection issue – one that must be addressed from the earliest stages of emergency response<sup>3</sup>. IRC's first priority is on delivering clinical care model to survivors. In the acute phase of the response (first 12 weeks), IRC has developed a specific GBV emergency response program model. This model outlines the concrete actions necessary to minimize risks to women and girls and ensure that GBV-specific services are available and accessible. It also highlights strategies related to coordination and advocacy with the goal of improving GBV response and mobilizing necessary action in other sectors<sup>4</sup>. IRC also has a more developed clinical care model which it seeks to implement beyond the immediate phase of the response.

In addition to clinical care, IRC's other 4 priorities are prevention of GBV (with a focus on male engagement); economic and social empowerment; research; and advocacy. These may play a lesser role in rapid onset response but a more important role in chronic crises and fragile contexts.

IRC invests significantly in research in order to provide evidence-based reports for advocacy and policy work and for the development of programming models. In recent years, IRC has released a large number of advocacy reports focusing on violence against women based on experiences from emergency response programs. IRC has been closely engaged with recent global advocacy forums on Violence Against Women (VAW) and plans to advocate on GBV and VAW related issues around the World Humanitarian Summit.

IRC has developed and shared a comprehensive collection of tools and resources for GBV response, including all of its program models. This is available at <http://gbvresponders.org>. These resources include guidance on ensuring GBV is addressed in preparedness and a diverse range of tools that can be used by other agencies. These include GBV focused preparedness templates, training models, GBV assessment tools and a resource library.

### Box 26. IRC's program models

IRC has developed a number of program models including guidelines and tools for implementing the models, available at the GBV responders website. These include:

- Clinical Care for Sexual Assault Survivors (CCSAS)
- Caring for Child Survivors (CCS)
- Preventing Violence Against Women & Girls: Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP)
- SASA! Activist Kit for Preventing

### Box 27. Recent IRC advocacy reports

Evaluation of Implementation of 2005 IASC Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings in the Syria Crisis Response, with UNFPA, UNICEF, UNHCR and IMC, 2015

Are We Listening? Acting on Our Commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict, 2014

<sup>3</sup> <http://gbvresponders.org/emergency-response-preparedness/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://gbvresponders.org/emergency-response-preparedness/emergency-response/>

IRC would like to see more agencies engaged in GBV response in emergencies as there is limited capacity in the sector relative to the need. This is behind the sharing of resources on the GBV responders website, and a significant focus on training local partners on clinical care and GBV response. IRC is active in the GBV AoR and would also like to see strengthened humanitarian coordination around GBV. Recently IRC has worked with UNICEF and UNFPA on the development of the global GBV information management system. IRC has a very large technical team in its women's empowerment team, as well as GBV specialists in its emergency response team.

## 7.4 Oxfam

Gender justice and women's leadership are global priorities for Oxfam. Oxfam is currently finalizing a new global gender in emergencies strategy, which is aligned with OI's global gender justice strategy. It has five objectives: Improved program quality through more consistent gender mainstreaming in all emergency response sectors; ensuring the voice and participation of women, men, boys and girls; working in partnership with local women's rights organisations; campaigning for gender justice; and ensuring an enabling environment for gender (including focusing on gender in budget allocations, management accountability, recruitment and staffing etc).

Oxfam prioritizes a gender mainstreaming approach, focusing on integrating women's rights issues in its livelihood, WASH and protection work, but will also implement a standalone women's rights focused program where there are specific and critical context specific needs. Gender analysis in assessment is the foundation of Oxfam's approach for gender mainstreaming and determining the most appropriate response models. Oxfam also seeks to implement a women-led response with recent good practice examples of women-led response in Nepal, Philippines and Yemen. The latter is considered a flagship program with regards to women's rights and women-led response. Oxfam Bangladesh has also developed an interesting handbook on women-led disaster response.

The key tool Oxfam uses to support implementation of its gender focus in emergencies are its minimum standards. The minimum standards were rolled out in 2012 with staff trained in ToT's in each region. All staff are expected to be aware of and able to implement a response in line with the standards. The standards are used in M&E related reviews of emergency responses and Oxfam has a goal of ensuring that 70% of the minimum standards must be achieved in each response. Oxfam also aims to be compliant with IASC minimum standards for GBV.

Oxfam's humanitarian gender advisor highlights in country leadership and capacity combined with strong gender expertise in any emergency response team as the critical elements for success. Staff buy in, awareness and support for women's rights in emergencies and a hesitance to put forward women's rights remains the greatest challenge.

### **Box 28. Oxfam's minimum standards for gender in emergencies**

Oxfam has 16 minimum standards for gender in emergencies built around 4 areas:

- Using gender analysis throughout the project cycle to inform planning, program design and implementation, and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
- Ensuring participation, dignity, empowerment;
- Promoting gender equality through internal practices;

OI has a dedicated global humanitarian gender advisor and one full time gender rapid response team member. Other gender advisors are deployed from an emergency roster which draws on expertise in country programs and elsewhere.

#### **Box. 29. Interagency collaborative initiatives on gender in emergencies**

At the global level, Oxfam is leading on or participating in a number of interesting collaborative initiatives to strengthen the gender focus in the humanitarian system. This includes an ECHO funded pilot initiative with 8 collaborating agencies designed to influence the humanitarian sector. The project is being piloted in South Sudan, Pakistan, Dominican Republic and Ethiopia.

The project works with UN women, in country women's networks, government authorities and humanitarian actors and has 4 main areas of action:

- involving actors in preparing a consolidated gender analysis including a ToT on gender analysis,
- developing and delivering a module on gender leadership in humanitarian action;
- strengthening the gender working group in each country and
- developing a gender accountability framework.

### **7.5 Relevance for ActionAid**

Compared to others, ActionAid's clear niche is in its rights based work and its focus on women's leadership in preparedness and response. While other agencies also commit to a rights based approach, AA is a clear leader in the priority and practical expression it gives to its rights focus, and the consistent promotion of women's rights awareness work, solidarity and supporting local policy action make it stand out from others. The explicit focus globally on women as leaders in emergency preparedness and response also appears to be distinctive – though Oxfam also shares this space to a certain extent. There are examples of others also doing very interesting work in this space (eg Oxfam in Bangladesh, CARE in Vanuatu), however in terms of focusing its global voice on women's leadership, AA stands out (eg CARE's voice is focused on gender equality and women's empowerment, IRC's on survivors of GBV). There is potential for AA's community based, women-led protection approaches to also provide a distinctive approach in the sector, however further work on articulating this approach and implementing it in a comprehensive way is needed (as discussed in section 4).

AA is well positioned to share its experience and expertise in rights awareness, supporting women's collective organization, women's spaces, strategies for engaging women in decision making and empowering women as leaders in preparedness, response and recovery. AA has recently collaborated with Oxfam and CARE on women-focused advocacy in the lead up to the World Humanitarian Summit. Approaches of these peers which are relevant for ActionAid include:

- CARE's approach to rapid gender analysis is a useful model in terms of documenting women's rights analysis and sharing this analysis as a form of influencing in the immediate phase of a response, as well as using it to strengthen program design.
- CARE's approaches to integrating gender concerns into sector responses could provide useful lessons for other response sectors. CARE UK is the lead on shelter and has done some useful work around women and shelter which may be of interest for AA.

- IRCs approach to gender based violence and their freely available GBV responder’s resources, such as work around referral models could contribute to AA’s protection model.
- IRCs evidence-based GBV reports provide interesting examples of international policy work grounded in emergency response programs which may be of interest in thinking about how AA uses its local policy work to inform global advocacy campaigns.
- AA could seek further information on Oxfam’s women-led emergency response approaches for learning opportunities, such as learning exchange between Oxfam and AA in Bangladesh.
- AA could explore opportunities to engage in interagency collaborative projects such as those being led by Oxfam, including the re-write of the gender mainstreaming handbook and interagency gender analysis as excellent opportunities to contribute AA’s voice and perspectives.
- The ‘gender in emergencies’ tools and guidelines used by CARE and the toolkits and training resources at IRC’s GBV responders website provide useful examples to consider when revising AA’s own women’s rights guidelines and tools.
- CARE and IRC’s work on male engagement may be useful to review in terms of addressing barriers to women’s leadership.
- Finally, AA could review which global coordination mechanisms focused on women’s rights issues it participates in and whether there is scope for influencing and strengthening global work on women’s rights by working with others in these spaces, including supporting national women’s networks to have a global voice. Further, AA could also review how it engages strategically in clusters at the field level to advocate for women’s rights.

## 8. AA evaluation guidelines

### 8.1 Women’s rights in evaluations examined from 2008-2015

As part of the meta-analysis, the extent to which the evaluations addressed women’s rights was examined using the criteria below in Table 2. In general, the evidence provided in the evaluation reports on women’s rights was limited (with the exception of Philippines 2015, Kenya 2015 and Gaza 2015). This makes it very difficult to build an evidence base which can support AA’s learning and influencing on women’s rights in emergencies. It is worth noting that improvements have been made over time, with more recent evaluations demonstrating a stronger focus on women’s rights.

**Table 4. Evaluations meeting basic criteria for addressing women’s rights (of total 13):**

Criteria	Yes	Partially	Not at all
Have gender and women’s rights aspects of the response been considered and evaluated in the response even minimally?	7	3	3
Does the evaluation specifically address women’s rights objectives of the response?	3	7	3
Does the evaluation integrate women’s rights analysis in across its evaluation of all aspects of the response?	1	6	6
Is quantitative data disaggregated by sex?	1	0	12

## 8.2 Strengthening women's rights focus in evaluations

### **Ensure women's rights are central to objectives in the design for the response in the first place**

Recent ActionAid responses such as Kenya, Gaza and Philippines have been sure to place women's rights at the centre of their response objectives responses, which forces evaluators to focus on them. As a result, women's rights are much more strongly analysed in the evaluations of these responses. Where a response did not put women's rights in its objectives, women's rights featured much less in the evaluation.

**Provide sex and age disaggregated data about the response** There is an almost complete absence of sex and age disaggregated data in all 13 of the evaluations analysed. Sex and age disaggregated data significantly contributes to the understanding of who AA is working with and in evaluations helps to validate claims (eg whether women are benefitting equally, participating equally etc), as well as to help with a robust analysis of what is happening for women in an emergency response. Even where the evaluation is not drawing on quantitative data, qualitative data should be consistently broken down by men and women, girls and boys to better understand the engagement of women in AA's programs, their needs and rights.

#### **Box 30. Why Sex and Age Disaggregated Data Matters**

We know that good data aids decision-making and programming, both crucial to our humanitarian enterprise. But if the data is not specific about the impact of our work on different groups of people, women, girls, boys, men, older people or disabled, then it is difficult to know if the specific needs of these people have been met.

This study by the Feinstein International Center shows us clearly that the humanitarian community has not invested enough in collecting and using sex and age disaggregated data to inform our programming. We do not know the differing needs of people affected by emergencies, and so we don't know if we have met them. From Haiti to Pakistan, case studies have demonstrated that not collecting sex and age disaggregated data puts the lives and livelihoods of different groups of people at risk.

### **Ensure TORs require evaluators to examine gendered differences and women's rights in all aspects of the response, not only in relation to specific women's rights objectives**

Although more recent evaluations have specifically addressed women's rights objectives and issues, often in a dedicated section of the evaluation, other sections sometimes remain gender neutral. For example, in general, the Philippines evaluation is a very positive example which addresses issues facing both women and men throughout the evaluation as well as specifically addressing women's rights objectives. However, the section on shelter provided limited insight into whether the specific concerns of women were being met. This issue is more pronounced in other evaluations, with 6 of the 13 evaluations not providing any gendered analysis throughout and a further 6 only partially.

**Be specific about what factors should be considered in the evaluation framework** Some aspects of AA's women's rights response such as protection may need to be more specifically referenced to ensure they are given adequate attention in evaluations. AA can also provide clearer instructions to

evaluators about issues to be considered and ensure the evaluation framework used covers off the key aspects of AA's women's rights approach such as protection.

**Engage closely with interagency evaluations to ensure a focus on women's rights and to share AA's work** As discussed in section 4.1, the joint evaluations reviewed either did not clearly address women's rights, or did address women's rights but did not feature AA's work. In order to make joint evaluations more useful for AA, AA should seek to engage closely to ensure adequate attention to women's rights and to share AA's work to ensure evaluators are able to assess it clearly.

**Find ways to capture evidence of the difference AA is making in women's lives** Evaluations for Kenya, Gaza and Philippines stood out from the rest in that they gave insights into the differences that AA's work is making in the lives of women. They did this through personal stories which provided a richer level of detail about the difference AA's programs made in their lives. Evaluators of future responses should be encouraged to document as much of this kind of evidence as possible, while ensuring there is sufficient methodological rigour to ensure such stories go beyond anecdote to providing defensible qualitative evidence.

#### **Box 31. Stories of change**

'ActionAid should go beyond results and narrate stories of change. ActionAid needs to strengthen its capacity to tell

## **9. Recommendations**

Many practical suggestions have been made throughout this report for AA to consider as it advances its women's rights in emergencies capacity. The following recommendations focus on a small number of high level strategic priorities, which, if implemented, will capture many of the practical suggestions made elsewhere in the report.

1. Use the Defining our Difference document as the framework for the programmatic elements of AA's signature approach and build on the good practice examples to further develop, document and disseminate replicable program models and methodologies. This should include all of the ten elements in the framework, but in particular focus on:
  - a. Consolidating AA's unique approach to women's safe spaces characterized by a strong emphasis on access to information, rights awareness, protection and empowerment
  - b. Reviewing AA's methodologies for supporting women's collective organization in emergencies, considering all of the approaches currently in use but in particular exploring REFLECT methods and how these can be applied in emergency response
  - c. Documenting AA's successful strategies for engaging women as active participants, decision makers and advancing women's leadership in a short, easy to use tool which can help other programs put these strategies in place
  - d. Making clear the standards and approaches for embedding community based protection mechanisms in the response (see Recommendation 2)
  - e. Sharing the Defining our difference document widely and pursue opportunities to build awareness and buy in across the organization.

2. Review AA's approach to protection to ensure a broader understanding of what embedding community based, women-led standalone protection mechanisms looks like in practice and incorporate this into AA's program model. In the immediate term, seek to close 'gaps' in protection nets by strengthening AA's implementation of consistent protection risk analysis, including risks arising from AA's programming ('do no harm'), and working with others on issues like referral mechanisms, and in coordination forums such as the protection cluster and GBV AoR.
3. Invest in strengthening AA's attention to women's rights in the immediate (first 3-6 months) of an emergency by:
  - a. Stronger, documented women's rights analysis about the specific impacts of the emergency and context specific needs
  - b. Bringing forward the implementation of AA's signature standalone women's rights activities into the immediate phase of the response, in particular safe spaces, access to information and rights awareness work alongside urgent shelter, WASH and livelihood responses
  - c. Better incorporating women's rights considerations into all aspects of the response, including shelter, WASH and livelihoods. Recognise these essential life-saving basic rights as necessary enablers to address women's rights more fully if designed and delivered with the right focus on women
  - d. Increasing staff capacity for early responders to implement women's rights work (see recommendation 7 below).
4. Tailor AA's preparedness and response strategies according to the 3 main pre-emergency programming contexts, with explicit attention to the following:
  - a. Where there is a pre-existing AA program with strong women's rights programming, ensure the emergency response directly engages and leverages the pre-existing women's rights programs including technical staff, partners, women's rights networks and approaches such as women's forums and REFLECT circles. Ensure these programs and staff are involved in preparedness planning and women's rights and DRR programs are closely integrated
  - b. Where there is a pre-existing AA program which doesn't already have strong women's rights programming in place, ensure iHART support to the program prioritises early deployment of women's rights expertise and provide close support and oversight on women's rights to the leader of the response. Where possible, support capacity building on women's rights during preparedness planning, and for high risk countries, engage with AA's broader women's empowerment teams to identify opportunities to strengthen the women's rights focus in the long term and connect with national women's rights networks
  - c. In emergency responses in a new location with no pre-existing program, ensure the team deployed, in particular the manager, has strong women's rights expertise. Commit to women's rights as the specific value added that AA can bring and work closely with others to ensure AA's response is integrating with longer term partners.
5. Ensure that fundraising for and allocation of funding to women's rights in emergencies work is prioritized by all AA fundraising affiliates. This includes ensuring appeal funds can be directed to women's rights work including leadership and protection; advocating with donors; working to ensure funding targets for women's rights are met at least at the same

level as other sectors; demanding mainstreaming of women's rights in other sector programs funded, in addition to supporting budget allocations for standalone programming.

6. Revise and simplify AA's guidelines and tools for women's rights work in emergencies to provide clear, practical resources which help staff implement the women's rights focus in practice. Top priorities might include guidance on rapid women's rights analysis in emergencies, protection approaches and how to implement the key program elements of AA's programmatic approaches and models.
7. Make strategic, targeted investments in increasing AA's staff capacity to implement women's rights in emergency response, prioritizing the following three actions:
  - a. Increase the available technical expertise on women's rights and protection in emergencies available to provide global leadership and support including by ensuring key women's rights experts are trained in humanitarian response
  - b. Make women's rights expertise a priority in all senior emergency manager recruitments
  - c. Provide capacity building to build the women's rights and protection skills of senior emergency managers focusing on iHART, the EFAST roster and high risk country managers.
8. Consider piloting work in one or two specific contexts around connecting local, national and global policy and campaigning work, specifically involving women and their organisations, to provide more evidence about this aspect of AA's work and to learn more about how to strengthen the women's rights focus and connectedness of campaigning in emergencies. Given the importance of women's land rights in emergencies, and AA's Key Change Promise to increase women's land rights, consider building a campaign and expertise around this theme. Emerging policy discussions with women's networks in Nepal may provide an opportunity to explore this further. Another opportunity for pursuing a local and global policy campaign might be around the South Asia Women's Resilience Index, building on work to deepen its impact locally in Bangladesh.
9. Strengthen work with other organisations with similar aims for greater impact and influence at the field and global levels, including:
  - d. Coordination bodies and peer NGOs, including participating in the protection cluster and bringing women's specific concerns and rights analysis into other clusters
  - e. Networks of women's organisations
  - f. Partners, including adopting a partnership strategy in emergency responses which plays to the strengths and complementary skills of all partners, using available women's rights expertise where it exists to help build the capacity of other partners.
10. Build a stronger evidence base for AA's women's rights in emergencies work through a stronger focus on women's rights in evaluations, in line with the suggestions made in section 8 of this report. Incorporate these into the AA evaluation guidelines currently being developed (in draft) by AAI.

## List of Annexes

1. Case studies
2. Terms of Reference – refer attached zip file
3. Inception Report – refer attached zip file
4. Assessment Matrix – refer attached zip file
5. List of documents reviewed – refer attached zip file
6. List of interviewees – refer attached zip file
7. Preliminary Findings, Submitted to AA 22 November – refer attached zip file
8. Preliminary Findings 2 page summary, Submitted to AA 22 November – refer attached zip file
9. Annex 9 Defining our Difference: Women’s rights, leadership and protection in emergencies (Draft), ActionAid 2015

## Annex 1 Good practice case studies

### Drought in Kenya, 2011<sup>5</sup>

In 2011, the Horn of Africa experienced what is considered to be the worst drought to affect the region in 60 years. In Kenya this resulted in a food security and livelihoods crisis which hit the northern and eastern regions of Kenya particularly hard. The immediate cause was the consecutive failures of the short and long rains of late 2010 and early 2011; yet what made the crisis so severe was not the extent of drought per se (2006 was said to have been worse in this respect) but a combination of factors, including high food prices and households hit by two recent bad years and unable to withstand a third. The symptoms of the crisis included very high levels of acute malnutrition (as high as 37% in parts of Turkana), distress migration and loss of income and assets, particularly the livestock of pastoralists. The crisis in Kenya was part of a recurrent pattern, made worse by both short-term economic factors and longer-term pressures of demographics, climate and resource scarcity.

### Women's rights analysis<sup>6</sup>

In areas where AA responded to the drought, the status of women was extremely low, where women are not treated as equal partners. AA's assessment of the crisis identified a number of issues affecting women and girls. Women reported an increase in their workload including being forced to walk long distances in search of water for their livestock and food for the family. In one AA program area, women were forced to walk for up to 20 kilometres in search of water which increased their vulnerability to gender based violence and placed pressure on women who were already struggling to cope with the drought and hunger. Girls were withdrawn from school to as their families struggled to cope with the drought. Women also reported resorting to the potentially life-threatening practice of binding their stomachs with rope in order to stave off hunger. Women said the traditional practice, which helped them to work without food, became more common as the drought worsened.

### ActionAid's response

ActionAid started responding to the drought across the country when the situation began to deteriorate. It focused first on immediate relief in the form of food aid, water and health support in 2011 and linked this response to a 2 year intervention to build overall drought resilience. Both phases were integrated into what is known as the Kenya Comprehensive Drought Response Programme.

The program had 6 objectives:

1. Supporting poor and excluded people and their institutions to address and secure their basic needs and rights.
2. Promoting income and livelihood diversification among people living in poverty and exclusions in arid and semi-arid lands.
3. Supporting community-led disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.
4. Facilitating women's participation and leadership in water and natural resource

#### Box 1. Shifting power

When we started the response I met a group of women who were passively receiving general food distributions from an AA program with WFP. Now that same group of women are leading a successful women's cooperative exporting produce. What started as an emergency response with food relief then brought women together to address land and livelihoods

<sup>5</sup> DEC Real Time Evaluation, 2012

<sup>6</sup> Kenya Comprehensive Drought Resilience Program Plan, 2011

- management and other decision-making processes.
5. Enhancing protection for poor and excluded women and girls vulnerable to and experiencing violence.
  6. Supporting communities to monitor and advocate for improved delivery of services and assistance by government, donors and other duty bearers.

The final evaluation of the Kenya Comprehensive Drought Response Program made impressive findings about AA's impact on women's empowerment, stating:

*'We discovered many changes in this area [power changes], on a broad spectrum, from provision of knowledge and skills to self-confidence building and changes of attitudes within communities. Some related to very ingrained behaviours, connected powerful social norms (e.g. on the role of women in communities). The most striking examples of work on changing attitudes related to women's rights and roles. We found evidence of changes in deeply ingrained social behaviours. Kenya Final Evaluation, 2015, p34.*

These impressive findings were the result of AA's investment in women's leadership at multiple levels, such as:

- Requiring women's leadership in committees as a condition of assistance for relief such as food distribution or infrastructure projects, which was both an incentive to receive aid and a challenge to traditional power structures. AA demanded that the distribution of relief (or the decision-making about the maintenance or set up of new infrastructure) would be done by local institutions led by women. This opened up opportunities for women leadership.
- Putting control of resources in the hands of women, such as livelihood assets, water, extension services etc, which in turn gave them power in the eyes of other community members.
- Building women's skills and confidence through training and rights awareness. These skills were valued by the community and created leadership.
- Increasing women's access to economic resources through livelihood alternatives, including supporting them in activities previously only available to men (eg livestock, beekeeping), and in doing so starting to transform gender roles. Men also started engaging in women's activities.
- Supporting women's solidarity and organization through REFLECT circles, self-help groups, cooperatives and other groups. While many different forms of organisation were supported, the evaluators found that AA's tried and tested methodologies of REFLECT circles offered greatest potential to leverage other areas of power and to create opportunities for awareness on practical and rights based issues.
- Supporting groups and individuals to claim rights from government and institutions.

#### **Box 2. Advocating hard for women**

It was particularly evident in the field visits that AAIK has advocated hard for female representation in the relief committees and that women were represented in the community-based

#### **Box 3. Surprisingly quick gains**

We were genuinely surprised by the quick gains on issues deeply rooted in social norms within the lifetime of the programme. In some places the new leaders and participants oozed self-confidence. Elsewhere they demonstrated progress, but required further support from the organisation.

The evaluation found that the program was effective in building leadership, especially that of women. Importantly, the program showed that when successful, the process of building leadership is also a process of empowerment. The experience also demonstrated that building leadership requires investments to bring about changes in all areas of power, and interlinking those changes. For example:

- Effective leaders had resources to manage (ie. they were in a position to manage the resources provided by AA).
- They were part of groups (eg. vigilance committees, reflect groups).
- They had gone through awareness raising processes, or were supported in developing self confidence.
- They were also supported in dealing with their institutions (or in creating new ones).

#### **Box 4. I was not able to speak in public**

<https://youtu.be/1Uqhw3r3Pz4> This woman says that before being trained by Actionaid she could not talk in public. But since she was empowered by Actionaid she has been elected for many committees. She is the chairperson of the CBO, a committee member of the dispensary, a member of the school committee, a member of the savinas and loans group. She says

The evaluation also highlighted the importance of relief programming in addressing basic rights such as food and nutrition as an enabler for empowerment. When people are affected by crisis, healing their bodies first is essential to enable them to survive first before they can engage and participate fully. This was essential to help the most marginalized women, such as women with HIV/AIDS to be able to participate in their communities.

#### **Box 5. Strengthen people`s bodies first**

In some cases it was recognised that no empowerment was possible unless the physical condition of people was improved. Physical strength was regarded as a precondition empowerment. Kenya

### **What factors contributed to effective women's rights programming?**

**Looking at power and putting women at the centre from Day 1** From the very outset of the response, AA recognized disproportionate power and denial of women's rights as defining characteristics of the crisis, and set out to address these issues by putting women at the centre of the response activities. The response was designed to ensure that women's leadership would be built at the same time as addressing emergency needs. Underpinning this was a trust and belief that women can and do lead emergency responses in their communities, working with local capacity and ensuring that women are truly participating in decision making, not merely being consulted.

#### **Box 6. Think power from the start**

The key lesson from this programme could be summarized as: "considering power from the start can make a difference". The programme managed to "think power" from the start and to use

### Box 7. Women at the centre

Overall the changes achieved in women status - and therefore in their inclusion as active actors in community (both in terms of appreciation of their role by others as well as in terms of self confidence) - is palpable. Women were put at the center of the action, and action was built around them.

**Long-term engagement and connection to broader programming** The results achieved by the program reflect several years of investment, with the evaluation taking place in mid-2015 (response began in 2011). The response was designed alongside a long-term strategy, and was complementary to other AAIK programs, such as work around GBV. The program demonstrates how if designed with a long-term view emergency response programs can kick start sustainable transformative change. Having this long-term vision from the outset is critical. Whereas many who resist a focus on women's rights in the midst of an emergency may suggest transformation isn't possible in emergency response, the Kenya examples shows that if you design your response with a transformative agenda from the outset, and match this with long term commitment and well designed connections to broader programming, it is indeed possible.

### Box 8. Changing power structures over time

Changing power structures and decision-making is not something that happens over-night, but in the LRP areas where AAIK has had a long presence it was emphasized by various external stakeholders that women's status in the communities had changed. This progress cannot be

### Box 9. Relief programming: a formidable opportunity for empowerment

Relief does not need to be addressed in ways that make people passive recipients. On the contrary, it can be a formidable opportunity for empowerment and transformational changes, which can also take place in the short term. The LRP we visited all were set up at the same time when the crisis hit. ActionAid was to be there in the long term. From the start the organisation was careful to ensure transformation - rather than strengthening - of existing exploitative power structures. Such transformation actually happened *very quickly* - i.e. within the timeframe of a relief/recovery programme. A case in point are the transformation in the role and self-awareness of women. A long-term presence is not a condition to make them happen, but rather to sustain and build on them.

**AA's engagement and participation strategies** As described above, AA used multiple strategies to engage women, ensure their meaningful participation in decision making and to advance women's leadership in their communities and in humanitarian response, leading evaluators to conclude that women's inclusion was a standout strength of the program. Particularly in the area of supporting women's groups, the evaluators suggested that REFLECT circles offered the greatest potential for transformation and accountable leadership. The Country Programme Manager for Kenya noted that this is a widely discussed issue, and in his view regardless of the collective form supported, the critical element for success is having a process which supports women to analyse, reflect and take action.

## What challenges did AAP face in advancing women's rights in the AA response?

**Building more capacity around women's rights in emergencies, using evidence based models** The country programme manager highlights the need to build more capacity around women's rights and feminist leadership in disasters as a key challenge. This includes residual pockets of resistance or lack of understanding among some staff across the organization about the value of humanitarian response firstly, as well as women's leadership within it. Key to this is building the evidence base, doing more critical analysis and documenting and sharing models more widely which demonstrate the power of humanitarian response as an opportunity to change women's lives.

**Funding** Although the program was designed as a comprehensive, integrated program, the way donor contracts allocated funding made the program difficult to manage. Budget documentation<sup>7</sup> suggests that specific women's rights components of the program received a significantly lower proportion of funding, and that this may have resulted in some areas of work not being implemented as planned or until much later (eg protection work)<sup>8</sup>. Some later funding (ANCP in 2013) was secured for very strong protection programming, but it's not clear to what extent the drought response program and the GBV program were then implemented in an integrated way.

**Men's engagement** The evaluation suggests that AA's approach to women's empowerment could be complemented by more work around men's engagement to help reinforce and sustain positive changes in gender roles and attitudes. For example, in livelihoods work, where women have started engaging in work traditionally the domain of men, this has been made possible due to men being away from home looking for alternatives due to the drought. The evaluation suggests the sustainability of the positive changes made will depend on AA's engagement with men to ensure there is no backlash or reversal on their return.

**Deepening analysis of exclusion** The evaluation suggests while AA's focus on inclusion of women was excellent, there is a need to do even more in depth power analysis about which women are most marginalized and excluded.

### Box 10. Changing men's mindsets

This Government officer says that - although ActionAid does a lot of work with women - men still control the resources. In practice, women have an increased burden.

### Box 11. Which women?

Work to include women could now be stepped up by looking at *which women* are most excluded: the view of this evaluation is that inclusion is a continuous process. As programmes create deeper relations with communities, power dynamics within them are unveiled and can be challenged. "Including women" could be a good enough endeavour in the initial phase of a

<sup>7</sup> Kenya Emergency Response Budget Report 2011-2013 (AA Internal document)

<sup>8</sup> Mid-term evaluation, 2015

## Philippines Typhoon Haiyan Response

Typhoon Haiyan (locally known as Yolanda) struck the Philippines on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and made landfall in the Visayas region at a speed of almost 300kph bringing intense wind, storms and rainfall. 14.1 million people were affected across nine regions, including 4.1 million people displaced, 6,201 people killed, 1.1 million houses damaged.

### Women's rights analysis

ActionAid's rapid assessment found that the priority needs of women included shelter, food, access to health services, income and livelihood options and protection concerns. The assessment also identified significant policy issues around women's land rights, with many vulnerable women being displaced as a result of the typhoon and lacking land tenure or being forced to move due to the government's decision to impose a 'no build zone'. It noted that women were largely passive recipients in the early relief efforts at that stage of the response with a need to engage women more actively as leaders. The assessment also identified the strong role women play in the economic management of families in the Philippines, but suggested that on the surface a picture of equality was masking deeper issues of gender inequality, such as women's burden of unpaid care and domestic violence.

### ActionAid's response<sup>9</sup>

Although ActionAid did not have a presence in the Philippines, AA mobilized a response and began immediate relief distribution within 14 days of the typhoon. From February 2014, AA transitioned from emergency response to early recovery interventions including shelter, livelihoods recovery, cash for work, and psychosocial support. A 2014-2017 ERP Country Strategy Paper (CSP) was developed after four months which embraces the principles of partnership, accountability to affected communities and fostering women's rights and leadership in emergencies, and with the vision to '*build back better, and safer.*' The three primary objectives of ActionAid's response program were to: i) empower women to claim their rights in emergencies; ii) revive and diversify livelihood opportunities; and iii) empower people to be more prepared to reduce risk and respond to disasters.

The evaluation found that AA's standout achievements in the Philippines included the high levels of engagement of women and civil society in every community visited. Women were strongly represented as leaders, community facilitators, volunteers and recipients of project support across the sites visited by the evaluation team. Community level women's groups were formed or revitalised through the program's support across all areas visited. Livelihoods activities engaged women, and some partners share AA's strategic focus on women's rights. Women also participated in decision-making processes and project planning and management processes, including needs identification, selection of participants and distribution of food, non-food items and other inputs including strengthening their capacity and forming their groups<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Philippines Evaluation, 2015

<sup>10</sup> Philippines Evaluation 2015, p3

Women's rights training, addressing VAW and the Philippines 'Magna Carta for Women', was conducted by a number of AA partners to increase women's knowledge of rights and protection issues. The evaluation provided a number of examples of program participants who spoke strongly of how greater awareness of rights through the engagement with AA partners had changed their lives. In one focus group discussion there was an example of a trainee using her position as head of a local organisation to request the government appoint a women's desk officer so that VAWC cases could be reported, and women reported that they felt greater confidence to take action on their behalf and to help others.

### Box 1. Training in women's rights

*"Before PKKK came we felt like we were slaves, we didn't have freedom or know the rights of women. Now we are aware of the Magna Carta of Women, we women can claim our rights, now we can stand up and practice them."*

Since the training, Lorna has asked the Mayor to provide a safe space for women in her village, as she knows that each barangay (village) has a mandated protection order. She has also asked the village head (the 'barangay captain') to provide a women's desk officer in the village hall as most women don't like reporting issues, particularly domestic violence to the barangay captain.

Lorna has also shared information from her training in preventing violence against women and children with fellow community members, and acts as a focal person for

In the livelihoods response, AA and partners provided emergency relief, cash for work and seeds in the immediate phase of the response. During the second phase, the program strengthened the capacity of small farmers and fishers and their collectives, especially women, by providing them with essential inputs (seeds), tools and kits to enable them to grow and market their produce. According to the evaluation, ActionAid and partners established a strong base for supporting women's rights and economic empowerment, or *peso power*, as one woman put it.

The third objective of AA's strategy for the Philippines related to disaster preparedness, with a focus on promoting women's leadership in preparedness. These activities have ramped up in Phase 2 of the response. AA is enabling motivated barangay leaders to conduct disaster planning and preparedness activities and is supporting community organizations to mobilize women and men and spread knowledge about the local government's 5% allocation for DRRM plans. The role of women in disaster preparedness planning is increasingly recognized in the community as a result of AA's program. Women are the ones to bring family members to evacuation centres, and to prepare clothes and other essential items that will be needed for the period before support can arrive. Men are often outside the home, taking care of livelihoods assets such as livestock when typhoons hit. Women interviewed by the evaluation team also spoke about the inadequate conditions of evacuation centres, which were often extremely basic: no toilets, lights and very crowded; and in some cases with unshuttered windows. There were many anecdotes of the bravery of women and men working together to ensure each other's safety, to share limited food and to find medical care for those most in need, such as women in labour.

### Box 2. Women's leadership in DRR

*Through the DRR seminars we realised that women play a critical role in DRR, it isn't just about physical strength. It's not only men who are meant to participate. Now we know how to share information with the community about typhoons. We shouldn't be dependent on men in disasters- I am a widow so if I'd have*

According to the Country Programme Manager<sup>11</sup>, AA's experience in community based disaster preparedness is showing the real difference women's leadership in disaster preparedness and planning can have. In the past, women have not felt considered in community disaster preparedness planning, especially with regards to their safety in evacuation centres. They have not felt included, safe or provided for, and therefore preferred to stay at home even if this meant facing greater exposure to the disaster. Through AA's support for women's leadership in disaster preparedness, women have a greater say in the planning and the control of resources. Now contingency plans and resource allocations respond to women's needs, both material, such as what relief items are prioritized, and needs for safety such as design of evacuation centres. Women in the community have more confidence in the plans.

Women participating in disaster preparedness planning have also had the opportunity for policy dialogue with the local government, and local barangays are taking on board concerns raised by women in the planning committees about evacuation sites, shelter and other protection concerns for women and children. According to the country programme manager, these changes are clearly evident in the communities' disaster plans.

In addition, women involved in the disaster preparedness work are now better equipped in their roles as first responders. They have training, better connection to information and to other response mechanisms to enable them to get information out quickly to their communities. Politically, the investment that AA made in empowering women has helped women to take up space and influence in community structures. They are able to use newly acquired knowledge, skills and resources to create spaces at the table.

### **What factors contributed to effective women's rights programming?**

**A partnership with dedicated women's network and cross learning between partners** In Samar, AA was working with PKKK, a network of women associations which is entirely focused on women. PKKK was a key partner in terms of implementing AA's women's rights focus, as they had strong experience in women focused initiatives. They also had networks of existing women's leaders that could be tapped into to be part of the DRR and response activities. PKKK was able to effectively deliver on women's rights training and psychosocial work with women, where this was more challenging for other partners. After realizing this, AA was able to work with PKKK to help influence other partners who needed more support to implement activities with a women's rights focus.

**Deployment of country program manager with women's rights expertise** The Philippines Country Programme Manager has a strong women's rights background. She was initially deployed to the emergency response as the women's rights technical specialist. Having such expertise in the senior management in country contributes significantly to ensuring AA drives an agenda where women's rights are non-negotiable in all its work and where women's rights inform conscious decisions about the way AA programmes.

**Funding support from ActionAid Australia (through ANCP) for women's leadership** The country programme manager noted that the ANCP funding received for women's leadership in DRR was instrumental in supporting the work around women's leadership in a way that wasn't possible with other funding and which allowed AA Philippines to innovate and advance that element of the response.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, Joyce Laker, November 2015

**Taking a non negotiable approach to women's leadership** The success AA Philippines demonstrated in ensuring women were engaged as leaders and facilitators in all aspects of the response has been attributed to AA's non negotiable stance on women's leadership and to building on women's existing capacities. In formal agreements with partners, AA clearly documented the commitment to women's participation and leadership as a priority in all work. Strategies which AA promoted to ensure women's leadership throughout the response included training women, targeting women specifically, establishing women-led committees for preparedness and response, providing resources, facilities and logistics to enable women to take an active role in response and preparedness work, and aggressively dialoguing at the local level to have women included and heard in formal structures such as barangay councils.

**Building on women's capacities** In the Philippines, women traditionally have responsibility for the control of money in the family. By supporting recovery of women's livelihoods, AA used livelihoods work as an entry point to start working with women and then expanded to open up rights awareness and leadership spaces and opportunities, in doing so building on women's existing capacities.

**Support from iHART and ActionAid Australia** iHART and ActionAid Australia have provided frequent support to the country programme on women's rights and protection work, including providing fast, responsive advice and referral, sharing experiences and examples from other responses. Through accountability mechanisms such as the oversight group, there was clear follow up on the women's rights focus including appropriate questioning and reminders.

#### **What challenges did AA face in advancing women's rights in the AA response?**

##### **Partner resistance and lack of capacity and understanding of women's rights**

Despite the positive contribution that AA's relationship with a women's network (PKKK) made to the response, AA faced challenges in implementing its response due to lack of awareness on women's rights issues from other partners. At least one partner was strongly resistant to the idea that women could be leaders. A couple of key lessons emerge from this experience. First, while partner selection was done in the midst of the emergency response, it may have been appropriate to review and change partners at the beginning of the recovery phase. Secondly, AA learned that it could use partners differently based on their strengths, for example by working with PKKK to strengthen women's rights capacity across all of the other partnerships.

**Limited focus on women's rights in shelter programming and immediate response activities** The aspect of the response where there was least focus on women was in the emergency shelter programming. According to a key stakeholder, issues relating to women's needs in shelter kits 'just didn't come up' and women's roles were limited to receiving the kits. This in part has been attributed to limited gender analysis specific to the shelter sector and late deployment of women's rights expertise. The challenges of working with partners in the early phase also meant that it took time for women's rights and protection issues to be embedded in the response.

**Protection** Protection is an area where the country programme would like to have achieved stronger results. While AA has been able to support training and rights awareness, there has not been attention to legal assistance, or referrals for support for violations to ensure women have the opportunity to claim their rights. The evaluation recommended that 'ActionAid, partners and rights-holders should work towards developing and documenting a more comprehensive understanding

of community level responses to VAWC and work with women, authorities and civil society to identify a longer term women's rights and resilience strategy. Work has been done to promote awareness of VAWC among women's groups, but there are no strategies for supporting an end to VAWC beyond reporting the matter to the local authorities and no services at community level<sup>12</sup>. One factor the country programme cites is lack of funding for protection work. Other factors include late deployment of women's rights expertise and the need for more standardized practical approaches and tools for protection which can support implementation in the early phase of the response, such as rapid protection audits. Protection concerns were widely evident in the immediate post disaster phase, including safety concerns in evacuation centres, trafficking, rape and exploitation and lack of safe spaces, but these issues were overwhelmed by the focus on other immediate response needs.

**Limited access to technical expertise in AAI** While the country programme appreciated the responsive support that iHART and AA Australia provided, it was also felt that access to technical expertise in women's rights and protection was limited and that the country programme would have benefitted from engagement from the broader women's empowerment team or from there being additional dedicated emergency focused women's rights and protection expertise in AAI.

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<sup>12</sup> Philippines evaluation, 2015, p24

## War in Gaza – Operation Protective Edge, 2014

The people of Gaza live in a complex and chronic humanitarian situation defined by persistent conflict, blockade and denial of human rights including freedom of movement. Traumatic stress, loss of homes, limited livelihood options, violence and related protection risks, food insecurity, inadequate infrastructure and services are all part of the day to day lives of women, men, boys and girls living in Gaza. This situation of chronic vulnerability is exacerbated by extreme spikes in the wars with Israel that have occurred most recently in 2008/09, 2012 and again in 2014 in Operation Protective Edge. From the 7th of July 2014 until the 20th August 2014 Gaza was subject to bombardment, resulting in the deaths of 2,254 people including 538 children<sup>13</sup>. 54,000 children were made homeless<sup>14</sup>.

### Women's rights analysis<sup>15</sup>

In addition to being more vulnerable to the effects of the Israeli occupation, Palestinian women are exposed to denial of their human rights as a consequence of the discriminatory policies, practices and attitudes inherent in Palestinian society. Women's participation in the formal labour market is low at 15.7%. Women continue to be responsible for the bulk of childcare and domestic work, and the value of work in the care economy is rarely recognised. Differential inheritance, along with discrimination in employment opportunities, pay, and access to credit, result in women generally having little capital with which to start their own economic ventures. Living in patriarchal communities, Palestinian women continue to face frequent denial of their control over their bodies, in terms of violation of the rights to physical security and freedom from violence, access to sexual and reproductive health services and information and decision-making capacity within and outside of the home. Early marriage – and subsequent early pregnancies – represents an additional challenge for young women, excluding them from equal access to education and employment.

Following Operation Protective Edge, PNGO (Palestine NGO network), a local network AA worked with on advocacy, prepared a fact sheet on the impacts of the crisis on women, highlighting the following facts (Box 1)<sup>16</sup>:

#### **Facts about Women Sector during the Israeli Offensive of Summer 2014:**

1. 483 women including 293 over the age of 18, 190 under the age of 18, were martyred by the Israeli occupation's offensive.
2. 23 women of the martyred women were widow, 65 were single, 199 were married whereas 6 others were divorced.
3. 1442 of the wounded were women.
4. 48 women with disabilities were wounded during the offensive.
5. 115 of the wounded women suffering disability after being wounded during the offensive.
6. 16.3% of the Palestinian women are widows; 750 – 800 of them were widowed after their spouses death during the offensive.
8. 18 women had their babies delivered at home during the offensive as a result of being unable to reach hospitals and access the necessarily needed medical care.
9. Number of premature baby cases increased by 30% during the offensive compared to the months leading up to the offensive, due to the fear and tension.
10. Infant mortality rate during the offensive has doubled, reaching 14% in comparison to previous months.

<sup>13</sup> Protection Cluster, 22 October 2014

<sup>14</sup> OCHA, 4 September 2014

<sup>15</sup> People's Action for Justice, AAP Country Strategy 2013-2017

<sup>16</sup> Factsheet: Impacts of each Israeli Occupation's Summer Offensive 2014 and Delayed Reconstruction on the Women Sector in the Gaza Strip, Women's sector of the Palestinian NGO network

## ActionAid's response to Operation Protective Edge

When the latest war broke out in Gaza, ActionAid Palestine (AAP) was not working in Gaza, although it had responded to emergency needs in the past after Operation Cast Lead in 2009-10. AAP had a long term country strategy (2013-2017) in place with the following objectives: i) advancing the political influence of Palestinian women and youth to hold authorities to account; ii) enhancing rights based responses to the occupation of the Palestinian territory; and iii) building the active agency of women and girls to address discrimination and exercise control over their bodies and resources.

Emergencies by their nature bring about change, and despite the crisis which ensues, they also open up new spaces, attention and resources to address the rights of people affected by them, especially women. AAP saw this window and mobilized a humanitarian response to the war in Gaza in 2014, addressing the acute needs of women newly affected by this crisis while seeing the longer-term opportunities to work in solidarity with women in Gaza. AA mounted an emergency response which included: cash and NFIs and winterisation; women's livelihoods; psychosocial and protection (rights awareness) for women and children; and advocacy relating to the blockade. From the outset of the response, AAP's Country Director stipulated that its emergency response in Gaza would be focused on women.

AA started its response to the crisis by distributing cash vouchers for food and non-food items, and focused on women by identifying them as beneficiaries on the vouchers and trying to ensure that women could access supermarkets. In practice, this was challenging due to access and security concerns and the point of the conflict at the time of distributions, which was during an uneasy ceasefire. Given protection risks, the security situation and cultural practices, in many cases male family members were in control of the shopping<sup>17</sup>. In later distributions, for example during a winterization distribution when active conflict had ceased, women were the ones who claimed the vouchers.

In the next phase of its intervention, AA was better able to reach women by working with local partners to provide support for livelihoods and psychosocial care. Through work with local partners PARC (Agricultural development association) and WEFAQ Society for Women and Children, AA provided livelihood alternatives for women who were heads of households (widows, divorcees, main breadwinners). The project worked with women who had knowledge and skills and could benefit from access to resources to activate livelihood options and generate an income. It also helped to connect women with each other and reduce their isolation. With WEFAQ, AA also provided

### Box 2. Building solidarity

The provision of livelihoods was linked to training and support (including psychosocial assistance). It was an incentive, for women, to increase their mobility and to gain new knowledge. The way in which assistance was delivered made women feel important. They also gained a sense of self worth and increased confidence (because of having project, having a goal, being self reliant). In some cases this translated in physical wellbeing (less stress, more sleep, less nightmares)

*Gaza Mid-term Evaluation, 2015 p.29*

The linkages established are still quite basic, and very localized. But they matter. The work of ActionAid and partners had helped already women to feel that "we were not alone, that other women had similar experiences". It broke their isolation. It is indeed

<sup>17</sup> Key informant interview

psychosocial programming for women and children traumatised by the war. With another local organization, Fekra, AA supported psychosocial initiatives for children which among other things, helped boys and girls relate to each other. On the advocacy and campaigning front, AA joined with local networks such as PNGO (Palestinian NGO network) to conduct advocacy about the rights denial by the occupation including producing fact sheets about the impact of Operation Protective Edge on women.

These programs helped AAP develop its relationship with partners and to find its space in Gaza. AAP is now working to further ramp up its focus on women through longer-term programs. AA's work with PARC has evolved to include work with Community Protection Committees on disaster risk management. There are 27 women actively involved as members of the three committees. AA has provided training on risk assessment to the committees who have been very involved in identifying vulnerable members of the community for livelihoods support, as well as conducting local advocacy about the occupation. The committees don't currently have a specific role in women's rights work or protection activities, but there is a strong potential for this to be a part of AA's future work with the committees.

The partnership with WEFAQ on psychosocial programming was expanded to include training in women's rights, and now plans are in place to develop the partnership further into women's centres which provide safe spaces, access to legal resources and rights awareness for women who have lost inheritance rights or been legally disadvantaged, for example through divorce, as well as providing support on issues such as child custody. The women's rights awareness training already provided has covered issues such as marriage, divorce, personal status law, penal law, rights of widows and divorcees and domestic violence and violence against women.

In line with its long-term strategy, AA is also committed to addressing issues of violence against women. This is a complex area of work and while there is tremendous need, it is also a crowded space in Gaza in terms of the numbers of agencies working on this issue. AA decided to start with a research project to better understand the VAW risks after Operation Protective Edge and identify where the greatest need for additional support is. In October 2015 AAP, together with Alianza por La Solidaridad (APS), published research into the context of Violence Against Women in Gaza. The

### **Box 3. Community Protection Committees**

After 11 years of marriage, I completed my secondary school," says Amira Ismael Ibrahim, a member of the Citizen Protection Committee (CPC) in the northern city of Jabaliya in Gaza. "Then I got a bachelor's degree in basic education. Now I manage an organization and want to pursue a master's degree in curriculum development."

Amira had to confront her family and her community to accomplish this, and she believes that bodies like the CPC should support women to stand up against socio-cultural boundaries and to secure their rights. She underlines the need to spread awareness on women's rights in Gaza, particularly on the rights of divorced women and widows. "They face so many problems because of culture and traditions. They can't move freely. They have to be confined to their houses. I am trying to change this. I always talk to people about this."

Amira has participated in other public actions undertaken by the CPC. She tweeted messages and photos from a bus as it traveled through Gaza to commemorate the end of the 2014 war. She joined farmers in the village of Johr ad-Dik to protest

report, *'Violence Against Women in the Gaza Strip after the military action Operation Protective Edge'*, 2014 provides deep insights into the kinds of violence being experienced by women in Gaza and the support available to them. AA is using this report to develop future programming options to address VAW.

### What supported women's rights work in the Gaza response?

**Leadership and long term strategy focused on women's rights** The fact that AA was very clear from the outset that its response and longer term programs would be focused on women's rights was instrumental in remaining focused on this priority and developing the program. The fact that the Country Director had strong women's rights expertise and a firm commitment to women's rights as non-negotiable was important.

**Incremental improvements building a strong program over time** Putting the focus on women's rights into practice in the immediate response was challenging, however AAP was not deterred and continued to build on its work and increase the focus on women's rights with each new phase of the response. The strategy was to make consistent, incremental advances that were appropriate to the context, the relationships with partners and their experiences, and to AAP's own experience in Gaza. This allowed testing and learning with partners along the way to build a strong foundation to address important women's rights issues over the long term in Gaza,

**Access to women through good partners, and the right combination of partners** AA's choice of partners was instrumental in reaching women in a very complex context. WEFAQ, as an organization focused on women's rights brought strong expertise and experience. PARC, an agricultural organization already had a strong focus on women's livelihoods and was able to reach many Palestinian women with its livelihood programs. Fekra had a strong commitment to bringing boys and girls together to overcome gender issues. PNGO had a women's sector and was interested in advocacy on women's rights issues. The four partners had complementary skills and in combination the group of partners provided the platform for a women-focused response across livelihoods, rights awareness and psychosocial support. Importantly, all four partners were also interested in advocacy alongside service delivery and were interested in working with AA on campaigning relating to accountability and women's rights in the community.

### What challenges did AAP face in advancing women's rights in the AA response?

#### **Finding niche for AA in a crowded space, especially to respond to issues relating to Violence Against Women (VAW)**

Gaza is a crowded and complicated operating environment in many respects. For AA, entering Gaza as a new actor in the midst of the emergency response, finding a niche was challenging and in some areas took time. This was particularly the case in the area of responding to VAW. While AA immediately started psychosocial support followed by legal protection work, the space for longer term engagement in work to end VAW was less clear due to the large number of actors already working in this space. AA's response was to work with a partner, APS, to commission in depth research into VAW and the services available to help define future programming. This is an appropriate approach to defining programming in a sensitive and complex area of work, but it does mean that this protection component of the program will be a longer term program intervention rather than having been implemented as part of the emergency response, and it may be useful to consider what VAW activities AA could support in future emergencies.

**A lack of geographic focus limited the capacity of AA to build focus on women's leadership** AA's programs with local partners targeted vulnerable women from across a range of geographic areas, rather than focusing on specific communities. The absence of a geographic focus translated into a lack of sustained relationships with a specific community, which in turn limited opportunities to focus on and build women's leadership within communities. It also limited the extent to which solidarity could be built between individual women receiving assistance. AA will seek to focus on supporting specific communities and women's groups through mechanisms such as REFLECT circles in future programming.

**A new team in Gaza meant AA needed to build its own capacity on women's rights, and could have benefitted from stronger support on women's rights from EFAST** AA had a small, new team in Gaza and movement restrictions imposed by Israel and the blockade meant that staff were not able to come out of Gaza for training, and the experience Palestinian staff from the West Bank were not able to travel in to Gaza. There was a need for new staff build their own knowledge and skills relating to AA's approaches including the focus on women's rights. An emergency manager was deployed from the EFAST roster, however they did not have strong expertise on women's rights either and so were not able to contribute to deepening the women's rights and HRBA focus in the response in the way that the country programme had hoped. For the country programme, the experience highlighted the importance of all emergency managers on EFAST having women's rights expertise, as well as being trained and prepared before a crisis.

## **Annexes 2-9 Refer Separate files**

For all evaluations examined in this meta-evaluation, see:

<https://hive.actionaid.org/IHART/Emergencies%20evaluations/Forms/AllItems.aspx>