UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES:

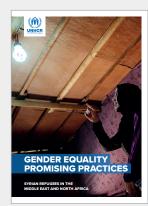## UNHCR AND PARTNER PRACTICES IN ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

See these publications for additional UNHCR and partner promising practices related to gender equality:

[Protecting forcibly displaced women and girls during Covid-19 Pandemic](#)
(UNHCR, 2021)

[Tearing down the walls – Confronting the barriers to internally displaced women and girls' participation in humanitarian settings](#)
(UNHCR, 2019)

[UNHCR Gender Equality Promising Practices: Syrian Refugees in the Middle East and North Africa](#)
(UNHCR, 2017)

[Learning from experience to advance gender equality – promising practices in Asia](#)
(UNHCR, 2017)

Cover:
08 March, 2021, Uganda.
South Sudanese refugees at Bidibidi settlement welcome visit of High Commissioner

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ACRONYMS

FADRA Adventist Development and Relief Agency

AGD age, gender and diversity

APBE Action pour le Bien-être

BODWI Borno Women Development Initiative

EUCAP European Union Capacity Building Mission

FGD focus group discussion

GBV gender-based violence

GSSS Government Senior Science Secondary School

IDP internally displaced person

IRC International Rescue Committee

JRS Jesuit Refugee Services

KEEP Kenya Equity in Education Project

LGBTIQ+ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer

LWF Lutheran World Federation

OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PSEA protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

PPE personal protective equipment

GBV gender-based violence

SOGI sexual orientation and gender identity

UN-Women United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

WASH water, sanitation and hygiene

ZTVA Zero Tolerance Village Alliance

11 November, 2020, Nigeria.
Internally displaced at Teacher's Village Camp

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a transversal, guiding theme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) global work to provide protection and solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and stateless persons. UNHCR's commitment to gender equality is enshrined through key policies and tools that support field operations and partners globally in recognizing gender equality as an organizing principle of all humanitarian work. Ongoing efforts to advance gender equality in UNHCR are steered by the 2018 Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) and the accompanying commitments to women and girls.[1] UNHCR pursues a two-pronged approach to gender equality, including both gender equality mainstreaming and targeted actions to progress gender equality (see Box 1 for more information on UNHCR's approach). In its continuing efforts to uphold fundamental gender equality commitments, UNHCR places a strategic emphasis on knowledge production and documentation, with the aim of leveraging and replicating practices that have been shown to promote gender equality across the organization. To this end, UNHCR is committed to regularly and systematically documenting efforts to ensure gender equality in its work and has previously documented promising practices in the Middle East and North Africa[2] and Asia regions.[3]

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[1] The full AGD policy can be found at
https://www.unhcr.org/protection/women/5aa13c0c7/policy-age-gender-diversity-accountability-2018.html.
[2] "Gender Equality Promising Practices: Syrian refugees in the Middle East and North Africa 2017" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2017). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/women/5a3bab8a4/unhcr-gender-equality-promising-practices-syrian-refugees-middle-east-north.html.
[3] "Learning from experience to advance gender equality: Promising practices in Asia" (UNHCR USA, 2019). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/protection/women/5c6d24434/learning-experience-advance-gender-equality-promising-practices-asia.html.
UNHCR has also documented good practices for GBV and community-based protection, both with a focus on Africa.

In the second half of 2020, UNHCR undertook an exercise to gather practices from operations in sub-Saharan Africa, covering the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes, West and Central Africa and Southern Africa. While previous exercises have focused on "promising practices", this exercise also included what UNHCR has termed "emerging practices", as well as case studies. An explanation for all three categories is provided in the next section. UNHCR made this change to reflect the reality that many of its operations work in extremely challenging contexts, which at times may inhibit more ambitious efforts towards gender equality. This shift is also part of a broader transition towards considering the transformation of the deeply rooted norms behind gender inequality to be a truly long-term pursuit. While it is important not to lose sight of this long-term goal, it is also important to break it down into concrete actions that can be taken to make progress on the rights and safety of women and girls, even in difficult circumstances.

The fact that this exercise was conducted in 2020 is significant, as the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the harsh consequences of gender inequality on women and girls worldwide, who have borne the social, economic, and health burdens of the pandemic in many ways.[4] This exercise highlights several efforts to uphold the commitments to gender equality during the pandemic response, as well as efforts made in recent years prior to the pandemic. Regardless of the time frame, the practices that follow demonstrate the crucial importance of taking action to achieve gender equality even in the most challenging circumstances.

Defining and understanding practices

It is important to first establish a clear understanding of the documentation process and the fundamental definitions that will be used in this exercise. There are no globally standardized definitions for promising practices or emerging practices, with different actors defining interventions or actions as "best", "good" or "effective", among others, based on their own understanding and criteria. UNHCR's methodology defines the terms promising practice, emerging practice and case study, noting that there is sometimes overlap between these, though it is important to stress that there is no hierarchy between them. Promising practices are more often (though not always) likely deemed so as they have been implemented for longer periods of time and thus have generated evidence in the form of programmatic data.

- **Promising practice:** A practice that has produced demonstrable, sustainable results and has protective and/or transformative potential for affected people and communities. It can serve as a model to be scaled up and/or replicated in other settings.

- **Emerging practice:** A practice that shows early indications of producing results to positively change the lives of affected people and communities.

- **Case study:** A descriptive and explanatory overview of a practice, or part of a practice, that adhered to, or attempted to adhere to, defined criteria. A case study may include an in-depth and detailed examination of actions without any evidence or judgement required on its results or sustainability. Case studies can provide insights and lessons learned into future programming even when it does not meet certain criteria.

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[4] See, for example, "The shadow pandemic: Inequitable gendered impacts of COVID-19 in South Africa" (Bianca Rochelle Parry and Errolyn Gordon, 2020). Available from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gwao.12565#gwao12565-sec-0080-title.
For a comprehensive review of the available evidence on pandemics and violence against women and children, see "Pandemics and violence against women and children" (Amber Peterman et al., 2020). Available from
https://www.cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children.

Box 1. A glance at UNHCR's framework and resources for gender equality

The UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) steers UNHCR's gender equality work. While recognizing that all groups in the population – men, women, boys, girls and people identifying as other genders – face their own challenges, the policy includes specific commitments to women and girls due to their demonstrated needs and opportunities. The 2018 update to the policy reflects the progress made in UNHCR's understanding of gender equality in humanitarian settings and includes the organization's updated commitments to women and girls:

- Women and girls participate equally and meaningfully in all decision-making, community management and leadership structures, and committees of people of concern to UNHCR.

- Women and girls are provided with individual registration and documentation, directly or through support provided by UNHCR.

- Women and girls have equal access to and control over management and provision of food, core-relief items, and cash-based interventions.

- Women and girls have equal access to economic opportunities, including decent work and quality education and health services.

- Women and girls have access to comprehensive gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services.

In early 2020, UNHCR released its Gender Equality Toolkit, which provides practical guidance on integrating gender equality in the operations management cycle, as well as a series of practical tools on women's participation, gender analysis for cash-based interventions, and advocacy.

In 2020, UNHCR released its Policy on the Prevention of, Risk Mitigation, and Response to Gender-based Violence, which seeks to consolidate the progress made by UNHCR and partners to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence (GBV) while further institutionalizing UNHCR's work on GBV throughout the organization. In recognition of the causal links between gender inequality and GBV, the policy's core action around prevention stresses the critical importance of confronting gender inequality, systemic discrimination and unequal power relations between women and men (and people with diverse gender identities) in order to prevent violence.

1

METHODOLOGY

In 2019, UNHCR articulated a standardized methodology for gathering and screening operational practices in gender equality, gender-based violence (GBV), community-based protection and child protection. This methodology also provides clear definitions and criteria for promising practices, emerging practices, and case studies.[5] A summary of the steps for this methodology is presented in annex A.

As this exercise was carried out during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR and partners had to take unprecedented measures to carry out their mandate of protecting forcibly displaced populations while complying with measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. We adapted the methodology of the exercise to account for the limitations imposed by the pandemic, particularly the inability to travel and meet beneficiaries and stakeholders in person, as well as constraints on UNHCR and partner staff availability. The process followed is described in Table 1.

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[5] See "Methodology and Background Document: Collecting Practices and Case Studies – Child Protection, Community-Based Protection, Gender Equality, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" (UNHCR, 2019).

Table 1. Adapted methodology

1	Identification and gathering of potential practices	• Desk review of UNHCR internal and external documents on AGD • Initial consultations with relevant technical staff in Geneva and regional bureaus • Communication with country operations to proactively identify practices
2	Engagement with country operations to collect information on practices	• Completion of a self-rating tool • Remote, semi-structured interviews with staff involved in the initiative
3	Analysis	• In-depth analysis of project documentation (including project proposals, baseline assessments, reports and beneficiary testimonies) • Analysis of interviews conducted • Additional desk research on contextual issues to supplement field information
4	Verification and write-up	• Discussion of practices with the gender equality unit and technical staff • Write-up of the report and verification by country operation staff

This exercise aimed to showcase the thematic and geographical diversity of UNHCR's work in Africa. Focus was placed on examples that demonstrated a concrete application of the principles of the UNHCR AGD Policy as well as important strategic gender equality priorities, including multisectoral actions that recognize the various experiences and vulnerabilities of women and girls, localization and the meaningful participation of women at all levels, and processes related to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security,[6] such as in formal peace processes.

The following criteria were used to categorize practices as either a case study, emerging practice or promising practice. To be considered an emerging practice, a project must largely adhere to the following criteria:

1. **Relevance:** The project successfully addressed the problem(s) identified. Project activities were well chosen and culturally contextualized to reduce, mitigate or transform the problem(s) in the context.

2. **Results:** The project largely achieved its defined goals (objectives, outputs and outcomes) and promoted gender equality, accounting for contextual challenges.

3. **Participation:** The project was participatory and involved a contextually appropriate representation of women, men, girls and boys in decision-making throughout its implementation. The project included accountability mechanisms for feedback and complaints.

4. **AGD:** The project accounted for the needs, risks, priorities and capacities of people of concern to UNHCR of different ages, genders and other forms of diversity, including people with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people.

5. **Innovation (optional):** The practice displays an innovative dimension in the form of tools, systems or approaches, and implements a new or improved good, service or process.

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[6] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is a landmark resolution adopted in 2000. The resolution acknowledges the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls and provides recommendations for their meaningful participation in conflict resolution built on four pillars: Participation, Prevention, Protection, and Relief and Recovery. The full text of the resolution is available at http://www.un-documents.net/sr1325.htm.

Beyond this, promising practices should further demonstrate:

6. **Scalability and replicability:** The project had the potential to be scaled up or adapted and replicated in other contexts.

7. **Sustainability:** The project was able, or had the potential, to continue after external funds ceased. It mobilized national or local resources and showed a clear exit strategy.

Finally, while the practice need not have been implemented for a minimum period of time, for it to be deemed a promising practice, it must have been implemented long enough to have reached its results and generated data demonstrating change and impact.

Limitations and impact on data

- **Difficulty of direct consultations with beneficiaries and stakeholders:** Previous exercises in Asia and the Middle East and North Africa made use of field visits, focus group discussions with beneficiaries, workshops and other participatory methods. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic it was unfortunately not possible to engage directly with beneficiaries; programmatic documents and accounts from UNHCR staff and partners were instead relied upon to understand and integrate beneficiaries' experiences. Under more optimal circumstances, the perspectives of women and girl beneficiaries would have been presented more clearly in the report, though UNHCR has made every effort to include accounts where possible.

- **Constraints on availability of field staff:** The demands on the time and resources of UNHCR and partner staff are numerous in the best of cases and have increased due to the additional work caused by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. It was therefore not possible to hold extensive consultations with all project stakeholders as would usually be the case during field missions.

04 December, 2020, Nigeria.
Cameroonian refugee organisation protects community from COVID-19

2

WORKING ON GENDER EQUALITY IN UNHCR'S AFRICA OPERATIONS: FRAMING THE BROADER OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

Sub-Saharan Africa hosts more than 26 per cent of the world's refugee population, with people of concern to UNHCR totalling 18 million.[7] As of 2019, more than 19 million people were internally displaced in their own countries,[8] a number that has continually grown in recent years as conflicts and fragility have spread in several regions. Africa is vast and diverse. Although the factors behind its fragility and conflicts are complex and vary from country to country, the legacy of colonialism and the more recent global inequalities that disproportionately advantage the Global North are clearly evident in many contexts across the continent. Africa's extraordinary geographical and human diversity is reflected in the work carried out by UNHCR and partners on the continent, which includes working to register newly displaced populations, support safe spaces for women and girls or advocate with the African Union. While this incredible diversity cautions wider generalizations being drawn on the operating environment, it is important to acknowledge patterns of structural and contextual challenges that reappear throughout the continent, making work in gender equality both extraordinarily difficult and rich.

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[7] "Africa" (UNHCR USA, n.d.). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/africa.html (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[8] "Sub-Saharan Africa" (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2020). Available from
https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/downloads/2020-IDMC-GRID-sub-saharan-africa.pdf?v=1.17.

Structural gender inequality: Structural gender inequalities remain the most salient and persistent barrier to achieving gender equality globally, including in Africa, affecting women in all countries worldwide.[9] African women in many contexts are likewise affected by entrenched gender norms that predominantly favour men's dominance in public and private spheres, which is visible in their unequal control of resources, power and decision-making and causes women in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, to fall behind in economic, sociocultural, education and health indicators.[10] When citing statistics, however, it is important to consider their subtleties. For example, although women's participation in the labour market in Africa is quite strong and pre-dates that of other major world regions, such as the Middle East, 9 out of 10 women in sub-Saharan Africa are involved in the informal sector, with many women potentially lacking control over their earnings and having limited influence on their working environment.[11]

Despite these challenges, it is relevant to highlight the significant progress that sub-Saharan African countries have made in recent years towards closing the gender gap, largely thanks to the dedicated activism of African women's civil society. On a broad level, in the past three decades Africa has made progress in instituting normative frameworks in support of women's rights and participation. The African Union recognizes gender equality as "a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth and social development",[12] and has developed a number of frameworks and mechanisms around gender equality, several of which have been adopted at national levels. The Maputo Protocol on women's rights, for example, has been ratified by 42 member states, though in late 2020 the African Union acknowledged slow progress in terms of the protocol's adoption and implementation.[13] A closer intersectional analysis reveals how personal characteristics, including age, ethnicity or racial background and sexual orientation, exacerbate inequalities and marginalization. As an example, displacement shows a trend of exacerbating gender inequality, with women and girls comprising the majority of those displaced globally.[14] Progress in women's rights in Africa (and also worldwide) has remained slow, and as mentioned in a later section, will be even more hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, structural inequalities frame the wider working environment for all humanitarian action in Africa as is the case elsewhere.

Increasing militarization of humanitarian spaces: While protracted conflict and displacement have long existed in Africa, certain geographies have been made particularly fragile due to rising violent extremism and terrorism of non-State armed groups.[15] Terrorism and the often highly militarized responses mounted by governments and the international community have displaced millions and, in many cases, have resulted in the militarization of the humanitarian space. This militarization presents a safety risk to women and girls and often hinders decision-making power, even of male civilians, effectively pushing women and girls out

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[9] In their discussion of women's leadership at a global level, Tam O'Neil and Pilar Domingo state that "even in countries with liberal multi-party politics and progressive constitutions, common beliefs and expectations about what women and men can and should do block women's political power and advancement." See "Women and power: Overcoming barriers to leadership and influence" (Tam O'Neil and Pilar Domingo, 2016). Available from https://www.odi.org/projects/2773-women-and-power-overcoming-barriers-leadership-and-influence.

[10] For example, the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 estimates that the gender gap in sub-Saharan Africa will take 95 years to be closed at the current pace of progress. See "Global Gender Gap Report 2020" (World Economic Forum, 2020). Available from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.

[11] "Closing the gender gap in African labor markets is good economics" (Andinet Woldemichael, 2020). Available from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/01/23/closing-the-gender-gap-in-african-labor-markets-is-good-economics/.

[12] "Gender equality and development" (African Union, n.d.). Available from https://au.int/en/gender-equality-development (accessed on 3 March 2021).

[13] As at November 2020, the 13 remaining Member States who had not ratified included 10 who had not signed, and three that have neither ratified nor signed. The African Union notes that challenges that have prevented progress included "issues of conservative governments and populations; pluralistic legal systems; resistance from strong faith-based groups; absence of, or lack of clarity on ratification procedures; the prioritization of peace and reconciliation in countries in active or emerging from civil strife; concerns with reproductive rights provisions and the provisions on rights related to marriage." See "Slow progress in meeting commitment to 2020 as the year of universal ratification of the Maputo protocol" (African Union, 2020). Available from https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20201118/slow-progress-meeting-commitment-2020-year-universal-ratification-maputo.

[14] See, for example, "Women and girls in internal displacement" (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Impact and Plan International, 2020). Available from https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/202003-twice-invisible-internally-displaced-women.pdf.

[15] "Situation in West Africa, Sahel 'extremely volatile' as terrorists exploit ethnic animosities, special representative warns security council" (United Nations Security Council, 2020). Available from https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14245.doc.htm.

of the public sphere. In these types of environments, efforts to tackle gender inequality are often shelved in favour of other priorities. In these spaces, aid workers are increasingly under attack, with 2020 marking a record year for attacks against aid workers globally,[16] and with three African countries amongst the five most dangerous countries for aid workers.[17]

Recruiting, retaining and empowering of female staff: Although gender equality starts within the humanitarian system itself, it can be difficult to promote in settings where ensuring a balance of women and men among UNHCR and partner staff proves challenging. Recruiting and providing a supportive environment for female staff can be particularly difficult in low-resource or severely insecure settings. Female staff of reproductive age often face distinct challenges when they are unable to bring their children and families with them to insecure field locations, presenting them with the difficult decision of whether to prioritize their family or their careers. While UNHCR has made many efforts to attain gender balance in its workforce and promote women's leadership,[18] structural barriers that hinder women's opportunities and demand a greater domestic burden make it difficult for many women to engage in formal humanitarian work alongside men in equal numbers. However, it should be noted that many women and girls serve as informal first responders in their communities.

COVID-19 and gender (in)equality in Africa: The pandemic has impacted gender equality worldwide, increasing the level of GBV suffered by women and girls[19] and exposing the fragility of progress made in women's rights.[20] Although Africa did not experience as high rates of confirmed COVID-19 infections and deaths as Europe and North America in 2020, the secondary economic and social impacts of the pandemic have disproportionately affected women and girls.[21] For women and girls who were marginalized before the pandemic, through displacement, for example, the pandemic has only exacerbated their vulnerability. The stress brought about by economic loss and future uncertainty weighs heavily on many African women.[22] As is the case in other regions, women and girls are at a greater risk of economic hardship due to structural and gender inequalities in the labour market and the home. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women are over-represented in informal sectors such as street vending, paid domestic and childcare work, cooking, hospitality and tourism.[23] In humanitarian settings, the pandemic has greatly impacted specialized services for women and girls. Even when services are made remote through mobile phones and the Internet, women may not be able to use them due to their limited access to technology or lack of a private space to speak within their homes, which is especially the case for those residing with their abusers. Girls in sub-Saharan Africa tend to have less access to digital tools,[24] making them more cut off from information and services during periods of lockdowns, enforced isolation and/or in-person service closures. African feminist writers Rosebell Kagumire and Vivian Ouya point to prominent incidents of violence against women and girls occurring on the continent since the pandemic and lament governments' lack of interest in addressing this problem:

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[16] "UN hails aid workers after record number of attacks" (Al Jazeera, 2020). Available from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/8/19/un-hails-aid-workers-after-record-number-of-attacks.
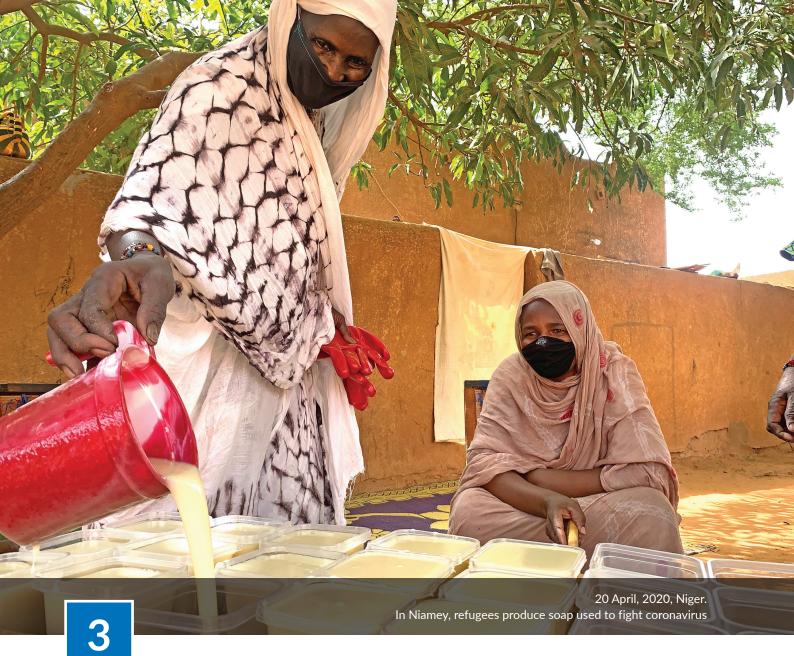[17] "Aid Worker Security Report 2020: Contending with threats to humanitarian health workers in the age of epidemics" (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2020). Available from https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/awsr2020_0_0.pdf.
[18] See, for example, "Across Africa, women humanitarians are stepping up to help those in need" (UNHCR, 2019). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/stories/2019/8/5d5a9a9c4/across-africa-women-humanitarians-are-stepping-up-to-help-those-in-need.html.
[19] "Pandemics and violence against women and children" (Amber Peterman et al., 2020). Available from https://www.cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children.
[20] "COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects" (Anu Madgavkar et al., 2020). Available from https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects.
[21] "The shadow pandemic: Inequitable gendered impacts of COVID-19 in South Africa" (Bianca Rochelle Parry and Errolyn Gordon, 2020). Available from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gwao.12565#gwao12565-sec-0080-title.
[22] Even short-term ceasing of economic activities outside the home is problematic, and doing so long-term is simply not an option for most Africans. According to an Ipsos survey published in May 2020, "most Africans would run out of food, water, medicine and money quickly [...] On average, most would run out of food in 10 days, prescription medicine in less than 9 days, and money in 12 days" if they were to stay at home. See "Responding to COVID-19 in African countries: Analysis and report of survey findings" (Ipsos, 2020).
[23] See, for example, "Protecting women's health and rights during COVID-19: Experiences and feminist perspectives from West African civil society" (Equipop, 2020). Available from https://equipop.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Rapport-Enquete-Covid19-ANGLAIS.pdf.
[24] "COVID-19 in the humanitarian settings in West and Central Africa" (Plan International, 2020), p. 4. Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Advocacy%20brief%20COVID19%20-%20Humanitarian%20crises%20in%20WACA.pdf.

"Containing COVID-19 has now become the primary focus of governments, with little attention paid to gender-based violence. State control and militarism have taken centre stage. The solidifying of oppressive state power in a pandemic means a consolidation of patriarchal power and violence at micro- and macro-levels."[25] This is a poignant reminder of the importance of prioritizing gender equality even when faced with the overwhelming challenge of the pandemic.

[25] "African women face two pandemics" (Rosebell Kagumire and Vivian Ouya, 2020). Available from https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/african-women-face-pandemics-200729132154433.html.

20 April, 2020, Niger.
In Niamey, refugees produce soap used to fight coronavirus

3

PRACTICES

Emerging practice in Niger: Women of Ayorou for peace

Practice overview

- Specific location: Tillabery Region, western Niger

- Thematic focus: Peacebuilding

- Timeline: 2018–2020 (project completed)

- Primary partner: Action pour le Bien-être (APBE)

- Objective: Improve stability through strengthening social cohesion among the population, particularly among women and youth, as well as collaboration with defence and security institutions and State actors.

Context

Niger, like its neighbours in the Sahel, is struggling with multiple crises in various areas throughout the country. As of late 2020, nearly 300,000 people are internally displaced and there are nearly 230,000 refugees, primarily from Nigeria (in the southern part of the country) and Mali (in the western part of the country).[26] Traditional practices and long-standing norms, such as polygamy, early marriage and the denial of education and employment opportunities, have contributed to some of the lowest gender equality indicators in the world and place women and girls at high risk of GBV.[27,28,29] Insecurity disproportionately impacts women and girls as they are most often the ones responsible for taking care of their families, collecting water and preparing food, tasks which require them to move about, thereby increasing their exposure to risks in insecure environments where military or insurgent presences are common. Women and girls also face particular discrimination and exclusion due to cultural and religious factors, gender inequality, a lack of will from political elites to make decision-making inclusive and responsive to women's needs, the limitation of women's ability to express their opinions in the presence of men, and a lack of women's leadership.

The situation in Tillabery Region (in which the Ayorou commune is located) on the country's western borders with Burkina Faso and Mali – an area known as the Liptako-Gourma region – is growing increasingly complex and violent and shows no sign of abatement.[30] Frequent attacks by non-State armed groups, displacement and competition over resources have led to tensions between ethnic groups in this traditionally diverse area, along with a growing lack of trust in State institutions and security actors. This is particularly salient in Ayorou commune and town, situated just miles from the Malian border on the Niger River, and home to many Malian refugees who live alongside locals and, increasingly, Nigerien IDPs. Recurrent attacks against the Nigerien defence and security forces further undermine security and contribute to a broader climate of social mistrust and fear between different groups.

Initiative background

UNHCR Niger, in partnership with the Nigerien non-governmental organization APBE, worked with community-based women's groups in Ayorou to strengthen women's leadership through enabling access to livelihoods, building the capacity of women's groups in leadership and non-violent conflict prevention and management, and seeking to increase their involvement in decision-making forums in order to build peace and community trust. The work with the Ayorou women's groups forms part of a larger initiative funded through the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office to support peacebuilding throughout Niger through the project "Renforcement de l'Engagement Communautaire pour la Gestion Alerte des Risques de Déstabilisation Sociales et Sécuritaires" [Strengthening Community Engagement for Managing Social and Security Destabilization Risks], led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR, who worked in consultation with ministries of the Government of Niger and their regional counterparts in Tillabery. The women of Ayorou initiative was underpinned by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 considerations and was designed to be complementary to other projects in the region focused on governance and peace, as well as the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) that seeks to support positive governance strategies among Nigerien authorities and the defence and security forces.

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[26] "Niger – UNHCR Operational Portal" (UNHCR, n.d.). Available from https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/ner (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[27] "Niger" (USAID, n.d.). Available from https://www.usaid.gov/niger (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[28] See analysis and statistics on gender equality in Niger, by UN Women. Available from https://data.unwomen.org/country/niger (accessed 4 March 2021).
[29] See, for example, "Improving child and maternal health: Why adolescent girl programming matters – Post-intervention evidence from Niger" (MercyCorps, 2015). Available from https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/mercy_corps_niger_rising.pdf; "Child marriage in Niger" (Save the Children, n.d.). https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/advocacy/child-marriage-niger.pdf.
[30] "Sidelining the Islamic State in Niger's Tillabery" (International Crisis Group, 2020). Available from https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/niger/289-sidelining-islamic-state-nigers-tillabery.

Process and activities

UNHCR has a long-standing presence in Ayorou and thus enjoyed a working relationship with refugee committees, enabling the organization to engage affected communities in the design of the project, including women's groups and youth, alongside community leaders who most often speak on behalf of community members during consultation processes. The following sets of activities were developed, seeking to address the problem from multiple angles:

- *Formation and strengthening of community-based groups involving host communities, refugees and IDPs:* A total of three groups, each comprising at least 50 per cent women, were formed and received training in leadership and human rights (including refugee rights), before being provided with resources to carry out community awareness-raising.

- *Women's leadership and networking:* To address women's marginalization in decision-making spheres, the Ayorou women's groups received training and resources to carry out awareness-raising among communities and to advocate for community needs. Efforts were then made to involve these women in community decision-making spheres that are typically dominated by men. The women's groups also created a women's network which was headed and coordinated by a dynamic woman leader.

- *Empowerment of women and youth to carry out income-generating activities*: Equipment, training and support in agricultural and animal husbandry livelihoods projects were provided as requested by beneficiaries.

- *Awareness-raising on the rights of women and children, legal rights, and services:* Awareness-raising was conducted in large and small groups throughout the communities.

- *General interest works and rehabilitation of community infrastructure*: To address frustration around public service capacity, the project worked on rehabilitating community infrastructure shared by multiple community groups, including sanitation, shared water points and community buildings. Women played a strong role in determining the public works projects.

- *A series of activities to improve dialogue between civilians and State and security actors*: To address issues of diminished trust in State authorities and State security actors, a series of activities including awareness-raising, dialogues and radio communication campaigns were conducted to provide civilians with information on the roles of such actors.

Apart from the specific focus on women, throughout the project, UNHCR and APBE sought to ensure that all major groups of the community were involved in the different prongs of the intervention, including members of different social and ethnic groups.

Results

The project revolved around two larger strategic objectives, specifically improving trust between the defence and security forces and local civilian populations and improving the ability of communities to contribute to and maintain peace, all in the interest of attaining greater security in this fragile area. The Ayorou women's groups component showed positive results in increasing women's participation at the community and intermediary levels through the livelihoods projects, training and involvement in dialogues and initiatives with security and State actors. Women members expressed appreciation and enthusiasm for the opportunities the project had given them, particularly livelihoods activities. At the end of the project, there appeared to be greater mutual trust between local State actors (such as the Mayor's Office and the Prefect), the defence and security forces, and the refugee and host populations. Although the project ended in early 2020, at the end of the same year, the women's groups were found to have continued some activities that were possible without the contribution of significant external resources. However, the wider deterioration in the security environment has hindered the project's larger strategic objective of ensuring security in Tillabery Region.

Lessons learned

Niger is one of the most challenging environments for humanitarian action, due to its militarized context and rigid, long-standing structural inequalities. The women of Ayorou initiative therefore demonstrates how efforts to address large, complex, seemingly insurmountable problems (such as insecurity) can be broken down into feasible, concrete, smaller-scale actions to support women, even when the wider environment remains inhospitable due to uncontrollable reasons. Since the project's end in 2020, violence by armed actors has largely continued and in some cases escalated. This is a harsh reminder of the forces that are outside the control of humanitarian actors, who in militarized areas may have to make difficult decisions around engagement with authorities to ensure access to and safety of people while upholding humanitarian principles. However, this initiative highlights the importance of working on women's participation to the extent possible, particularly in male-dominated domains such as security. As always, even in humanitarian settings, it is crucial not to push aside women's participation when faced with what may be deemed more urgent problems. Even if women's participation will not dramatically alter the wider environment at the moment in question, it has great value to the women and their communities and is essential in achieving long-term peace.

Tips for replication

- Achieving the women, peace and security agenda starts with women at the community level who are most affected by violence and conflict. As such, actions should involve creating culturally appropriate opportunities for leadership, such as women's networks.

- In projects with more complex or abstract objectives (such as governance), tangible and visible activities such as livelihoods support and community infrastructure rehabilitation are important and should be carried out alongside awareness-raising, dialogues and training.

- When surroundings are safe, women and girls should be encouraged to participate in dialogues and engage with security and governance actors to ensure their interests are not marginalized.

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12 November, 2020, Nigeria.
Internally displaced woman in Mohammed Goni International Stadium camp

Promising practice in Nigeria: Zero Tolerance Village Alliance

Practice overview

- Specific location: Borno State, north-east Nigeria

- Thematic focus: GBV

- Timeline: June 2019–December 2020

- Primary partner: Borno Women Development Initiative (BOWDI)

- Objective: Empower communities to confront and change norms and behaviours around GBV through engaging all members of the community.

Context

For over a decade, Borno State in north-east Nigeria has been the centre of a massive humanitarian crisis brought about by the violent Boko Haram insurgency and the often-aggressive campaign of the Nigerian military to defeat it. This insurgency forms part of a larger crisis in the Lake Chad Basin that had displaced 2.4 million people in the larger Lake Chad region at the end of 2020 and is a startling example of the rise in armed violence in the Sahel region. A staggering 2 million people are internally displaced woman in Nigeria,[31] many of them residing in IDP camps run by the Government and in host communities. Women and girls continue to suffer acutely from the humanitarian crisis in the north-east on all levels, in many cases experiencing kidnapping and enslavement by extremists, and ostracization and secondary violence upon return to their communities, thus hindering their reintegration.[32] Displaced women and girls face enormous risks of GBV and often lack access to adequate sexual and reproductive health services, as well as the ability to make decisions about their bodies and health.[33]

Widespread insecurity caused by incessant attacks combined with a lack of protection safety nets, livelihood opportunities and basic necessities such as food and non-food items continue to increase the risk of GBV, further entrenching harmful gender norms that cause such violence. Girls are less likely to attend school than boys, a disparity that follows them into adulthood, as women have far less access to formal employment.[34] Research in Nigeria has also identified high levels of attitudes normalizing gender discrimination, GBV and victim-blaming of GBV survivors.[35]

Initiative background

The Zero Tolerance Village Alliance (ZTVA) is a community-led model for GBV prevention, based on the achievement motivation and labelling theories. Piloted in South Africa from 2011 to 2012 by the Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme,[36] ZTVA focuses on the need for communities (termed "villages" in the intervention model) to acknowledge and assume ownership of both the challenge of GBV and the solutions needed to sustainably bring about the considerable changes in norms that will contribute towards ending gender inequality. ZTVA was adapted to displacement contexts in Uganda, with further roll-outs of the programme taking place in Ethiopia and Zambia in 2019–2020 under the joint UNHCR and Population Council Sauti/VOICE Project. The ZTVA model departs from the time-tested SASA! approach[37] in several ways, the most important of which is its shorter implementation period, making it well suited to contexts such as Borno State, where frequent population movements and attacks make it difficult to implement longer-term prevention methodologies. Through community-led interventions, ZTVA aims to inspire communities to brand themselves as "zero tolerance" zones regarding GBV. Implementation is led by the Stakeholder Forum, which comprises community members, with UNHCR and the local partner providing guidance and technical assistance. A list of Stakeholder Forum-endorsed criteria must be met for the village to be accepted into the larger alliance, the main deliverable of which is to inform the community of villagers' GBV-related rights through an intensive

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[31] "Nigeria emergency" (UNHCR USA, 2020). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/nigeria-emergency.html#:~:text=To%20date%2C%20the%20Lake%20Chad,refugees%20in%20the%20four%20countries (accessed on 3 March 2021).

[32] "Returning from the land of jihad: The fate of women associated with Boko Haram" (International Crisis Group, 2019). Available from https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/275-returning-land-jihad-fate-women-associated-boko-haram.

[33] "Delivering supplies when crisis strikes: Nigeria" (United Nations Population Fund, n.d.). Available from https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/18-291-DeliveringSuppliesCrisis-Nigeria-finalweb.pdf.

[34] "Nigeria's laws hold women back, and the economy suffers" (Alexandra Bro and Jack McCaslin, 2019). Available from https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerias-laws-hold-women-back-and-economy-suffers.

[35] "Nigeria Men and Gender Equality Survey (NiMAGES): Nigeria Country Report 2015" (Promundo, 2015). Available from https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/V4C-Nigeria-Men-and-Gender-Equality-Survey-NiMAGES.pdf.

[36] An evaluation of the pilot, including a detailed description of activities, can be found in "Zero Tolerance Village Alliance Intervention Model: Evaluation and report 2010-2012" Craig Carty, 2012). Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266543845_Zero_Tolerance_Village_Alliance_Intervention_Model_Evaluation_and_Report_2010_-_2012.

[37] SASA! is a community mobilization approach developed by the Ugandan non-governmental organization Raising Voices, aimed at preventing violence against women and HIV. SASA! seeks to engage a critical mass of people in communities over time to challenge harmful power norms. Information on the package can be found at https://raisingvoices.org/sasa/.

series of dialogues. The overarching principle of these dialogues is "active citizenry", with the intended outcome being that people both know their rights and are empowered to exercise those rights in accordance with the host country's laws. In Nigeria, UNHCR worked with its partner BOWDI to implement the ZTVA model in the Mohammed Goni International Stadium IDP camp in Maiduguri and the Government Senior Science Secondary School (GSSS) IDP camp in Bama Local Government Area.

Process and activities

In May 2019, a community baseline assessment was conducted in the sites selected for the pilot in the Mohammed Goni International Stadium and GSSS camps. In each camp, three smaller zones were identified to function as villages per the ZTVA methodology. Following the results of the assessment, UNHCR and BOWDI supported community members to appoint members to the Stakeholder Forum, a central group made up of various actors who represent different groups within the community, including traditional leaders, religious leaders, business owners, women, youth and older people. The community members also selected community activists, monitors and liaison officers to lead the community mobilization efforts.

In June 2019, with the support of UNHCR and BOWDI, the community held a ZTVA launch event during which the Stakeholder Forum and the community pledged their commitment to the ZTVA process. Each village was then supported with community mappings and set a timeline for their activities. UNHCR and BOWDI then trained the Stakeholder Forum on human rights accountability monitoring, community activism, good governance and basic GBV concepts. In collaboration with the Stakeholder Forum and the other community activists, the following activities were carried out:

- community dialogues with community leaders and members;
- twice-monthly meetings with the Stakeholder Forum committee to discuss progress and priorities;
- door-to-door campaigns and mass public awareness sessions (pre-COVID-19) on GBV;
- "one-teach-two" sessions on GBV issues;
- community debates on GBV issues;
- follow-up sessions with community leaders on the implementation of agreed action points.

Results

As is common in north-east Nigeria, the project has faced the ongoing challenge of insecurity, which at times prevented access to the project sites. The BOWDI field staff also required additional coaching to implement the ZTVA methodology, as it was the organization's first time doing so. The project was already under way when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, with the country's subsequent restrictions on gatherings obligating UNHCR to drastically reduce the number of participants in awareness-raising sessions and dialogues. Despite the pandemic and the other challenges, over time community members managed to organize and conduct public debate sessions, dialogues and awareness-raising sessions led by the Stakeholder Forum and community activists with increasingly less support from UNHCR and partner staff, demonstrating their empowerment. Since the project's inception, the community leaders have shared information on GBV during their gatherings at least twice a month. To date, the Stakeholder Forum has also worked to hold GBV perpetrators more accountable rather than ignoring or excusing their behaviour per traditional norms.

The project also achieved the following results that altogether have helped to improve safety in the project sites:

- **Night-time supervision of areas at high risk of GBV incidents:** Night-time patrolling of camp areas known for security incidents against women and girls has, according to anecdotal accounts, reduced the occurrence of many potential incidents, particularly the harassment and attack of young girls.

- **Protection of women when collecting firewood:** Some ZTVA members mobilized community members to act as protective escorts that accompany women going out in search of firewood to reduce the risk of harassment and assault outside the community.

- **Supervision at aid distribution sites:** Some ZTVA members supervised distribution sites to create safer and fairer access to women and girls and other vulnerable individuals.

- **Visitation to and assessment of the reception centre:** ZTVA members visited the reception centre to assess the risks of violence against women and girls and raise awareness of the people there.

- **Protection of people with disabilities:** ZTVA members engaged people with disabilities, helping them to access services and involving them in activities. They also worked to ensure that people with disabilities were not stigmatized, shamed or discriminated against in the community.

- **COVID-19 awareness-raising campaigns:** When the pandemic hit north-east Nigeria partway through the project, ZTVA members worked to provide their villages with essential information on how the virus spreads and how to prevent transmission. This proved especially important in an environment where there was limited access to clear information that people trust and the potential for misinformation was high.

Lessons learned

The success of the ZTVA initiative hinged on the sincere engagement of community members in the hope that community ownership would ensure its long-term continuance. To increase ownership, the two villages were supported in identifying and agreeing on their own criteria to follow and monitor during the ZTVA process in order to be declared a "zero tolerance" village. During community dialogue sessions, UNHCR and BOWDI adapted the "one-teach-two approach" (which is at the core of the ZTVA approach) to reach out to the wider community. This enabled the 94 trained members of the Stakeholder Forum and the community activists to reach more than 5,000 community members with messages on GBV prevention over the course of five months.

Tips for replication

- Prevention approaches being rolled out for the first time should start on a smaller scale and enable sufficient time and effort for implementing partners and communities to understand the methodology.

- It should not be assumed that community approaches to confront harmful norms are not possible during acute emergencies such as COVID-19. Despite the pandemic hitting during the project, community activities continued on a smaller scale and incorporated public health messaging.

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Box 2. Overcoming barriers to women's leadership in community-based structures

Community-based participation structures, such as protection committees, child protection committees and camp management committees, are an essential component of UNHCR's work to promote the participation of affected populations. In support of its age, gender and diversity (AGD) commitments, UNHCR also encourages the equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in these structures, with the aim of ensuring that the needs and interests of women, girls and other marginalized individuals are concretely represented, while also enabling women and girls to reap the psychosocial benefits of participation. However, despite the proven benefits of women's representation, in many humanitarian contexts rigid gender norms often mean that women face resistance and pushback from men and boys when taking part. Even when gender quotas are enforced and women ascend to leadership positions, women may feel sidelined or marginalized by more influential male leaders and even aid actors.

UNHCR and its partners have taken many steps to tackle these barriers, including training, awareness-raising, working with men and boys and instituting and implementing gender quotas. In the **South South Region of Nigeria**, where UNHCR has a presence to respond to the Cameroonian refugee situation, the organization worked closely with its camp coordination and camp management partner, the State Emergency Management Agency, to advocate for 50 per cent representation of women in camp leadership structures. Out of 118 elected leaders, 51 were women, which increased female representation in leadership structures to 43 per cent compared with just 30 per cent the previous year. This process was possible through a series of dialogues with refugee representatives on issues relating to women's rights and participation and decision-making. As part of this process, it was decided that if a man were elected as a committee chairperson, then a woman must hold the deputy position. UNHCR worked to build the capacity of the women who were elected in leadership, conflict resolution, the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the code of conduct, as well as child protection and GBV prevention and response. This work in participation is being complemented by efforts that seek to empower and build women's economic resilience through existing livelihoods projects. In this way, UNHCR is taking a broad approach to women's empowerment.

In the **Cameroonian capital of Yaoundé**, UNHCR works with a refugee collective that represents the interests of the diverse refugee populations in the capital. Engaging women in the collective's leadership proved difficult as many women had several demands on their time, lower levels of education and feelings of inferiority to men, who often sought to occupy leadership positions. To overcome these challenges, UNHCR worked with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education and its partner Plan International to carry out sessions that informed women of opportunities and increased their self-confidence and interest in running for leadership positions. Refugees created regulations and an electoral guideline that integrated considerations around gender and diversity, and an electoral commission was established, comprising two men and two women. Following these efforts, five women and five men were elected.

09 October, 2017, Cameroon.
Refugees make briquette fuel to reduce deforestation

Emerging practice from Cameroon: Environmentally-sensitive women's livelihoods

Practice overview

- Specific locations: Gado, East Region, and Maroua, Far North Region, Cameroon

- Thematic focus: Livelihoods

- Timeline: Pilot project in 2015, with ongoing implementation by the partner; in the Far North, with implementation by UNHCR and the partner ongoing since 2017

- Primary partner: Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

- Objective: To provide a readily available, alternative source of energy while increasing the protection of women and girls from GBV through livelihoods.

Context

A country of striking geographical and human diversity, Cameroon faces three humanitarian crises in multiple regions. An ongoing conflict between the Government and separatists in the Anglophone region has displaced over 600,000 people. The country's Far North Region, like its neighbours Chad and Nigeria, continues to suffer from the blistering violence of the Lake Chad Basin crisis Boko Haram attacks.[38] The ongoing conflict in the Central African Republic has led to refugee flows in the East, Adamawa and North Regions. Cameroon hosts over 434,000 refugees primarily from the Central African Republic and Nigeria. A startling number of people are internally displaced, including over 320,000 IDPs in the Far North Region.[39] While performance on some gender equality indicators are above regional averages, women and girls remain highly disadvantaged in education and economic and public life. Poverty and underemployment disproportionately affect women and only 1.6 per cent of women have a property and/or land title officially in their name, even though they perform the vast majority of informal agricultural labour.[40]

The "Briquette project", as it is known, is carried out in two major regions, having been first piloted in Gado on the eastern border with the Central African Republic, and then subsequently rolled out in the Far North Region.

- **Gado, East Region:** Gado has received several waves of refugees from the Central African Republic, primarily comprising Fula individuals. At the time of the project's pilot in 2015, the refugee population in the department of Lom-et-Djerem was over 70,000. Large numbers of refugees settled in Gado 1 and 2 refugee sites, though most of the refugees were settled in villages across Lom-et-Djerem. Most refugees in Gado depend on firewood and charcoal for cooking and heating. Traditional cooking methods over "three-stone fires" are highly inefficient as they disperse 80 per cent of their generated heat and are also highly toxic due to the fumes emitted in and around dwellings. Furthermore, collecting firewood contributes to deforestation and potential conflicts over resources between host and refugee communities. Just as importantly, women bear the responsibility of gathering firewood for cooking, meaning they are often obligated to leave the site to do this which exposes them to the risk of GBV outside the site while adding to their existing domestic burdens.

- **Maroua, Far North Region:** Straddling northern Nigeria to the west and Chad to the east, the Far North Region hosts over 115,000 refugees from Nigeria and 320,000 IDPs,[41] a number that continues to grow in pace with increasing insecurity.[42] A rather militarized approach to the Boko Haram crisis has contributed to a harsh working environment for humanitarian actors and widespread mistrust.[43] As is the case in Gado, the host population and refugees largely depend on firewood for energy needs, with the increasing deforestation having caused frustrations. The long dry season in this Sahelian zone makes it difficult to reforest areas where trees have been cut down, yet the need for wood continues.

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[38] See "Cameroon" (International Crisis Group, n.d.). Available from https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon (accessed on 3 March 2021).

[39] "Cameroon – UNHCR Operational Portal" (UNHCR, n.d.). Available from http://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr (accessed on 3 March 2021).

[40] According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, women account for 71.6 per cent of workers in the informal agricultural sector. See "Data on gender equality in Cameroon" (Delphine Brun, 2019). Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/data_on_gender_equality_in_cameroon-hno_2020-17_oct_19.pdf.

[41] "Cameroon – UNHCR Operational Portal" (UNHCR, n.d.). Available from http://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/cmr (accessed on 3 March 2021).

[42] "Hunger and fear stalk survivors of attack in north Cameroon" (Moise Amédjé, 2020). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2020/9/5f5253e64/hunger-fear-stalk-survivors-attack-north-cameroon.html.

[43] "Cameroon's far north: Responding to Boko Haram" (Edward B. Rackley, 2017). Available from https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Cameroons%20Far%20North%20-%20Responding%20to%20Boko%20Haram.pdf.

Initiative background

To address the identified challenges of environmental degradation, women's economic disempowerment, and GBV risks associated with the gathering of firewood, UNHCR piloted the briquette livelihoods project with LWF in Gado. The project aimed to provide a readily available, alternative source of energy and to increase the protection of women and girls from GBV. Through the project, women are trained to make briquettes from crop by-products and sawdust to replace firewood, thus providing women with an opportunity to learn a new skill and earn an income while producing a more sustainable form of energy for people residing on the site. After some promising initial results in Gado, UNHCR and LWF also piloted the project in the Far North Region in 2017 where it continues.

Process and activities

An in-depth assessment was conducted in both sites prior to the pilot phase to provide a detailed understanding of available energy sources and the viability of the proposed interventions. The primary target group of the project is women, who were selected based on their vulnerability to GBV and other protection risk factors, such as being a single head of household. These women received training and equipment to enable them to produce briquettes made from sustainable biomass, with the aim of selling these to community members. To ensure that women and communities are able to correctly burn the briquettes, UNHCR also trained groups of women to produce and use clay stoves that replace the widely used traditional three-stone stove. These "improved" stoves have the advantages of consuming less firewood, generating less smoke and not dirtying pots as much as firewood, meaning women spend less time washing pots. Although women were the primary targeted beneficiaries, efforts have been made to integrate other groups into the various components. For example, male youths from the host community and refugee population were involved in gathering biomass materials, while people at heightened risk benefited from the distribution of these improved cooking stoves.

Results

The briquettes were largely well received in the project zones. Briquettes are generally considered to be more affordable than other sources of energy, with data from the Far North Region showing that beneficiaries are reducing their monthly expenditure on all types of fuel. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the improved clay stoves are well used. In Gado, direct funding from UNHCR has ended, but LWF has largely continued with the women's groups that were initially trained, with several of the trained women having since become trainers themselves. According to LWF, the use of the improved stoves considerably reduces fuel consumption (wood and charcoal) as they concentrate more than 50 per cent of the heat for cooking unlike the traditional three-stone fires which barely concentrate 15 per cent of the energy. The improved stoves are therefore more economical than the traditional three-stone fires and can save fuel with regular use.

Lessons learned

This project has had the benefit of time to mature its approach, as well as the experience of implementation in two different regions of Cameroon. The project team's ability to respond to the contextual and environmental challenges has been key to its results. In both regions, there were some challenges with adapting to the use of the more sustainable improved stoves. People were used to burning firewood and, in some cases, preferred this method as it burned more quickly than the briquette stoves. It was therefore necessary to adapt the improved stoves by including a small amount of wood in the briquettes so that they would cook more efficiently. Another challenge was the inconsistent availability of biomass supply mechanisms with which to make the briquettes,

along with some breakdowns in the machines used to process the materials, which meant that at times the briquettes were not available. This initiative is notable in that it has already gone through the process of scaling and replicability, having transitioned from the pilot phase in Gado and then expanding into the Far North Region with adaptations to account for the considerable differences in climate and context. Although the overall project model is replicable in other African contexts where access to sustainable energy is problematic, the project must first be adapted and shaped by a nuanced understanding of the environment, markets and local culture and preferences, as well as an assessment of energy uses that takes a gender lens to understand how women and girls access, use and are affected by energy resources.

Tips for replication

- As livelihoods projects for women can be particularly complex and technical, strong collaboration should be established between protection and livelihoods colleagues.

- A thorough assessment was essential to enable UNHCR and LWF to ensure that the project would be feasible given the markets and environments and should therefore be carried out.

- Consistent feedback should be provided so that approaches can be adapted when they are not working. For example, when it was flagged that the improved briquette stoves did not burn as quickly as firewood, they were adapted to include a small amount of wood to burn more efficiently.

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Box 3. Rapid gender analysis in Uganda during COVID-19

Gender analysis is an essential tool of humanitarian action worldwide and enables humanitarian actors to identify the differential experiences and needs of women, girls, men and boys of diverse backgrounds during acute emergencies. UNHCR recommends the use of gender analysis as part of its operations management cycle and has provided guidance on how to undertake such analysis in the UNHCR Gender Equality Toolkit. UNHCR's Uganda operation provides a recent example of how a rapid gender analysis (RGA) can be used to inform multisectoral actions during an acute emergency, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. Uganda hosts more than 1.4 million refugees, 23 per cent of whom are women and 60 per cent children. When the pandemic began, the Government of Uganda responded rapidly to implement COVID-19 prevention and response measures. The restrictions on movement and other lockdown measures, while necessary to stem the spread of the virus, have had an immense impact on the lives of Ugandans and refugees and have aggravated protection risks. These include restricted access to legal services for refugees, increased tensions between refugees and host community members, increased discrimination and social stigma, hindered access to services, increased gender-based violence (GBV), increased child and family separation and increased emotional distress.

Women, girls and young children have been the most susceptible to violence within the home, with no shelter or alternative place to distance themselves from abusers. UNHCR thus embarked on a joint RGA with UN-Women, the International Rescue Committee, CARE International, Alight and the Danish Refugee Council, with the support of other actors and the Government of Uganda. The RGA sought to assess the impact of COVID-19 on refugee women, men, girls and boys of diverse backgrounds, complementing the findings of other assessments. Utilizing the RGA methodology and following COVID-19 prevention guidelines, household surveys and key informant interviews were carried out in Kampala and refugee settlements across the country. During the assessment, UNHCR sought to prioritize:

- **Safety and a do no harm approach:** The analysis was conducted with the support from sector leads, protection colleagues in the field and partner organizations with expertise in the area of protection, gender equality and women's empowerment, among others. Confidentiality was ensured and enumerators were trained on ethical issues related to the research.

- **Meaningful access:** The RGA sought the participation of diverse groups, including people with disabilities, adolescent girls and boys, older people, child-headed households, people with serious medical conditions and people living with HIV.

- **Participation and empowerment:** Refugee community leaders were consulted as key informants, and the RGA results communicated back to the community through feedback sessions.

In December 2020, the final report was launched through Zoom with the participation of senior government officials and UNHCR and partner staff. A joint press release was issued and the report has since been shared widely. The team received commitments from humanitarian and development partners that the findings will be used to inform the COVID-19 response. Detailed discussions with sectoral working groups are planned for early 2021 and will aim to ensure the findings will be used to inform programming.

21 April, 2020, Simplice Kpandji, Chad.
Refugee students teach COVID-19 awareness in city communities

Promising practice from Chad: Community engagement to provide protection to women, children and other people at risk during COVID-19 in N'Djamena

Practice overview

- Specific location: N'Djamena, Chad

- Thematic focus: Community-based protection

- Timeline: Starting in March 2020 (ongoing)

- Primary partner: Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) United States of America

- Objective: Raise awareness among the urban refugee and host populations of COVID-19 risks and prevention measures while supporting the most vulnerable populations.

Context

Like its Sahelian neighbours on its western border, Chad is contending with several challenges, to which the COVID-19 pandemic has only added. In the south-west, the country is battling the Boko Haram insurgency, while on the eastern border with Darfur Region (western Sudan) the country has suffered violent intercommunal tensions. The country is also home to a significant number of displaced people, including more than 365,000 Sudanese refugees, 95,000 refugees from the Central African Republic and nearly 16,000 Nigerian refugees. There is also a large number of Chadian returnees from the Central African Republic and Lake Chad Basin, and more than 330,000 IDPs.[44]

Women and girls face many challenges in Chad. More than 65 per cent of girls in Chad are married before the age of 18 and face significant barriers to realize their sexual and reproductive rights, with only 20 per cent of women having satisfactory access to modern family planning methods.[45] Women's formal participation in government is also at particularly low levels, reflecting a wider environment of structural inequalities. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, as elsewhere in the world, dealt a further blow to the safety of women and girls in Chad. A study conducted in 2020 found that intimate partner violence in the country increased on average by almost 30 per cent due to COVID-19,[46] a figure that likely does not reflect the full scope of the problem due to the shame and stigma associated with disclosing GBV.

Chad's capital, N'Djamena, was the first area affected by COVID-19. The capital hosts more than 7,600 refugees from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Libya, Nigeria and Sudan, who live in urban settings. As schools and universities closed, refugee children and youth were at risk of falling even more behind in their education, a problem that affects girls most acutely. At the same time, there was a large risk of misinformation about COVID-19 and many refugees lacked the knowledge and resources to purchase and use masks, soap, sanitizer and other personal protective equipment (PPE).

Initiative background

In N'Djamena, UNHCR collaborates with its partner JRS to support and maintain a network of community structures that serve as mechanisms for refugees and other vulnerable members of the host community to access information and services at all times, as well as to participate in community-based decision-making. Recognizing the immediate protection risks faced by refugees and vulnerable community members after the declaration of the pandemic in Chad, UNHCR collaborated with JRS to engage with the broader network of community-based structures in N'Djamena to raise awareness and ensure that the groups of refugees at greatest risk, including young children, older people, women and adolescent girls, would be able to access essential information, equipment and services to weather the challenging period of the lockdown and months to follow.

Process and activities

To ensure a strong adherence to the AGD approach, UNHCR and JRS had previously established community structures that are accessible to different ages, nationalities and gender groups in the refugee and host communities in N'Djamena. This includes ensuring the presence of women on all committees, as well as members that reflect the diverse composition of refugee communities. Following the declaration of the pandemic, the community structures collaborated with UNHCR and JRS on a series of activities:

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[44] "Chad – UNHCR Operational Portal" (UNHCR, n.d.). Available from https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/tcd (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[45] "Chad" (UN-Women, n.d.). Available from https://data.unwomen.org/country/chad (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[46] "Analyse rapide de l'impact de la pandémie liée au COVID-19 sur les violences faites aux femmes et aux Filles au Sahel" [Brief analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women and girls in the Sahel] (Ag Dalla Ousmane and Julie L. Snorek, 2020). Available from https://www.jdwsahel.org/2020/07/19/rapport-detude-des-vbg-sous-la-covid-19/. The study covered Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal and it unearthed stark differences in the reported increases between the countries, such as a 5 per cent increase in Burkina Faso versus a 30 per cent increase in Chad. It is important to note that the survey was not a representative sample, which may partially explain the variation, alongside other contextual factors.

- **COVID-19 awareness-raising and production and distribution of PPE:** A key priority was disseminating crucial information on COVID-19 risks and prevention and distributing essential equipment to enable people to protect themselves. UNHCR and JRS established a WhatsApp group to share information rapidly with community leaders and child protection actors on COVID-19 risks and to update them on case numbers and government decisions. The community structures in turn carried out the following activities:

  - Youth refugee students worked to raise awareness of the risks of COVID-19 and to disseminate information on the public health measures people could use to protect themselves from infection.

  - UNHCR worked with the Association des Jeunes Filles Musulmanes [Young Muslim Women's Association], an association of refugee women, providing them with financial support to craft 600 masks that were subsequently distributed to vulnerable older members of the refugee and host communities.

  - UNHCR worked with male and female community leaders throughout all 10 neighbourhoods of N'Djamena to distribute masks, soap, sanitizer and informational flyers to older people and children at risk to enable them to comply with mask regulations and protect themselves against COVID-19.

  - Community leaders led door-to-door awareness-raising campaigns on COVID-19 and protection.

  - A larger information campaign on the dangers of COVID-19 and the importance of compliance with public health measures was launched across the capital.

- **Continuing education for children and youth:** With schools and universities closed during the initial lockdown period, young children, adolescents and youth were unable to attend formal and informal educational spaces. The following activities were therefore carried out:

  - An in-home tutoring system between young refugees and Chadian university students was established to provide informal tutoring to refugees preparing for the national university exams. In 2019, with the support of the Youth Initiative Fund, UNHCR established tutoring groups for urban refugee students who were preparing to sit for national exams. In April 2020, 35 tutors were trained via WhatsApp to prepare them to give sessions tyo their peers. These tutoring sessions began in May 2020 and were held outdoors, with participants wearing masks to prevent the risk of transmission.

  - Colouring books, crayons and PPE were distributed to young children (most of whom were girls) for use during a learning activity for children.

- **Emergency protection services:** The closure of schools, work and safe spaces for women and girls increases the risk of protection incidents, particularly against women and girls and young children. During this time, UNHCR and JRS continued to collaborate with community structures to the greatest extent possible to support protection cases with referrals to relevant resources and protection services. Ensuring equal or greater representation of female members in committees and as focal points was crucial to guaranteeing that protection incidents received follow-up. Activities included:

  - Collaboration with the community structures to identify potential individuals at heightened risk, including people with disabilities and female-headed households, to inform them of the options for services and to offer referrals.

  - Capacity-building with the child protection committees to enable them to respond to issues during COVID-19.

  - Establishment of remote monitoring of children at risk (often with a particular emphasis on girls) through creating a WhatsApp group with child protection committee members to enable them to support vulnerable children.

Results

The project reached a large number of people across different groups (over 5,000 in late 2020) with information about the set of activities in a short period of time. Working with a diverse set of community-based structures and focal points ensured a wider impact for the affected communities. Thanks to the vigilance of focal points and community structures, it was also possible to follow up on urgent protection cases despite the closures and restrictions put in place during the pandemic. For example, JRS was able to continue carrying out its best interest assessments for vulnerable children by switching to remote working. However, considerable challenges were faced during this period, such as unreliable Internet and electricity, which complicated remote work for UNHCR and partner staff. The restrictions on movement made work difficult at times, a challenge that was mitigated by providing additional bicycles and cellular phones to community focal points to enable movement and communication. The hindered access of refugees (particularly children) to digital resources also complicated the delivery of certain educational activities.

Lessons learned

Community-based protection is an essential approach for UNHCR and partners in fragile and humanitarian settings, and like all UNHCR protection work should be guided by the AGD approach. While these community-based groups are often valuable forums for community participation (particularly for women, girls and youth who may lack other formal participation opportunities outside the home), they do not always maintain full functioning during periods of unexpected crises and instability. In the case of N'Djamena, the existence of such community-based groups that reflected the community's gender, age and nationality diversity prior to the pandemic was key to ensuring that UNHCR was able to reach out quickly to the different groups of society when the pandemic hit. This highlights the importance of applying a strong AGD lens when establishing, training and working with community structures to ensure that less visible population groups, whether women, girls, older people or people with disabilities, are accounted for and represented in the structures. Additionally, ensuring that women had strong representation in the committee structures created more space for them to reach vulnerable young girls, adolescents and adult women. Although this is not necessarily a new lesson learned, the swiftness with which the COVID-19 pandemic descended upon most countries was a harsh reminder of the importance of the presence of women and girls in community structures to quickly respond when the unexpected hits.

Tips for replication

- When working with community-based protection structures, it is essential to ensure that they reflect the wider diversity of people of concern to UNHCR within the community and include a minimum of 50 per cent representation of women. This diversity in the structures will enable a faster response to less visible members of the community during times of acute crisis.

- Diverse communication approaches should be used during periods of lockdown, including WhatsApp and other social media messaging,[47] as well as door-to-door awareness-raising for people who are not able to move widely from the home.

- Remote monitoring and assistance tools should be developed to serve as alternatives to traditional protection tools and solutions during COVID-19.

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[47] "Using social media in community-based protection, a guide: January 2021" (UNHCR, 2021). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Using-Social-Media-in-CBP.pdf.

05 May, 2020, Uganda.
Refugee mothers in Uganda amid the COVID-19 outbreak lock down

Emerging practice in Uganda: Gender and diversity focal points

Practice overview:

- Specific location: Throughout the country

- Thematic focus: Gender Equality

- Timeline: Starting in November 2019

- Primary partners: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Alight, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Human Rights Promotion and Awareness Forum and national refugee organizations

- Objective: Ensure that UNHCR and partner staff are equipped to consider the differential needs of women, men, boys and girls of diverse backgrounds, including people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI), and therefore improve the quality of services provided.

Context

Uganda has long been known for its hospitality to refugees and stands as the largest UNHCR refugee operation in Africa, with 1.4 million refugees primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.[48] Uganda has a progressive refugee policy that grants refugees the right to freedom of movement, the right to work and the right to access health care and education. The Government has also made progress towards developing policy and legal frameworks to protect women's rights.[49] However, there are significant

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[48] "Operations: Uganda" (UNHCR, n.d.). Available from https://reporting.unhcr.org/uganda#:~:text=Uganda%20has%20a%20longstanding%20history,South%20Sudan%20since%20July%202016 (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[49] "Uganda" (UN-Women, n.d.). Available from https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/eastern-and-southern-africa/uganda#:~:text=The%20Government%20of%20Uganda%20has,welfare%20and%20interest%20of%20women (accessed on 3 March 2021).

challenges for women, girls and people with diverse SOGI among both refugee and host populations. People with diverse SOGI are at risk of suffering discrimination or harm due to their identity. Gender analyses in Uganda point to the persistence of deeply rooted discriminatory gender norms, showing that women and girls in particular suffer from entrenched inequality in all spheres of life and that men's worth is largely based on their capacity to provide for their families. As a result, women and girls face greater levels of GBV, increased domestic responsibilities and economic inequality.

Initiative background

Recognizing the need to confront the challenges faced by women, girls and people with diverse SOGI, in late 2019, UNHCR Uganda initiated the gender and diversity focal point system. The role of these focal points is to provide technical support on gender equality, including gender mainstreaming and targeted actions, to UNHCR colleagues and senior management and partners in a number of areas. This includes, but is not limited to, programming, information-sharing, capacity-building, advocacy and awareness-raising. The focal points are critical resources in the field operations to ensure that UNHCR's updated commitments to women and girls in its AGD Policy (2018) are implemented, and that safe spaces are created for people with diverse SOGI in an otherwise hostile environment. Each UNHCR sub-office in Uganda nominated two focal points, one main and one alternate. In December 2019, a total of 13 focal points attended a two-day training workshop in Kampala where sessions were facilitated by UNHCR Kampala and field-based staff, Alight, OHCHR, UN-Women, national human rights non-governmental organizations and refugee groups. During and after the workshop, the focal points developed workplans for their sub-offices, including activities to work towards implementing the commitments to women and girls and the protection of refugees with diverse SOGI.

Process and activities

The purpose of setting up the gender and diversity focal point system is to ensure safety and dignity, meaningful access, accessible accountability mechanisms and empowerment of women, girls and people with diverse SOGI. It also aims to equip UNHCR and partner staff working in the field with the necessary skills to prevent doing unintended harm.

- **Prioritize safety and dignity and a do no harm approach:** National and international organizations working on gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights were closely involved in training the focal points to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out their work effectively and safely, without causing harm. Refugees with diverse SOGI were invited to speak about their experiences and discuss the "dos and don'ts" of working with refugees with diverse SOGI.

- **Meaningful access:** As stated previously, the nomination of well-trained gender and diversity focal points aims to ensure meaningful access for women, men, girls and boys with diverse backgrounds, including people with diverse SOGI, while also increasing the capacity to identify barriers to access and effectively address them.

- **Accountability:** In the future, the focal points will, among other things, look at ways to make existing accountability mechanisms more accessible, safe and appropriate for people from diverse groups. They are also the focal points for refugees with diverse SOGI to provide feedback on services and share their needs and priorities in a way that is confidential, safe and comfortable for them.

- **Empowerment:** One of the focal points' tasks is to help empower women and girls specifically, in line with the commitments to women and girls. This is one of the objectives of their workplans, and all focal points have included activities to increase the number of women in leadership structures. Community-based organizations working on SOGI issues were empowered through their attendance at the training and direct engagement with UNHCR field staff.

Results

Although the impact of a gender and diversity focal point system is yet to be assessed, it is expected to equip staff with the necessary skills and expertise to effectively and adequately mainstream gender into UNHCR and partner service delivery, while also raising awareness about the importance of gender transformative action. It is hoped that it will widen the network of allies and leverage greater support from UNHCR and partner field teams.

Lessons learned

As is often the case in humanitarian settings, there is limited technical expertise on gender equality in the Uganda operation, and there have been few coordinated efforts to incorporate gender in humanitarian service delivery. Through the establishment of the gender and diversity focal point system, UNHCR Uganda intends to increase the capacity of staff to mainstream gender and undertake targeted actions in their respective offices. This will help to increase the accessibility of services among diverse groups of people of concern to UNHCR. Effectively mainstreaming gender in service delivery and providing adequate protection to refugees with diverse SOGI is challenging. Although senior managers provided support, there were several concerns that field-based staff would find themselves taking on another responsibility in addition to their already heavy workload, while also facing limited resources to fulfil their roles. Effectively implementing workplan activities and monitoring their implementation was a further challenge due to limited staffing capacity on gender and community-based protection at the Kampala office as well as COVID-19-related complications. Although positive about the workshop content and diversity of presentations from different organizations, focal points fed back that a lot of content was covered in a short amount of time, leaving little time for discussion and reflection. It was therefore recommended that the focal point training be extended or supplemented with an additional session to address this. The need for more capacity-building was also identified as an issue to be addressed.

Tips for replication

- National and local organizations and associations involved in SOGI issues should be closely involved in identifying needs and priorities, designing inclusive programming and implementing any initiatives relating to SOGI issues, as they are able to best advise on appropriate and respectful language and approaches when engaging with people with diverse SOGI.

- When working on such sensitive subject matter, it is crucial to proceed cautiously to avoid harm rather than seek a quick fix to a complex problem. It is important to be aware of the potential risks to staff who choose to work on SOGI issues in settings where these remain highly controversial, ensuring that staff have options in case they feel their safety is threatened.

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February, 2018, Rwanda.
The school striving to give Burundian girls an education

Case study from Rwanda: Safe rooms for girls in schools

Practice overview

- Specific location: Throughout the country

- Thematic focus: Education and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

- Timeline: Starting in 2016, ongoing

- Primary partners: Government of Rwanda, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Rwanda and Word Vision Rwanda (in refugee schools)

- Objective: Improve girls' access to education by providing dignified and safe menstrual hygiene management services in schools.

Context

Since the 1990s, Rwanda has generously hosted refugees, primarily from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other African nations.[50] In the years since its bloody civil war, Rwanda has enjoyed greater stability, enabling it to make admirable progress in gender equality. The World Economic Forum ranked Rwanda among the top 10 most gender-equal countries globally.[51] Rwanda has received considerable praise for ensuring a high representation of women in government and in the labour force. Despite this laudable progress, many of these gains are less salient for women and girls in less socially and economically advantaged echelons of society, including refugee populations. Although women and girls may have gained opportunities in education, employment and political participation, in many cases, gender norms remain rigid at the family and community levels. Adolescent girls in particular (as is the case in so many other settings worldwide) face particular disadvantages and challenges in realizing their rights in education, participation and health, often facing these barriers at the community level.[52]

Education is central to adolescent girls' advancement, protection and well-being, a fact that the Government of Rwanda has recognized.[53] However, many adolescent girls at primary, secondary and Technical and Vocational Education and Training schools face barriers to attend school due to their menstrual periods, as the fear of stigmatization around menstruation along with the lack of adequate facilities in schools prevent them from managing their periods in a dignified and confidential way. In fact, this is one of the causes of high dropout and absenteeism rates among girls. According to World Bank statistics, at least 20 per cent of girls of menstruating age in Rwanda, particularly in rural areas, miss up to 50 days of school per year either because they cannot afford sanitary pads or due to other menstruation-related issues. Female students have stated that they have nowhere to comfortably change materials and clothing during their periods, or that there is no space for them to go if they would like to lay down and rest when experiencing painful menstrual symptoms during school. Many girls also cannot afford disposable sanitary pads and instead reuse cloth pads that require rewashing. Many of these girls may therefore choose to remain at home during their periods as there are no private spaces in schools where they can launder their reusable pads, particularly in situations with inadequate school WASH facilities.

Initiative background

To mitigate the challenge of inadequate infrastructure and sanitary facilities, in May 2014, the Ministry of Education developed the school health minimum package to provide guidance on the minimum conditions required for providing a healthy schooling environment for children, teachers and other staff. However, these guidelines did not provide adequate guidance for ensuring the health of girls in schools. In 2018, the Ministry of Education therefore introduced guidelines on safe rooms for girls in schools. The aim is to support the establishment of safe rooms for girls in public and private schools so that they can comfortably attend school during their menstrual periods. These safe rooms aim to provide girls with access to adequate sanitary supplies (such as disposable sanitary pads) and infrastructure (toilet facilities) in a private space just for girls. As part of a wider government menstrual hygiene management initiative in Rwanda, UNHCR supports its partners ADRA and World Vision in 15 schools that are attended by both refugees and Rwandan nationals together. The initiative is community-based and involves the support of parent-teacher committees (which involve parents, senior students and model female teachers who provide guidance and support to girls during the periods) in helping to manage the safe rooms.

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[50] "Information on refugees in Rwanda" (UNHCR, n.d.). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/rw/refugees (accessed on 3 March 2021).
[51] However, Rwanda dropped out of the top five after the 2017 report. See "Global Gender Gap Report 2020" (World Economic Forum, 2020). Available from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.
[52] See, for example, "Rwanda ranks in the top 5 for gender equity. Do its teen girls agree?" (Gregory Warner, 2018). Available from https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/01/10/577018509/rwanda-ranks-in-the-top-5-for-gender-equity-do-its-teen-girls-agree.
[53] According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 98 per cent of children are enrolled in school in Rwanda, but only 71 per cent complete their primary education. See "Rwanda: Education" (UNICEF, n.d.). Available from https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/education (accessed on 3 March 2021).

Process and activities

Safe rooms for girls in schools where refugees and nationals attend alongside one another are equipped by UNHCR in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda and the schools. These spaces have been designed and established in a way that respects privacy and serves girls in need without any discrimination. The government guidelines stipulate that the rooms should be in a safe space that can be securely locked and should provide minimum services, including rooms for changing, a bathroom, a bedroom and a counselling space, in addition to necessary menstrual hygiene management materials including clothes and sanitary pads. The safe rooms also engage facilitators who receive girls, register them, show them the facilities and ensure they feel comfortable and safe in the space. UNHCR's partners collaborate with the 15 schools to build the capacity of the facilitators and monitor the activities of the safe rooms. The school administration and sectoral and district education authorities provide additional monitoring of the safe rooms. Girls also have the opportunity to attend counselling sessions and receive information on GBV services provided by partners in the area.

Lessons learned

Menstruation remains a largely taboo topic in Rwanda, which means that any such intervention requires sensitivity and adjustment. Although the initiative has not yet been formally evaluated, anecdotal monitoring suggests that there is a positive relationship between the availability of safe rooms and girls' school attendance. However, the initiative has not been without its challenges. For example, ensuring the complete privacy of the rooms can prove difficult, especially as some girls felt embarrassed when seen going to the rooms by their classmates, as they believed this advertised the fact that they were menstruating. This demonstrates the importance of consulting with girls to ensure they are comfortable using the services.

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26 November, 2019, Malawi.
View of the Dzaleka refugee camp

Emerging practice from Malawi: Supporting LGBTIQ+ individuals in Lilongwe and the Dzaleka refugee camp

- Specific location: Dzaleka refugee camp

- Thematic focus: Gender equality and community-based protection

- Timeline: 2018, ongoing

- Primary partners: Plan International Malawi, JRS, Centre for the Development of People, Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation and Churches Action in Relief and Development

- Objective: To ensure equitable access to essential services for LGBTIQ+ people and to enhance the capacity of service providers to provide support to LGBTIQ+ people

Context

Malawi has enjoyed relative stability in recent years, which has made it a natural destination for refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and more recently Mozambique. UNHCR Malawi works primarily in the Dzaleka refugee camp near the capital of Lilongwe, where there were more than 45,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in August 2020.[54] LGBTIQ+ individuals in the Dzaleka refugee camp, like their cohorts throughout the country, are at risk of discrimination and violence. This forces many to conceal their SOGI, limiting the ability of humanitarian actors to identify them, understand their protection needs and extend the services that they require. As a result, their protection and basic needs often go unmet and they have limited access to fair refugee status determination, psychosocial support, inclusive health services (including information on sexual and reproductive health) and economic empowerment projects. One of the reasons for the lack of LGBTIQ+-inclusive services is a significant knowledge gap among service providers regarding the protection concerns and specific needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Furthermore, many LGBTIQ+ individuals lack awareness of their rights, the legal environment in Malawi and how they can keep themselves safe and seek support in the case of violations.

Initiative background

To counter discriminatory attitudes against LGBTIQ+ individuals and build the capacity of service providers to make their services more LGBTIQ+-friendly, UNHCR has carried out consultations with experts and LGBTIQ+ community members on the issue of mainstreaming LGBTIQ+ considerations into projects. The project was initiated in both the Dzaleka refugee camp and urban areas of the capital Lilongwe, with a focus on ensuring equitable access to basic services and enhancing the knowledge and capacity of service providers to help protect LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Process and activities

Malawi initiated a series of activities focused around (a) service provision to LGBTIQ+ individuals and awareness-raising and (b) capacity-building of stakeholders and service providers. Such activities included:

- identification of two safe shelters to accommodate LGBTIQ+ individuals in a situation of crisis or in need of safe temporary housing;

- an orientation programme for LGBTIQ+ individuals in the camp and safe houses, aimed at raising their awareness on the procedures and guidelines for reporting cases of harassment and abuse and assessing the safeguarding risks that should be addressed;

- provision of specialized counselling sessions for LGBTIQ+ individuals, as well as awareness-raising on their rights, COVID-19, HIV and sexually transmitted infections;

- training of camp leadership to enable them to support LGBTIQ+ individuals' access to services;

- training of service providers on mainstreaming the needs of LGBTIQ+ individuals in their activities and addressing access barriers to services that LGBTIQ+ individuals face.

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[54] "UNHCR Malawi factsheet, August 2020" (UNHCR, 2020). Available from
https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Malawi%20Factsheet%20August%202020.pdf.

Indicative results

The project's activities have been hindered by restrictions put in place to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, such as limitations placed on gatherings. Despite this, UNHCR has managed to achieve several initial results. Firstly, it has made efforts to determine the refugee status of those who have declared their sexual orientation and/or gender identity as a reason for persecution. UNHCR has also reached a total of 54 LGBTIQ+ individuals thus far with training sessions, awareness-raising activities and psychosocial support. UNHCR and its partners continue to support safe spaces, while discussions are under way to engage the group in livelihoods activities.

Lessons learned

LGBTIQ+ issues are extremely sensitive and must be approached with caution. Given the potential risks to individuals' safety, a do no harm approach should be adopted in the running of safe shelters. It was essential to prioritize the safety of individuals by ensuring the availability of two safe shelters to provide temporary housing to LGBTIQ+ people at particularly acute risk while also carrying out other activities such as awareness-raising among community leaders and training sessions and engagement with LGBTIQ+ individuals. UNHCR and partners hold regular meetings with LGBTIQ+ refugees housed in the shelters, who are provided with basic services and information. These meetings seek to understand their concerns and to obtain and incorporate their feedback on the safe shelters in which they are housed. UNHCR also holds regular meetings to assess whether LGBTIQ+ refugees are currently part of formal or informal peer support groups, and how humanitarian actors can support LGBTIQ+ refugees in strengthening their protective peer networks.

Tips for replicability

- Inadequate knowledge and attitudes among service providers can be a significant barrier to LGBTIQ+ individuals' access to services, and it is crucial to provide training and awareness-raising for service providers to improve that access.

- The consultative process and continuous dialogue with LGBTIQ+ people are a critical component of the strategy and therefore need to be emphasized and promoted as a good practice. As mentioned above, working with national and/or local LGBTIQ+ organizations or associations is essential, to better understand needs, create safe and effective referral pathways, and avoid causing unintended harm.

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27 February, 2020, Kenya.
Mentorship programmes helps keep refugee girls in school

Promising practice from Kenya: Kenya Equity in Education Project

- Specific locations: Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps

- Thematic focus: Education

- Timeline: 2017–2022 (ongoing)

- Primary partners: World University Service of Canada and Windle International Kenya

- Objective: To increase the enrolment and performance of marginalized refugee and local girls in primary education.

Context

Bordering several countries affected by long-standing instability, Kenya hosts one of the largest populations of displaced people in sub-Saharan Africa. As at July 2020, the country was hosting more than 494,000 refugees, more than 50 per cent of whom originate from Somalia, and nearly 25 per cent from South Sudan.[55] Many of these refugees reside in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, respectively, located in remote arid and semi-arid land areas in north-western and eastern Kenya. Economic growth and social progress have also been slow to reach Kenyan communities living in these areas, resulting in extreme poverty, low literacy levels and deeply entrenched conservative views towards girls' and women's education. As at July 2020, there were more than 196,000 refugees in the Kakuma refugee camp and the nearby Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement,[56] nearly 158,000 of whom were South Sudanese refugees. A large portion of the population are of school age, including many children repatriated from Dadaab camps and currently living with families, relatives and friends in Kakuma but not officially enrolled in schools. Dadaab's refugee population is approximately 217,000, among which more than 35 per cent are youth.[57] In this context, the Kenya Equity in Education Project (KEEP) seeks to improve the learning outcomes of refugee and host-community girls through support provided at the individual, school and community levels.

Background

Funded through the UK aid initiative "Girls' Education Challenge", KEEP is now in its second five-year iteration spanning from 2017–2022. The vision of KEEP II is to create improved learning opportunities and socioeconomic outcomes for more than 20,000 marginalized girls from Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, as well as surrounding vulnerable host communities. All the participants in KEEP II meet the "highly marginalized" criteria developed by the partners together with the UNHCR protection team, and include girls who face significant barriers to education due to poverty, disability, negative sociocultural attitudes, early marriage and/or early pregnancy, significant household burdens and a lack of family support. The KEEP II theory of change is based on the premise that ideal conditions for learning are created by mutually supportive relationships between the female students, the school and the home. When girl students are empowered, they become better equipped to advocate for themselves and their ambitions. Additionally, when parents and caregivers are engaged in the educational process, schools are held more accountable for delivering high-quality education. When teaching quality improves, a more supportive environment for girls' learning is created in the classroom and in schools. Lastly, when school Boards of Management, parents' associations, and local and national education authorities are involved in each of these processes, gains are likely to be institutionalized and outlast project timelines.

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[55] "Kenya figures at a glance" (UNHCR Kenya, 2020). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/ke/figures-at-a-glance.
[56] See "Kakuma and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement" (UNHCR Kenya, 2020). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/ke/kakuma-refugee-camp#:~:text=The%20camp%20is%20located%20on,the%20end%20of%20July%202020.
[57] The population of Dadaab is decreasing as a result of a Kenyan Government call to fast-track repatriation of the Somali refugee population. See "Kenya – Registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of 30th June 2020" (UNHCR, 2020). Available from https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/07/Kenya-Infographics-30-June-2020.pdf.

Processes and activities

KEEP II is active in 34 schools in Kakuma (including 17 host community schools and 17 UNHCR refugee schools) and 50 schools in Dadaab (including 22 host community schools and 28 UNHCR refugee schools). The project includes the following major components:

- **Community engagement to advocate for girls' education:** Community engagement is an important factor in creating successful remedial learning and returning girls to school. Before remedial classes are offered, it was imperative to secure buy-in from local leaders. Community mobilizers[58] were identified with input from local stakeholders to monitor progress, track potentially at-risk girls and those prone to dropout, conduct household follow-up if needed, and serve as the link between the remedial interventions and the community. The community mobilizers' role was to increase support for girls' education and ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

- **Mentorship:** Ongoing mentorship support is provided to remedial teachers, with coaches visiting and observing their sessions, providing feedback on mastery of content, interactive teaching and learning, lesson-planning and organization, and pedagogy. The continuous mentorship and coaching components are often key factors in overall programme effectiveness and learning outcomes. Furthermore, one-day information sessions are offered to parents to give them the opportunity to engage in dialogue with teachers and understand the challenges affecting girls' attendance and performance in remedial classes, as well as in school.

- **Life-skills sessions for girls:** KEEP II selects girls from all the KEEP II-supported schools to attend its five-day life-skills camps designed to improve their resilience to community challenges. The camps are held twice annually during the April and August school holidays in boarding secondary schools in Kakuma and Garissa.

Results

Since its inception in 2017, KEEP II has produced the following positive results:

- Varying degrees of positive attitudinal change among stakeholders in intervention communities regarding girls' ability to perform well at school and the value of educating girls.

- An increase in the number of girls in schools sitting Kenya Certificate of Primary Education exams and scoring higher than 200 marks, which has earned these girls greater recognition in their communities.

- An increase in confidence among the girls, with more girls believing that they can perform as well as boys in school. However, this is mixed with increased frustration as girls are aware of how they are more constrained by cultural norms, bias, neglect and lack of resources.

- Evidence that provision of remedial education, monitoring/follow-up of individual girls and scholarships for girls can rapidly improve girls' attendance, retention and performance in school.

- A cohort of 310 (in phase one) and 170 (in phase two, which is currently ongoing) girls with scholarships progressing through secondary school in host and refugee communities, and who can potentially, upon graduation, become role models to other girls in their communities.

- A total **of 700 teachers who have increased their knowledge of large class management, and counselling, child protection and basic pedagogy skills.**

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[58] KEEP has hired local youth in the host and refugee camps to act as community mobilizers and as a link between the community, schools and the project. They reside in the same communities where the girls come from, understand the issues girls face and easily trace them to their homes.

- **Over 500 parent-teacher associations and Boards of Management members demonstrating greater understan**ding of the importance of and barriers to girls' education, and their role in promoting and enabling education for their girls.

Lessons learned

Both KEEP I and II placed a strategic focus on adolescent girls, who have been shown to be at a higher disadvantage than their male cohorts and adult women across the board. In Kenya, adolescent girls face the highest risk of school dropout when transitioning from the primary to the secondary education level. A heightened awareness of the specific times at which girls are most vulnerable to dropout and the risks they face are critical to the success of the intervention. KEEP II has had the advantage of building on lessons from KEEP I, for example, the extent to which extreme poverty im peded families from being able to send their children to school. When research found that girls from more food-secure households performed better than girls from food-insecure households, the project incorporated cash grants into the remedial programme, enabling parents to continue sending girls to school as basic household needs were met. Equally as important to the intervention's success was its sensitivity to girls' concerns and anxieties. For example, the project offered key support to address both poor academic performance and low levels of community support for girls' education by holding small group remedial sessions with low-achieving or at-risk girls during the weekend. These sessions were built on discretion and understanding so that the girls attending them did not feel stigmatized for taking remedial lessons and could instead build confidence in themselves and their ability to perform.

Tips for replication

- Many complex factors hinder girls' access to education. This intervention has sought to address the problem from multiple angles, including parents and caregivers, the schooling system, and community leaders and stakeholders. This has enabled the project to demonstrate results over time.

- Working to build girls' confidence and life skills alongside traditional academic skills is important to long-term success and girls' well-being.

- It is critical to focus on capacity-building of teachers to enable them to identify girls who require additional support and to tailor their teaching accordingly. Capacity-building should not be limited to training sessions – it must also include classroom observations and targeted support for teachers to help them keep students engaged. Teachers are also a critical resource in identifying girls who are at risk of dropout and alerting community engagement officers.

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15 October, 2019, Kenya.
Somali refugee women make traditional Somali products in Dadaab

Case study from Kenya: Increasing access to formal justice for women and girls in Dadaab

- Specific location: Dadaab refugee camp

- Thematic focus: Community-based protection and GBV

- Timeline: 2015–2021 (ongoing)

- Primary partners: The Judiciary of Kenya and the Refugee Consortium of Kenya

- Objective: To increase access to fair, formal justice mechanisms for women, girls and other individuals at heightened risk.

Context

In humanitarian settings, providing access to legal support to women and girls – and particularly GBV survivors – is an especially challenging aspect of the GBV response and of efforts to ensure gender equality for all women and girls. In Dadaab, residents often resort to traditional justice mechanisms to resolve disputes and to seek recourse when their rights are violated. However, as observed in many other contexts, traditional justice systems and processes uphold and are dominated by patriarchal norms, and women's agency and voices are often lost in them. Women who experience discrimination, intimate partner violence, denial of resources and opportunities such as inequitable inheritance, and other forms of GBV – as well as broader gender discrimination – are therefore disadvantaged by traditional mediation. Residents have had the option of Kadhis' courts that under Kenyan law hold jurisdiction over Islamic law relating to personal status, marriage, divorce or inheritance. Kadhis' courts are established under the Kenyan constitution and seek to provide an option to Muslims who wish to go through this system rather than through the magistrate, to which it is complementary.[59] However, those who wish to access formal justice systems in the form of the magistrate must spend time and money on travelling to Garissa, the nearest large city to Dadaab.

Background

Recognizing these barriers to fair legal support for women and girls, UNHCR worked in partnership with the Kenyan Judiciary to facilitate monthly mobile courts in Dadaab for a number of years prior to 2020. These mobile courts regularly brought in magistrates from Garissa to provide legal services to refugees in Dadaab and to members of the surrounding host communities who experience similar difficulties accessing legal support and formal justice systems. However, the rapid population growth in Dadaab, growing demand for judicial services – including the services of the Kadhi's court set up in the camp – and the difficulty of sustaining the cost of regular mobile visits led UNHCR to pinpoint the need for a longer-term solution for residents of Dadaab (particularly women and girls) to seek justice in a safe and dignified manner. Additionally, the periodic nature of the mobile court visits delayed the handling of certain cases, compelling the community to resort to traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. The newly operationalized permanent court in Dadaab aims to provide a space in which residents can resolve their disputes through the Kenyan formal justice system rather than through long-standing traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, which are often marred by patriarchy, inequality and gender discrimination. The permanent court in the camp also aims to eliminate the need for Dadaab residents to travel to Garissa for proceedings and hearings. This permanent court is representative of UNHCR and partners' broader efforts to improve access to justice and legal support in Dadaab, including legal counselling, legal clinics in the camps and awareness-raising on legal rights in the community.

Processes and activities

UNHCR along with the Kenyan Judiciary and a number of partners working in Dadaab supported the construction of a permanent court building in Dadaab between 2015 and 2017. The court became fully operational in October 2020 when it was granted official status, a magistrate and other judicial staff. The Kadhi and the magistrate are now located on the same premises, and they participate in the legal coordination mechanisms along with UNHCR. Since the court's opening, both the Kadhi's and the magistrate's courts, in collaboration with UNHCR's access-to-justice partner, have been working on legal awareness campaigns in Dadaab to inform residents of their options should they wish to seek support.

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[59] Per the Kenyan legal framework, Kadhis' courts cannot contravene Kenyan law. They act as halfway points between Kenyan law and Islamic sharia law. For more information on Kadhis' courts in the Kenyan justice system, see "The kadhis' courts in Kenya: Towards enhancing access to justice for Muslim women" (Kevin Wanyonyi, 2016). Available from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306263431_The_Kadhis'_Courts_in_Kenya_Towards_Enhancing_Access_to_Justice_for_Muslim_Women.

In its efforts to support the operationality of the court, UNHCR and its partners work to ensure adherence to key protection principles. Private in-chamber hearings (between the judge and the concerned parties) are to be carried out for matters relating to GBV, other forms of violence, and cases involving children per Kenyan law to preserve safety, privacy and dignity. The court premises include secure , private magistrates' chambers for this purpose and UNHCR and its partners will monitor the courts to ensure adherence to these principles. All GBV and child protection cases are automatically held in private chambers, and other disputes (such as around inheritance) can be carried out privately upon the request of the parties. Pre- and post-trial counselling is provided to women and girls and other people at risk of marginalization, in addition to transport to and from the court to help women and girls access the courts.

To ensure accountability, a court users' committee has been set up in Dadaab, which will serve as an accountability and coordination mechanism to strengthen the administration of justice, support the functions of the court, provide an avenue for addressing stakeholder concerns, ensure public participation and engagement and maintain positive relations between stakeholders. UNHCR and the judiciary (including representation from the Kadhi's court), the Refugee Affairs Secretariat, the sub-county administration, partners, law enforcement and members of the public sit on this committee. UNHCR and its partners also intend to carry out capacity-building among judicial officials on international and refugee law, child protection, AGD considerations and GBV.

Lessons learned

Importantly, increasing access to formal justice is not a guarantee that women's rights will always be upheld in practice, even when they are guaranteed on paper, nor does the availability of formal justice mean that community members will abandon traditional systems that tend to uphold harmful gender norms. It can take time to build trust in more formal justice systems, particularly in communities where traditional mechanisms are preferred by many and where women and girls may not trust that their rights will be upheld by formal systems.[60] It is therefore important to take a measured approach to prevent unintended harm and to ensure that women and girls have clear information on their different options for accessing justice.

The sustained presence of these courts in Dadaab is expected to ensure that refugee and host communities can freely exercise their legal rights under Kenyan law regardless of AGD status, and to promote greater respect for the rule of law and human rights. In the brief time that the court has been operational, it has ruled on child protection cases in ways that were seen as favourable to women. Initial community feedback from Dadaab suggests the court is increasingly seen as a viable channel for women to seek recourse. In the long term, it is expected that the permanent court will provide access to justice for women and girls, particularly given Kenya's signature to international protocols around gender equality. To achieve this objective, the court will work towards dealing with GBV cases in a manner that conforms to the principles of justice enshrined in the Kenyan legal system, thereby ensuring greater fairness to women and girl survivors whose interests are so often lost within traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

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[60] For an analysis of the challenges of traditional mechanisms for GBV survivors, see "Whose justice, whose alternative?: Locating women's voice and agency in alternative dispute resolution responses to intimate partner violence" (Brian Heilman et al., 2016). Available from https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ICRW-Mediation-Paper-FINAL.PDF.

17 November, 2020, Nigeria.
Internally displaced at Bakassi IDP camp, Maiduguri.

4

CLOSING REMARKS: SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICA

When tackling gender equality in fragile and humanitarian settings, progress can be frustratingly slow, and gains can be seemingly lost by factors outside our control. In this report, we have highlighted examples of how UNHCR and partners have sought to uphold UNHCR's foundational commitments to women and girls despite operating in difficult circumstances that present many unexpected challenges. From these experiences, some broader considerations can be drawn:

- **Gender equality is everyone's responsibility:** Within UNHCR and many other humanitarian organizations, there is often a tendency to conflate work to combat GBV and to advance gender equality. An unfortunate consequence of this is the assumption that responsibility for gender equality lies solely with protection units or gender focal points when these are present in operations. Yet, as the diverse examples in this report have demonstrated, gender equality is transversal and essential in all sectors. While it is very important that we understand and acknowledge the causal relationship between gender inequality and GBV in humanitarian work, it is crucial to bear in mind that advancing gender equality is incumbent on all sectors of humanitarian action, and on every single member of the organization. Ideally, organizations should ensure the availability of technical gender staff who can provide sustained support to other staff and partners in order to fulfil the commitments to gender equality.

- **Committed leadership and adequate resource allocation are critical to advancing gender equality within UNHCR:** UNHCR has developed a solid policy architecture for gender equality, most importantly through the AGD approach and the accompanying tools. However, upholding these policies requires both committed leadership within country operations to ensure these policies and the necessary financial, time and human resources to fulfil the gender equality commitments. Leadership plays a significant role in modelling commitments to gender equality, finding ways to increase the participation of women aid workers and maintaining a nurturing environment for them, and seeking out and mobilizing resources for gender equality. Operations in which the leadership has acknowledged the barriers to gender equality and are continuously working with their teams to confront these barriers have shown great progress in quality programming.

- **Particularly in fragile and emergency settings, there is a strong need to identify concrete, targeted actions for gender equality, keeping in mind longer-term efforts to tackle structural gender inequality:** Especially in emergency settings, humanitarian actors may feel discouraged by structural challenges that feel insurmountable. In fragile humanitarian settings, it is therefore critical to break down larger efforts into a series of concrete actions that can be taken to advance gender equality. It bears stressing that approaching challenging situations with a strong gender equality approach is in fact crucial for providing effective protection and paving the way for more sustainable long-term work. UNHCR strongly recommends adopting a contextualized, two-pronged approach of integrating gender equality considerations across *all* work, while also undertaking targeted actions. While it is important not to set aside long-term ambitions for tackling structural gender equality, in times of emergency it remains critical to continue striving for gender equality within the constraints that the emergency situation imposes. This remains highly relevant as African operations in 2021 and the coming years will continue to tackle the primary and secondary consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Women's and girls' participation and leadership should be prioritized in all settings:** Despite what we know about the linkages between meaningful women's participation and more effective humanitarian assistance and longer-term prospects for peace, research from fragile and humanitarian settings continues to demonstrate that women and girls' leadership is frequently shelved or deprioritized. In line with previous research, we stress the importance of prioritizing women's participation at all levels of society. Working with local women within different spheres of participation, including informal community-based associations, formal women's organizations, and formalized women's leadership structures at national or regional levels, is crucial to becoming more accountable to women and girls.

- **Collaboration with and (empowerment of) local women's organizations must be prioritized:** Linked to the critical importance of participation, UNHCR should seek to actively collaborate with women-led organizations in humanitarian settings, as they are critical first responders and have the potential to ensure greater accountability to women and girls. Partnerships with local women-led organizations should also emphasize long-term empowerment and capacity-building.

- **Intersectional challenges faced by women and girls need to be kept in mind:** UNHCR's AGD approach requires us to always uphold our commitments to women and girls, while also bearing in mind other aspects that affect the experiences of individuals such as age, diversity status, and economic and social status. As we have seen with these examples, it is crucial to conduct a strong analysis of the problem and its impact on women and girls to enable us to take these complex factors into account in our interventions. Particularly in areas that have the advantage of relative stability, it is useful to tackle complex, gendered problems from multiple angles.

ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF UNHCR METHODOLOGY FOR GATHERING PROMISING PRACTICES

	Step	Brief description
1	**Identification and submission of practices and/or case studies**	An initial effort to gather potential practices that can be carried out in several ways, including technical field missions, surveys, self-assessments, formal documentation exercises such as independent evaluations, programme reports, and formal calls/requests to Regional Bureaus and country programmes.
2	**Screening of promising practices, emerging practices and case studies**	The process of reviewing potential practices identified in Step 1 on the basis of *Time* (whether it was implemented in the past three years, with some flexibility), *Adherence* to minimum standards of protection, and the *Results* of the activity as demonstrated by evidence such as baseline and endline evaluations.
3	**Review and analysis**	A two-step analysis of practices identified in Step 2, with a self-assessment by the field operation and a review by the primary technical unit. This step also includes participatory primary and secondary data collection (including stakeholders, partners and persons of concern to UNHCR) and analysis of these findings.
4	**Documentation**	Documenting practices with a description of the project and the context, an overview of evidence-based outcomes, and an analysis of the factors that enabled or inhibited their achievement.
5	**Peer review of emerging and promising practices**	To ensure the quality and suitability of the content, practices are reviewed by other UNHCR colleagues, including but not limited to technical staff in UNHCR and Bureaus, operational staff, and representatives from other partners.
6	**Dissemination**	Wide sharing of the practices through various channels, including in a final report that is published on UNHCR's website.