

ACommittee: Social Humanitarian (SOCHUM- GA3)

Issue: Women as game changers towards eradicating humanitarian crises

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INTRODUCTION

More people around the world are facing humanitarian crises than ever before. An estimated 274 million people will need humanitarian aid in 2022, according to The United Nations Office for Coordination in Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). While challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, forced displacement and extreme climate conditions affect humanity on the whole, it is true that women and girls, among other vulnerable groups, are disproportionately affected. And, yet, it is from the vulnerable that hope emerges for a radical change in how crises are being solved around the world. Women can and should be transformed from victims of crises to game changers.

It is true that the role of women within our society has always been underestimated. From ancient times until today, women have been constantly fighting, so as to earn basic human rights, as many cultures seem to have been holding females in low regard to this day, often exploiting, harming, and objectifying them. Women are also not usually chosen for leadership roles, often seen as the inferior gender. Gender stereotypes, societal and institutional factors, and individual mindsets are the three factors that prevent women from occupying leadership roles and are seen as important towards solving crises. The continuous fight of women throughout history, has resulted in the female gender becoming a symbol of unity and power within our society today.

With this Study Guide, we are hoping to aid you in gaining more knowledge and understanding in the mentioned topic, in order for you to construct your position papers, to do your research regarding your countries' policies and to craft resolutions. However, this must not be your only source of information. You are expected to conduct further research according to the country or organization you represent. For any questions that may arise, do not hesitate to contact us via our emails (Ioanna- Maria: i.varotsi@acg.edu , Xenia: xeniamitsi5@gmail.com, Christina: cliatsikou@gmail.com). We are looking forward to the conference and to an insightful debate.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Humanitarian Crisis

A specific definition of a humanitarian crisis does not exist. When one or more circumstances endanger the population's long-term health and security and deprive them of access to basic necessities including water, food, housing, medical treatment, and education, they are typically referred to as humanitarian crises. Events are usually categorized in three groups: Man- Made crises, such as armed conflicts, nuclear destructions and crashes, disasters associated with natural hazards and complex emergencies, which are usually a combination of man-made and natural hazards and include violence, deaths, significant damage to economies and societies and displacement of populations.

Feminism

Feminism is the belief in and advocacy of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. It is expressed especially through organized activity in favor of women's rights and needs. In general, feminism can be seen as a movement which aims to fight sexism, exploitation, and oppression. Its cause is also achieving full gender equality in law and in practice.

Sexism

Sexism is a form of discrimination based on the gender of the victim. Although its origin is unclear, the term sexism was first used by “second wave” feminists, during 1960-1980. It is the belief that one sex is inferior to the other, setting limits to the actions and rights of it. Even though the term can apply to the discrimination against any gender, it was originally created to refer to the oppression of women and girls, and the gender-based prejudice against them.

Game Changer

A game changer is a newly introduced element (event, idea, or procedure) that transforms a situation, a way of thinking, or an activity in a significant way, and usually improves it remarkably.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The extreme hardships that women face during humanitarian crises

It has been observed that during humanitarian crises, such as violent conflicts or natural disasters, women are affected more than men. Women and girls endure extreme hardships, such as gender-based violence and discrimination, trafficking, unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality, unsafe abortions, child, early and forced marriage, restricted mobility, and disproportionate domestic and livelihood responsibilities. Moreover, it is estimated that disasters kill more women than men, and hit women's livelihoods more severely. What creates great concern is that humanitarian crises over the past two years have afflicted women and girls, who receive inadequate health care, are victims of gender-based violence and their educational opportunities have decreased in many countries of the world.

A prime example of the detrimental effects that women face during humanitarian crises is the war in Ukraine. The harrowing images from Ukraine where women are giving birth in bomb shelters, maternity hospitals are under siege and pregnant women are forced to flee illustrate the vulnerabilities of women caught in conflict. As the world looks on in dismay at events in Ukraine, let us remember the countless other scenes of such suffering playing out across the globe. To name just a few, there is conflict in Northern Ethiopia while the horn of Africa deals with food insecurity and malnutrition from a historically long drought and desert locust infestation. Drought conditions are also affecting Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria. In addition, these countries face economic crisis, political instability and conflict. There is no doubt that immediate action is necessary and women can and should undertake a leading role.

The importance of women's participation in humanitarian action

Research shows that when women are involved in prevention and crisis management, this leads to better outcomes and lower risks. This can be attributed to the fact that women tend to have a different yet complementary leadership style to men since they have acquired a set of different skills and strategies learnt while overcoming barriers during their long stay in mid-career stages and are characterized by a more democratic and transformational approach to leadership than men. A survey conducted by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) of over 1000 women humanitarians in 115 countries gives prominence to three unique characteristics that women bring to humanitarian action: the ability to effectively communicate with women from affected communities, unique

perspectives and a unique style of leadership. Women's representation and engagement in leadership roles would highlight women's issues, challenge the traditional hierarchies of knowledge and advocate for more inclusive, diverse and representative decisions.

Barriers hindering women's leadership

Despite their critical role within the community, women are often excluded from leadership roles in peacebuilding operations and continue to be left out from decision-making processes. Female advancement faces significant obstacles against access to advanced education, career progression and promotion, extreme bias in research funding, access to journal publication, and invitations to present at high-level meetings. This is due to a number of factors: inadequate guidance and mentoring, difficulty balancing family responsibilities while meeting promotion criteria, and overt bias and gender discrimination in the workplace.

People are also less likely to recognize leadership qualities in women than in men. Furthermore, there is a visible gap in advancing women's leadership as their work often falls outside the margins. Patriarchal sociocultural values and their associated gender ideologies are negatively related to women's career development, limiting career choices to those that adhere to the traditional division of labour and which do not compromise domestic responsibilities. Women are also expected to occupy lower-level roles due to culturally coded linkages between leadership and masculinity. This non-permissive environment impacts women's construction of their leadership identities and their self-perception as leaders, which has as a result low self-confidence and discouragement from the pursuit of high-level positions. The few who decide to break the norm could face discrimination, opposition, life threats, or even imprisonment.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

USA

USA has always encouraged women to take higher positions. A memorable event was in 1920 when the 19th Amendment finally passed and women gained the right to vote. Moreover, on 1963 The Equal Pay Act, which aimed to abolish the wage discrimination against women, was signed. The USA had also some inspiring female leaders such as Kamala Harris, Vice-President of the United States who had also been elected District Attorney of San Francisco, California Attorney General, and United States Senator. Sadly, even though USA

seems to continue doing so it has taken some steps back regarding the female evolution such as the ban of abortions by the US supreme court. Even more, Gillian Steel Fisher, a Senior Research Scientist at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, noted that discrimination in the USA in health care is 18%, in equal pay/promotions 41% and higher education 20%.

Denmark

Denmark ranks 2nd in the EU on the Gender Equality Index (a composite indicator that measures the complex concept of gender equality and, based on the EU policy framework, assists in monitoring progress of gender equality across the EU over time). Furthermore, there is a variety of legislation and organization that protect the local citizens from experiencing gender inequalities. For example, from 1 January 2022, Denmark has introduced an explicit ban on discrimination on the grounds of gender identity, gender expression and gender characteristics. Denmark has also had some really powerful female leaders. Helle Thorning-Schmidt, born in 1966, is Danish politician who became Denmark's first female prime minister when she took office in 2011. Another example is Kira Marie Peter-Hansen, 21 years old, made history as the youngest person ever to be elected as a Member of the European Parliament, which is an association that debates legislation, passes or rejects laws, and it make amendments.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has ranked 65th (out of 156 countries) in the latest Global Gender Gap Index 2021 published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) but it is the best performing South Asian country. While Bangladesh's success in empowering our women in politics is laudable, it is behind regarding the sectors of economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival. Continuing, a method of the Constitution of Bangladesh that protects the citizens from gender discrimination is the article 28. It expressly prohibits any kind of discrimination including gender-based discrimination and guarantees women equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life. Furthermore, women of power in Bangladesh are really admirable. One of the most influential Bangladeshi women leaders is Sheikh Hasina, the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Since 1981, Hasina has been leading the Bangladesh Awami League (a center to center-left political party in Bangladesh). In her long political career, she served as the Opposition Leader of Bangladesh from 1986 to 1990 and 1991 to 1995.

Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)

In order to address the financing gaps and create greater synergies between different sources of finance to meet the needs of women across the humanitarian-development divide, a Women, Peace and Security Financing Discussion Group (FDG) was established in June 2014. Composed of representatives from donors, conflict-affected Member States, United Nations entities and civil society, it recognized the urgent need to prioritize action and established the Women’s Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). Fastly, it became a global pooled funding mechanism which aims to re-energize action and stimulate a significant shift in the financing of the women’s participation, leadership and empowerment in humanitarian response, and peace and security settings.

Association for Women Rights in Development

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) was founded in 1982. Explaining, it is an international, multi-generational, feminist, creative, future-orientated membership organization that is working to achieve gender equality and stabilize women’s human rights across the word. The organization functions based on an idea that it supports; that the gender justice movements to become driving forces in oppression.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1979	Convention on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York.
1981	Sandra Day O’Connor becomes the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.
2010	The United Nations’ General Assembly creates UN Women.
2014	Women, Peace and Security Financing Discussion Group (FDG) is established.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Through historic accords like the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN has significantly advanced gender equality over many decades (CEDAW).

The UN's Millennium Development Goals helped draw attention to problems including delivery and prenatal care. Maternal mortality has decreased by 45 percent worldwide over the past 25 years, according to the World Health Organization and the UN Population Fund. However, poor nations continue to account for 99 percent of fatalities, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for more than half of them.

In addition to being a fundamental human right, achieving gender equality has significant socioeconomic implications. Strong economies are fueled by the empowerment of women, which boosts output and expansion. However, there are still significant gender disparities in every community. Women endure occupational segregation, salary inequalities, and a lack of access to suitable employment. Insufficient finance and the absence of a single acknowledged leader to guide UN actions on gender equality problems have been key obstacles the UN has encountered for many years in its attempts to promote gender equality internationally. UN Women was established to deal with such issues. It is a vibrant and forceful advocate for women and girls, giving them a strong voice at the international, regional, and local levels. UN Women works for the following causes among others, all of which are grounded in the goal of equality stated in the UN Charter:

1. Eliminating discrimination
2. Empowerment for society
3. Equal rights amongst genders

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UN Women, was established by the UN General Assembly in July 2010. By achieving this, UN Member States made historical progress toward advancing the Organization's objectives for gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women combines and expands upon the significant work of four formerly separate UN entities, all of which had a singular emphasis on empowering women and promoting gender equality. Its work includes making evidence of the differential impacts of disaster or conflict on women both available and understood, providing coordination so that UN and other technical teams have access to knowledge and expertise on gender, supporting capacity-building and agency of national actors, including

women's groups, parliamentarians and others and providing targeted services, such as safe spaces or psychosocial counselling wherever there are gaps.

In 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul, UN Women led preparations for the High-Level Leaders' Roundtable on Women and Girls: Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality. The five commitments that were endorsed by stakeholders at the Roundtable were the following:

- Empowering women and girls as leaders and increasing support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action.
- Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all women and adolescent girls in crisis settings.
- Implementing a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in crisis.
- Ensuring that humanitarian programming is gender-responsive.
- Full compliance with humanitarian policies, frameworks and binding documents on gender equality, women's empowerment and rights.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened gender inequalities everywhere. UN Women led immediate responses and provided long-term solutions. They acted through 88 field offices and partners and launched the Generation Equality Campaign.

Overall, UN Women's most positive contribution had been its campaign to put an end to violence against the female population. Throughout the years, UN organizations have done their best to not only support women, but all genders.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

In the previous years there have been some movements that gave the opportunity to women to take on leading roles. For example, following the first Arab Spring in 2011 and the second Arab Spring in 2019, women were at the frontline of protests, which has challenged the deeply-embedded institutional and cultural barriers to gender equity. The Syrian crisis has also created opportunities for women in host countries such as Jordan and Lebanon to work in the humanitarian field. For instance, with a highly educated female workforce and an overall low employment rate among women in Jordan (21%), the influx of international humanitarian organizations has provided new career opportunities for women especially as humanitarian work is seen as an extension of the traditional more female-dominated domains

such as health, education and social work. Since most of the international NGOs provide vacancies of equal opportunities where people are recruited based on skills, women are more capable of fulfilling senior positions in the humanitarian field and of “silently” defying the odds by working in traditionally male-dominated professions within NGOs.

Southern perspectives on barriers and opportunities for women leaders in conflict and health within the broader Women in Global Health movement have been largely missing from the current dialogues at leading international conferences, academic outputs and other events. Conferences such as the 10th anniversary of Empowering Women in Science in Kuwait in October 2017, highlighted achievements, challenges, areas for further research and policy for women in the MENA region and globally. Why women have been left behind in leadership in the Global South was the biggest issue at a conference on Accelerating Women’s Health Agenda: Priorities and Opportunities Through Sustainable Development Goals, in Kenya in November 2018. Around the same time, the Manila Declaration set out ambitious targets for 50% of all programmes to have women as leaders across the Red Cross Societies. These events and targets will hopefully set the tone for other organizations to ensure more equitable pathways for several young women aspiring to become women leaders in conflict and health.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It is vital for women to have the chance to engage in the aid regarding crises. This can be done by promoting and recruiting women employees actively. Various organizations must also create efficient equality programs in order to absorb female candidates interested in working and to promote women leadership. They must also carry out research regarding gender inequality amongst their members and personnel. Furthermore, it is imperative for organizations to provide equal training opportunities for women. Moreover, women should be encouraged by funding/volunteering organizations that combat for women’s empowerment. Early and sustained engagement with women and women-led groups must be a priority when crisis strikes, not an afterthought. They understand the local context and the unique needs of women and families and should be full and equal participants in all recovery, resilience and peacebuilding efforts. Governments must also provide adequate, dedicated funding to protect the safety and dignity of women and girls in their time of greatest need. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to ensure collaboration with women and girls across the humanitarian program cycle and through all phases of every humanitarian response, equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services and prevention and

response to gender-based violence. Finally, as we all know, education always plays a major role. Everyone, from males to females, must be educated regarding women's rights, as well as the effects that their exclusion from situations like this has on them.

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