

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
11 – 13 JUNE 2013 - International Conference Center Geneva**

THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in emergencies: our
collective responsibility to move from rhetoric to
reality, from policy to implementation**

Tuesday 11 June 2013, 14h30 – 16h15 - Room 4

Sexual and Gender-based violence continues to be a pervasive and unacceptable reality in humanitarian settings. When UNHCR conducted its 2011 regional dialogues with refugee women and girls in conjunction with the 60th Anniversary of the Refugee Convention, the subject of gender-based violence came up repeatedly—whether the conversation was about health services, shelter, education or livelihoods. While there is greater global awareness of the problem, and standards and guidelines for humanitarian programming have been put in place, the regional dialogues highlighted the ongoing gaps between policy and practice. The dialogues made clear the need for specialized SGBV programs and for much better implementation of basic protection standards in all program areas from the very start of emergency response. These actions are key to effective humanitarian programming. And they are central to our humanitarian obligation to deliver assistance in ways that strengthen protection and mitigate risk.

This session will focus on concrete, practical steps that must be taken across program areas to address gender-based violence and meet our collective responsibilities to affected populations. Participants will share their successes and challenges in integrating SGBV prevention and response efforts into their work in emergencies. And information will be shared on tools and materials that have been developed, or are being developed, to support field workers and communities in designing and implementing more effective programming.

The Increase Risk of SGBV in Conflict:

The risks of sexual and gender-based violence are greatly exacerbated in war and other humanitarian crises, especially for women and girls. During conflict, sexual violence may be used to terrorize and destroy communities. In some conflicts, rape and sexual violence is used as an intentional tactic by armed groups. Women and girls are at greatest risk, but men and boys are victims as well. General insecurity, impunity, limited assistance and

breakdown of traditional social structures lead to high rates of domestic violence, assaults by strangers or community members, and widespread sexual exploitation—the demand for sex in exchange for food and other necessities.

Impacts of Sexual and Gender-based Violence:

Sexual and gender-based violence is a human rights violation that has devastating impacts on survivors, their families and communities. There are direct and immediate physical and emotional consequences. Some injuries will be fatal unless immediately treated. A survivor has just 72 hours (or three days) to get the care necessary to prevent the transmission of HIV. A woman who has been raped has just 120 hours (or five days) to access emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy. Quick and sustained access to psychosocial services is also critical for survivors. The negative consequences of violence **can impact a survivors' long-term wellbeing when not appropriately and immediately addressed.**

As was evident in the conversations with refugee women and girls during the regional dialogues, gender-based violence—and the threat of such violence—is a major barrier that impedes their access to services and to assistance. This includes essential medical and psychosocial services but also safe access to education, food distribution, water, shelter and economic opportunities. SGBV is a threat to survivors' security and sometimes to their lives. It threatens the health and well-being of individuals and is detrimental to the long-term stability and development of families and communities.

Improving Emergency Response:

The humanitarian community has learned that the quality of emergency response affects the quality and the sustainability of early recovery. “Getting it Right” in the emergency phase is key. The humanitarian community has developed standards and guidelines to help humanitarian workers and other responsible actors “get it right” on SGBV at the very start of the response. Core Guidelines include the *Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Gender-based Violence Intervention in Humanitarian Settings* launched in 2005. The Guidelines detail basic but essential steps that should be taken in each program area to help prevent gender-based violence and ensure services for survivors. Various program areas are represented—health, water and sanitation, food distribution, camp management, shelter and education. The GBV Guidelines are currently being updated to reflect the increase in urban displacement, changes in the humanitarian system such as the formation of the cluster system, and new developments in SGBV programming.

In addition to the IASC Guidelines, UNHCR has developed its *Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls* and an e-learning tool that explains the key concepts of SGBV and assists participants in identifying SGBV prevention and response strategies across UNHCR's main program areas. Implementing agencies should also take advantage of the resources put together by the Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility under the Protection Cluster.

Despite these useful tools and resources and the IASC-endorsed GBV Guidelines that have been in place for eight years, effective implementation remains spotty. There are

still too many cases where the most basic prevention considerations are not being implemented consistent with the Guidelines. We have all seen multiple examples of water points located in unsafe areas; of latrines that are not separated by sex and don't lock from the inside; of food distributions that favor the strong and quick; of camp designs that don't take into account the vulnerabilities of female headed households; of economic programs that don't adequately consider the needs and capacities of women and girls. And it continues to be a struggle to immediately get in place services for survivors of gender-based violence.

We ask participants in this session on SGBV to be prepared to share their best thinking on several questions:

- Why in the rush to respond, do many in the humanitarian community continue to ignore or poorly implement existing guidance?
- What needs to be done to ensure better accountability?
- What do partners need that they don't currently have to take the necessary action in key program areas?
- Are there specific areas related to SGBV prevention and response in humanitarian settings that remain poorly understood and require more research and/or better tools and resources?

Suggested Reading:

- IASC Guidelines (review action sheets for sectors in which your organization works)
- GBV AOR Action Sheets for X Crisis
- UNHCR's updated strategy *Action Against Sexual and Gender-based Violence*
- UNHCR Handbook for the Protection of Women and Girls