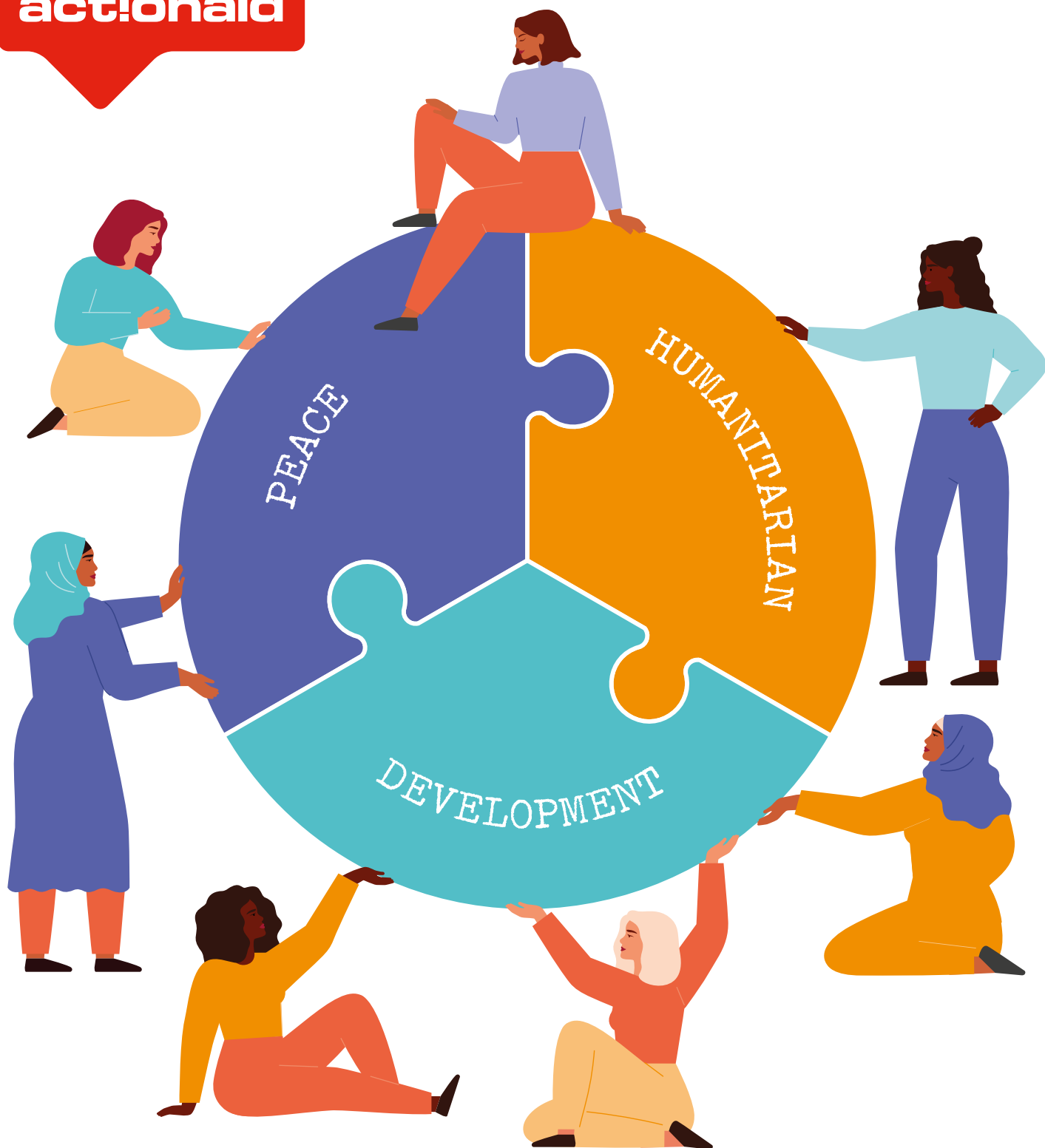


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Leading the Way: The Nexus through a Feminist Lens

November 2022

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Executive Summary

Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actions have traditionally been conceptualised as distinct processes, with crisis-related immediate needs set against longer-term peacebuilding and development activities by international non governmental organisations (NGOs), UN agencies and donors. In reality, however, these three areas overlap and support each other in building long-term sustainability and resilience.¹ Working in siloed ways between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding does not serve the holistic needs of those in need, who often find themselves over long periods of time in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding categories.² This is increasingly evident as protracted crises increase and emergency responses become more multifaced and complex.

The emergence of the 'triple' Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus concept (hereafter known as the Nexus) marked a significant paradigmatic shift towards creating a more effective and efficient humanitarian system. By focusing on the root causes of crises and bringing about longer-term and more sustainable solutions, the Nexus attempted to overcome long-standing siloed approaches to humanitarian action, which reinforced artificial divisions across the interconnected sectors of development, humanitarian and peacebuilding.

The international community is still failing to implement approaches that adequately reflect the intention and aspiration of the Nexus, and the gendered perspective within this is still largely missing. Nexus approaches

are not yet grounded in a robust evidence base, and the international community continues to struggle with how to operationalise the Nexus in practice.³ Most of these conversations have been framed by the viewpoints and experiences of donors and humanitarian agencies, rather than the views and experiences of local actors, specifically women's rights and women-led organisations (WROs and WLOs) who are central to humanitarian responses, and directly impacted by such decisions. While international NGOs, UN agencies and donors have been slow to adapt this approach, WROs and WLOs at the forefront of humanitarian emergencies have been transcending these divides within their responses, despite this not being acknowledged.⁴ This is symptomatic of the sector's wider ways of working, with women and girls⁵ being seen as passive victims and spectators to conflict and peace processes, instead of recognised as active agents of change.

This research aims to fill this gap and bring new insights to the rhetoric, by drawing on the experiences of women and their organisations working across the Nexus to lead responses to emergencies in Haiti, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somaliland to examine how they work across the Nexus, and what these siloes mean to them. It explores how the international community can learn from these approaches and how, in turn, this can lead to more sustainable humanitarian responses by working across humanitarian, development and peace action to tackle the root causes of structural inequalities.

Food distribution in Satiile Village, Somaliland, in response to 2022 drought Crisis (2022).



The research finds that despite the international community still grappling with the practicalities of the Nexus, WROs and WLOs are, and have been, implementing a 'Nexus approach' within their communities – as first responders, but also as key actors of change in development and peacebuilding activities.

This research pulls together the experiences of WROs and WLOs about what it means to bring a feminist lens to the Nexus, looking at the following key findings recommendations, before it concludes that the international community must invest in local women-led interventions and shift power, decision making and funding to WROs and WLOs who are best placed to understand emergency needs.

Key Findings & Recommendations:

1 Gender Transformative Programming is a first step in addressing inequalities and adopting an integrated Nexus approach. There is a need to undertake comprehensive gendered-conflict analysis at all stages of humanitarian action; with the integration of advocacy, policy building and specific links to women's protection and resilience building across all humanitarian programmes.

2 Recognising the role of WROs and WLOs, who have been operationalising the Nexus and supporting their leadership promotes more efficient humanitarian action.

Donors and the humanitarian community should ensure accessibility of WROs and WLOs to international conversations, invest in capacity building around longer-term and sustainable opportunities and respect the authority and credibility of WROs and WLOs.

3 Dedicated funding and meaningful partnerships with WROs and WLOs are crucial in meaningfully operationalising the Nexus. This includes long-term flexible funding modalities; simplification of funding requirements; the participation of women in the development of bids and ensuring an appropriate risk matrix.

1 Introduction

The Nexus has been coined as a term to describe the interaction between humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding efforts and how work in these three areas is undertaken by different actors. Even though in recent years, humanitarian action has largely adopted a more nuanced approach that takes into consideration concepts of preparedness, long-term sustainability and recovery, this is not consistently happening in practice. The international community still struggles with how to operationalise the Nexus, despite recognition that actors working in humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding efforts have surpassed the traditional lines of what they constitute either as ‘response’ ‘development’ or ‘peace’ activities.⁶ There has been significant uncertainty over what the Nexus means both in concept and practice, with issues arising on how to align preparedness with response and development efforts.

Understanding the context behind the Nexus is vital, as debates around it respond to changing political, social, economic and environmental realities over time.

1.1 Background

Historical Debates and Notions of the Nexus

Early conversations around the Nexus in the 1990s revolved around Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), through a recognition that a transition from humanitarian response to longer term development support was needed.⁷ This brought into discussions concepts of resilience and disaster risk reduction, focusing on a better transition between humanitarian, rehabilitation and development activities. Conversations revolved around how best to link disaster management to sustainable strategies, with the introduction of resilience framing.⁸ In practice, aligning development and humanitarian work proved complicated, with uncertainty as to when implementing actors should collaborate. This presented criticism that aligning development and humanitarian assistance with resilience as linear progression failed to understand the cyclical nature of disaster management, where development, response, preparedness and recovery can overlap, and often work simultaneously.⁹

Important conversations around humanitarian neutrality also happened in the 1990s, drawing on experiences from interventions in Somalia, Rwanda and the former

Yugoslavia. Following the aftermath of the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack in 2001, the international development sector began to align more closely with the securitisation agenda. This period saw aid and development budgets diverted towards global security and stabilisation,¹⁰ stalling further progression around the Nexus and the resilience debate.

It was not until the late 2000s that requests for humanitarian and development actors to work together more closely to help build longer-term resilience were truly recognised. The need for humanitarian assistance grew dramatically, with the number of crises increasing around the world and the number of people in need multiplying.¹¹ These changing demands provoked new international discussions, and governments and agencies began to rethink how to respond. Conceptualising the relationship between disaster response and underlying development evolved from discussions about relief continuum between humanitarian and development, and how to move away from the securitisation of humanitarian interventions towards the integration of risk and conflict sensitivity within the response.¹² In light of this, the Nexus debate recognised that emergency needs are often symptoms of underlying issues that make people and societies vulnerable, and that a more effective international response needs to do more to address these root causes.

In 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), its first formal and legal document to require parties to prevent violations of women’s rights in conflict and support their participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. In subsequent years, the resolution was joined by nine more,¹³ calling for change in areas including conflict-related sexual violence; sexual exploitation and abuse; and women’s participation in peacebuilding. These 10 resolutions together form the WPS agenda. The commitment to WPS in principle provides an opening for better collaboration across the Nexus and an opportunity to advance funding for what has been, to date, a critically under-resourced area of humanitarian work.¹⁴

The WPS agenda was undertaken alongside the creation of other international agreements which committed to the recognition of nationally owned

and locally led development plans, such as the 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁵ and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit commitments, such as the Grand Bargain which included recommendations for closer engagement

between humanitarian and development actors. This was in parallel to a surge of protracted and volatile climate-related disasters and conflicts, with a recognition that peacebuilding and security needed to be considered as part of the humanitarian and development discourse.

WPS Agenda & Considerations of Gender in the Nexus

The UNSCR 1325 resolution, adopted in 2000, was the first official and legal document issued by the Security Council asking parties at conflict to respect women's rights and support their participation in peace negotiations, as well as in development activities.¹⁶ It consists of four main pillars that can contribute to reduce violations against women: 1) prevention; 2) protection; 3) participation; and 4) relief and recovery. Relief and recovery directly addresses the inclusion of humanitarian action, calling for actors to apply a gender lens when addressing international crises, for example by considering the needs of women and girls in the provision of aid.

As the Nexus debate recognises that emergency needs are often symptoms of underlying issues that make people and societies vulnerable, and as the WPS agenda specifically engages humanitarian and development actors, it is natural to incorporate peace into the approach. By doing so we acknowledge the importance of conflict resolution and prevention in ending humanitarian need, reducing poverty, and ensuring sustainable development.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the interlinkage between conflict resolution and ending humanitarian need has been critiqued as being the most ambiguous and under-researched part of both the Nexus and WPS agenda¹⁸ – often missing out how gender analysis and the inclusion of WROs and WLOs correspond in the conversation.

Since gender inequalities are often root causes of vulnerability and risk within communities, and

women's empowerment can effectively contribute to building resilience, increasing the focus on the drivers of risk also implies increasing the focus on gender equality as a key step towards the Nexus debate.¹⁹ However, in 2019-2020 only 6.3 billion USD per year, or 5% of total bilateral aid was dedicated to gender equality as the principal objective of the programme.²⁰ This demonstrates a clear gap in actioning the relationship between the WPS agenda and humanitarian action. WPS presents a challenge to humanitarian and development actors to live up to its ambition of participation, prevention, protection, relief and recovery for women and girls in conflict affected settings as they must move beyond engaging with local humanitarian actors, specifically women and girls, as 'beneficiaries' of aid, and instead engage them as active agents of change and leading partners and respondents of humanitarian action.²¹

Gender equality is a significant area of overlapping (and, at times, joint) commitments between humanitarian, development and peace actors – offering a potentially impactful testing ground for Nexus approaches – but this cannot be done without centering women, girls and their organisations within the core of the debate. The implementation of a Nexus approach that promotes this would provide a substantial opportunity to enhance gender justice, including through long-term support to WROs and WLOs and ensuring that women's rights are integral to both immediate responses and longer-term outcomes.²²

Moving Forward in the Nexus and Inclusion of WPS Agenda in Humanitarian Debate

The number of people living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is unprecedented, with UNCHR estimating that in 2022, 100 million people are

displaced by spiralling crises around the world.²³ This year, 2022, it is estimated that approximately 274 million people worldwide will need humanitarian assistance, and the UN will require a record \$41 billion to respond to 63 emergencies around the world.²⁴ This raises concerns around the ability of fragile states to respond to emergencies, with the Organisation for



Photo: Saw Lay Dar Du/ActionAid

Women Leaders from a Women's Self-Group in Kyun Kalay Village, Myanmar focused on village development and sustainable livelihoods in response to floods (2019)

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) projecting that 80% of people living in poverty will live in fragile settings by 2030.²⁵ The Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted pre-existing fragilities and inequalities for those most affected by emergencies, specifically women and girls,²⁶ with an estimated additional 47 million women expected to be pushed into extreme poverty as a direct result of Covid-19.²⁷ Conflict, fragility, and crisis on the one hand, and poverty and inequality on the other, are intertwining means of vulnerability, demanding integrated, concerted attention.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also brought to focus the critical role of local actors, specifically WROs and WLOs in humanitarian operations, working across all stages of humanitarian action.²⁸ Donors, UN agencies and INGOs have talked about the need

for a radical step-change in funding and partnership approaches in the humanitarian system,²⁹ but despite the unprecedented scale of emergencies and numerous international discussions, these actors continue to work in siloes. The humanitarian system remains gender-blind³⁰ with humanitarians tending to dismiss the WPS agenda, seeing it as the purview of peacebuilding and often failing to integrate women's rights and gender equality in their programmatic work. This severely limits gender-transformative humanitarian action and fails to recognise the role that local organisations, specifically WROs and WLOs, play in transcending the Nexus.

How the Nexus is Defined by Different Stakeholders

Conversations on the Nexus will continue to evolve in line with the changing socio-economic and political environment. As we continue to learn from the Covid-19 pandemic and the increasingly complex nature of today's crises, there is deeper recognition from international actors of the need for synergistic approaches that consolidate capacities and resources for durable results – putting discussion around the Nexus at the forefront of international policy discussions. However, despite revamped commitments by the international community to the Nexus³¹, it is not clear how the UN's sovereignty-focus can address global political economy drivers of conflict, crisis, and fragility,³² nor is there an agreed definition of the Nexus and its conceptual boundaries.

Challenges to defining the Nexus begin with agreeing on priorities, framings, and principles. Humanitarianism's apolitical and needs-based approaches are different to the more long-term, political, rights-based approaches of development and peacebuilding actors. Similarly, international politics has often been accused of blocking international action towards an enhanced and integrated approach to global peace.³³ Thus, when discussing the Nexus, different actors interpret elements differently, according to their respective interests and agendas. For INGOs, this usually means integrating better conflict sensitivity, supporting social cohesion or peacebuilding – although there is an understanding that these need to be linked to official processes.³⁴

Donors base the Nexus on funding modalities and 'strengthening complementarities' within programmes. In 2019, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) recommendation provided a set of working principles for DAC donors on the Nexus, cementing donor commitments on this agenda and adding the peace component to form a more transformational triple Nexus.³⁵ This is defined as: *'the aim of strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity. The approach seeks to capitalise on the comparative advantages of each pillar – to the extent of their relevance in the specific context – in order to reduce overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict.'*³⁶ Donor

members ultimately make this fit within their own policies through a set of recommendations on prevention, mitigation and peacebuilding; joint up programming with 'risk analysis; and basing people-centric activities on 'do no harm' principles.

Even within the UN System, there are differing connotations of the Nexus. For example, 'UNICEF's approach to [the Nexus] places an emphasis on a number of key initiatives, which include strengthening systems, developing risk-informed programmes, engaging community participation, planning and preparing for emergencies, fostering partnerships and mobilising vital resources.'³⁷ UNOCHA sees it under the lens of The New Way of Working, describing it 'as working towards achieving collective outcomes that reduce need, risk and vulnerability, over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors.'³⁸

While there is a clear rhetoric on stronger collaboration and coordination among actors from the fields of development cooperation, humanitarian action and peacebuilding, again, most of these conversations have been constructed largely through the perspectives of implementing agencies – speaking mostly around the collaboration of different international actors and international initiatives. Definitions of the Nexus have been framed by the viewpoints and experiences of donors and humanitarian and development agencies, rather than the views and experiences of those most affected – namely local actors, specifically WROs and WLOs. This represents a lack of understanding of how communities, specifically women, girls and their organisations experience and respond to crises.

Civil society spaces, and especially organisations led by women and girls, are also where the most transformational linkages between humanitarian, development and peace work is already happening, and in recent years they have led the way in interpreting a range of WPS resolutions expansively and intersectionally.³⁹ And yet, the Nexus is a policy term which seems to have been developed by the international fora while dismissing the voices of the most instrumental players.

1.2 Methodology and Research Approach

This research brings together the experiences of women leaders and members of WROs, WLOs and women's movements in Haiti, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somaliland, who have both been impacted by and led responses to emergencies in their communities. Within each context, they interrogated why inequalities occur, exploring the synergies between their work within humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding activities, often working without labels.

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, including a literature review, as well as the collection and analysis of primary qualitative data and the quantification of qualitative data through the use of a survey across all contexts. ActionAid worked collaboratively with WROs and WLOs in Haiti, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somaliland, ensuring their leadership in developing the research, analysing the data and validating findings and recommendations. Primary data was collected through 53 key informant interviews and 18 focus group discussions across all countries. 178 women leaders, WROs and WLOs participated in the quantitative survey data collection.⁴⁰ Preliminary research findings were shared with all participants ahead of report finalisation to allow for meaningful feedback on the initial analysis, validation of findings and support in the co-development of final recommendations.

ActionAid adopts a feminist approach to research, seeing it as a tool to bring about shifts in power. Research findings and evidence can be used to dismantle potential bias from decision-makers views and actions, and to challenge how and where power negatively manifests and reproduces oppression. ActionAid's Feminist Research Guidelines⁴¹ focus on 'people-centred evidence' which aim to be empowering, build solidarity and shift power. In this light, ActionAid's feminist research approach brings to the centre the experiences and rights of those who are most at risk of being marginalised and together interrogates why inequalities occur. This arises from our wider commitment to intersectional feminism as an ideology, an analytical framework and a social change strategy in our programmatic, policy and research approach – where we strive to share power, be accountable and protect the rights and well-being of the girls and women we interact with at all stages of our work.

As such, ActionAid strives to do research that prioritises women and young people's perspectives,

validates their knowledge and connects them with decision-makers so that they can create their own change.⁴² Drawing on an intersectional feminist framing, we acknowledge gender does not operate alone as a basis for structural inequality. Power and privilege are experienced in different ways by different groups of women and at different points in their history and in varying contexts.⁴³ This helps support our own humanitarian programming, by focusing on shifting power and accountability to communities, and prioritising women and young people's leadership as a step to break down the systems of inequalities and structures that sustain them.⁴⁴ This meant this research took on participatory, reflexive and feminist approach throughout, developing comprehensive ethical guidelines and co-developing questions with research participants.

ActionAid's programmatic focus and unique Humanitarian Signature is rooted in these feminist principles, enhanced by our understanding and experience of shifting power to local communities, specifically through working in partnership with WROs and WLOs. This is done by promoting the leadership of women and their organisations who are impacted by crisis to ensure we remain accountable to affected communities and meaningfully respond to the contextual needs and realities of women and girls. This is alongside a commitment to longer-term sustainability and resilience building by empowering women leaders to address the underlying causes of inequality within their communities.⁴⁵

2 Key Findings

Despite the artificial lines imposed by international actors between humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding efforts, the WROs and WLOs we spoke to work across the Nexus to respond to multiple compounding risks, such as climate change, conflict and rapid-onset emergencies. Our findings have been organised around the following themes: (a) Gender-transformative programming and dismantling structural inequalities supports integrated Nexus programming; (b) operationalising the Nexus in practice; and (c) paving the way for sustainable and long-term change.

2.1 Gender-Transformative Programming Dismantles Structural Inequalities in Crisis Contexts and Supports an Integrated Nexus Approach

It is clear from the findings that current crisis response plans often lack considerations of existing gender inequalities, leading to gender blind programming and the de-prioritisation of women specific services in emergencies. This was noted as a gap in the way international actors understand root causes

of discrimination and in turn fail to meaningfully develop programmes that expand beyond short-term humanitarian lifesaving initiatives.

Recognising and identifying the root causes of structural inequalities that women and girls face in emergencies, supports a meaningful design and effective implementation of gender transformative humanitarian programming⁴⁶ that that allows for the meaningful implementation of development and peacebuilding activities. This is a critical starting point for a Nexus approach that addresses gender norms and inequalities, and contributes to an underlying objective of coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts in order to reduce risks and vulnerabilities effectively, while simultaneously supporting prevention efforts. To do this however, it is vital to understand structural and economic inequalities faced at the community and national level, and how these interlink.

Structural Inequality and Societal Stigma

Our findings highlighted that across each of the countries, societal stigma and patriarchal attitudes make women and girls more vulnerable during crises, leading to a lack of understanding of women and



Photo: Naw Thaw Thaw Moo/ActionAid

An ActionAid organised women's self-help group in Myanmar, focused on village development and sustainable livelihoods (2019)



Photo: ActionAid

Women in Haiti worked to raise awareness on masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19 (2020)

girls' rights and the acceptance of social norms that prioritise men and boys' status and needs within a community. In Lebanon participants commented,

'Men and women are going through the [same] main crisis, however the vulnerabilities are not the same. Women and girls are more vulnerable to risk.'

Women leaders in Haiti highlighted that women were more likely to be exposed to Covid-19, as they represented the majority of frontline professionals in the health and social care sector. Similarly, participants in Myanmar flagged that rising commodity prices after an emergency can affect women more adversely, as they are often responsible for household chores and more likely to skip a meal to support their families.

Gender inequality may intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as sexual orientation, race, gender identity, age, ethnicity or disability. This was flagged by participants from Myanmar, speaking to the additional discrimination some individuals and minorities face in IDP camps, where they may experience additional stigma and be unable to reach public health information. Representatives from the WROs interviewed reported that LGBTQ+ women were less likely to participate in activities due to discrimination. This led to a reduced understanding of their needs and difficulty in mobilising resources to support these women. Without analysing the intersectional needs of those at greatest risk of marginalisation before, during and after emergencies, there is a risk of further exacerbating the needs of women and girls.

Economic Inequality and Limited Social Protection

Women and girls face a lack of security around employment and education and are often the first to be removed from the workplace or education system when a crisis hits.⁴⁷ This is in part because women tend to be overrepresented in informal employment, with participants in Myanmar noting that women were more likely to be employed in precarious sectors such as garment factories. During lockdowns women's care responsibilities also increased as schools closed and responsibility for the education of their children fell on them. Participants in Lebanon, for example, said 'the women were obliged to find a balance between their job, for those who were working, and online education', leading to a situation where 'all the responsibilities were lying on women'. This was raised as a concern in both Haiti and Somaliland, where interview participants spoke of the increase in women's economic challenges, such as fewer opportunities for women employed in agricultural settings due to loss of crops which can lead to a loss of autonomy and certainty around their long-term futures. As a result of shrinking employment prospects, participants in Somaliland commented that women have had to take, or were forced into, exploitative jobs and situations, with some mentioning an increase in forced marriages and sex work. Participants in Somaliland also raised concerns about the increase in girl brides during situations of conflict including the exchange of girls to keep the peace during reconciliation processes, as their rights were not accounted for.

Intensification of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and De-prioritisation of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights

Increase of GBV in emergencies is particularly common and well documented.⁴⁸ In all four country contexts, the increase of GBV during emergencies, and shrinking of GBV response services, was highlighted as one of the most prominent concerns, with multiple crises compounding GBV risks for women and girls. Talking of the impact of Covid-19, the Beirut Blast in 2020 and subsequent economic crisis, participants in Lebanon said, ‘the violence has increased in all its types – physical, mental and sexual’. Participants in Myanmar reported increases in GBV in times of conflict, leading to a situation where women and girls did not feel safe in either public or private spaces, with one commenting:

‘Women and girls are being violated both inside and outside the home based on their gender. They are being oppressed due to cultural norms, and societal beliefs.’

In Somaliland, a drought assessment by the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Family highlighted a 25% increase in GBV due to drought conditions, reporting an increase in domestic violence, rape, early/forced marriage, and denial of resources to women.

Planning processes linked to emergency response were noted to be heavily male-dominated and militarised – which saw an increase of reports of sexual violence perpetrated against women refugees and IDPs, who may be unclear what the relevant reporting mechanisms are or how to access support. The additional presence of security forces in conflict affected regions of Myanmar has been met with caution and resistance, with participants highlighting the risk of sexual violence and harassment perpetrated by these groups. One participant stressed ‘we have no idea where to go and ask for help if violence happens’ and another that ‘we could not do anything when gender-based violence happens’. This was raised by participants across all contexts, who stressed that survivors of GBV were unable to report incidents, as a result of cultural norms and stigma leading to a culture of silence and as well as a lack of adequate reporting mechanisms.

Participants further spoke of the way in which crises exacerbate the specific health needs of women and

girls and hinder access to essential health services, specifically focused on sexual health and reproductive rights (SRHR). A woman in Myanmar stated,

‘In some camps, there are no dignity kits for women to use during their menstruation period. They don’t have enough menstrual pads.’

There were reports of less income being available for women’s hygiene and sanitary products as prices rose during emergencies and household finances were diverted to other resources, such as personal preventative equipment during the Covid-19 pandemic. A participant from Lebanon added that the issue had been ‘overlooked’ by policymakers and as a result ‘women were not able to afford buying sanitary products’.

Mental Health and Wellbeing of Women and Girls During Emergencies

Mental health needs of women and girls also increase during crises as external pressures grow and access to support shrinks. Participants spoke of the greater mental load carried by women during emergencies, with familial pressures often disproportionately impacting their traditional role as caregivers. In Myanmar, a woman commented ‘these burdens are more stressed upon women although both men and women are living under the same worries and insecurities’ and in Lebanon that ‘all the pressure is put on women until at a certain point they would explode’. Increase in demand for mental health services was reported in all country contexts. However, access to support was described as erratic and limited, with a lack of consistent funding directed to mental health services.

Why is this important to the Nexus? In summary, our research highlights how women and girls are disproportionately affected in crisis contexts, with WROs and WLOs stressing that ongoing humanitarian programming often does not account for this. Gendered inequalities and discrimination which are faced within such contexts underpin and affect any humanitarian, development or peacebuilding work. When these are heightened and not addressed within a crisis, it becomes harder for development and peacebuilding activities to be meaningful.

Understanding the extent to which humanitarian emergencies affect groups of diverse women and men differently, both in the immediate and longer term, is a vital step towards being able to develop an integrated approach that crosses across preparedness, response and recovery activities. For example, considering how GBV can destabilise and reduce trust within communities (and the state at large, when such violence is committed by national security forces); or understanding how women's unequal livelihood and economic participation can hold back economic growth and recovery in a community, pinpoints exactly why gendered analysis is essential. Providing humanitarian assistance solely, without addressing these root causes of structural inequality is unlikely to cause any meaningful change in communities' wider resilience, development or increased peace.

By not analysing structural and economic inequalities, as well as ignoring the disproportionate violence faced by women and girls in emergencies, we waste important opportunities for change. Examining how different actors within humanitarian, development and peacebuilding spaces can work together to address gender norms and inequalities is a first step towards better coherence within their work. Joint, gender-transformative analysis can provide the critical starting point for a Nexus approach that addresses gender norms and inequalities, contributing to an underlying objective of coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts.

2.2 Operationalising the Nexus

Across the four countries we surveyed, 95% of WROs and WLOs interviewed stated the need for better linkages between the work INGOs do in supporting crisis-affected communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from an emergency.

It was perceived that INGOs tend to respond to rapid-onset emergencies and do not often consider longer-term response and resilience building. A lack of understanding and awareness of the needs of women and girls by those involved in response planning and delivery was also highlighted by participants, particularly during emergencies when international and government attention is focused elsewhere. The WROs and WLOs we spoke to referred to the lack of Nexus programming of the international community hindering their operationalisation. In light of this, the women leaders and their organisations have had to find alternative mechanisms to respond, working across the Nexus to meet the needs of those most at risk of marginalisation within their communities.

The Dangers of a 'One Size Fits All' Approach to Crisis-Affected Contexts

Crisis response should always be rooted in gendered and context specific analysis which considers and



Photo: Fabienne Douse/ActionAid

Distribution of dignity kits in Jacquet, Haiti, by women first responders, a group of women leaders trained by ActionAid

addresses the needs of the community as a whole. However, a key finding which came through in this research was the perception that international actors undertake humanitarian activities without fully understanding the context and historical background of the country they are working in. WROs in Lebanon acknowledged that whilst in principle humanitarian work is about responding to the immediate needs created by the crisis, ‘when it happens in a society that has pre-existing discrimination and longstanding needs, responding to the emergency per se in a segregated way is not enough – it is a cumulation of compounding impacts.’ This is in reference to the Beirut Blast in August 2020 which compounded the existing stresses faced by women and girls in Lebanon, namely Covid-19 and economic instability in the country.⁴⁹ Contextualising any humanitarian response plan therefore is of vital importance, with a participant in Lebanon stressing that,

‘there are NGOs providing services in the area to respond to an emergency but they do not address women’s issues and other structural inequalities, which is not effective in the long-run.’

Repeated emergency climate-induced events create a vicious cycle of vulnerability in risk-affected states, with WROs in Haiti and Somaliland stressing the gendered impacts of such events, including the increase in women’s economic challenges and increased risk of GBV.⁵⁰ For example, climate impacts such as shortage of food or water supply directly affect the ability of women living in rural areas to feed their families and can result in loss of income and livelihood.⁵¹ The residual impacts of such losses can erode women’s capacity to adapt to climate change over time and push them into a downward spiral of fragility, in turn making it harder to reduce and manage climate-related risks.⁵² WROs and WLOs interviewed in Haiti and Somaliland highlighted that working in a climate-induced emergency context meant that organisations struggled to select which emergency to respond to, creating ‘a vicious circle of floods, landslides and responding to the crisis at hand’ all of which required context specific understandings. Yet, despite being on the frontlines of the climate crisis, women are often marginalised from the decision-making processes related to responding to these climate-induced emergency events, at regional, national and global levels.⁵³

There is also a further need to recognise the difficulty of delivering humanitarian and development aims

in the absence of peace. Participants in Somaliland noted that in regions where communities experience recurrent conflict, there is a greater need for discussion around conflict prevention and conflict resolution in humanitarian work. As a women leader in Somaliland explained,

‘conflict is a pre-existing driver of issues such as GBV – due to recurrent conflict, more girls are becoming brides at an early age as a reconciliation to peace.’

The notion of ‘lack of peace’ or not considering how conflict contributes to both humanitarian and development activities, was raised as a barrier to the achievement of individual rights and freedoms in terms of violence, but also in terms of other sectors seen more as ‘development’ orientated - such as education and healthcare.⁵⁴ Participants raised concerns around the shrinking space for civil society to operate in Myanmar, despite the central role that CSOs have played in coordinating and scaling responses in humanitarian action and peacebuilding. A participant described how this brought into focus the lack of coordination between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors:

‘If we want to develop our country, we must also integrate peace building. Similarly, gender mainstreaming should be done at the same time. If we only do development and do not include peace, it will only last for a while... we cannot simply take one approach for each crisis’.

In Haiti, women flagged violence and instability as barriers to delivering effective humanitarian response. WROs reported roadblocks, smuggling and kidnapping by armed groups as obstacles to the running of women only safe spaces and accessing communities in remote regions.

Issues Caused by Needs Being Determined at the International Level

One participant in Lebanon stated: ‘The international actors come with a background based on relief and emergency response with the intent to address the immediate needs. The problem is in what we have to

tell them about the existing needs, and the already existing strategy that we have.’

Across all contexts, WROs and WLOs mentioned that they have to meet specific donor requirements or they will not receive funding for ongoing activities, sometimes feeling the need to ‘change their scope of work to be able to get funding’ when a new onset emergency occurs. A woman leader in Haiti noted that supporting INGO responses to a humanitarian crisis can lead to ‘paralysis’ of their ongoing work, as they quickly have to shift priorities, with another woman leader reflecting that it is ‘like having to press the pause button on activities that are no longer donor priorities’. This was mirrored by a participant in Lebanon who stated that after the Beirut explosion an INGO shut down a school for refugee children which employed twenty female teachers and diverted the funding to support children who were affected by the Beirut explosion. Several participants also noted that projects announced by INGOs, which would have employed women prior to the Beirut explosion, were suspended following the blast.

With attention and funding diverted elsewhere, women can find themselves marginalised and their needs deprioritised in crisis situations. An example of this is the side-lining of women and girls’ SRHR services due to the deprioritisation of allocated funds. As one participant in Lebanon explained, ‘women’s issues are put on the side, and the priority is given to the crisis [...] these issues [violence and GBV]

become secondary [...] Even existing interventions that were in place were suspended.’

In Lebanon, most of the focus group discussions stated that during crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and Beirut explosion, women were marginalised and their needs deprioritised.⁵⁵ Concerns were also raised by women in Somaliland who felt they were not meaningfully able to continue with everyday activities while responding to newly funded climate-induced events:

‘The crises and droughts have meant that we have had to shift all our previous programming around protection and women’s economic empowerment for implementing projects to responding to the immediate needs of the community such as water trucking, food distribution and resettlement of IDPs. This is sometimes forgotten.’

It is important to note that any diversion of funding or halt of ongoing preparedness and development activities can stall social advances made in GBV prevention and services, with potentially devastating long-term consequences for those most at risk of marginalisation.⁵⁶



Photo: Anderson Pierre/ActionAid

ActionAid Haiti piloted ActionAid’s feminist approach to protection in communities in 2021 to speak out on their safety, dignity and the rights of women and girls. Here a student who participated in these pilots speaks out to her right to education during emergencies.

Moving Away from Short-term Humanitarian Responses

WROs and WLOs involved in the research felt that, currently, humanitarian responses deliver periodic short-term relief for the symptoms of crises rather than investments in communities' resilience against future crises. They spoke of the disproportionate donor response to fast onset emergencies, with a preference for funding short-term activities over long-term work, despite protracted crisis contexts. The majority of WROs and WLOs we spoke to felt that donor funding was not sufficiently flexible to meet their needs. Of the women leaders who took part in the survey, most (51%) described the funding they received as short-term with limited flexibility, with a minority (10%) stating they received long-term funding with good flexibility. To be able to meaningfully respond to an emergency, 79% of participants said they needed more funding for core costs, 76% more flexible funding and 73% more consistent funding.

Too often, in emergencies, WROs and WLOs are seen wholly as service delivery leads, missing an opportunity to engage their expertise and knowledge. This was raised in the research, where 64% of the survey participants noted that they received funds for specific service delivery and programme implementation; with this figure dropping significantly for peacebuilding (43%); resilience building and development (27%); and advocacy (22%). This was further stressed by the focus group and interview discussions, with the complaint that in emergencies short-term funding makes it difficult for WROs and WLOs to meet their strategic organisational objectives, provide quality response, and support and retain staff. Participants stressed that funds to cover staff salaries, overhead costs or to invest in capacity strengthening are incredibly challenging to find. A women leader from Lebanon described how their WRO was not able to implement projects 'that take us from relief work to more sustainable work' due to a lack of long-term funding.

The progress of development efforts is often hampered by a culture of short-termism and excessive focus on individual projects, that are detrimental to rapid programmatic shifts in emergency contexts. To deliver effective crisis responses, WROs and WLOs require more flexible, reactive and long-term funding that allows for rapid programmatic shifts in emergency contexts. A women leader in Somaliland spoke of how 'the humanitarian system is predominantly designed to respond to short term emergencies reactively' rather than invest in and prepare communities for

successive climate-related shocks in the country. Another explained that

'development is about building something sustainable, limiting ourselves to relief work [...] does not help people to evolve and improve their conditions.'

This short-term approach deepens structural inequalities by failing to respond to the long-term needs of the most marginalised, or to tackle the root causes of that marginalisation. Given that emergency needs are often symptoms of underlying issues that make people and societies vulnerable to risk in the first place, failure to address these structural inequalities will result in slower recovery and growth.⁵⁷

Despite humanitarian funding increasing over recent years, it remains largely inaccessible for WROs and WLOs despite the important unpaid labour they provide in crisis responses. Funding modalities remain siloed into humanitarian and development blocks, which do not correspond to people's lived experiences. Pooled funds have been argued to be a potential avenue for better financing for Nexus-style programmes as Country-based Pool Funds (CBPFs) in particular have the potential to contribute to Nexus programming, not least because they are increasingly used by donors to deliver Grand Bargain commitments on unearmarked funding and to channel more funding to national and local actors.⁵⁸ Yet, our findings revealed only 8% of the women leaders, WROs and WLOs surveyed have received CBPFs for their development programming and operations, and 13% of those surveyed have received CBPFs for their humanitarian programming and operations – with the majority of funds of those surveyed still coming through intermediaries (85% of current funding for humanitarian programming is from INGOs, such as ActionAid, and 55% is for their development work). Most donors and UN agencies still fall significantly short of ensuring that their funding for programmes have gender equality as a principal goal – with UN agencies and humanitarian coordination clusters not systematically tracking which of their partners are WROs and WLOs.⁵⁹ This lack of information makes it impossible to understand the degree to which humanitarian partnerships currently engage WROs and WLOs, but from recently reviewed data, 7 of 11 government donors allocate just 2% of funds to targeted gender equality programming in humanitarian settings.⁶⁰



The ActionAid team worked with women and youth groups in Baalback and Joub Jannine to conduct a rapid needs assessment and respond to the needs of the communities during the Lebanon Storms in 2019.

Photo: Lebanon Storm cash assistance/ActionAid

Where partnerships do exist, participants reported a lack of accountability and trust from the international community towards them. WROs reported feeling that international actors ‘do not trust’ them or that ‘donors do not see us without INGO partnerships,’ sparking concerns about donors and international actors failing to implement localisation meaningfully. This transactional relationship is often based in the transference of risks from international to national partners, but without also transferring the means and resources to mitigate and respond to those risks and in hindsight, without shifting accountability back to donors or international agencies. Indeed, one WRO leader in Lebanon asked us ‘what about [donor’s] accountability to us – how do they track this?’

Pulling this together – working through the Nexus to adapt to the changing context of humanitarian response has become the new norm for many WLOs and WROs. Despite this shift in the wider aid system, the WROs and WLOs we spoke to highlighted the lack of recognition they have received in doing this, and reflected on the challenges they’ve seen the international community face. Conflicting priorities, stringent donor and internal processes that stick to humanitarian short term activities and inflexible funding have been reported across contexts, along with a lack of consideration of the intersectional dimensions of climate change, conflict and peace and how these risks increase vulnerabilities and rights of women and girls. A key missing step is the inclusion of women leaders and their organisations who have had to work through these challenges and have found ways to bridge the shifts and gaps of humanitarian, development and peace-building actors. Failing to include them throughout these processes or recognise how they have worked to fill the gaps between the

arbitrary Nexus lines manifested by different actors is a key missing step for the international community to begin to understand and address the challenges they have faced in operationalising the Nexus to date.

2.3 Paving the Way for Sustainable Change and Meaningful Partnerships

In order to deliver effective humanitarian responses moving forward, INGOs and donors must break out of their siloed approach and engage in meaningful partnerships with WLOs and WROs. There is a need for an expansive, inclusive and intersectional understanding of the WPS agenda within humanitarian action as first step to recognising, investing in and partnering with women leaders and empowering their leadership and role and addressing the barriers to their inclusion.⁶¹

Women’s Leadership and Role in Humanitarian Access

WROs and WLOs play a crucial role in building trust with communities and providing a bridge to reaching those in need. Their community knowledge and context specific understanding of the needs of women and girls often makes WROs and WLOs best placed to address needs in their communities. When women are valued in society and supported by their community as active, respected and valued decision makers, the resilience of the wider community to respond to and recover from crises is enhanced.⁶² But despite WROs being both ‘the original champions of women’s rights in conflict and critical first-responders in crises that merit humanitarians’ solidarity and

partnership’,⁶³ it is clear from the research that women’s leadership in humanitarian contexts lacks long term funding, recognition and efforts to secure active participation.⁶⁴ As a WRO representative in Lebanon explained, ‘The idea is that you do not have to do separate interventions exclusively for health for example, and then exclusively for protection. The interventions should take into account different aspects and be multisectoral.’

Participants in all four country contexts spoke of the leadership role played by women in emergencies and the centrality of this to building trust with and gaining access to communities at risk of marginalisation. A participant from Myanmar commented: ‘For the community, WROs are a hope for them. Even if their needs are not met, it is good to have a group that takes these women’s issues seriously.’

This was echoed by a participant in Lebanon who said, ‘We had to think about the specific needs of women, as a women led NGO. The other NGOs not led by women would never think of this.’ WROs and WLOs played a critical role during the Covid-19

pandemic in building trust and understanding needs as first responders in their community, occupying spaces INGOs and donors struggled to access. A woman leader from Somaliland said, ‘Covid-19 meant more movement at the local and national level – we haven’t seen any [international] agencies for almost two years now because of Covid-19, and even though there are difficulties with the drought, we do the work.’

Barriers to Women’s Participation and Leadership

While participants noted an increase in women’s leadership and participation during crisis responses, they also stressed a lack of recognition of their leadership, as well as a lack of opportunities for longer-term participation outside crisis settings. In all country contexts, participants outlined the absence of women in most decision-making positions and processes leading to gender-blind measures disregarding their needs. In Somaliland it was noted that cultural barriers inhibit women from holding positions in these spaces, with no women



Photo: ActionAid

ActionAid’s Emergency Response to the Beirut Blast, in Lebanon, August 2020

representatives in the legislative branch of government or judiciary and only limited representation in the executive branch which affects the decisions made by the government. While participants in Myanmar highlighted that women have been consistently unable to access formal humanitarian decision making spaces at the national and local level, a participant in Lebanon commented 'we cannot say in general that we make the decisions about the issues that affect us'. Another participant in Lebanon commented, 'there is a difference between the role we are given in the context of a humanitarian response and outside that state of emergency'. The findings revealed that, despite often being the best placed to respond, women and girls are frequently marginalised or excluded from decision making and planning processes. As a participant in Haiti commented,

'only when you understand the needs of the community can you understand how to respond, and this is the only way to promote development and facilitate peace.'

Multiple barriers to meaningful participation were cited by participants. Many of the women spoke of patriarchal societal norms which inhibited their access to certain spaces and processes. A participant in Myanmar spoke of 'social pressure' meaning 'women are not able to make decisions freely', and in Lebanon a participant commented that 'traditions put limits on women'. While women may have

some access to decision making spaces, as one participant in Myanmar explained 'the problem is that their discussions are not taken into account'. Another participant elaborated, 'only few people accept women's leadership' as well as that 'women have no decision-making power and only men have this power'. Institutional barriers were also highlighted by participants. Women in Lebanon and Haiti commented that meetings set up by INGOs and donors required capacity and financial resources they did not have and languages they did not speak in order to meaningfully participate. While one participant stated 'there is a kind of capacity building required and not available', another questioned 'why should we be talking in English?'

WROs and WLOs' Leadership and Alternative Solutions to Crises

WROs have continued to respond, despite the challenges they face in their recognition as key actors and lack of visibility on the ground. Women's increased leadership during crises was in part attributed to the adaptability of WROs and their access to communities at risk of marginalisation through their existing networks. A participant in Myanmar explained that 'there are differences between original objectives and current scenarios and we need to adjust them', and a woman in Somaliland added 'we have to be adaptable, we will help.' It is clear from the research that WROs work across the Nexus flexibly, prioritising different areas depending on the situation at hand.

Examples of Women-led Responses Before, During and After Emergencies

WROs in Somaliland have been at the forefront of GBV responses during Covid-19 and drought periods, despite GBV services often being sidelined and survivors facing difficulties accessing support such as health and psychosocial assistance and legal aid. During Cyclone Sagar in 2018, these same WROs mobilised and trained community members to share vital information with community members at greatest risk of marginalisation, such as those with disabilities or living in rural areas.

In the aftermath of the Beirut Blast in Lebanon, WROs opened a temporary shelter for those who had lost their homes in the explosion. They found

that women living alone were the worst affected and least supported, commenting 'we tried to help them because they had no one'.

Following Hurricane Matthew in 2016, several WROs in Haiti supported the evacuation of people from high-risk areas and led awareness raising of the specific risks experienced by women and girls living in temporary shelters at heightened risk of GBV.

In Myanmar, WROs regularly distribute humanitarian assistance through community-based women peer groups, who then deliver support to target households in the community.

Enabling Women’s Meaningful Participation and Leadership

WROs and WLOs we spoke to highlighted that, even if given the opportunity to engage more meaningfully in decision making structures, they would still require key inputs such as staffing, training, funding and other support in order to meaningfully participate. As a participant in Lebanon commented, ‘we are more knowledgeable in terms of needs and community, maybe we need support on other levels’.

When it came to partnerships with INGOs and donors, WROs sought more effective information sharing and more opportunities for collaboration, networking and capacity building. As a participant in Haiti elaborated,

‘we need to be given much more training and tools to be able to strengthen ourselves economically’

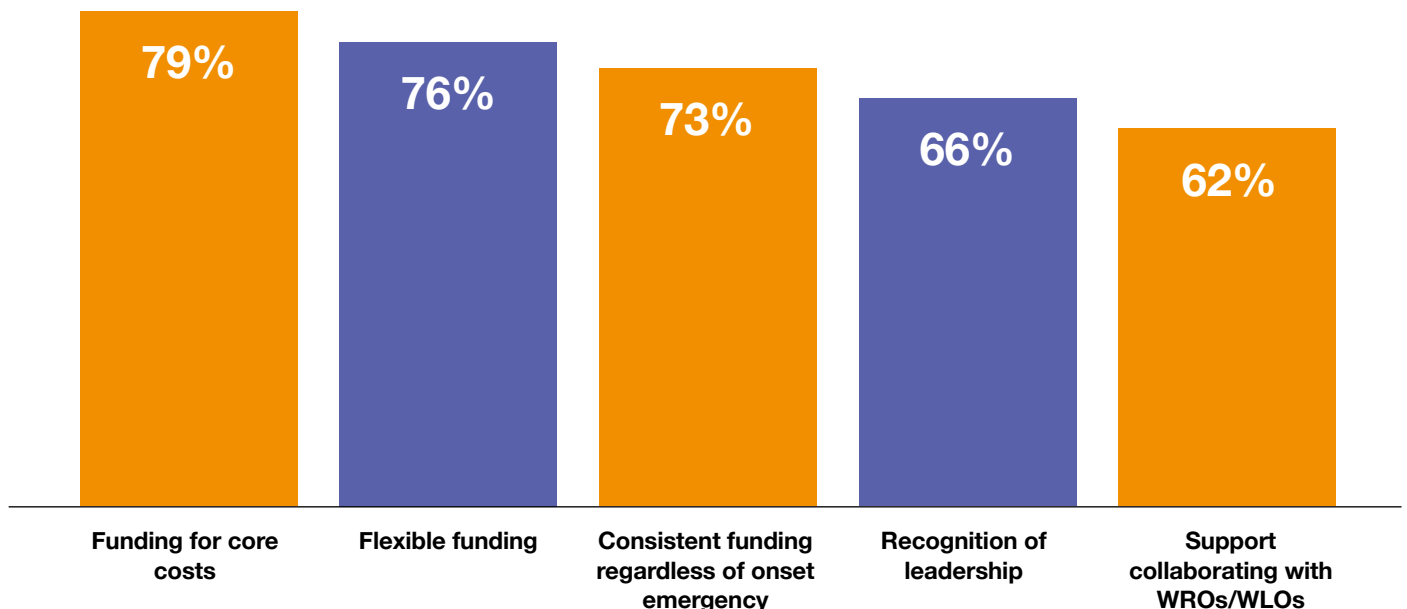
and in Lebanon a participant added ‘we should always be trained so we have the capacity to participate’. When asked what they needed to meaningfully engage in responding to the needs of their community, 62% of participants said support in collaborating with other WROs and WLOs and 66% required greater recognition of their leadership. Other requirements mentioned were long-term conversations with other actors (59%), support elevating national-level advocacy (55%) and training on humanitarian language and terminology (45%).

To summarise, our research found that WROs and WLOs work across the Nexus to respond to multiple compounding risks, such as climate change, conflict and rapid-onset emergencies – without the artificial lines which have been manifested by a range of international actors and donors working in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.

The current global context of Covid-19, increased protracted emergencies and climate change adaptation has indicated crises simply do not conform to these divisions. As the research highlights, local women’s rights and women-led organisations have had to come up with alternative solutions to respond to emergencies, while still pioneering and providing key services to the community in the long term. They demonstrate how to work through the Nexus successfully, and their work offers examples the international community can learn from. However, several elements are needed to make this transformation possible:

First, gender transformative programming is needed to dismantle structural inequalities in order to undertake meaningful humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities. We know that women and girls are more vulnerable during crises to multiple forms of discrimination, including gender-based violence. This is exacerbated when intersecting with other forms of discrimination – for example, the report finds that LGBTQ+ women are less likely to receive support during crises due to fear of stigma.

Top 5 requests to ensure WLO & WRO meaningful engagement from the women leaders surveyed for this research



Second, operationalising the Nexus is a challenge because of conflicting priorities by different actors in international development. 95% of individuals surveyed said better linkages are required between the work INGOs do to prepare for, respond to and recover from an emergency. Respondents also highlighted the dangers of a 'one size fits all' approach, noting that this often leads to critical women's rights issues being ignored. Indeed, participants noted that long-term women's rights work is often paused, or funds diverted to short-term emergency work when crises occur.

Finally, paving the way for sustainable and long-term change requires recognition at an international level of WROs' and WLOs' deep understanding of their own communities and transference of power and decision-making abilities to these groups. For example, in Somaliland it was reported there are no women representatives in the legislative branch of government. To generate sustainable change, greater recognition for WROs must be combined with long-term funding commitments from INGOs and other international actors, as illustrated by the table of findings on the previous page.



3 Conclusion & Recommendations

The Nexus can be a meaningful tool to shift ways of working, power dynamics, and partnership and funding mechanisms across the international community. To date, we have not seen the Nexus being implemented effectively, and a gender lens has been largely absent. This is despite the work that WLOs and WROs have been doing in operationalising the Nexus – almost always working outside the rigid categorisation of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding action imposed by the international community.

The research finds that working closely with WLOs and WROs is not only the morally right way to work in humanitarian action but also produces higher quality programming, policy and impact. Collaborating with WLOs and WROs helps the international community

to transcend the Nexus and start to dismantle the power dynamics which privilege the rights and needs of men and stakeholders from the Global North, in order to create a system which upholds the rights and contributions of diverse women from the Global South.

Participants from Myanmar, Somaliland, Haiti and Lebanon provided useful insights into broader efforts of operationalising the Nexus and working effectively in humanitarian spaces. They also shared the need to change the standard ways of working, to allow for more locally, connected and rights-based programming that is led by the voices of the community, and specifically the women leaders who have been leading efforts within them to date, with the following key recommendations:



Women groups in the community of Hidhinta, Somaliland shared concerns that the recurrent droughts put stress on their resources and livelihoods (2022).

Photo: Daniel JukesActionAid

Key Finding: Operationalising the Nexus – Gender Transformative Programming is a first step in addressing inequalities and adopting an integrated approach.

Crisis response should always be rooted in gendered and context specific analysis which considers and addresses the needs of the community as a whole.

Understanding the context where a crisis is operating (whether induced by risks of conflict or climate change) can help actors understand the root causes of exclusion and discrimination and prevents lapse or relapse into greater exclusion and discrimination.

Joint, gender-transformative analysis can provide the critical starting point for a response that addresses gender norms and inequalities which contributes to an underlying objective of coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts in order to reduce risks and vulnerabilities effectively, while simultaneously supporting prevention efforts.

Donors and the International Community (Humanitarian Actors and Civil Society working in development and peacebuilding) should develop and adopt an integrated approach to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming, through:

1 Undertake comprehensive gender analysis when planning for emergency responses in order to understand and respond to the intersectional needs of women and girls working in crisis-affected contexts. Additional disaggregation of data for identified ‘at-risk’ groups, such as pregnant women and women with disabilities, should be prioritised to help document and analyse the likely intersectional gender differences and effectiveness of programming for them.

2 Put gendered-conflict analysis at the centre of short- and long-term global responses to humanitarian and protracted crises. Using participatory methodologies, work with women’s groups to document and understand the root causes of conflict, capturing the multidimensionality (political, social, economic, security) of conflict and how this can affect programme design and delivery.

3 Integrate advocacy, policy building and monitoring and evaluation into programme design through the leadership of women’s voices.

4 Ensure humanitarian programming builds in effective links to women’s protection, resilience and development, through dedicated funding to address, respond to and prevent GBV and provide effective women’s protection (e.g. protection of safe spaces and access to women-centred services).

Key Finding: Recognising the role of WROs and WLOs, who have been operationalising the Nexus and supporting their leadership promotes more efficient humanitarian action.

WLOs and WROs have been operationalising the Nexus by adopting nuanced and sophisticated ways of linking response, preparedness and long-term sustainability while also addressing structural inequalities and peace and recovery processes.

Donors and the International Community (Humanitarian Actors and Civil Society working in development and peacebuilding) should:

1 Ensure accessibility of WROs and WLOs to international conversations, and to enable their direct engagement with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors. This can be done through open dialogue with women groups to get advice on how to best to remove barriers to women's meaningful engagement, including travel and security restrictions to decision making spaces, financial constraints, and addressing language issues such as by providing translations.

2 Invest in capacity building around longer term and more sustainable opportunities for women so they are able to build resilience and exercise greater autonomy during emergencies.

3 Respect the authority and credibility of WROs and WLOs, for example by including their branding and ensuring their validation, collaboration and sign-off on external reports and public documents that reflect their work.

To Government Actors in Country:

1 Strengthen the representation and power of local women and women-led actors within government planning, humanitarian and recovery mechanisms. This could be done through:

- Ensuring WROs and WLOs are included into conversations on strategic priorities at country-level Humanitarian Response Plans.
- Bringing WROs and WLOs in conversations with national gender machineries, female parliamentarians and sectoral line ministries and national parliaments to account for the impact of decisions on women's rights in crisis response.

2 Ensure that information is shared to WROs and WLOs during emergencies – specifically when coordination mechanisms are hosted nationally and any new funding opportunities arise. This can help ensure that commitment to and accountability for women's leadership and women's rights in response efforts is an explicit and primary objective of national response plans.

Key Finding: Dedicated funding and meaningful partnerships with WROs and WLOs is crucial in meaningfully operationalising the Nexus.

Despite the fact that WLOs and WROs have been operationalising the Nexus, they are not being given the recognition, space, or funding that they need and should have access to.

Donors and the International Community (Humanitarian Actors and Civil Society working in development and peacebuilding) should:

1 Provide long-term, multiyear and flexible funding which can be adapted to different contexts in order to avoid siloed funding streams and slow unreactive funding (e.g. reactive to insecurity in times of conflict and reactive to climate change in times of drought). A percentage of these funds must reach and support local organisations (specifically WROs and WLOs) who have already been working across the Nexus and often are not prioritised in international funding mechanisms, with stipulated conditionalities that include specific and mandatory targets to ensure resources reach women and girls. In order to do this meaningfully, set up in-country advisory meetings with WROs and WLOs to understand which funding mechanisms work best (and why) in their context.

2 Simplify funding requirements particularly in the financing of emergency responses, so that they have more simple, innovative and accessible application routes. This will allow funding streams to be more easily and quickly accessible to WROs and WLOs, rather than working through intermediaries.

3 Ensure women's participation in the development of bids and provide support in applying for institutional funding, for example by: providing training on proposal writing, and by covering overheads and core costs that will allow WROs and WLOs space to apply for such opportunities.

4 Build meaningful long-term partnerships with WROs and WLOs, including through the systematic review of how the parameters and requirements of international funding and partnership approaches may generate risks for local partners, and consult partners on ways to prevent or mitigate these risks, and adopting a partnership approach to risk management, centering the specific risks faced by local WLOs and WROs.

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- ⁴⁰ Those participating in the research identified themselves either as a member of an official WRO and WLO, or as an individual woman leader who has supported/volunteered as part of humanitarian responses or responded to a humanitarian crisis within their community.
- ⁴¹ ActionAid. (2021). ActionAid Feminist Research Guidelines. Retrieved from: [ActionAid Feminist Research Guidelines_2021.pdf](https://www.actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Safety%20With%20Dignity%20manual%20%282019%29.pdf)
- ⁴² *Ibid*
- ⁴³ ActionAid. (2019). Safety with Dignity: ActionAid's Women Led Community-Based Protection Manual. Retrieved from: <https://www.actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Safety%20With%20Dignity%20manual%20%282019%29.pdf>
- ⁴⁴ ActionAid's emergency responses are guided by our Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) as well as our Humanitarian Signature. The signature focuses on promoting women-led preparedness and response in humanitarian emergencies, occupation and conflicts to strengthen their power and agency to transform the humanitarian system to be more locally led and accountable to affected communities. This is underpinned by resilience building and longer-term sustainable change, including empowering individuals and addressing underlying inequalities through all our development programming.
- ⁴⁵ ActionAid. (2019) WLCBP approach: 2019 -AA-WLCBP-Manual-A4-digital-v4.pdf ([actionaid.org](https://www.actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/WLCBP%20Approach%202019%20AA-WLCBP-Manual-A4-digital-v4.pdf))
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- ⁴⁸ See: Gender-based violence in emergencies | UNICEF
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- ⁵⁰ Based off the research findings, this was stressed as fewer opportunities for women employed in agricultural settings due to loss of crops.
- ⁵¹ Steady, F. C. (2014). Women, Climate Change and Liberation in Africa. *Race, Gender & Class*, 21(1/2), 312–333. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/43496976](https://www.jstor.org/stable/43496976)
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- ⁵⁴ On the definition of peace to include the household level and focus on the attainment of individual rights, also see: ActionAid, IDS and WomanKind (2012) From the Ground Up: Women's Role in local peacebuilding in Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/from_the_ground_up_-_executive_summary.pdf
- ⁵⁵ Due to women most likely being carers in the household and frontline health workers, and with lower access to health care services. For further reading on this, see: GAPS. (2021). Now and the Future – Pandemics and Crisis: Gender Equality, Peace and Security in a COVID-19 World and Beyond. Retrieved from: <https://gaps-uk.org/resources/now-and-the-future-pandemics-and-crisis-gender-equality-peace-and-security-in-a-covid-19-world-and-beyond/> and: OECD. (2020). Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a8269/>
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