

# INTER-AGENCY HUMANITARIAN EVALUATION ON

# GENDER EQUALITY

## AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Management, funding, and implementation of the evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group (IAHE SG). An evaluation team from KonTerra conducted the evaluation.

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## Evaluation Team [The KonTerra Group]

Mariangela Bizzarri

Mireia Cano Vinas

Hisham Khogali

Terrence Jantzi

## Evaluation Management

OCHA Evaluation Manager

Kelly David, Anne Danker, Ali Buzurukov

Evaluation Management Group

Carlotta Tincati (UNICEF)

Hicham Daoudi (UNFPA)

Isadora Quay/Caitlin Shannon (CARE)

Mari Honjo (WFP)

Henri van den Idsert (UNHCR)

## KonTerra Management

KonTerra Evaluation Manager

Nathan Horst

Quality Assurance

Tony Beck [The KonTerra Group]

*The KonTerra Group | 700 12th St NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA*

## Disclaimer

The contents and conclusions of this evaluation report reflect the opinion of the authors, and not necessarily those of the United Nations, OCHA, donors, or other stakeholders.

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# About the 2020 Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation

## Scope

This report presents the results of the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls (GEEWG) commissioned by the IAHE Steering Group and covers the period from January 2017 through December 2019. It is an independent assessment of the collective results in humanitarian responses of Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) member organizations related to GEEWG implementation and mainstreaming.

## Evaluation Questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:



### EQ1

To what extent are humanitarian responses tailored to build the capacities and resilience of women, girls, men, and boys?



### EQ2

How consistently are existing system-wide policies, programme guidance and tools on gender equality and the empowerment of women implemented among IASC members?



### EQ3

How effective are existing IASC-promoted efforts to strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian programmes?



### EQ4

To what extent are efforts by IASC members to strengthen gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian programming coordinated?

## Use

The main users for this evaluation are the IASC stakeholders, including the IASC Principals; the IASC Deputies Forum; the Operational Policy and Advocacy Group; and the Emergency Directors Group (EDG). The evaluation is intended to inform progress on the operationalization of GEEWG in humanitarian responses, as well as to present lessons learned and recommendations for improvement to the IASC.

## Methods

The evaluation drew on a mixed-methods approach (document review, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and site observations) and gathered inputs from both global-level humanitarian actors as well as from stakeholders and beneficiaries from within selected individual humanitarian responses. In addition to IASC-level global interviews, the evaluation team carried out in-depth case studies, including fieldwork, of four responses (Bangladesh, Colombia, Iraq and Nigeria). Six additional countries (Chad, Myanmar, Palestine, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen) were selected for desk-based document review. Overall, 261 persons were interviewed from humanitarian actors (IASC organizations, government representatives, donors and non-governmental organizations) along with 335 affected people through focus group discussions.

## Evaluation Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

There has been progress in integrating GEEWG issues into IASC humanitarian responses since 2017, especially in protracted crises.

### Strong Efforts at Gender Mainstreaming

EQ1

GEEWG mainstreaming has been increasingly integrated within humanitarian responses, although still not to the degree envisioned in the IASC Gender Policy. Gender expertise is increasingly found at the country level, albeit still not at sufficient levels and chiefly in longer-term responses. With more gender expertise in the responses, humanitarian actors had more systematically consulted women and girls; improved in the collection and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data; made some progress in accounting for the needs of multiple populations and the specific needs of women and girls in needs assessment; and undertaken more nuanced analyses of gender-related gaps, inequalities and contextual factors in Humanitarian Response Plans. Additionally, more women and girls had improved access to a greater number of feedback and complaint mechanisms across humanitarian responses.

### Success Factors

EQ2 EQ3

At the global level, success factors contributing to the mainstreaming of GEEWG into long-term IASC humanitarian responses include the elaboration of global cluster and individual agency policies, guidance and practices that promote gendered approaches and are largely in alignment with the IASC gender policy. This has been combined with increased attention across the board (IASC, global clusters, individual agencies) to the roll-out of guidance, training and socialization on GEEWG. Gender expertise at the global level within individual agencies and global clusters has also improved. At the IASC level, the Gender Policy, Gender Accountability Framework, GenCap senior advisors and Gender with Age Marker have all been important resources for contributing to increased GEEWG integration in humanitarian responses. At the country level, success factors<sup>1</sup> included the presence of an inter-agency senior gender advisor deployed with a long-term mandate<sup>2</sup> who sat at the level of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) or Inter-Cluster Coordinating Group (ICCG); the allocation of gender expertise within the cluster; the elaboration of the IASC's global gender equality commitments by HCT members, which included targeted, time-bound action points; and the creation of GEEWG coordination structures that did not conflate GEEWG solely with gender-based violence (GBV) and Protection.

On the other hand, at the outset of humanitarian operations, nearly all humanitarian responses tend to be gender blind, although this does improve over time.

### Sudden Onset Emergency Response<sup>3</sup> Approaches and Practices

EQ3

The evaluation found that global clusters were not able to deploy timely gender equality expertise successfully during sudden onset emergency responses, which limits the degree to which immediate front-line responders are supported to ensure that activities, such as needs assessments, take gender equality into account. For example, the practice of interviewing only heads of households in major assessment exercises can reduce the voice of women when the heads of households are male. Delays in revising programming once needs are originally identified exacerbate this issue and its impacts. Finally, gender equality is often deprioritized in the first phase of a response, as it is not considered a “life-saving issue” to the same extent as other humanitarian needs, with the exception of responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) or GBV cases among affected women under the Protection mandate.

<sup>1</sup> Success factors are distillations of patterns from country case studies and general document review. Not all success factors were found in all cases. Delays in setting up the success factors is one important factor in the relative gender blindness observed at the beginning of sudden onset emergency responses.

<sup>2</sup> This was most often a GenCap senior advisor.

<sup>3</sup> Natural or human-made emergencies arising with little or no warning – see <https://www.who.int/hac/about/definitions/en/>.

## Gender-sensitive Analyses

EQ3

As a result of the above, the quality and frequency of inter-cluster gender analyses and the integration of GEEWG issues into the initial phase of the response (beyond GBV and protection from SEA) remains a gap. In particular, the collection and reporting of sex- and age-disaggregated data (SADD) is less common at the point of initial responses (in comparison to a year or two later), and there is limited evidence of SADD being used to inform the analysis and adaptation of project activities and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs) within front-line responses. This has had a negative effect on the quality of the initial response activities for women and girls compared to other populations.

### Recommendation 1 Strengthen gender equality expertise in sudden onset emergency response.<sup>18</sup>

During initial front-line humanitarian responses, the IASC should ensure that agencies and all clusters immediately deploy gender equality expertise to assist with cluster analyses, project activity design, sectoral plans and HRP strategy development. This should involve having gender equality integrated clearly into the terms of reference – and responsibilities – of the front-line actors who carry out cluster activities. The HCTs should further ensure that the standard assessment methodologies employed emphasize an appropriate diversity of stakeholder consultations and take into account locally produced gender tools and guidance as appropriate.

## Women’s meaningful influence on decision making, especially at the higher levels, remains limited in both protracted and sudden onset emergency responses.

### Consultation Versus Decision Making

EQ1

While the participation of and consultation with affected women for needs assessment increases over the duration of a response, this has not necessarily translated into women and girls being involved in *decision making* regarding project activities or response management. Women and other diverse voices were interviewed regarding their needs during the assessment phases but were not included in the actual design of projects or the strategic decision making of the response. Additionally, consultation with women on their needs was often limited to “women’s issues” as perceived by humanitarian actors – such as hygiene or sexual and reproductive health – rather than their other broader needs, or their own strengths, resilience and capacities.

### Other Marginalized Groups

EQ1

Similarly, the voices and needs of youth and marginalized groups (for example, LGBTI people, persons with disabilities, the elderly and specific ethnic groups, among others) are still largely absent from decision making on humanitarian response, even as there have been improvements in consulting these groups in needs assessment exercises. A good practice observed in a few of the reviewed case studies to increase women’s influence on decision making was to have women-led organizations and self-organizing women’s groups more intentionally integrated into the response management and coordination structures. However, this practice was not observed with respect to any other marginalized group.

### Feedback and Complaints

EQ1

Another form of influence is through the complaints and feedback mechanisms. But even here, women and girls were not able to access complaint and feedback mechanisms as easily as men, limiting the degree to which their perspectives are considered. Affected populations consulted during the evaluation, or in other exercises reviewed by the team, rarely reported receiving feedback on how their inputs were addressed, and the resolution of cases presented through the feedback mechanisms were tracked in only one of the case study countries.

### Recommendation 2 Strengthen meaningful participation of women in humanitarian decision making

The IASC should ensure ongoing support to HCs and HCTs to strengthen meaningful participation of women in humanitarian decision making. This should involve the inclusion of at least one women-led national NGO/group on HCTs in a long term-strategic role or the development of a robust consultation mechanisms with women’s organizations to inform strategic decision making. In addition, funding for women’s organizations should be further prioritized in alignment with the localization agenda.

<sup>4</sup> Recommendations in the Executive Summary include only a brief summary of action points. For the full detailed recommendations refer to section 5 in the main report.

**While there has been observed progress on GEEWG implementation, gaps in country-level gender expertise and coordination thwart efforts to support and sustain it.**

### **Strategic-level Gender Expertise**

**EQ3**

The findings from country case studies and desk reviews show that both high-level strategic expertise and cluster-specific, long-term<sup>5</sup> gender expertise is necessary for the successful operationalization of GEEWG at the country level. However, in-country gender expertise was often disparate, was located at the wrong levels, or lacked coordinated collective efforts. Specifically, the absence of investment by donors and agencies to place inter-agency, strategic-level gender expertise within the HCT leads to a heavy reliance within the HCTs on GenCap senior advisors, whose engagement can only be expected for up to three years, to fill strategic gaps. This is not only not sustainable, but also contributes to the lack of strategic-level gender capacities for sudden onset disasters because the deployment of the GenCap senior advisors was often after the initial front-line response activities had been developed. When a senior-level inter-agency gender advisor was present, the HCTs produced better quality gender policies and commitments for the response, integrated gender targets and SADD reporting more quickly into HRPs, and were more proactive in responding to GEEWG opportunities within the response.

### **Operational/ Technical Gender Expertise**

**EQ4**

While the presence of a senior-level inter-agency gender advisor for the HCTs was necessary, it was not sufficient to ensure gender equality mainstreaming across all of the diverse and varied project activities within cluster operations. When gender expertise was allocated within a response, it was often not sufficiently expert on cluster-level technical operational programming to be able to “speak the language” of the clusters leading to gaps in technical operational expertise. As they are mainly comprised of nominated non-gender experts with other and perhaps more primary tasks, inter-agency gender working groups struggled to provide the necessary fine-grained technical support to the project activities. Additionally, the working groups were often disconnected organizationally from the operations of the clusters and from the HCT or ICCG actors, limiting their influence on both strategic decision making and project design and implementation. As a result, the more effective fora for promoting GEEWG within humanitarian response were those more closely linked to intra-cluster operations. In particular, cluster operations improved for GEEWG when the lead agency of the cluster/sector deployed dedicated gender expertise within the cluster and when the expertise was allocated to the sector as a whole and not simply seen as an agency-specific resource.

### **GEEWG Coordination**

**EQ4**

Notably, in almost all humanitarian responses reviewed through case studies and desk reviews, some form of inter-agency, inter-sector coordination mechanism for GEEWG was created – even though this is not a requirement in the humanitarian architecture – suggesting not only a clear need, but also support for, GEEWG coordination from HCTs. In the absence of a dedicated platform and high-level expertise on GEEWG, the GBV sub-cluster often becomes the default mechanism for all GEEWG-related work within humanitarian responses. This has helped create a unifying framework under a unique umbrella with a multiplicity of initiatives. However, this has also led to the work on GEEWG being oriented primarily towards GBV and/or protection. In order to be effective and address the lack of gender equality in all spheres, it is necessary for gender equality and women’s participation to be integrated throughout all clusters/sectors.

### **Recommendation 3 Increase HCTs access to strategic and technical expertise on GEEWG**

All HCTs should have access to a dedicated inter-agency strategic gender capacity, complemented by embedded technical-level cluster expertise. The IASC should ensure the mandatory placement, and adequate resourcing, of a high-level, inter-agency gender advisor position for the entirety of the response. Cluster lead agencies should allocate long-term, dedicated senior-level gender equality and technical sector specialist to serve as a cluster-specific resource and connect the operational and strategic levels in collaboration with the HCT gender equality advisor.

<sup>5</sup> Present throughout the entire period of a humanitarian response.

## | There is no clear “home” for GEEWG issues in the IASC.

### **GEEWG Results and Responsibilities**

EQ2 EQ4

GEEWG mainstreaming is named as an important priority within humanitarian response in line with the Member States gender commitments emerging from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. However, this priority is not visible within the current structure, plans and management processes of the IASC, which inhibits the full operationalization, monitoring or accountability of GEEWG at all levels. For example, the Gender Reference Group sits quite low within the IASC in relation to the normative mandate for gender. Also, besides GBV (UNFPA) and Protection (UNHCR), GEEWG is assumed to be a shared responsibility among IASC members. Although gender is among the IASC Strategic Priorities (and associated Work Plans), there are no high-level gender results statements or associated indicators for tracking gender outcomes within the Strategic Priorities or associated Work Plans. These institutional limitations at the IASC level and their replication among the HCTs impede the operationalization and tracking of (and accountability to) the overall GEEWG commitments at both the global and field level. As a consequence, in the absence of these mechanisms, successful GEEWG implementation in humanitarian response activities becomes highly dependent on voluntary leadership or an individual manager’s commitment to GEEWG, leading to ad hoc and inconsistent gender mainstreaming and duplication in responses.

#### **Recommendation 4** Improve IASC strategic planning and monitoring of gender results outcomes

The IASC should ensure systematic planning and monitoring of gender-related results at global and country levels. The IASC Strategic Priorities and Associated Work Plans should include, track, and report on at least one high-level gender results statement and associated indicators. HRP monitoring frameworks should include GEEWG indicators aligned with the IASC high-level indicator.

#### **Recommendation 5** Strengthen global leadership and capacity for gender

The IASC should strengthen the opportunities for global leadership and capacity for gender through the integration of the Gender Reference Group (GRG) within the core structure of the IASC, improved use of external IASC gender capacity, and increase the emphasis on GEEWG themes in leadership discussions. This would involve revising the ToRs and placement of the GRG and respective results groups; and exploring how to make better use of UN Women’s specific gender mandate within the IASC structure. As part of enhanced leadership capacity development, OCHA should ensure that HC retreats, which serve as venues for orientation and socialization, include sessions on gender equality commitments for HCs.

## | In order for GEEWG to be sustainably realized, existing accountability mechanisms must be better utilized and leveraged.

### **Leadership Sustainability**

EQ2

The leadership of the Secretary-General and the Emergency Relief Coordinator on gender parity and gender equality is an important factor contributing to the elaboration and roll-out of the IASC Gender Policy and gender commitments. However, high-level attention is not enough to ensure sustainable and long-term progress. Leadership from all humanitarian leaders and managers is needed. Sustainable GEEWG mainstreaming cannot be guaranteed unless gender commitments are further institutionalized and made visible within the humanitarian system. GEEWG accountability tools exist for both the global and country level. However, their use and application are inconsistent and not routine.

### **Global-level Accountability Tools**

EQ4

At the IASC level, although there is a global Gender Accountability Framework (GAF) annual report with recommendations for improvements, there are not yet institutionalized reporting lines for implementation and follow-up on these recommendations. Meanwhile, not enough attention has been paid to gender equality or the GAF recommendations by the IASC leadership. Another missed opportunity to address GEEWG programming is the annual retreats of HCs, which provide an important venue for collectively orienting and discussing important issues – such as gender equality mainstreaming – affecting all humanitarian responses.

## In-country Leadership Accountability

EQ3

HC and HCT leadership recognize gender equality as important, but they are not accountable to prioritize it beyond GBV, protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and Protection. For example, there are no specific non-negotiables or action points to ensure their compliance in the HCT compact. Combined with the above lack of requisite gender expertise at both the strategic level and within clusters, concerted efforts on gender were lacking and predominantly focused on GBV and PSEA, rather than GEEWG as a whole. This leads to inconsistency across the clusters in GEEWG mainstreaming, and weak operationalization and monitoring of gender-responsive programming.

## Country-level Accountability Tools

EQ3

The lack of a tool for monitoring progress in GEEWG implementation has led to the use by HCTs and donors of existing capacity development tools such as the Gender with Age Marker (GAM) to predict whether a project will contribute to gender equality programming, although that is not their intended purpose. In UNCTs, the UN SWAP Gender Scorecard is applied as a systematic reflection exercise. By comparison, in HCTs the GAF is considered to be a “tick-the-box” exercise that is rarely done as a collective reflection exercise among the entire HCT and whose results are even more rarely shared with the in-country humanitarian actors. HCT stakeholders and humanitarian actors within a response usually had to wait until the publication of the global report to find out the results for their humanitarian response. Because of the time lag in publication, this could be up to two years after the exercise.

### Recommendation 6 Enhance management response to Gender Accountability Framework report

The IASC should strengthen mechanisms for follow-up to the recommendations from the IASC Gender Accountability Framework (GAF). The IASC should develop a formal management response plan for outlining actions to follow up on the GAF annual recommendations. The IASC principals should review progress on the GAF recommendations while HCTs should ensure that the results of their specific GAF assessments are presented to all in-country stakeholders so that a response’s performance on the GAF can reach in-country humanitarian actors in real time.

### Recommendation 7 Enhance accountability for GEEWG action

The ERC/HC annual compacts should include specific actions for GEEWG, and the HCT compacts should include HCT roles and responsibilities as set out in the IASC Gender policy. HCT compacts should outline specific commitments and actions for GEEWG to be a priority for operations and mainstreamed into other portfolios. This should include updating the HCT compacts to align with the revised IASC Gender Policy and Gender Accountability Framework. Furthermore, the HCT compacts should ensure the inclusion of women in decision making as a distinct fifth ‘non-negotiable’ and integrate specific elements that can be used to assess compliance on GEEWG mainstreaming.

## | Achieving GEEWG requires adequate funding

### The Gender Funding Myth

EQ3

The evaluation found that there is an implicit assumption among some humanitarian programming staff that GEEWG considerations can be addressed without resources, including funding for expertise. In case after case, the evidence shows that successful GEEWG implementation requires the allocation of dedicated resources to support gender expertise positions at both strategic and cluster levels to inform GEEWG programming, and this expertise needed to be present throughout the duration of a response. Funding for GEEWG expertise, including GBV, remains low, affecting GEEWG implementation. Although there are exceptions, cluster lead agencies and donors do not consistently allocate resources to ensure that this gender expertise is available within humanitarian response teams.<sup>6</sup> The GenCap senior advisors do represent a dedicated source of funding for strategic-level gender expertise, albeit time-bound, and these advisors have been a valuable resource for filling this expertise gap. When GenCap senior advisors were present, the humanitarian responses showed substantive improvements in gender equality programming and coordination. Correspondingly, when GenCap senior advisors left, and were not replaced by other long-term gender expertise, the quality of GEEWG programming and coordination declined.

<sup>6</sup> The UNDP used to have a project that placed a senior gender advisor in the RC/HC’s office, but this project ended prior to the period under evaluation.

## Funding GEEWG Programming

### EQ3

In addition to limited funding for gender expertise positions in humanitarian responses, funding for GEEWG programming also faces limitations. On the positive side, there has been an increase in funding *requested* for GEEWG as a percentage of total requests within humanitarian responses.<sup>7</sup> However, even though the amount requested had increased, gender equality projects targeting women and girls were disproportionately underfunded compared to other humanitarian projects. Only 39 per cent of funds requested for projects targeting women and girls were received, which is significantly lower than for other types of projects (69 per cent).

## Tracking GEEWG Funding

### EQ4

The possibilities for tracking funding for GEEWG programming or expertise are limited. This makes it difficult to measure progress and also to hold humanitarian actors accountable for GEEWG outcomes. For instance, this evaluation's evidence suggests that the greatest gains for prioritizing available gender funding would be in the areas of inter-agency gender equality expertise within clusters and at the collective strategic level. However, the ability of the team to further explore this finding was limited by the existing mechanisms for tracking GEEWG. Against the backdrop of an increasingly resource-constrained environment, it becomes even more important to be able to better track funding for both GEEWG programming and gender equality expertise in order to understand how to best leverage the funding that is available.

### Recommendation 8 Improve tracking of GEEWG resources and expertise

The IASC should improve the linkages between programmatic and financial tracking mechanisms to enhance support to implementation and compliance, including allocation of resources for gender equality expertise. In addition to elements already highlighted as recommendations to the IASC from other studies on GEEWG funding, improvements should also include tracking funds spent on women's and girls' programming through HPC and UN Sustainable Development Framework processes; tracking, compiling, and auditing GEEWG-related progress; and tracking the resourcing of gender expertise within humanitarian responses.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.