



# Africa Health Organisation

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## STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN IN EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS



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## Introduction

This document addresses the complexities of gender within times of disaster and emergencies, and how this can cause serious implications for the health of women and girls. This plan aims to identify how these issues can be reduced both prior to the emergencies, with ways to prepare communities to deal with potential disasters, as well as providing support for communities during disasters and emergencies.

This strategy identifies current international and frameworks that exist, including the Sendai Framework. Using this information it will outline a plan of strategies of the most appropriate ways to engage stakeholders from a variety of fields and backgrounds, including those individuals directed affected by the disasters; this will help to develop an in depth plan to support women and girls on an individual level as well as incorporating the wider community and at a governmental level.

The purpose of this document is to establish guidelines for directing the health sector action in countries in Africa, by taking this research into account.

## Background

### Overview

Individuals from less economically prevalent backgrounds are more vulnerable when disasters and emergencies hit, particularly as they are less likely to receive much support. Within this, women and girls are most disproportionately affected by this, both in terms of their physical health implications as well as the increased risk of sexual assaults during times of disaster; this can be particularly prevalent in displacement camps.

Other examples of the disproportionate impact of disasters towards women and girls is the increased likelihood of malnutrition. This is noticeably problematic in times of food shortages for a number of reasons, including the fact that women consume less calories in order to prioritise men and children eating, as well as the specific nutritional needs that women have during times of pregnancy or breast feeding.

## Current Frameworks

### Africa Hydromet Program

The World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery are supporting several African countries through the Africa Hydromet Program. This program ensures that communities build climate and disaster resilience by supporting them through preparing them for dealing with droughts, floods and other climate related emergencies. It is a partnership between a variety of organisations which encourages the inclusion of women in technical fields as well as decision making in order to ensure that all governments and agencies involved understand the importance of gender dimensions in disaster risk reduction.

### Sendai Framework

There is a framework that currently exists that focuses on the impact of disasters and emergencies, with gender analysis being central to this. This focuses on the following global targets:

*(a) Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020-2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.*

*(b) Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020 -2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.*

*(c) Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030.*

*(d) Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030.*

*(e) Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.*

*(f) Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of this Framework by 2030.*

*(g) Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030*

Frameworks, such as these, are important to encourage international cohesion and the ability to acknowledge the increased difficulties that not only occur from disasters but can also be gender specific and require multi agency cooperation to be overcome. These frameworks take into account wider agency cooperation from governmental level to more grassroots movements as it requires cohesive strategies in order to improve the situation.

### Current work of Africa Health International

AHO facilitates a large amount of work regarding gender inequalities, including the disproportionate impact that disasters and emergencies have on women and girls. Currently AHO works to support individuals that are impacted by disasters and emergencies in a variety of ways, including the following:

- AHO works with children, their families, communities and local authorities around violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- AHO create safe environments for children to access counselling, support networks and to be referred into other services
- Parenting courses are provided to caregivers to help them cope with crises
- AHO use the community mental health model which respects local traditions and cultural diversity and addresses the needs of the most vulnerable. The aim is to promote and protect the mental health of the population

## Proposal

There is a vital need to use multi agency cooperation in order to overcome some of the issues that women and girls face when confronted with emergencies and disasters. AHO aims to approach these problematic areas using a number of methods, including working closely with governments around both increased investment into health services as well as identifying the most appropriate policies that can be focused on the needs associated with disasters and emergencies; this includes women's physical and psychological health requirements. There is a need to develop national frameworks that tackle the prominent issues associated with gender inequalities within disasters along with ensuring that patterns of increased gender based violence that occurs in displacement camps are minimised through improved security and tackling traditional views of gender inequality.

## Strategy

AHO aim to develop indicators to measure the following goals to ensure that they are being met effectively and sustainably. These goals are all interconnected and require a multi-agency approach to ensure that they are effective and successful in supporting women and girls during times of disaster.

## Goal 1

**Influence policy, practice and budgets at the national and international level to ensure all health services are prepared for disasters & emergencies including with focus on women's health needs & psychological support during times of trauma**

AHO analyse current programme evaluations, research and needs assessments in order to influence policy, practise and budgets, particularly on child protection in disaster resilience, preparedness, response and recovery; this is on international, national and local levels.

This can be developed further to identify the specific needs that women also face during times of crises, which incorporates the need to focus on physical and psychological health needs. This includes acknowledging specific sexual and reproductive health needs and support during and post pregnancy,

It is important to identify the gaps in policy at the moment through evaluation of previous projects and programmes, and recognise the increased risk that is posed to women and girls. This includes the increase risk of gender based violence in disaster settings, as well as the associated challenges with women and girls who are responsible for the main caregiver role and the health implications that are attached to this, which require in depth policy and budget discussions.

## **Goal 2**

### **To develop national frameworks for addressing Gender Based Violence in disasters**

The aim of AHO is to work with local governments and municipalities to develop national frameworks for addressing the gender based violence that occurs in emergencies and disasters.

AHO work to advocate on a national and international scale for the rights of women and girls to be included in the development of disaster policy and programmes, focusing specifically on identifying their needs and how these can be addressed. This consists of changing traditional attitudes which increase the likelihood of gender based violence, by providing high quality sexual and reproductive health services and ensuring that there is economic support in place.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has devised a handbook outlining guidelines based on Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings, this focuses on the prevention of sexual violence during times of emergencies. There are a number of in depth directions for professionals working within emergency settings which are relevant in identifying the needs of women and girls.

Along with international guidance, it is beneficial for there to be a multi-agency input looking at the needs of individuals during emergencies and disasters and the capacity that professionals currently have in being able to identify and support these needs. This includes health professional, social care, police, teachers, community leaders and religious leaders. It requires a realistic, holistic insight into the capabilities of organisations to deal with these situations, the responsibility that each organisations/agency holds and where there are recognisable gaps that need to be address. Whilst guidelines and standards are beneficial, a

mixture of frontline response and national feedback is vital in creating guidance that can be followed effectively by those involved; this will take into account the realities of the situation, and respond to the barriers that need to be overcome to effectively protect women and girls in emergency situations, particularly against Gender Based Violence.

AHO can support the network of agencies in addressing these needs in order to devise a workable and relevant set of guidelines and policies that will reduce the likelihood of violence occurring during times of crisis.

## **Goal 3**

**Training agencies to be able to recognise and deal with these issues in times of disasters, ensuring that the most effective resources and training materials are in place.**

All agencies should be able to recognise specific needs and understand the impact that crises can have on individuals, particularly women and girls, recognising that some indicators may not be as noticeable as others, such as the increase in psychological harm. This includes working with a variety of agencies and organisations and is not exclusive to social care and health related professionals. For instance, it is useful and constructive for those in an education setting, the police, community and religious leaders to benefit by being able to identify whether women and girls require support for their specific needs. As women are often the caregivers in many areas, the health related issues can have a negative impact on their dependants and therefore it is invaluable that there is a network of agencies that is able to identify and address these needs during times of emergency.

Currently, AHO partners with a collection of agencies including: civil society organisations, community leaders, local governments, academics, activists and NGOs, providing training and building the capacity of partners to support the structures that currently exist to keep people safe.

AHO supports national child protection systems to deliver case management services to children and their families, which ensures that children with urgent protection needs are identified and receive support from the appropriate services; this includes searching for separated family members and linking children to foster families. This requires

communication and cohesion amongst a variety of statutory and non-statutory agencies, with awareness of identifying protection needs in times of emergencies. As well as this, AHO helps caregivers to develop skills and be prepared to deal with issues arising during times of emergency through parenting courses being held.

This also consists of AHO organising events, such as one which focuses on the importance of accessing data to look at the intersectionality of social axis and ensure that support is in place to acknowledge how individuals are impacted differently, for instance how women and girls with a disability may be more vulnerable and require a differing level of support; this is fundamental to disaster risk reduction and management.

## **Goal 4**

### **Increase security in areas of displacement to combat Gender Based Violence**

Displacement camps can lead to an increase of different health related issues for individuals, but women and young girls are disproportionately impacted by the increase of violence in these conditions. This is caused by a number of factors, including the increased of individuals from different communities living in one area; the break up of the usual community dynamics and the increase of strangers living in emergency conditions leads to an increase in violence which is directed particularly at women and girls. There is also a link between the increase in intimate partner violence in reaction to the chaotic changes that are created during a crises.

Furthermore, the layout of the displacement camps can facilitate violence through the lack of security and safety precautions in place. This includes the lack of lighting, which can decrease social capital of the camp community through lack of social interactions and communication, as well as increasing the likelihood of violence and other crimes being committed.

Furthermore, the proximity of the toilets and washing areas have been noted as a reason for an increase in violence as women and girls are having to travel further to reach them, leaving them vulnerable to being attacked on the route.

AHO work to challenge harmful traditional practices, such as gender based violence, through multi agency work in addressing this violence as well as working on a national scale to raise awareness of the risk of violence and the increase of education to combat these practices.

These matters can be linked into the policy and practice requirements that need to be discussed on a local, national and international level. The violence can increase towards girls that are left in vulnerable positions, for instance those who do not have their family around them, which is where AHO work closely with the social care organisations to ensure girls who require extra support and safety planning are identified.

## **Goal 5**

### **Women and girls being able to access health supplies during times of disaster**

AHO support the needs of girls during times of crisis, for instance following the Idai cyclone, adolescent-friendly spaces were introduced to offer the opportunity for girls to discuss issues regarding their health, particularly in term of sexual health, and ensure that their needs are met in a secure and safe environment. These safe spaces also offer the opportunity to access counselling and other psychological support, vital during times of emergency through the increased likelihood of trauma. AHO recognises that psychological support comes not only from mental health services but also from the broader community support, in terms of family and friends.

AHO conduct work looking at health service management, services and systems and other related health information outside of the sphere of emergencies, however this oversight is important in being able to ensure that the health needs of women and girls are met in the context of disasters. The work that AHO does includes; strengthening the role of the Ministry of Health in the performance of essential public health functions and looking at the policies, systems and health services in place in member countries in order to ensure access to health services. This work is vital to link into the needs of women and girls in times of emergency, and can help to create stronger foundations in times of crisis.

## Monitoring, Analysis and Evaluation

AHO aim to implement a monitoring and evaluation process as part of this strategy. It will focus on the following indicators:

- i. Identifying the current rate of gender based violence and monitoring whether the rate of increase/decrease following support with regions
- ii. Identifying whether regions have gained a wider access to psychological support, both through health services and in the broader community context
- iii. Proportion of budget allocated to disaster preparation, including to eradicate gender based violence during times of emergency
- iv. Number of countries with up to date information regarding disasters and emergencies and how to cope effectively with them, particularly from a gender perspective
- v. Number of countries that prepare effectively for disasters, with particular focus on areas that have the a comparable context and whether they have preparedness guidelines (E.g. compared against areas with similar economic status)
- vi. Number of countries with human resource training plans in place that focus on pre and post disaster preparedness, with a focus on gender
- vii. Number of vulnerable areas—as determined by the extreme poverty rate or a prevalence of low height-for-age in excess of 15%—that have mechanisms at the municipal level to permit the participation of women and other community actors in health and development planning.

## Financial Implications

In order for this plan to be successful it requires input from a variety of stakeholders and long term cooperation. It is important that there is a multi-agency approach for this plan, which requires all organisations and stakeholders to input their resources for a more effective and sustainable approach.

The projected cost of these needs being met is US\$590 million.

## Summary

Not only is it important to prepare communities for the impact of disasters and emergencies, it is vital to identify the increased risk that is posed to women and girls and how this leads to larger societal issues post disaster. There is a need to work with governments as well as local organisations to encourage the implementation of appropriate policies that can be adhered to in order to ensure that communities are prepared pre disaster as well as being able to access resources post disaster.

It is important to ensure that women and girls have access to the appropriate healthcare during disasters including addressing their psychological needs. There is a vital need to decrease gender based violence by increasing security in displacement camps or other areas of disaster and planning structures.

There is a need to recognise that:

- Women and girls are disproportionately affected in times of disaster and emergencies which can lead to an increase in physical health issues e.g. including malnutrition
- Gender based violence increases towards women and girls during times of disaster, particularly in displacement camps. It is important to consider security and safety measures by considering the layout of the camps e.g. the proximity of toilets, how well lit they are, the way communities are situated within these camps.
- Women and girls have particular health needs that need to be addressed including their needs during and post pregnancy which requires specific attention

- Women and girls require support for their psychological needs which can be impacted by the emergency itself as well as the increased vulnerability of their situation following these disasters, including the increased likelihood of sexual assaults
- Women and girls generally hold the role of caregivers within their communities which can impact the way that they react to the initial disaster and their responsibilities with looking after other family members throughout the period. This can further impact their physical and psychological health.

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