

Why AGD & Participatory Approaches are important

Not all members of a society will experience an emergency in the same way. Humanitarian aid should be needs based, and some segments of a population might have different needs than another. A minimum requirement for any needs assessment is that it puts people at its centre and can distinguish between different types of needs. Supporting age, gender and diversity approaches is necessary from a protection standpoint. UNHCR uses protection as a lens through which to view all other sectors, including health, WASH, nutrition, shelter, livelihoods, etc.

Participatory approaches in needs assessment allow populations of concern to voice their opinions about their own needs, rather than humanitarian personnel deciding for them. Ensuring community participation helps to minimize the potential of needs assessments and the resulting humanitarian interventions to cause harm, such as undermining local coping mechanisms, neglecting marginalized social groups' needs and wasting resources on aid that is not required.

Practical ways you can include an Age Gender & Diversity (AGD) and Participatory Approach in Needs Assessments

1. Stratify¹ focus group discussions according to AGD principles (i.e. have separate focus group discussions for men, women, boys, girls, different economic classes, etc.)
2. Use key informants for closed questionnaires / structured interviews who are from different strata of society
3. Triangulate data from different strata to see how different types of people have different experiences of a humanitarian situation
4. When selecting villages or camps to be assessed, stratify them to reflect diversity
5. Assess questions and themes that might be relevant to marginalized or less vocal segments of communities
6. Partner with specialized NGOs who work with hard to reach groups (e.g. HelpAge International, Handicap International, etc.) to get needs assessment data
7. Establish regular field presence to understand communities and gain their trust
8. Mobilize self-governance structures (such as Youth Committees, Women's Committees, etc.) as sources for needs assessment information.
9. Conduct a participatory ranking of problems and solutions, where community members themselves do the prioritization.

¹ "Stratify", in this context, means to arrange the population into groups based on certain characteristics, while "strata" refers to the groupings based on these different characteristics. Strata can be created not just on the basis of age and gender, but also by economic status, geographic area of origin, date of arrival or many other characteristics that may affect one group's experience of the humanitarian situation differently than that of another group

10. Hold assessment interviews with different segments of a population simultaneously (e.g. men's and women's focus group discussions) so that one group does not try to infiltrate the other and so both feel equally consulted.
11. Use good people skills and community management skills in addressing populations of concern. Be respectful and patient, and listen.