Women and Girls: Catalysing action to achieve gender equality
NGO brief for the High Level Leaders’ Round Table

This brief is intended to inform discussions with stakeholders leading up to, and during the High Level Leaders’ Roundtable (HLRT): “Women and Girls: Catalysing Action to Achieve Gender Equality”. Led by ActionAid, CARE and Plan International, coordinated by ICVA, and shared widely amongst ICVA’s membership, this brief is the result of collective analysis by NGOs heavily engaged in gendered humanitarian response.

Context

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) aims at achieving major global reforms to better protect and assist people affected by crisis. With this, NGOs call on the WHS to put women and girl’s leadership, gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) at the heart of these reforms.

Research and experience have demonstrated how the failure to address the gendered impacts of crises, including sexual and reproductive health and GBV, is one of the biggest weaknesses and reoccurring gaps in emergency responses. Further, women and girls with disabilities face particularly grave risks and are often excluded from decision making processes and assistance programs. Women, girls and local women’s rights organisations are often amongst the first responders in crises, taking risks, providing unpaid care and essential work, and making important contributions to recovery efforts that too often go unrecognised. More lives will be saved, and resilience efforts will be strengthened if we put the agency and rights of women and girls at the heart of the WHS outcomes.

Key NGO messages for this High Level Leaders’ Round Table

The five proposed core commitments for the HLRT are aligned to the Secretary General’s (SG’s) *Agenda for Humanity* Report, which, in summary call for:

i. The empowerment of women and girls as change agents and leaders;

ii. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights;

iii. Implementation of a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in crisis contexts, including through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies;

iv. Increased funding for gender-responsive humanitarian programming; and

v. Full compliance with humanitarian policies, frameworks and legally binding documents related to gender equality and women’s empowerment.¹

In relation to the core commitments listed above, NGOs stress the importance of the following key messages for action by Member States, the UN, NGOs themselves and all actors engaged in humanitarian action:

1. The empowerment of women and girls from crisis-affected populations to participate meaningfully and equitably in the leadership of humanitarian preparedness, response, protection and recovery programmes, and the formulation of humanitarian policy. This is a call to all humanitarian actors, consistent with the SG’s appeal, to implement and adequately resource policies and programmes that aim for women and girls’ full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels, including women and girls with disabilities.

In realising this,

1.1. All stakeholders at the WHS should commit to strengthen and scale-up their support to such empowerment and guarantee women’s meaningful involvement in local and national disaster risk reduction (DRR), resilience, preparedness and response and reconstruction plans and programmes;

¹ Note: An inclusive and intersectional dimension to policy implementation and programming recognizes that women are not a homogenous and/or equal grouping, and their ethnic, social and economic realities must be taken into consideration.
1. All humanitarian actors should work towards achieving equal representation of women in humanitarian positions in all stages of preparedness and response, and at all levels;

2. Recognising that local women’s rights organisations are often amongst the first responders, but their contributions remain inadequately resourced, and their voices not heard in the humanitarian architecture, **NGOs appeal to all humanitarian actors to prioritize the empowerment and engagement of local and national women’s rights organisations, including organizations of women with disabilities, in humanitarian action. This should be done through different avenues including reforms in humanitarian funding, partnerships, leadership and coordination.** We make this call echoing the SG’s appeals to empower women and girls; substantially increase funding to local women’s groups; and integrate the specific needs of women and girls in national and international development and humanitarian programming and funding.

With this, **NGOs call upon:**

2.1. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to undertake major reforms in structures like the wider cluster coordination system, humanitarian country teams and country-level gender task forces, and in the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) - to promote the inclusion of women and girls at all levels, including in humanitarian oversight mechanisms. This reform is to facilitate the formal engagement of local and national women’s rights organisations at the global, country and local levels in monitoring humanitarian effectiveness to respond to women’s and girls’ needs and tracking progress in closing the gender gap in humanitarian action.

2.2. All humanitarian actors pledge to strengthen their partnerships with a diverse range of local and national women and girl’s rights organisations on both policy decision-making and practice.

2.3. All humanitarian actors pledge to increase their funding in support of the work of local and national women’s rights organisations, as part of a larger commitment to ensure increased funding flows to local actors.

3. **NGOs call on all governments to urgently strengthen their institutional capacity and put in place minimum standards that will advance gender equality and women’s leadership in national disaster risk reduction (DRR), resilience, preparedness and response plans and programmes.**

As such,

3.1. NGOs call for political commitments that as a priority will translate into building greater state capacity for gender responsive budgeting and gathering of sex and age disaggregated data;

3.2. All States need to ensure that the development of national plans on DRR, emergency preparedness and response guarantees the meaningful involvement and inclusion in decision-making by local women’s rights organizations and women from crisis-affected communities at all stages (consultation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

4. **NGOs strongly endorse the call for all WHS stakeholders to rally to more effective approaches to promoting accountability for gender responsive programming.**

4.1. Following on from the Summit, existing processes to document and scale up good practices in use of the IASC Gender Marker, the ‘Minimum Standards’ relating to age, gender and disability, the piloting of ‘gender equality measures’, the deliberations on the accountability framework for the IASC Gender Policy Statement should be brought together to promote a more effective, aligned and comprehensive approach across policy and practice. While no ‘one size fits all’ approach is necessary or desirable, there is a clear need to share and promote good practices, avoid inconsistencies and encourage alignment. Learning from efforts to promote accountability for addressing GBV, SRHR and gender equality in humanitarian action,
along with efforts to address issues that inter-sect with gender such as age and ability, should be brought together into a coherent framework. Accountability for gender must shift beyond the ‘tick box’ approach to more effectively save lives and build resilience in the future.

5. **NGOs urge all humanitarian actors to ensure that the protection of women and girls from GBV, and the provision of comprehensive sexual reproductive health services, in all emergencies, is at the heart of WHS outcomes on humanitarian aid effectiveness and accountability.** We also call for the adherence of existing minimum standards and normative frameworks echoing the SG’s urge for all actors to “*Guarantee access to sustainable and dignified livelihoods and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.*”

To this end,

5.1. National government capacity to deliver GBV prevention and response services should be built, informed by best practices and standards including the new Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action (IASC GBV Guidelines).

5.2. All actors should commit to implementing the ‘Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies’ Roadmap to 2020, and recommendations from the 15th anniversary review of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.

5.3. The Summit deliberations and outcomes should promote and strengthen recommendations from the Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Reproductive Health in Crisis Situations which recently released a global study assessing gaps in frontline service provision for reproductive health in emergencies.

This NGO brief strongly aligns with a recent [joint NGO position calling for a pledge to empower women at the World Humanitarian Summit](http://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2015/8/18/joint-position-calling-for-a-pledge-to-empower-women-at-the-world-humanitarian-summit) developed through extensive input from women from crisis-affected communities and local women’s rights organisations from contexts affected by natural disasters and conflict. It builds on recommendations generated at consultations with over 40 women at the UN Commission on the Status of Women (March 2015), a regional consultation with over 75 representatives of women’s rights organisations in the Latin America region (April 2015), a workshop in The Hague on the 15th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 (May 2015) and an online consultation in July 2015 with many more civil society groups.