

# MAKING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE WORK FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

• GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE KUNDUZ OFFENSIVE

On 28 September 2015 the Taliban launched a violent offensive in Kunduz city, the provincial capital of Kunduz, the first time Taliban forces had taken a city in Afghanistan since 2001. The offensive lasted 15 days before Afghan security forces were able to recapture the city.

The offensive claimed 289 lives and injured a further 559 people; 284 of the casualties were women and children. More than 15,000 families were forced to flee to neighbouring provinces including Takhar, Badakshan, Baghlan, Balkh and Kabul.<sup>1</sup>

Disasters and conflict situations impact women, men, boys and girls differently, including an increase in the risk of gender-based violence. In recognition of this, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Taskforce, led by UN Women and the Norwegian Refugee Council, commissioned a gender analysis of the humanitarian response to the Kunduz crisis.

The report analyses the gender aspects of the response to the Kunduz offensive, identifying successes, challenges

and gaps, and providing recommendations to help ensure that future responses integrate the distinct needs, vulnerabilities and capabilities of the affected population, with particular attention to women and children.

The mainstreaming of intersections of gender with broader concerns was largely uneven, however, due in part to a pre-emergency needs assessment, many WASH and shelter concerns that intersected with protection risks were identified early. This led to improved distribution of aid and infrastructure that better catered to the needs of more vulnerable groups.

Other good practice interventions were also implemented, including child-friendly spaces, mobile services to reach women at risk of gender-based violence, and programming aimed at building women's resilience. Many activities, however, were primarily focused on meeting women's and children's practical needs, with less emphasis on their participation in decision-making and access to resources.

## GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION TASKFORCE

Under the leadership of UN Women and the Norwegian Refugee Council, with technical support from IASC GenCap senior gender advisor, the Taskforce incorporates UN agencies, international and national organisations involved in humanitarian work, as well as those overlapping with development programming. It works to ensure that gender concerns are mainstreamed throughout humanitarian activities

in Afghanistan, encouraging equal participation and benefit for women and men. It also strives to bridge the humanitarian-development divide to ensure longer-term resilience to emergencies.



## CHALLENGES

In general, response activities were largely based on a set of assumptions that all people are equal in the face of a disaster, that male recipients of aid will accurately report the needs of female household members, and that gender-based violence is not a significant problem in emergencies in Afghanistan due to Islamic customs that segregate men and women.

The continued tendency to focus on addressing practical needs such as girls' education, reproductive health, and gender-based violence means that strategic needs based on socially constructed roles, differing capacities and vulnerabilities are not analysed and addressed. This gap is exacerbated by a lack of ownership over global guidelines and toolkits, and a lack of translated resources for field staff.

Although the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data is improving, there is a shortage of human and financial resources and technical capacity to compile, analyse and report this data from a gender perspective. Large gaps also exist in the mobilisation of trained protection partners or gender advisers and female needs assessment staff to collect data from women and girls in emergencies.

While aid did reach the most vulnerable groups, it was largely distributed to men, who reportedly did not always recognise the particular needs of women, children and other vulnerable household members like the elderly and disabled.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- More human and financial resources need to be channelled into strengthening capacity for compiling, analysing, reporting and interpreting sex and age disaggregated data. This includes ensuring the right methodologies are used for the right purpose.
- HR policies that identify and support opportunities for female staff within humanitarian organisations need to be actively explored, in order to increase the number of female staff that can be mobilised for emergency response. This should include a focus on policies that make it easier for women to work in the field, for example hiring couples and family members, or ensuring mahram policies are in place.
- Women need to be actively positioned as recipients of aid rather than immediately distributing aid to men. In saying that, more evidence needs to be collected in relation to the potential positive or negative impacts of direct distribution to women, including on whether cash transfers to women increase or decrease GBV, and how effective they are in strengthening women's economic empowerment and decision-making in the household. Humanitarian organisations should also ensure that aid distribution sites are adequately set up to enable women's participation, including ensuring separate queues for men and women.
- There needs to be a better understanding among humanitarian actors, particularly those contributing to needs assessments, of gender-based violence. In the field there appears to be a strong focus on physical and sexual violence, at the expense of other types of violence such as early and forced marriage, and denial of resources and opportunities.
- Better awareness on the role of gender in humanitarian action is needed in order to counter negative discourses and assumptions. Considering the fact that these assumptions are largely at odds with existing data, evidence-based advocacy can be particularly effective.

# 284

of the civilian casualties from the Kunduz offensive were women and children, including 66 deaths.



# 15k

The number of families displaced by the Kunduz offensive. Most of whom fled to neighbouring provinces.

# 122k

girls were deprived of education during the offensive because all of the schools were closed.

<sup>1</sup> ALL STATISTICS SOURCED FROM [http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/special\\_report\\_on\\_kunduz\\_province\\_12\\_december\\_2015.pdf](http://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/special_report_on_kunduz_province_12_december_2015.pdf)

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