

Gender-Equality Programming in Humanitarian Action

When crises strike, they do not affect everyone equally. Those who are most vulnerable in a population become exponentially more vulnerable at times of tumult. Women are affected differently during times of crisis, and as a result, UN Women, the Secretariat of CSW, endeavors to meet the specific needs and interests of women at times of crisis and humanitarian need.¹ CSW serves as the principal intergovernmental policymaking body that sets global standards and formulates policy recommendations to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and their human rights worldwide.² It is important to note that policy recommendations cannot actually be enforced by CSW. While there has been significant efforts put forth by CSW to create policy that ensures these needs and interests are met, complete gender-equality in humanitarian action has not been achieved and there is much room for improvement.

The first piece of our discussion is how can we better the efforts that CSW puts forth to promote equality in humanitarian action for women. In 2020, 167.6 million people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance, which is the highest reported figure in decades, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, increasingly complex refugee crises, and increased natural disasters like floods, droughts, earthquakes, and tropical storms.³ CSW has responded to increasing humanitarian needs by promoting accountability for gender equality globally and locally; addressing the immediate needs of crisis-affected women and girls; and strengthening the resilience of crisis-affected and at-risk populations by empowering women and girls and leveraging their leadership and engagement in decision-making processes. Many initiatives have been outlined in the Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action put out by IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee), with whom UN Women partners.⁴ While significant efforts have been taken to promote equality, what further initiatives should be taken? How can we build upon the work that has been done to create more effective gender-equality programming in humanitarian action? Has your country taken any steps to combat gender inequality in humanitarian action or received aid with that goal? If so, what efforts were they, were they successful, and how can they be improved on?

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action>

² <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2020/2>

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/humanitarian-action-and-disaster-risk-reduction-2019-annual-report>

⁴ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2018-iasc_gender_handbook_for_humanitarian_action_eng_0.pdf

In addition to improving the policy, another key factor of successful resolutions is creating a plan for implementation. When CSW creates policy to strengthen gender-equality, UN-Women provides Member States, upon request, with six types of support in its operational activities to carry out that policy: (a) normative support; (b) United Nations coordination for gender equality and the empowerment of women; (c) integrated policy advice; (d) capacity development; (e) advocacy and social mobilization; and (f) technical assistance for essential services.⁵ How can we work to streamline the process of implementing policy passed by CSW? When a crisis strikes, how can we ensure that the needs are responded to in an orderly and timely fashion?

A final point I want us to consider is once we formulate better policies and better modes of implementation, how would they work for current humanitarian crises? How would your policy and enforcement plan be implemented in the current crises of COVID-19 and the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan?

I look forward to hearing your country's perspective on how to better policy on gender-equality in humanitarian efforts and its subsequent implementation. Please remember that it is your responsibility to represent your country's view on the topic, which is particularly relevant regarding women. Please be cognizant of the capabilities and limitations of CSW when formulating your papers. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at nesiegel@mail.yu.edu!

Best of Luck,
Nina Siegel
Chair, CSW

⁵ <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2020/2>.