

CASE STUDY

Consultation with women and girls as a core component of water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and camp coordination management (CCCM) in emergencies.

This case study – focused on experiences of anchoring consultations with women and girls within emergencies preparedness and response in the WASH and CCCM sectors – is part of a broader, global project led by UNICEF that aims to capture innovative approaches and practical resources on how gender-based violence risk mitigation has been institutionalized within humanitarian response. The project was led by UNICEF, with generous support from the USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance and in collaboration with an inter-agency advisory group.¹

1. Background

Since the launch of the revised [Inter-Agency Standing Committee \(IASC\) Guidelines on Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#) in 2015, integration of gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation into programming and coordination has gained significant traction across multiple sectors and levels of humanitarian response. In recent years, there has been increasing recognition that to ensure sustainability of these advancements, GBV risk mitigation must also be firmly anchored in the institutional elements that underpin programming.

GBV risk mitigation institutionalization focuses on **shifting institutional systems, structures and processes** ('institutional DNA') so that GBV-related risks are proactively identified and addressed in a predictable, self-sustaining manner. In practice, this means that humanitarian response is delivered in a way that is safer for and more accountable to women and girls – across every sector, in every emergency, throughout each phase of preparation, response and recovery.

Through institutionalization, GBV risk mitigation becomes part of the organization or humanitarian sector's standard ways of working and accountability frameworks. It gets triggered automatically and predictably – rather than being dependent on individual personalities or a particular set of contextual factors – meaning GBV specialists can focus less of their time advocating for GBV risk mitigation and instead focus on its implementation (through technical support, capacity-building and adapting tools to fit the context).

2. Introduction

As outlined in the IASC GBV Guidelines, engaging women and girls in all phases of the programme cycle is one of the foundational components of GBV risk mitigation. This case study examines why engaging women and girls in humanitarian response is important, the consequences of not doing so, and how efforts to institutionalize consultations with women and girls have evolved over the last decade. The content draws on the experiences of the Global WASH cluster (GWC), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Women's Participation Project (WPP) within camp coordination and camp management (CCCM). These examples highlight how consultations with women and girls have been built in as a regular feature of these sectors' standard ways of working. The information captured in this case study was gathered through a review of documents and key informant interviews with select practitioners.

3. The consequences of failing to consult with women and girls in humanitarian response

It is well documented that humanitarian emergencies – including climate crises – are not gender neutral. Not only are women and girls impacted in distinct ways, they are also often the first to respond to the needs of their communities at the onset of a crisis. While a wealth of global commitments and technical resources on this topic exist, women and girls can still be sidelined in decision-making spaces and funding opportunities.²

When women and girls are not consulted, humanitarian response is less effective, community resilience is compromised, and GBV risks increase. Specific negative impacts of failing to consult with women and girls include:

- **Ineffective interventions:** Women's and girls' perspectives and insight on their communities' dynamics, risks, resources and priorities can inform more effective and culturally appropriate response strategies. Excluding the perspectives of over half the population from programme planning and monitoring increases the likelihood that interventions will fail to reach and deliver, as intended,³ thus wasting resources and missing targets in terms of service reach and quality.
- **Putting women and girls at risk:** Failing to adequately consult women and girls may inadvertently increase risks of GBV linked to the location, timing and/or modality of service delivery.
- **Undermined community resilience:** Women play key roles in community innovation and leadership, including caregiving, livelihood activities, sustainable peacebuilding, social connectedness, and long-term resilience.⁴ By not actively including women's and girls'

perspectives in decision-making, humanitarian response can weaken communities' ability to recover and rebuild after crises.

- **Lack of accountability:** Involving women and girls in decision-making enhances accountability and transparency in humanitarian responses. When people are engaged, aid agencies and service providers are more likely to prioritize (and less likely to miscalculate) their needs. The impact and delivery of interventions is more effectively monitored.

Box 1

How a lack of consultation with women and girls can impact WASH outcomes

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by water and sanitation crises, and as such are the key stakeholders in the WASH sector. Inconsistent and insufficient consultation with women and girls often leads to unacceptable, inaccessible, or unsafe WASH facilities and seriously diminished WASH outcomes. Risks can increase when social context, stigma and women's safety is not understood nor integrated into design and priorities.

The extent of the influence of poor consultation processes on WASH programme outcomes is stark. The direct risk of violence, for example, and/or fear of gender-based violence is often compounded with women and girls bearing significant physical burdens and psychosocial stress.

A review⁵ of how humanitarian agencies implement emergency sanitation in 11 different humanitarian responses shows that on average 40 per cent of women are not using the latrines provided by agencies. This poor result is attributed to failure to regularly engage women and girls in dialogue and to collect or act on feedback in a culturally sensitive manner. The reasons provided by women and girls for not using agency constructed facilities, point almost always to their health, gender specific norms, protection and safety, including issues not considered during the design phase, such as: not wanting to be seen going to the toilet, sexual harassment, the lack of locks on doors, lack of privacy (people peeping in), lack of lighting at night, fear of vermin and lack of cleanliness.

The fact that “one third of schools around the world lack adequate sanitary facilities, and [require] minimum additional modifications to make them ‘MHM [menstrual hygiene management]-friendly’ (e.g., a wash basin)” has also been attributed to lack of incorporating the perspectives of women, adolescent girls and people who menstruate⁶ in the design process.⁷

The consequences of not engaging women and girls in WASH programming and coordination can reach far into other areas of private and public life and further exacerbate the gender power imbalances that underpin GBV. Women and girls may avoid using latrines, face increased risks of violence and be forced to find alternative ways to deal with basic hygiene. The life-course of women and girls and a range of outcomes are impacted, including but not limited to:

(...)

- Health: increased vulnerability to waterborne disease infections. Menstrual hygiene can be neglected, leading to adverse health and social outcomes
- Education: higher school dropout and truancy rates for girls, especially around puberty
- Economy: women's ability to participate in public and civic life is limited, including reduced paid work, political and livelihood opportunities
- Safety and dignity: increased exposure of women and girls to risks of GBV, particularly in conflict or disaster-affected settings.⁸

4. Global standards and commitments around women's and girls' engagement in humanitarian response

4.1 Global standards

A range of global standards and guidance documents highlight the importance of women's and girls' participation. For example, the IASC Guidelines represent a foundational global commitment that emphasizes consultations and engagement with women and girls as integral to mitigating the risk of GBV across all sectors. Following the revision of these guidelines in 2015, other inter-agency commitments were made that also reinforced the need to engage women and girls, including [Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls \(GEEWG\)](#) in 2017, the [Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action](#) in 2018, and [Guidance on Strengthening Participation, Representation and Leadership of Local and National Actors in IASC Humanitarian Coordination Mechanisms](#) in 2021.

In addition, the IASC Gender with Age Marker, piloted since 2015 and updated in 2021, specifically measures the level of participation in decision-making as part of the criteria, stating "Females and males of appropriate ages and different abilities participate in design AND review of the project AND their suggestions are incorporated."⁹ At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, one of the 'Calls to Action' was to better engage women and girls and to empower women to participate meaningfully.¹⁰

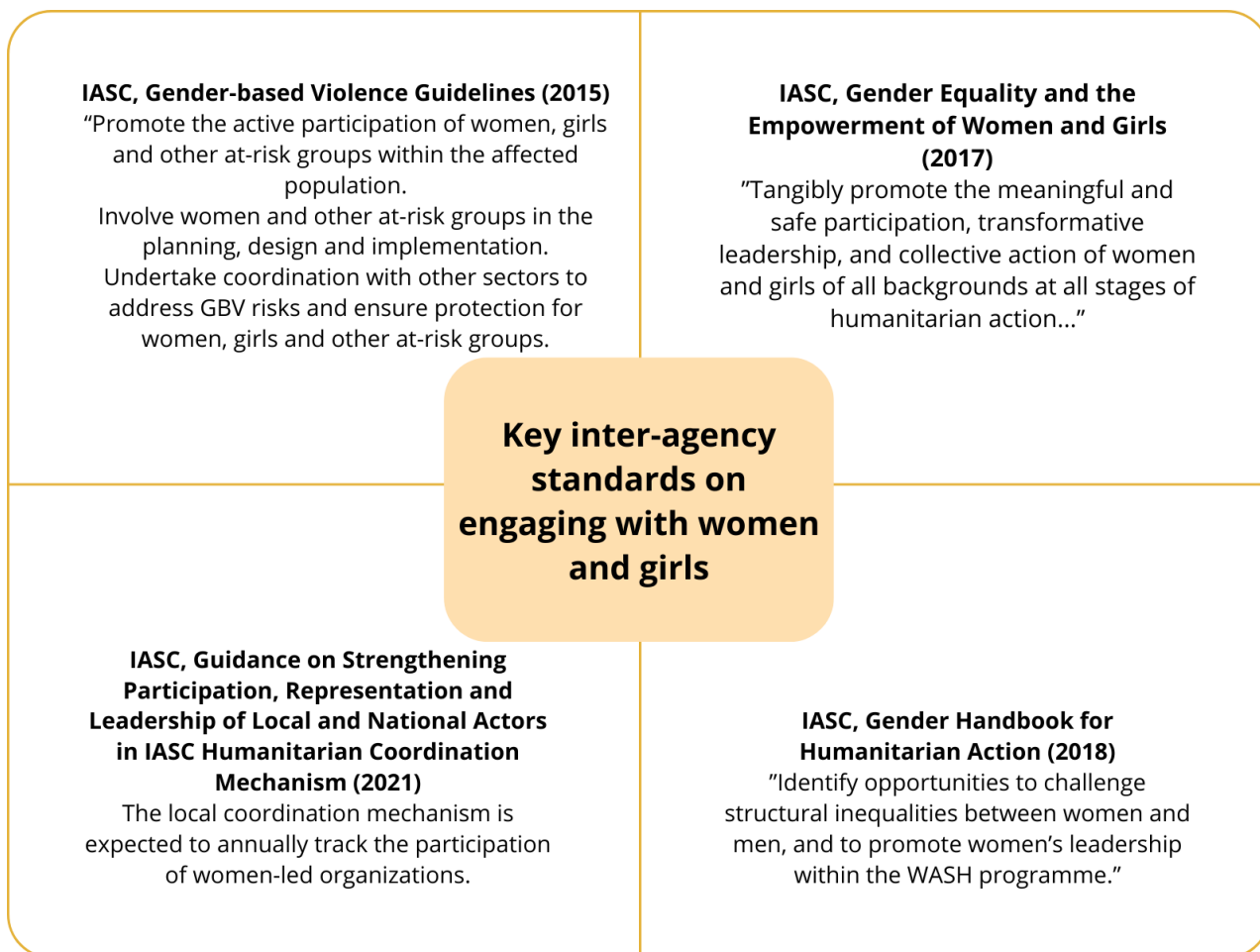


Figure 1: Sample extracts from inter-agency standards on the engagement of women and girls

Box 2

Critical moments for consultation with women and girls¹¹

Effective GBV risk mitigation measurement integrates regular and routine consultations with women and girls. It outlines three critical moments to consult women and girls:

1. Before a project begins: women and girls themselves can identify GBV risks in the environment and/or barriers to accessing services, along with their priorities for which risks and/or barriers are most critical to address;
2. During the project: women and girls provide feedback as to if/how your GBV risk mitigation efforts have affected their access to services and/or perceptions of safety. This feedback allows you to assess the effectiveness of your risk mitigation measure(s), identify any unanticipated or unintentional consequences; and, if necessary, make changes in your programming; and
3. When the project is nearing completion or after it has ended: consultations help identify what worked and what did not work to generate lessons learned and next steps which risks and/or barriers are the most important to be addressed.

4.2 Sector-specific standards for WASH and CCCM

To facilitate application of the standards mentioned in the previous section, a wealth of sector-specific resources and tools have also been developed. The Humanitarian Programme Cycle Toolkit for WASH Cluster promotes engagement of women and girls at all stages. In 2014, the Global WASH cluster released five [minimum commitments to the safety and dignity](#) of affected people, representing a significant step towards increased quality WASH programming. It provided a foundation for the development of the WASH Accountability and Quality Assurance initiative which focuses on a people-centred approach, including consultation with women and girls, as core to WASH programme quality.

Similarly, the CCCM sector advanced consultation with women and girls in displacement settings as integral to programme processes and core Camp Management Activity. The [Minimum Standards for Camp Management](#), released in 2021 and part of the Humanitarian Standard Partnership, have a dedicated pillar on community participation and representation of the site population, with key actions and indicators that promote the decision-making roles of women and girls in site management (in addition to key actions and indicators related to gender-sensitive programming included in other pillars). [The Women's Participation Project \(WPP\)](#), described in further detail below, promotes a participatory and evidence-based mechanism to develop strategies adapted to the context, to enhance the participation of women and girls in displacement sites.

5. Experiences of anchoring engagement with women and girls in humanitarian programming and coordination

5.1 The Global WASH Cluster's efforts to institutionalize consultations with women and girls in WASH coordination

Over the past decade, the GWC has made significant progress embedding consultations with women and girls into their systems, structures and processes. Beginning in 2014 with the adoption of the five minimum commitments regarding the safety and dignity of affected people. These five commitments form the sector's programming standards and are endorsed by cluster partners.

As part of a broader emphasis of “placing people at the centre of the [Humanitarian Programme Cycle],” the five minimum commitments recommend prioritizing opinions of women and girls, considering the critical roles they play in WASH activities at home and in the community. Accompanying tools, such as monitoring forms and organization questionnaires, were subsequently developed to support implementation. The tools were socialized via annual meetings with WASH cluster members which helped gain traction among sector stakeholders.

Subsequent years saw further positive developments. For example, in 2017, a focus on consultations with women and girls was embedded into the GWC's core operating documents and training packages. In 2018, the Quality Assurance and Accountability Initiative, which later became known as the Accountability and Quality Assurance initiative began. The initiative sought to streamline and bring together several cross-cutting components and markers of programme quality. This project was implemented in collaboration with interagency partners.¹² Drawing from the experience and learning from baseline quality assessments completed in Bangladesh, Colombia, Myanmar and South Sudan, the [Quality Assurance and Accountability Systems Guidance Note](#) and [the Modular Analytical Framework for Quality and Accountability](#) were initially developed and launched in May 2020.

Whilst engagement with women and girls was included within the guidance note and framework, challenges arose for WASH clusters in the field to put the guidance into practice, especially in terms of engaging with women and girls in WASH governance and decision-making. In response to this challenge, the GWC started working with the IOM CCCM team to learn from the approach and tools developed within the Women's Participation Project, and to identify potential areas of collaboration to enhance women's and girls' meaningful participation in WASH decision-making. Based on this, the guidelines and the framework were revised and continue to be applied in GWC work: [the Accountability and Quality Assurance Initiative: Measuring What Matters](#); and [Modular Analytical Framework for Quality and Accountability](#).

In order to implement the relevant components of their annual work plan, the GWC and Norwegian Refugee Committee partnered to establish a GBV/People-Centred Programming Coordinator position in 2021, which serves as the technical lead on both GBV and participation issues in WASH emergencies. The Coordinator sits in the GWC Field Support Team and is dedicated to supporting National WASH Coordination Platforms to mainstream GBV risk mitigation and "ensure the satisfaction, inclusion, safety, participation and feedback from affected people in WASH coordination and response".¹³

The work of this position has helped to embed the people-centred approach in resources for capacity-strengthening, guidelines and policies across the GWC. For example, the emergency training package for coordinators and the five-day interactive WASH Operational Coordination and Leadership (WOCL) training includes a stronger emphasis on and practical approaches to how to engage women and girls in WASH. The training dedicates a whole day to transversal, or cross-cutting, issues, including people-centred programming, for which engaging women and girls is central. Alongside trainings and dedicated support, a GWC Safety and Accessibility Audit toolkit for WASH facilities, and guidance on how to mainstream GBV risk mitigation and increase women's participation was produced and piloted in 2023, led by the GBV/People-Centred Programming Coordinator.

In 2021, under the leadership of the GWC's first female Global Cluster Coordinator, a study on women in WASH coordination was commissioned. The findings of this study¹⁴ highlighted how the gender gap within the WASH sector acts as a critical

barrier to meaningful engagement with women and girls in WASH decision-making – with implications for effective GBV risk mitigation. The report produced stark findings, revealing, among other matters, that in 2021 only 19 per cent of national WASH coordinators contracted by UNICEF were women. Concurrently the GWC Women in WASH strategic roadmap¹⁵ was created to help close the gender gap in WASH coordination positions at various levels.

Box 3

Centring women and girls within a people-centred approach

The GWC people-centred approach represents a shift from measuring the quantity of aid delivered, to the quality of aid delivered. It focuses on accountability and demands consideration of cross-cutting issues such as gender, GBV risk mitigation, disability inclusion, accountability to affected populations, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, age, environment and climate change, cash and markets, and localization.

At times, such ‘streamlined’ approaches to cross-cutting issues can overlook gendered power dynamics and GBV-related risks. However, the GWC’s approach represents a strong example of striking a balance between minimizing the burden that can be created by too many cross-cutting demands, and still maintaining a focus on critical elements of GBV risk mitigation, including but not limited to engagement with women and girls.

5.2 The International Organization for Migration – Women’s Participation Project

The IOM Women’s Participation Project (WPP) was launched in 2016 as a result of the cooperation between IOM and Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) in coordination with the Global CCCM Cluster as part of the ‘Safe from the Start’ project.¹⁶ The primary aim of the project is to reduce GBV risks “through supporting CCCM practitioners to have a broader understanding of what participation is and to develop strategies adapted to their specific context of operations to enhance the participation of women and girls in displacement sites”.¹⁷ The approach explicitly seeks to strengthen women’s and girls’ participation in and contribution to decision-making processes and governance structures in displacement contexts through dedicated activities that are designed with the women and girls, following the initial data collection exercise that assesses contextual barriers to participation, including their sense of safety in the displacement sites. The WPP promotes a phased approach and emphasizes the design of an inclusive project that also targets the women and girls who are at heightened risk of GBV, such as adolescents and those with disabilities.

By March 2023 WPP had reached over 16,000 women and girls globally and has been implemented in 13 countries.¹⁸ As its success becomes better known across

IOM it will likely gain even wider influence, as one key informant explained: “[though] we don’t implement the project in all the countries where we do CCCM ... because it requires additional resources ... it’s started to become quite [well] known by other departments across the organization as it’s seen as good practice.”¹⁹ The most successful WPP models have been in the countries where IOM missions were able to integrate or mainstream WPP activities across the core operation of CCCM (or other units) with their donor funding and existing resources.

Significantly, the WPP is designed for any organization to be able to implement and use its open-source toolkit that includes: resources for assessment; design and evaluation of project activities that aim to enhance women’s and girls’ participation in decision-making and governance structures; improve their sense of safety; and mitigate the risks of GBV. However, training, and technical support from the specialised and dedicated project team in IOM HQ is needed to reduce the risk of harm, promote the phased and evidence-based approach of the project and ensure better outcomes.²⁰ Although designed to be implemented in displacement contexts where CCCM is active, the model has generated interest among and promoted cooperation with other sectors or units across IOM including in WASH, shelter, and cash-based interventions.

5.3 Key components for institutionalizing the engagement of women and girls (entry points and enabling factors)

Several entry points and enabling factors have been identified as key to the efforts of GWC and IOM to make engagement with women and girls a more standard component of their respective ways of working.

5.3.1 Entry points²¹

Programming standards and frameworks

The GWC five minimum commitments, the Accountability and Quality Assurance Guidance Note and the Modular Analytical Framework all feature consultations with women and girls. Similarly, the IOM Institutional Framework for Addressing GBV in Crises²² includes specific focus on engaging women and girls across the programme cycle. Colleagues in both the GWC and IOM have cited how instrumental these core documents have been in sending a message that consultations with women and girls should be considered a non-negotiable, normal way of working.

Resource mobilization and budgeting

Dedicated, multi-year resources were instrumental for GWC and IOM progress on making consultations with women and girls a more consistent element of their work. In particular, ‘Safe from the Start’ project funding provided by the United States State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration was invaluable, as it allowed for sustained staffing to drive this work; enabled global and field-based

initiatives to take place concurrently; and created space for longer-term relationship building and collaboration among GBV specialists and colleagues working in other sectors.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Accountability and Quality Assurance system specifically provides a way to monitor the WASH response against a jointly agreed, synthesized, contextually relevant quality and accountability framework.²³ The modular analytical framework supports the tracking of unintended consequences and timely course correction. In 2019, indicators and ‘question banks’ were reformulated to inform WASH needs assessments so that implementing partner organizations could not only be reminded of the importance of consulting with women and girls, and the rationale for doing so, but also had the necessary tools. Questions include, for example: How satisfied are women in the community with regard to access to menstrual materials? How satisfied are the female community members with regard to access to sanitation facilities (latrines/toilets)? The question bank also highlights the need for gender balance within consultation cohorts, teams and groups disaggregated by sex, where appropriate.

Similarly, the WPP toolkit also provides a comprehensive set of data collection tools for CCCM practitioners. During the initial two-year pilot phase of the project, IOM used robust baseline and endline data collection to continuously learn and improve, whilst evidencing the impact of engaging women and girls. As the project gained momentum and the operations embedded it into their regular CCCM programming, a dedicated monitoring and evaluation tool was developed to ensure regular data collection between the baseline and the endline.

Human resources

Having dedicated staff with GBV expertise embedded within cluster and programme teams was cited as one of the strongest resources and facilitators to support the integration of consultation with women and girls. Examples include: the UNICEF GBV specialist role supporting all UNICEF-led clusters (2017–2023); the GWC GBV/People-Centred Coordinator post (initiated in 2021); and the IOM GBV specialist and WPP project officer within the global CCCM team at IOM HQ. In addition, the project review report for WPP highlights that in locations where adequate GBV expertise was available, women’s participation was better integrated across CCCM programming and IOM core operations, creating a more effective model for anchoring consultations with women and girls in a sustainable way.²⁴

In addition, the project review report for WPP, based on the best practices collected across countries of implementation, recommends close integration and cooperation between CCCM programming and GBV expertise – at both global and country level – to sustain a model that more effectively and sustainably promotes the consultations with women and girls and boosts their decision-making role.

The respective experiences of the GWC and IOM illustrate how placing GBV specialist staff within other sector teams can enable a critical two-way learning

process, more innovative and relevant programmatic solutions, and more sustainable results.

Additional human resources used by both the GWC and IOM included training, inductions and hands-on mentoring to institutionalize consultation with women and girls. Two trainings were frequently cited as useful entry points and as ways to significantly influence the behaviours and attitudes of staff and WASH cluster coordination: the induction training (part of the briefing package), which is often delivered remotely; and the WASH Operational Coordination and Leadership training.

Other examples of more holistic targeted capacity-strengthening around the consultation with women and girls went beyond just a one-off training session for partners. For example, the People-Centred Programming Coordinator worked alongside country coordination teams to help set up and train a Gender Technical Working Group and an Inclusion Technical Working Group (in Ukraine and Yemen respectively). This type of collaboration and dedicated support lasted for three months each, and included face to face trainings, the joint development of resource materials for national-level clusters on gender and inclusion, and the creation and chairing of the technical working group meetings, before being fully handed over to the members.²⁵ The WPP project report also shares a similar view – one off training is not enough. It emphasizes “the needs for more structured and continuous sensitization and capacity-building and training”²⁶ as it would take time to promote positive attitudes about women’s participation and gender equality.

5.3.2 Enabling factors

Motivation

The majority of respondents from the GWC and IOM felt they had witnessed a significant shift in attitudes over the past 10 years which was motivating staff to actively mitigate GBV risks. Two key factors to institutionalize consultation with women and girls were evidence of the need and pressure from the broader humanitarian sector.

First, the substantial evidence showing that if women and girls are not engaged, risks of GBV increase, leading to failed project outcomes,²⁷ is contributing to a stronger desire for implementing change among humanitarian staff. As examples of good practice have proliferated, staff have also seen that when women and girls are engaged the project’s impact is far greater. Secondly, the growing number of global commitments around GBV risk mitigation and safe programming have pushed multiple humanitarian sectors to improve how they can promote safety. Pressure is also coming from donors to include GBV risk mitigation and plans for women’s and girls’ involvement in proposal design and reporting cycles.

There is some sort of pressure from the cluster at the local level, at the country level, but also global and the WASH cluster now. Also, from donors – to make sure that we are more accountable on that [engaging women and girls] area ... It has a lot to do with positioning from our side to make sure we don’t get behind.²⁸

Female staffing and leadership

Key informants from GWC pointed out that appointment of the first female GWC coordinator in 2020 further boosted the efforts of GWC to better engage women and girls in WASH. While security (including financial/job) and cultural norms around women's work in the WASH humanitarian sector are undeniable challenges, when the cluster can model gender equality with a female leader who prioritizes consultation with women and girls, other actors are “urged to make efforts to augment the presence of female staff at all levels while ensuring that all staff recognize gender equality as an organizing principle of all humanitarian work”.²⁹

As one colleague working directly on the WPP reflected, a lack of women staff members can also act as a practical hindrance to engagement with women and girls from affected communities:

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Starting a project in my country, where my team is all male and many of our staff are not convinced [about] women's empowerment, is a challenge. Because it's a very normal thing, [that] women do not have a voice in my own community and problematic attitudes can be [found] even among female staff. There are a lot of processes you have to go through before starting the WPP, to get the buy-in from your team and to train them.

6. Opportunities for further improvement

Though significant progress has been made on institutionalizing consultations with women and girls within the GWC and through the WPP, some important areas for improvement have also been identified – namely, collaboration with local women's organizations and narrowing the gender gap in staffing.

6.1 Building bridges between the international humanitarian architecture and local women's organizations

One potential ‘quick win’ for humanitarian organizations to facilitate consultations with women and girls is by building strong relationships with local women's organizations. However, it is important to recognize that – while such institutional relationships can help facilitate engagement with individual women and girls who have been directly impacted by the emergency – the two structures should not be viewed as fully interchangeable. From a practical perspective, there are gaps in understanding how to work together across different operating environments, different communication preferences and ways of working. There is still confusion, or lack of awareness regarding the benefits of collaboration, and ways to engage: “Many people in WASH don't consider women-led organizations in humanitarian response. They said they didn't know they existed.”³⁰ Some progress has been made in this area, including as part of the GWC's Women in WASH Coordination assessment and a mapping exercise that has been undertaken by IOM in various locations.³¹ However, additional investment and commitment are needed.

6.2 Gender gap in humanitarian response: the example of WASH

Achieving gender balance in humanitarian response continues to be a work-in-progress across most programmatic sectors. WASH has been highlighted in this section because of the detailed data available. However, other sectors – including CCCM – have observed similar dynamics and challenges.

Although there has been a gradual increase in female WASH staffing, the gap remains substantial and poses a significant obstacle for WASH initiatives to overcome and engage with women and girls. In January 2022, 181 people had a role in National WASH Coordination Platforms, and just 20 per cent were women.³² Despite the growing awareness of the gender gap and its implications only two humanitarian response plans committed to recruit female staff in 2023.

Added to the complexity is that when women do work in WASH they are more likely to work in roles related to hygiene promotion (of which many positions are volunteer) rather than engineering roles – which are still privileged for coordinating or decision-making positions. Often referred to as ‘soft’ vs ‘hard’ skills respectively, the male bias in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and careers, plays out in the humanitarian WASH sector with a significant difference in decision-making power (and funding) between those working in ‘soft skill roles’ and those working in ‘hard WASH skills’.³³ As one interviewee put it, “Funding is like 20 to 1 for hard skills. Of course, decision-makers care more about hard skills, that is where their money is.”³⁴ Cluster funding and decision-making bias towards ‘hard skill’ areas constrains key activities that support meaningful participation in decision-making and limits progress.³⁵

6.3 Intersectionality

Gender inequality impacts all women and girls in different ways. As the WPP toolkit highlights, consultations must “reach not just the women and girls who are easiest to reach but ensuring those who are at heightened risks to GBV, such as adolescent girls and women and girls with disabilities, are included in the assessment, project design, implementation, and evaluation.”³⁶ As additional efforts are made to further advance consultations with women and girls within humanitarian response, it will also be important to ensure consistent advocacy as well as practical tools and examples on how to include the voices of those who face multiple barriers to influencing decision-making processes.

7. Conclusion

The examples highlighted above provide insight into the process and efforts made to realise consultation with women and girls as a central tenet of humanitarian work, and as a foundational step in institutionalizing gender-based violence risk mitigation. While this work is ongoing, the learning from successes, challenges and identification of entry points and facilitators is likely to be relevant to other sectors and agencies in their pursuit of better practice, and a move to a more routine and cohesive approach to engaging women and girls across the humanitarian response – eventually becoming part of its ‘DNA’.

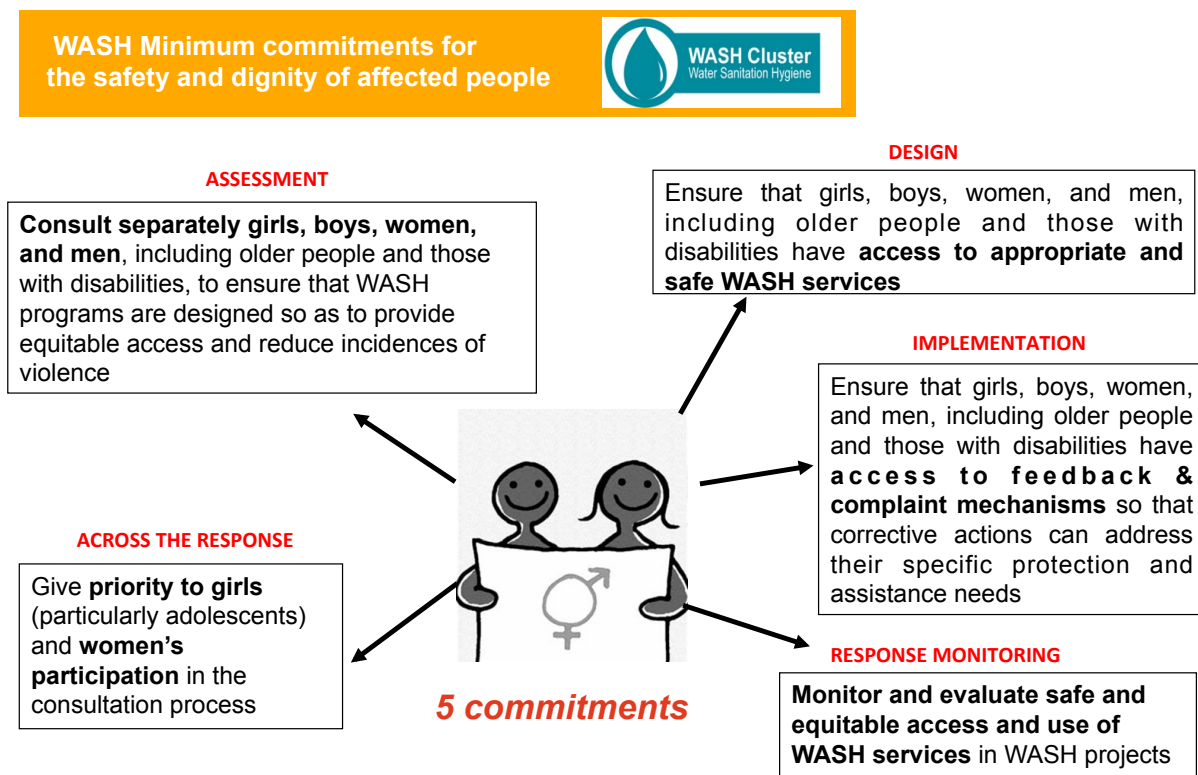
Efforts to engage women and girls can be taken as paramount and foundational because without that, most other commitments (and project objectives) cannot be realised. Such engagement is most often a strategic precursor and necessary foundation to achieving other goals at various levels of humanitarian response and including mitigating risks of GBV.

Institutionalizing consultation with women and girls within an organization or system is strengthened with the use of entry points through funding, programming standards and tools, human resources, capacity strengthening and monitoring. When the issue is emphasized in several areas of the organization or cluster mechanics, it emboldens everyone involved to integrate the participation of women and girls in their work. An enabling environment created by leadership, motivated staff and available expertise facilitates listening to women and girls about their experiences, needs and risks in emergencies, and advances that process to become part of the identity and culture of an organization, paving the way for institutionalization.

Annex I:

WASH Minimum Commitments to Safety and Dignity: Framework and Tools (“The 5 Commitments”)

Reproduced from: [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](https://gbvguidelines.org/). WASH Minimum Commitments to Safety and Dignity: Framework and Tools (gbvguidelines.org)



Endnotes

- 1 Information was gathered in partnership with the Tsunagu consulting team, through review of 37 primary and secondary documents, dated from 2015 to 2024 as well as 12 interviews with selected practitioners involved in relevant processes and GBV response work.
- 2 [CARE International](#), 'Where are the Women? The Conspicuous Absence of Women in COVID-19 Response Teams and Plans, and Why We Need Them', Care International, 2020; VOICE, 'We Must Do Better: A Feminist Assessment of the Humanitarian Aid System's Support of Women and Girl-Led Organizations during the COVID-19 Pandemic' VOICE, 2021; Dietrich Ortega, L.M., Skakun, Z., Cabezas Pino, A., and Novelo Duarte, M.F. 'Who Holds the Microphone?' Crisis affected women's voices on gender-transformative changes in humanitarian settings: Experiences from Bangladesh, Colombia, Jordan and Uganda, New York: UN Women, 2020.
- 3 Lough, O., Barbelet, V. and Njeri, S., 'Inclusion and Exclusion in Humanitarian Action: Findings from a three-year study', Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2022.
- 4 Banks, N. and Ghazali, M., 'Recognising Resilience: Women's Leadership In North-west Syria's Earthquake Response and Beyond, ActionAid, 2023.
- 5 Oxfam Policy and Practice, 'Sani Tweaks - A Better Approach for Sanitation in Emergencies' Oxfam, 2022.
- 6 Babbar, K., et al., 'Inclusion Means Everyone: Standing up for transgender and non-binary individuals who menstruate worldwide, *The Lancet Regional Health - Southeast Asia*, 13:100177, 2023.
- 7 UNICEF, [Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools: Global baseline report 2018, UNICEF data, 2018.](#)
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- 9 IASC GenCAP, Gender with Age Marker, Gender Equality Measures (GEMs) summary < <https://www.iascgenderwithagemarker.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GEMs-summary-EN.pdf>> accessed on Sept 2024
- 10 CHS Alliance, How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector, Humanitarian Accountability Report, 2018, p.19.
- 11 UNICEF, 'Tip Sheet: Consulting with Women and Girls on Existing GBV Risk Mitigation Measures', UNICEF, 2023.
- 12 Oxfam, Solidarités International, Tufts University and UNICEF as the Cluster Lead Agency. The project also worked closely with expertise in the Global Cluster Coordination Unit cross-cutting working groups composed of gender, GBV, disability and accountability to affected population focal points to ensure integration of all cross-cutting issues.
- 13 GWC, Field Support Team, Caroline Haar www.washcluster.net/node/30446.
- 14 M. Yamashina, 'Where Are Women', unpublished document
- 15 See the Global WASH Cluster (GWC), Delivering Humanitarian WASH at Scale, Anywhere and Any Time: Road Map for 2020-2025, UNICEF, Geneva, 2020 and the WASH Road Map for 2020-2025 (internal).

- 16 Within a funding agreement from ‘Safe from the Start’, supported by the US Government Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.
- 17 See the [Women in Displacement, Women’s Participation Project](#).
- 18 International Organization for Migration, ‘Project Review Report, Women’s Participation Project’, 2023.
- 19 Key Informant interview E&G07.
- 20 Key informant E&G07 outlined that the influence of the WWP approach on the sector and partners has been stronger when IOM are lead or co-lead of the cluster, as this enables IOM practitioners to promote the use of the tools more actively with greater influence.
- 21 For a full list of the institutional entry points identified as part of the broader GBV risk mitigation institutionalization project, please see the accompanying Resource Package. UNICEF, ‘GBV Risk Mitigation Institutionalization: A Resource Package for Practitioners’ (to be published in October 2024)
- 22 International Organization for Migration, ‘Institutional Framework For Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crises’, Department of Operations and Emergencies, IOM, 2018.
- 23 Global WASH Cluster, Accountability and Quality Assurance system (updated February 2024).
- 24 Smith, M., ‘Project Review Report: Women’s Participation Project’, IOM, 2023.
- 25 Key Informant interview E&G01.
- 26 Smith, ‘Project Review Report’. 2023, p.5.
- 27 Raftery, P., et al., ‘Gender-based Violence (GBV) Coordination in Humanitarian and Public Health Emergencies: A scoping review’, *Conflict and Health*, 16, 37, 2022.
- 28 Key Informant interview E&G10.
- 29 International Organization for Migration, ‘Closing the Gender Gap in the Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector in South Sudan’, IOM, 2020; and UNHCR, ‘Tearing Down the Walls: Confronting the Barriers to Internally Displaced Women and Girls’ Participation in Humanitarian Settings, UNHCR, nd.
- 30 Key Informant interview E&G02.
- 31 UNICEF, ‘Action Learning Brief, Partnering With Women- And Girl-Led Organizations’ UNICEF, nd.
- 32 Based on the GWCs contact lists as of January 2022. Roles include coordinators, co-leads, information management officers, WASH focal points of both national and subnational WASH clusters/sectors.
- 33 International Organization for Migration, ‘Closing the Gender Gap’, IOM, 2020.
- 34 Key Informant interview E&G04.
- 35 UNICEF, ‘Where are Women in WASH Coordination? : Barriers and enablers for women and women-led organizations to work in WASH coordination’, internal consultant report, UNICEF, 2022.
- 36 See: [Women in Displacement: Toolkit, nd.](#)