

# GiHA

## NEWSLETTER



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Photo Credit- UN Women/Evelin Jaïta Karmokar

## Background of Gender in Humanitarian Actions Working Group (GiHAWG), Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh has committed through global and regional platforms, such as the World Humanitarian Summit, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to better integrate gender equality into DRR, humanitarian and development programmes. In achieving the desired commitments, it's imperative that we address the different needs, participation and voices of women, men, boys, girls and the gender diverse community across the full cycle of risk reduction.

With the endorsement of the Department of Women Affairs and the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) in Bangladesh, the inter-cluster Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group (GiHAWG) was established in February 2017 to ensure the effective mainstreaming of gender equality in humanitarian action. The aim is to support the works of each thematic

cluster and inter-cluster working group to realize gender responsive programming while ensuring that the overall disaster response and preparedness efforts of the country is addressing the gendered needs of the population. The group consists of focal points of various thematic clusters, HCTT working groups and other organizations committed to gender equity and humanitarian action.



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## Women's leadership and Partnerships with Local women-led organizations

and leadership during, and post crises drive equal progress for everyone. To apply the 'Leave No One Behind' principle and achieve the Sendai Framework's target, Bangladesh has committed to bringing more women's voices to the Disaster Risk Management process. Engaging and promoting women led CSOs as the critical agent for inclusive humanitarian response is also crucial for advancing the localizing agenda in Bangladesh.

Since 2019, UN Women, in partnership with Christian Aid, has facilitated a network of 56 local women led CSOs from three cyclone prone and two flood prone districts in Bangladesh. These CSOs were trained to strengthen knowledge and understanding on gender in disaster risk reduction and climate actions and trained on how to effectively respond during humanitarian crisis situations. These CSOs are not only instrumental to reaching the most vulnerable, marginalized and hardest hit people, but they are also best placed to lead the crisis-response with timely decision-making. This also serves to mitigate tensions around response work among vested interest groups.

This year, the theme for International Women's Day was 'Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world'. It is evident that women are still underrepresented in public life and decision-making processes. As a result, women's voices and needs are missing from government strategic direction, where they fail to recognize their role in positively transforming women's lives. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction considers the presence of strong women-led Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and grassroots networks as a pre-requisite to any inclusive and gender responsive humanitarian intervention. Women's full and effective participation

Since these programmes have been rolled out, support has reached the most vulnerable rapidly and efficiently. The women led CSO's contributions in identifying the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable groups in post disaster situations are noteworthy. These CSOs were at the forefront in the response and recovery efforts of COVID-19, Cyclone AMPHAN 2020 and the monsoon floods of 2019 and 2020. In recent needs assessments and humanitarian response plans, gender aspects were stronger than ever. By supporting and amplifying the voices of local level women leaders, we have observed a demonstrated snowball effect in how women and communities fare through crises.



## Policy commitments for framing Gender Responsive Humanitarian Actions in Bangladesh

Over the last few years, Bangladesh has been working to build gender-inclusive disaster management strategies. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) and its line agency, the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), have since included gender in relevant policy and regulatory frameworks, including the;

- Disaster Management Act 2012
- Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD) 2019
- National Plan for Disaster Management (NPDM) 2021-2025
- Disaster Management Policy 2015

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs included a specific section on women and children in disasters in the National Women Advancement Policy 2011. SOD 2019 also offers a Gender Responsive Guideline that elaborates on four key principles for mainstreaming gender-equality in disaster risk management initiatives. These are:

- a) Process of gender sensitive coordination
- b) Gender equality-based participation and women's empowerment & leadership
- c) Initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and safety-security for women

- d) Gender transformational initiatives to eliminate gender discrimination.

The SOD 2019 also identified that risk assessment and risk minimization programmes for women and children's mental health in post-disaster situations are the responsibilities of MoWCA. NPDM 2021-2025 considered twin track approaches as a key strategy to ensure women's voices and participation are included in disaster risk management processes. They also prioritized space for women's empowerment.

Most national policy documents on disaster management emphasize gender-inclusivity in disseminating information about early warning systems and empowering women during disasters. Issues such as the identification and assessment of gender-related needs; assurance of gender responsive income opportunities; and equal participation in decision making in the context of disaster management are addressed moderately. National Disaster Management Policy 2015 highlighted the application of women's knowledge and experiences and addressed the allocation of gender-related resources in DRR. Physical and mental health are now also prioritized during rescue and rehabilitation.

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## Gender Responsiveness Coordination within Humanitarian Architecture

The Government of Bangladesh has advanced its commitment to put gender equality and women's leadership at the Centre of its humanitarian coordination and architecture. The newly revised Standing Order on Disaster (SOD) 2019 ensures that all relevant committees for disaster preparedness, response and recovery include the voice and participation of relevant women-led agencies and CSOs. Thus the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and Department of Women Affairs (DWA) have taken an active leadership role in national and local level committees to address the different needs of men, women, children and the gender diverse population; and the protection of rights that ensure everyone is able to live a life free from violence. The government has also recently recruited new female CPP volunteers to bring a 50/50 ratio to the 74,000 strong volunteer corps. The National Plan for Disaster Management 2021-2025 also makes a commitment to women's empowerment and gender equity.

Simultaneously, humanitarian coordination in Bangladesh has emphasized gender by setting up the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group,

co-chaired by the DWA and UN Women. GiHA WG consists of representatives from each of the eleven thematic clusters. Each cluster has been working to integrate gender perspectives into their approach with support from the GiHAWG.

Collecting disaggregated data and reporting on the role of gender in post-disaster analysis is key to gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action contexts. This supports the HCTT to develop their gender responsive action plan and programme, and advocate for gender responsive intervention and women friendly relief packages with concerned ministries and agencies.

In 2020, the GiHAWG produced three rapid gender analysis reports on COVID, Cyclone Amphan, and the monsoon flood. The GBV **cluster** has been supporting the most vulnerable women and girls with dignity kits and the HCTT has driven humanitarian projects exclusively focusing on supporting female-led households. Overall, through active engagement and contribution of the GiHA WG and GBV cluster, the humanitarian actions of the HCTT have been far more gender responsive than ever before.



## Dignity Kits: Defending Dignity of the Underprivileged

Preserving women's sense of **dignity** is essential to upholding their self-respect and confidence; feelings that are important when coping with stressful, and potentially overwhelming humanitarian situations. In 2000 the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) initiated the distribution of Dignity Kits to address women's unmet (non-nutritional) needs; helping women and girls to maintain their sense of **dignity** during humanitarian crises. These kits include basic hygiene items such as underwear, sanitary pads/sanitary napkins, soap, a toothbrush and towels. Dignity kits help free women and girls to participate in social and economic activities. They also become a possible entry point for introducing education on sexual and reproductive health and rights – an important strategy in the prevention of VAWG.

In 2020, for the first time, the UNFPA specifically designed dignity kits for the transgender community in Bangladesh. With the funding and support from UN CERF and the Australian Government, UNFPA distributed dignity kits, menstrual hygiene and health management kits, and reproductive health kits to over

15,000 women, girls and transgender people in Bogura, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Jamalpur and Sirajganj districts. Given the ongoing pandemic, the kits also included flashcards with COVID-19 precautionary measures, as well as the phone numbers of helplines to report incidents of gender-based violence. The tailored dignity kits for the transgender population may be a small action, but the individual impact can be enormous.

Kajli, a member of the transgender community in Kurigram District, Bangladesh, shares how UNFPA dignity kit assisted her in the wake of severe floods in the Jamuna River basin in July 2020.

**“For the first time in my life, I felt that I was treated like a normal human being.** The most important items in this kit for me are the cloth, hand sanitizer, and bucket. I am so happy to see these arrangements for us. After the pandemic, we have been really scattered and we do not have any income. I did not have any money to buy these things. I don't even have a proper place to live at the moment and the place where I am staying can go underwater any minute”

Photo Credit- UNFPA





Photo Credit- UN Women/Fahad Kaizer



## Cash based intervention in Humanitarian Response and promoting women's livelihood

**Cash** support gives people choice and makes **humanitarian aid** more accountable to the affected people; leveraging the opportunities created by financial services - including digital payments. Cash support in humanitarian response, in conjunction with protection activities, can shift gender dynamics and give women control over their spending decisions.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, following cyclone Amphan and the floods, the most vulnerable groups who lost their livelihoods were living in dreadful conditions. Many families were surviving without food, income, or even shelter. UN Women's

cash assistance supported vulnerable women-headed families, persons with disabilities, the elderly, sex workers and transgender people. This assistance had an immediate and positive impact; helping these groups to meet their urgent basic needs, mitigated some of the socio-economic impacts and support community compliance with the government stay-at-home orders and social distancing recommendations. Of the 2,322 most marginalized people who received the lifesaving cash assistance through mobile fund transfer, 99 per cent were female and the remaining were gender diverse people. A significant number of ethnic minority communities (Munda) in Satkhira and Khulna supported under this project did not receive assistance from any other provider. The project also supported 130 sex workers.

**Begum is a 45 year-old sex worker at Baniashanta brothel, in the southern district of Dacoope, Khulna.**

Begum received cash support, along with other women and girls in the village hardest hit by Cyclone Amphan. Begum describes the situation she found herself in during the pandemic:

“Before the pandemic, as a sex worker I used to earn BDT 400-500 (5-6 USD) per day. I also had a small tea stall adjacent to my home, as a side business that earned me another BDT 300-400 (4-5 USD) every day. This was something I was quite proud of. I worked hard and saved up for a long time to build my house and fill it with new furniture. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed me out of work and due to social distancing rules in place I have been unemployed for the past seven months”

During Cyclone Amphan, when everyone moved to take refuge in the nearby cyclone shelters, Begum remained at home, afraid to leave the house and belongings that she had accumulated over the years with so much of hard work and love. As the cyclone intensified, she was forced to take refuge at a nearby shop and was unable to bring anything with her. Her house and shop were destroyed and Amphan left her fully destitute. With no food and support in sight, workers like her were at the mercy of the few people offering relief.

Responsible for supporting her younger brother and his family, with the cash support, Begum fixed her tea stall and house and bought household essentials and kitchen utensils. She wanted to build back what she had. The flood has made her homeless and left her devastated, but it did not break her spirit. She did not give up her dream to be self-employed and self-dependent again.



Photo Credit- UN Women/Evelin Jaita Karmokar



## Contributions of GiHA for Gender Responsive Humanitarian Actions in 2020 and up to June, 2021

The GiHA Working Group in Bangladesh has provided technical advice, guidance, and capacity development support for implementing gender responsive assistance in humanitarian actions with the following key achievements:

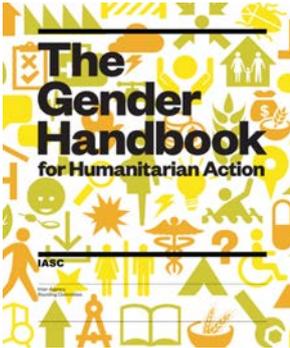
- Took lead in producing 3 Rapid Gender Analysis Reports on COVID -19 , AMPHAN and Monsoon Flood in 2020 that has made difference by helping HCTT and clusters to address gender issues in humanitarian response plans;
- Ensured strong linkages and coordination on information sharing with National Assessment Working Group, GBV, Health and SRHR, Education, Food Security, Shelter and WASH cluster to collect SADD data and address gender issues emerging locally;
- Contributed in reviewing and updating of Joint Need Assessment (JNA) tools from gender lens during COVID -19 , AMPHAN, Flood response in 2020 and during YAAS in 2021;
- Organized 6 week long online Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) Training starting from 20<sup>th</sup> June to 12<sup>th</sup> August 2021 with the aim to increase the pool of RGA experts in the country to be engaged in RGAs in post disaster situation. 14 participants from Department of Women Affairs, UNDP, WFP,

UNFPA, UN Women, CARE, Oxfam, Action Aid, Plan International, Concern Worldwide, BRAC, BNPS, MJF have been chosen for the training. The orientation program of the Training course held virtually on 20 June 2021 was attended by Ram Chandra Das, Director General, Department of Women Affairs (DWA). UN Women and CARE are facilitating this training.;

- Provided Technical Support to NAWG in facilitating 3 batches of training on Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) to its partner organizations to enhance capacity among local level CSOs in collecting SADD and gender related information to feed into JNA and RGA process.
  1. COVID -19 Bangladesh: Rapid Gender Analysis <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2020/05/rga%20bangladeshfinalmay2020.pdf?la=en&vs=1725>
  2. Rapid Gender Analysis Cyclone Amphan <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/RGA%20Cyclone%20Amphan%20Bangladesh.pdf>
  3. Preliminary Rapid Gender Analysis Of Monsoon Flood 2020 [https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73963\\_rgamonsoonflood2020july.pdf](https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73963_rgamonsoonflood2020july.pdf)



# Knowledge Bank: key documents on Gender in Humanitarian



IASC Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action 2018 provides guidance on gender analysis, planning, and actions to ensure that the needs, priorities and capacities of women, girls, men and boys and gender diverse communities are considered in all aspects of humanitarian response.

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-09/The%20Gender%20Handbook%20for%20Humanitarian%20Action.pdf>



IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action provide practical guidance and effective tools to prevent and mitigate of gender-based violence, throughout all stages of humanitarian response—from preparedness to recovery.

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-03/IASC%20Guidelines%20for%20Integrating%20Gender-Based%20Violence%20Interventions%20in%20Humanitarian%20Action%2C%202015.pdf>



CARE Gender in Emergency Guidance Note on Rapid Gender Analysis provides information on why and how responders should use the Rapid Gender Analysis Assessment Tools.

<https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/images/documents/rapid-gender-analysis/GIE-Guidance-Note-Rapid-Gender-Analysis.pdf>