WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS ROLE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN PALESTINE: BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

UN WOMEN

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBOs — Community-based organizations
CSOs — Civil society organizations
FGDs — Focus Group Discussions
GAM — Gender with Age Marker
GBV — Gender-based violence
GEEWG — Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women and Girls
HC — Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT — Humanitarian Country Team
HGG — Humanitarian Gender Group
HNO — Humanitarian Needs Overview
HPC — Humanitarian Program Cycle
HRP — Humanitarian Response Plan
HPF — Humanitarian Pooled Fund
IASC — Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICCG — Inter-Cluster Coordination Group
KI — Key Informant
LEAD — Women Leadership, Empowerment, Access, and Protection in Crisis Response
LGBTI — Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
MHPSS — Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NGOs — Non-governmental organizations
OCHA — United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD — Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
oPt — Occupied Palestinian Territories
PCBS — Palestine Central Bureau Statistics
PNGO — Palestinian NGOs Network
PSEA — Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RC — Resident Coordinator
TORs — Terms of Reference
UNRWA — United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees
UN Women — The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WASH — Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WLOs — Women-led organizations
WROs — Women's rights organizations
WPHF — Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Capacity strengthening: A deliberate process that supports the ability of organizations and networks to institutionalize new or improved systems and structures, and individuals and groups to acquire or improve knowledge, skills or attitudes, which are necessary to function effectively, achieve goals and work towards sustainability and self-reliance.[1]

Humanitarian coordination: Humanitarian coordination is the process where humanitarian actors come together to ensure a coherent and principled response to emergencies with the aim of assisting people when they are most in need of relief or protection. Humanitarian coordination takes place in the context of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, an operational framework setting out the sequence of actions for the planning, management, delivery and monitoring of collective humanitarian responses.[2]

Humanitarian funding: Direct funding from donors or donations to local and national actors for humanitarian purposes or funding, channeled through a pooled fund that is directly accessed by local and national actors or to a single international aid organization—including a federated/membership organization— that reaches a local or national actor directly from that one intermediary (single intermediary).[3]

Institutional capacity strengthening: In the context of the Grand Bargain, institutional capacity strengthening means increasing and supporting preparedness, response and coordination capacities, especially in fragile contexts and where communities are vulnerable to armed conflicts, disasters, recurrent outbreaks and the effects of climate change.[4]

Local and national actors: Organizations engaged in relief that are headquartered and operating in their own aid recipient country and which are not affiliated to an international NGO.[5]

Localization: Despite the lack of an agreed definition of localization in the context of the Grand Bargain, the overall objective of localization has been defined by the workstream co-conveners (Switzerland and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) as ensuring access for all and building on the strengths of local actors in fast, quality, impactful and sustainable humanitarian assistance that is efficient, effective and fit for purpose.[6]

BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

Israel has for all but six months of its 73-year history, maintained military rule over some portion of the Palestinian population.[7] Today a protracted crisis continues to face women, men, boys and girls in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), driven by Israel's military occupation (which includes a strict closure regime of the Gaza Strip), violations of international law, ongoing internal Palestinian political divisions and regular escalations of hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups.[8]

UN human rights experts recently observed that the occupation was "more embedded than ever" with the "living conditions of the Palestinians, let alone their political future, [having] become even more precarious".[9] One result has been that "unemployment remained stubbornly high in 2021" with the unemployment rate at 26.4 per cent in the second quarter of 2021 (16.9 per cent in the West Bank and 44.7 per cent in Gaza). The World Bank estimates that the May 2021 conflict pushed poverty in Gaza to 59.3 per cent; a 16.3 percentage point increase above the most recent available official data from 2016 -2017.[10]

Continued restrictions on the freedom of movement in the oPt obstruct the movement of Palestinians between the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip and abroad. Roughly 593 Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks continue to effectively obstruct Palestinians' access to rights and services, including health, education and work. The ability of Palestinians to leave Gaza continues to be severely impaired, to a much greater degree following the May 2021 escalation of hostilities.[11] While they experience unique contexts and face different sets of developmental challenges, both the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem, also face significant humanitarian challenges.

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, OCHA reports that in 2021 alone 68 Palestinians were killed and nearly 14,000 injured by Israeli forces.[12] The UN

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 has highlighted that "recent trends on the ground are getting worse, not better", reporting that the Israeli settlement population is approaching 700,000 settlers.[13] In Gaza, OCHA reports that in 2021, 264 Palestinians have been killed and 2,300 injured by Israeli forces.[14] Gaza today remains under a strict closure regime, severely limiting movement and access. As the Special Rapporteur on the oPt has observed, "the amount of violence required by Israel to maintain the occupation continues to rise". [15]

Research has demonstrated that crises impact women, girls, boys and men of all ages and abilities differently. Given that their needs and interests differ (as well as their resources, access, capacities, and coping strategies), humanitarian actors must work to actively engage women and girls in humanitarian action which can present new opportunities for more progressive gender roles and relationships to emerge. Women's organizations can provide expertise in understanding and addressing the needs of women and girls, including as relates to vulnerabilities, demands and capacities. To this point, the Agenda for Humanity's Grand Bargain has prioritized bolstering the decision-making influence of women-led organizations within humanitarian responses.[16]

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), in alignment with the UN Women and OCHA joint-action plan, has supported the multi-country programme entitled "Women and girls who have experienced/are experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) or are at risk of GBV benefit from provision of and access to quality services and empowered to increasingly engage in decision making and leadership in GBV response, mitigation and prevention".[17] In the oPt this project has supported, for the first time, funding to UN Women in order to support localization as well as women-led organizations (WLOs) and women's rights

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organizations (WROs).[18]

In the Palestinian context, a number of actions have been implemented within the framework of the OCHA/UN Women partnership aimed at increasing the participation of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian action through the following approaches:

1. Providing WLOs/WROs with information on structural humanitarian processes and planning cycles;

2. Identifying entry points for the participation of WLOs/WROs in humanitarian clusters and related activities;

3. Building the capacity of WLOs/WROs on gender in humanitarian action as well as the Gender with Age Marker (GAM);[19]

4. Ensuring the participation of WLOs/WROs in the humanitarian gender group;

5. Advocating for increased financing for humanitarian projects submitted by WLOs/WROs.

A 2021 evaluation report of the UN Women and OCHA Joint Action Plan in Palestine (entitled 'Strengthened Gender Focus in Humanitarian Action') confirmed that one of the main intentions of the plan was to address the need to increase the participation of women and women's organizations in humanitarian processes.[20] It documented an increase in the funding women's organizations received as well as an increase in the number of women's organizations actively participating in seeking humanitarian funding (a total of 11, exceeding the goal of nine). Additionally, while the UN Women and OCHA Joint Action Plan did not have any dedicated operational funds, UN Women 'demonstrated efficiencies by harnessing complementarities between the Joint Action Plan and its other programmes'[21] to foster partnerships with Palestinian women organizations. This report includes two case studies that highlight the engagement of WLOs/WROs in gender responsive humanitarian programming and multisectoral service delivery to affected populations of women and girls.

Moreover, the aforementioned evaluation captured the Joint Action Plan's theory of change (detailed below) as well as the roles it expected key stakeholders to play in implementing the Joint Action Plan, which included:

- Cluster coordinators: "foreseen to have the primary responsibility to effectively integrate gender within the Strategic Response Plan and Sector Humanitarian Programming. Cluster coordinators assign the gender focal points, whose role it is to provide support to mainstream gender in the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC). They participate also in the [Humanitarian Gender Group (HGG)] together with the gender focal points of the clusters".

- Other UN Agencies: "a mandate and commitment to advance gender equality in humanitarian action and well placed to contribute to strengthened gender coordination".

- The gender focal points: "to mainstream gender in humanitarian programming and to ensure coherence, accountability and gender equality in their agencies' humanitarian programming. The gender focal points come from both the UN agencies and national and international organizations".[22]

Photo: UN Women Palestine/ Seung Deok Seo

In recent years, UN Women, OCHA, UNFPA and OHCHR have worked to increase engagement with Palestinian women's organizations in humanitarian processes. Women's organizations engaging as active actors in the humanitarian architecture has been essential in making humanitarian action more gender responsive and inclusive.[23] Key achievements have included the increased participation of WLOs/WROs in cluster meetings, the inclusion of WLOs/WROs in the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) advocacy activities as well as the increased access of WLOs/WROs to humanitarian financing.[24]

Building on these achievements, this report assesses WLOs/WROs roles in humanitarian action and proposes action-oriented recommendations (aimed at informing UN Women's approach and strategy) tailored to the specific context of the oPt to strengthen the participation and leadership of WLOs/WROs in humanitarian coordination, preparedness and response. Furthermore, this analysis aims to identify challenges and opportunities in strengthening the role and leadership of WLOs/WROs in humanitarian action in the Palestinian context. It intends to bolster their role in the HCT in supporting humanitarian planning, design, coordination, advocacy, financing and partnership building with the long-term, strategic objective of ensuring that humanitarian action in Palestine is gender responsive, localized, equitable and timely.

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METHODOLOGY

This report defines women-led organizations (WLOs) as organizations with a humanitarian mandate and/or mission that is governed/directed by women or whose leadership is principally made up of women (demonstrated by 50 per cent or more occupying senior leadership positions). It also defines women's rights organizations (WROs) as organizations that self-identify as women rights organizations with the primary focus of advancing gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights. WROs are also considered as those that have, as part of their mission statements, the advancement of women's and girls' interests and rights (or where 'women', 'girls', 'gender' or local-language equivalents are prominent in their mission statement). For the purposes of this report, WROs are also considered as those that have, as part of their mission statement or objectives, the objective to promote positive social norms, to challenge and transform gender inequalities (unjust rules) as well as unequal power relations.

The analysis adopts a measurement assessment framework established by UN Women and the Humanitarian Advisory Group; created by Maya Tamayo, Pip Henty, Sara Phillips and Kate Sutton.[25] That assessment provided a methodology for measuring the participation and leadership of women and WROs in COVID-19 responses. It was designed to be contextualised locally and adapted to other humanitarian responses to measure and reflect on how WLOs/WROs are leading, influencing and being supported throughout a humanitarian response.

The report has been informed by a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, including: an Arabic-language online questionnaire surveying WLOs/WROs (with outreach to 28 WLOs/WROs and 16 participants completing the survey); focus group discussions (one with members of the Humanitarian Gender Group (HGG); one with WROs/WLOs who currently participate in humanitarian systems and two with WROs/WLOs who do not currently participate in humanitarian systems);[26] semi-structured interviews (with WLO/WROs leaders, members of the humanitarian community in the oPt, as well as members of international organizations) and a literature review. The online Arabic language questionnaire was designed to be straightforward and simple in an effort to minimize the time it took participants to complete (given the multiple burdens they carry). The questionnaire intentionally did not define terminology (e.g., active participation, safety, diverse, support) in order to allow participants to interpret these terms and share their honest responses. Of the 16 participants completing the survey, 100 per cent described the focus of their organization's work as on women; 31 per cent on persons with disabilities; and 18.8 per cent on refugee women. Respondents also identified focusing on the other groups: one responded marginalized groups; one responded youth and childhood; one responded the family with all its components; one responded female heads of households and victims of violence; and one responded university graduates. For confidentiality purposes, no names or other identifying data was requested in the survey and no information in this report will be attributed to individuals or organizations. Due to the prioritization of participants' confidentiality, it was not possible to ask follow up questions to obtain more information regarding participants' responses.

A number of factors limited data collection efforts for this report. These included: the COVID-19 pandemic which has limited avenues for outreach and the timing of data collection (conducted in months after the 2021 escalation of hostilities in Gaza as well as at the end of the year when organizations are often overwhelmed with administrative responsibilities as well as inundated with demands). While multiple efforts (including adding an additional focus group in February 2022) were made to connect with WLOs/WROs that are not currently participating in

the humanitarian planning process, only two such participants joined focus groups on this topic. As is discussed in-depth throughout this report, limited participation may be due to bandwidth challenges experienced by many WRO/WLOs.

The mixed-methods approach of this assessment has attempted to benefit from a qualitative approach (which can reveal a deeper understanding of relevant issues) in combination with quantitative data (meant to provide a standardized and broader understanding of relevant issues). Conclusions and recommendations have been drawn from a careful analysis of the results of this assessment in an integrated and concurrent manner.

SAFE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION GENDER RESPONSIVE LOCALIZATION

UN Women's global research highlights that many factors are required to achieve full community participation, seen through a gender lens. These include:

- A coordinated approach;
- The inclusion of partnerships with diverse civil society and networks, including local WROs and networks;
- Embedded and broad-based gender expertise amongst humanitarian actors and agreements on assessing progress and quality towards gender-responsive participation revolution;
- Long-term investments of human and financial resources at the individual, institutional, community, as well as country and response-wide level;

- The integration of corrective actions to address remaining barriers and challenges.[27]

In the oPt context, it has been documented that consistent advocacy by UN Women and OCHA has contributed significantly to the mainstreaming of gender into the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) workplans for 2018, 2019, and 2020,[28] particularly in internalizing the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the assessments and having age and gender disaggregated data that identified gender inequalities"[29] Moreover, the regular inclusion of Palestinian civil society organizations (CSOs) at HCT events has provided platforms for the voices of local actors and encouraged HCT members to provide opportunities engage civil society members and organizations, including women leaders.[30] It is against this backdrop that this report assessed WROs/WLOs ability to safely and meaningfully participate in humanitarian action.

Box 1:

Survey findings: Safe and meaningful participation-gender responsive localization

Presented below are survey results related to the topic of safe and meaningful participation by WROs/WLOs.

- Asked their opinion if humanitarian processes and planning adequately addressed gender-based issues, a vast majority of respondents (69 per cent) agreed; one quarter (25 per cent) did not; and one respondent (6 per cent) strongly disagreed. These results suggest that the vast majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey believed that humanitarian processes were adequately working to address gender-based issues.

- Asked their opinion if the appropriate organizations were receiving support to address gender-based issues, 81 per cent of respondents (13 of 16) agreed; two respondents (12.5 per cent) did not agree; and one respondent (6 per cent) strongly disagreed. These results suggest that a vast majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey believed that the appropriate organizations were being supported to address gender-based issues.

- Asked about which coordination/decision-making platforms and/or processes they have participated in, 81 per cent of respondents (13 of 16) stated they had participated in cluster meetings; 75 per cent (12 of 16) stated they had participated in the Humanitarian Gender Group; 56 per cent (9 of 16 respondents) stated they have participated in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) process; 31 per cent (5 of 16) stated they had participated in the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) process; 19 per cent (3 of 16) respondents stated they had participated in the ICCG; zero stated participating in the HCT process; and one stated they had participated in an 'Other' process (which was described as the 'Protection and Women sectors in the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO)'). Given the high percentage of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey reporting at some time participating in coordination/decision-making processes like cluster

meetings, the HGG and the HRP, this finding demonstrates that a vast majority of survey participants have access to and bandwidth to participate in existing coordination/decision-making platforms.

- Asked their opinion if WLOs and WROs can actively participate and engage in relevant forums, 31 per cent of respondents (five of 16) strongly agreed and 69 per cent of respondents (11 of 16) agreed. These results demonstrate that all survey participants agreed that WROs/WLOs can actively participate in relevant humanitarian forums.

- Asked if key humanitarian forums/meetings are conducted in the local language, one respondent (six per cent) strongly agreed; 50 per cent of respondents (eight of 16) agreed; six respondents (38 per cent) did not agree; and one respondent (six per cent) strongly disagreed. These results suggest that there is a significant disagreement amongst WROs/WLOs participating in this survey regarding whether or not key humanitarian forums/meetings are being conducted in Arabic.

- Asked if it was safe for organizations to participate in humanitarian coordination forums and meetings, all respondents either strongly agreed (19 per cent) or agreed (81 per cent). These results demonstrate that WROs/WLOs participating in this survey unanimously agreed that humanitarian coordination forums and meetings were safe spaces.

- Asked if barriers to attending coordination forums and meetings (e.g., transportation, internet, location) were actively addressed, one respondent (six per cent) strongly agreed, 69 per cent of respondents (11 of 16) agreed, 12.5 per cent of respondents (two of 16) did not agree, one respondent (six per cent) strongly disagreed, and one respondent (six per cent) responded 'I don't know'. These results demonstrate that the majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey agreed that barriers to attending coordination forums and meetings have been actively addressed.

The survey results regarding the safe and meaningful participation of WROs/WLOs reflect positively on the humanitarian space in the oPt. The modest dataset presented here indicates that WROs/WLOs participating in this survey generally believe that the humanitarian processes are adequately addressing gender-related issues; that the appropriate organizations are receiving support to address gender-based issues; that they can safely and actively participate in decision-making platforms; that they have participated in some decision-making platforms (predominantly cluster meetings and the HGG); and that barriers to attending coordination forums and meetings are actively addressed.

While the majority of the responses to questions asked in this section were highly positive, they must be examined within a broader context. Given that the vast majority of survey participants indicated that they have access to and bandwidth to participate in existing coordination/decision-making platforms (e.g., 100 per cent of participants agreed or agreed strongly that WROs/WLOs can actively participate and engage in relevant forums; 75 per cent agreed that barriers to attending coordination forums and meetings have been addressed), the sample therefore is heavily-skewed

towards representing those WROs/WLOs that have existing networks and bandwidth enabling their participation in humanitarian processes (and initiatives like this survey).

Interview and focus group findings

Interview and focus group findings presented a more nuanced perspective related to the safe and meaningful participation of WROs/WLOs in the humanitarian space in the oPt. Representatives of and those participating in the humanitarian system highlighted entry points that exist for WROs/WLOs. Voices speaking on behalf of WROs/WLOs who do not participate in the humanitarian system, however, described difficulties in engaging with the current system.

Interviewees facilitating humanitarian processes described entry points for WROs/WLOs through the standardized, annual processes of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC). They stated that WROs/WLOs could participate in humanitarian processes through the cluster system throughout the year to engage in discussions on the HNO, HRP, setting priorities to address vulnerabilities, carrying out assessments and putting forth project proposals for the planning cycle. They highlighted the HGG as a successful forum for engaging WLO/WROs in

both the West Bank and Gaza. Additionally, they highlighted that UN Women takes the lead in capacity building and engaging with WROs/WLOs, whereas OCHA facilitated and provided the support to WROs/WLOs through the cluster system.

Box 2:

Safe and meaningful participation: CERF (and related) global best practices

- 'Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) should ensure increased roles in decision-making for women – and their representative organizations – for guiding responses, including the inclusion of at least one women-led national NGO/group on HCTs in a long-term strategic role. If this is problematic, it should establish a robust consultation mechanism with women's organizations in the country to inform strategic decision-making'.[I]

- 'OCHA [should] take on the role of enhancing leadership capacity development in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG) issues.'[II]

- 'Regardless of whether an allocation is earmarked for GBV, conduct regular and ongoing advocacy with country offices about the importance of using CERF funds for GBV specialized programming as well as risk mitigation across all areas of humanitarian response through webinars, tip sheets and other forms of explicit guidance'.[III]

- 'Work with the OCHA Gender Unit to develop strategies to ensure Resident Coordinator (RC)/ HCs and other humanitarian leadership participate in the CERF webinars related to GBV allocations, such as asking them to speak in the webinars. Also encourage the CERF focal points in country to link to the GBV lead agency from the start of discussion about the funds'. [III]

- 'Consider providing guidance to the RC/HC and HCT about how to analyze need for GBV funding at the country level, particularly for those settings where there may not be a GBV-specific allocation, but where CERF is advocating to ensure greater attention to GBV in CERF proposals.... this guidance might include recommendations for the level at which GBV should be funded compared to, for example, funding for the overall HRP; the level of gaps in life-saving services in the setting; significant shortfalls from the previous year; etc. Providing suggestions about how to analyze need for GBV funding at the country level would have the added value of engaging the RC/HC and HCT in discussions of GBV funding deficits'.[III]

Other representatives of international organizations opined in interviews and focus groups that WROs/WLOs were participating well in humanitarian processes; that their entry points to participating were 'clear' and primarily through the cluster system. The Child Protection, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and GBV sub-clusters were highlighted by focus group participants. In particular the GBV Sub-Cluster was described as a forum in which WROs/WLOs were very active (e.g., helping develop an annual plan for GBV based upon four pillars, which included capacity building, information management, advocacy and guidelines/ protocols); made high-quality contributions; increased the Sub-Cluster's coordination; and were supported in knowledge sharing as well as capacity building (e.g., 14 WROs/WLOs developed contingency plans through this support). In Gaza, WROs/WLOs were described to be active in three clusters (protection, health, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)). The Women's Affairs Center (WAC) rapid assessment on vulnerable women's and girl's needs in the aftermath of the May 2021 escalation in the Gaza Strip was cited as a successful example of the contributions of a WRO/WLO as a leader and agenda setter (rather than a passive recipient) through the cluster system.[31] In the West Bank, participants highlighted that the Health Cluster hosted a number of 'women's-health mandated organizations but that there were not WROs/WLOs participating in the shelter or education clusters. Focus groups with WROs/WLOs

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I   IAHE, Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, 2020, p. 51.

II   MOPAN, MOPAN Assessment Report, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2020 Assessment Cycle, 2021, p. 57.

III   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 6.

participating in humanitarian processes supported the sense that WROs/WLOs were able to engage successfully in humanitarian action, as participants shared that they were aware of the cluster system; online platforms such as Zoom allowed a new avenue to participate regularly in meetings and that existing clusters and sub-clusters were sufficient to address women's needs.

A number of participants described structural challenges facing WROs/WLOs who do not currently participate in the humanitarian system.[32] One interviewee described the HGG (the oPt Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group) as a place where WROs/WLOs could be nominated to participate in the cluster systems but drew attention to the fact that gender focal points (GFPs) of WROs/WLOs often experienced bandwidth issues. Tasked with a large portfolio of duties, GFPs were often observed as having limited time to participate in humanitarian planning processes, especially given the fact that humanitarian funding projects are often the shortest in length but perceived to be the most time-consuming procedurally. Moreover, when GFPs or members of WROs/WLOs do participate with the humanitarian system, interviewees described a significant power imbalance which negatively affected WROs/WLOs engagement. This dynamic was described as one where clusters do not empower WROs/WLOs but instead 'act as if they're doing a favor to the active agent' with gender technical expertise. Clusters

outside of the Protection Cluster and GBV Sub-Cluster were perceived to be spaces that were not open for 'honest engagement' as was requested by WROs/WLOs and did not motivate WROs/WLOs through 'serious conversations'. This subject was substantiated in a recent evaluation in the oPt which highlighted the following:

The extent of the influence of the gender focal points however, was very case-specific depending on several factors such as the level of motivation of the focal point; his or her relationship with the cluster lead, and the latter's own openness to giving the focal point space to influence the work of the cluster. It also depended on the commitment of the cluster to gender mainstreaming and to prioritizing it in their work given that the function of a gender focal point was done on a voluntary basis. It almost always created additional work and responsibilities for the focal point that were not reflected in their TORs, nor renumerated. [33]

The above assessments reveal an important and sobering dimension to consider when interpreting data in this report; if WROs/WLOs are weary of engaging the humanitarian system, they may be either unlikely to participate (e.g., complete surveys or join focus group discussions) or feel pressured to provide positive feedback out of the concern that their honest feedback may be dismissed or jeopardize their funding.

COLLECTIVE INFLUENCING AND ADVOCACY

Notable progress has been made in advancing a gender responsive approach in the oPt context, as has been expounded upon in this report. A recent evaluation of the OCHA-UN Women Joint Action Plan reviewed a number of issues on this topic, including issues related to the collective influence and advocacy of WROs/WLOs. Despite what the evaluation describes as 'notable efforts to mainstream gender at policy level', it notes that 'institutional change has not happened at senior level of the HCT'.[34] The continued advocacy and influencing of WROs/WLOs is required if this reality is to be improved upon. The following sections share survey results as well as findings from interviews and focus group discussions on this topic.

Interview and focus group findings

Interview and focus group findings presented a number of important dynamics at play in the oPt related to the collective influencing and advocacy of WROs/WLOs in the humanitarian space. Focus group participants from WROs/WLOs that currently participate in humanitarian action described various dynamics that they have experienced relating to communicating with humanitarian systems, international partners and donors:

- One participant described how recent developments (such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the May 2021 escalation in the Gaza Strip) demanded that her organization change their programmatic approach on the ground, stating that 'most donors are flexible and respond to our needs' in such circumstances.

- Another participant, when discussing the cluster system, stated that regular surveys were provided to assess the opinions of partner organizations, highlighting that while cluster partners would sometimes respond immediately to feedback, other times participants would receive no feedback.

- A third participant, speaking about the humanitarian planning process and incorporating the needs of young women, stated that more intervention was needed early on in the planning processes. She further elaborated that WROs/WLOs needed 'more room to participate' and needed to be less burdened when participating; that CSOs needed to be better equipped with technical capacity to participate in humanitarian planning processes; that more 'local ownership was needed' and that the international community needed to better support WROs/WLOs on these issues.

Interviewees touched on the previously mentioned issues and highlighted a number of other related points, including:

- The fact that for WROs/WLOs to participate in humanitarian processes as currently designed requires a very high level of technical expertise which creates a major barrier for the participation of WROs/WLOs in humanitarian action.

- Current humanitarian processes instill a sense of competition amongst WROs/WLOs who compete for funding at the cluster level.

- While WROs/WLOs participate in the humanitarian system, very few can influence the highest forum of humanitarian planning at the HCT. On a related point, it was shared that the next session for the oPt Humanitarian Fund will include at least one WRO/WLO as part of its advisory board which may present an opportunity for advocacy and influencing.

- While a national GBV service directory (including resources in braille and sign language) exists, an updated national database of WROs/WLOs working on humanitarian programming that can be accessed does not yet exist.

Box 3:

Survey findings: Collective influencing and advocacy

Presented below are survey results related to the topic of collective influencing and advocacy by WROs/WLOs.

- Asked if the needs of diverse women have been addressed adequately in humanitarian processes and planning cycles, survey participants responded as follows: 56 per cent (nine of 16) agreed and 44 per cent (seven of 16) did not agree. These results suggest no clear agreement among WROs/WLOs participating in this survey regarding humanitarian processes adequately addressing the diverse needs of women.

- Asked if advocacy by WLOs and WROs have influenced the development of humanitarian policies and standards, survey participants responded as follows: 69 per cent (11 of 16) agreed, 25 per cent (four of 16) did not agree and one respondent (6.3 per cent) 'did not know'. These results suggest that a vast majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey believed that their advocacy has influenced humanitarian policies and standards.

- Asked if international partners and donors have 'adequately supported my organization to advocate for the participation of diverse women in humanitarian action', survey participants responded as follows: 62 per cent agreed, 19 per cent did not agree, 12.5 per cent (two respondents) strongly disagreed and one respondent (6.3 per cent) 'did not know'. These results suggest that while a majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey agreed that international partners have supported their organization in participating in humanitarian action, a large portion (over 31 per cent) believed that international partners had not adequately supported them.

- Asked if humanitarian action policies and standards 'reflect the priorities of my organization', respondents replied as follows: 12.5 per cent strongly agreed, 69 per cent agreed, 12.5 per cent did not agree and one respondent (6.3 per cent) 'did not know'. This response indicates that a very large proportion of participants (81.5 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that humanitarian action policies and standards reflected their own organization's priorities as well as a strong alignment between WRO/WLOs and humanitarian action policies and standards.

- Asked if donors have amplified the voices of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian action, respondents replied as follows: one respondent (6.3 per cent) strongly agreed, 75 per cent agreed, 12.5 per cent did not agree and one respondent (6.3 per cent) strongly disagreed. This data reveals that over 80 per cent of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that donors have amplified the voices of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian action.

- Asked if donors have 'invested resources to support advocacy by my organization and/or other WLOs/WROs', respondents replied as follows: 81 per cent agreed, 12.5 per cent did not agree and one respondent (6.3 per cent) strongly disagreed. This data is closely aligned with the previous question ('if donors have amplified the voices of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian action'). The result demonstrates that a vast majority (81 per cent) of those surveyed in this report perceive that donors are investing in supporting WROs/WLOs' advocacy abilities.

Data obtained through the survey, interviews and focus groups of this research reveals an important dynamic impacting collective influencing and advocacy: an organization's size. WROs/WLOs who do not currently participate in the humanitarian system[35] are unlikely to have the bandwidth or ability to equip staff with the technical expertise to participate in humanitarian processes. Larger organizations, however, do have the ability to specialize and equip staff with this expertise. This dynamic may have affected responses in this report, particularly in the survey, where it is likely that larger organizations that are well versed in the humanitarian planning process and with the bandwidth to participate have shared their feedback, which is overall positive when it comes to assessing how international partners/donors resource WROs/WLOs voices and advocacy. The recent evaluation of the OCHA-UN Women Joint Action Plan captures this issue well, stating:

...larger well-established women-rights organizations were able to access more funding opportunities [as part of the HPC]. These results were brought about through the

deliberate and sustained effort made by both organizations to provide space in the planning of the humanitarian response to them, as well as through the provision of technical support. The Joint Action Plan has not been able to sufficiently and effectively engage smaller CBOs that are often at the frontline of humanitarian action..... the demanding set-up, and processes of the humanitarian system, as well as the complex programme and funding instructions, national stakeholders feel that UN agencies tend to largely stick to and engage with the large civil society organizations that they have been working with already. Smaller grassroot community-based organizations felt particularly disadvantaged. Some of those that do not get access to funding also felt excluded from other types of support (technical and in terms of capacity building)..... NGOs that were partners to UN agencies were more positive about the type of support received as well as the space provided to them to participate in the process and to show-case their experience.[36]

Box 4:

Collective influencing and advocacy: CERF (and related) global best practices

- 'Enhanced expert support: Two Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) expert groups on gender and disability have been established to provide strategic and technical advice on how to improve the impact of CERF and CBPFs within the two areas of humanitarian response. The groups... identify concrete recommendations and actions to take forward, including on how to support the field better on technical issues'.[IV]

- 'In 2021, OCHA established a Pooled Fund Gender Contact Group and a Pooled Fund Disability Inclusion Contact Group. Composed of independent experts, the time-bound groups provided advice on ways to improve the impact of the OCHA-managed Pooled Funds in terms of GBV, gender issues and disability-related concerns.... The groups also highlighted the need to further sensitize decision-makers on GBV/gender- and disability-related issues and to ensure that gender-related data is appropriately incorporated into all CERF and CBPF guidance and templates. The contact groups encouraged CERF and CBPFs to continue pursuing both mainstreaming approaches and targeted gender/GBV and disability-inclusion allocations when relevant'.[V]

IV   UN CERF, Summary of 2020 CERF Reviews: CERF Advisory Group Meeting, 2021, p. 2.

V   UN CERF, CERF Annual Results Report, 2021, p.19.

PARTNERSHIPS

Global research supported by UN Women has outlined good practices for international actors in partnering with WROs/WLOs in humanitarian settings that can achieve strategic objectives related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Good practices include: valuing the contribution of local women's organizations in their role as first and national responders in humanitarian settings; integrating two-way accountability tools to assess quality and impact; and critically appraising partnerships and how they support the empowerment of women and girls.[37]

This section will review some of these themes as relates to WROs/WLOs role in humanitarian action in the oPt.

Box 5:
Survey findings: Partnerships

Presented below are survey results related to the topic of WROs/WLOs and their partnerships in the oPt context.

- Asked if their organization is involved in decisions guiding humanitarian coordination and planning processes, 69 per cent of the survey respondents agreed, 25 per cent disagreed, and 6.3 per cent (one respondent) strongly disagreed. These results indicate that nearly 70 per cent of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey were involved in coordination and planning processes.

- Asked if their organization is involved in funding decisions related to humanitarian action, 50 per cent of the survey respondents agreed, 44 per cent disagreed, and 6.3 per cent (one participants) strongly disagreed. These results indicate that WROs/WLOs participating in this survey were split on this question as half agreed and half either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This suggests that many WROs/WLOs do not perceive themselves as active partners in the area of funding decisions in humanitarian action.

Interview findings

Findings from interviews addressed issues related to partnering with WROs/WLOs in the humanitarian space in the oPt. They also supported guidance from UN Women's own research on how to best promote gender-responsive localization in humanitarian action. One global good practice that has been documented is supporting 'humanitarian networks and consortia of WLOs and WROs to enable exchange of information, access to resources and knowledge building'.[38] An interviewee from an international actor endorsed localizing this approach calling it 'the most important entry point' encouraging further support from donors/large NGOs to encourage networking amongst WROs/WLOs to support building a more 'unified agenda' in the oPt. This individual further highlighted the importance of providing space for WROs/WLOs to 'empower themselves…. without strings attached', to define their own agenda, which the interviewee believed would be more sustainable. Moreover, the interviewee presented as evidence the Hemaya Network in East Jerusalem, where 16 CBOs and local NGOs developed a strategic framework and an action plan to respond to women's issues and needs (including responding to violence against women as well as the need for psychosocial support) without significant support from international organizations or donors. While this is an example from a developmental context, the arrangement should be considered within the humanitarian context in the oPt. Others support this point as well, including the proposal to fund multi-year institutional capacity strengthening programmes for local and national WLOs/WROs, focused on their priorities and their value as first and local responders in humanitarian settings. The recent contributions of AISHA and WAC in the humanitarian response to the May 2021 escalation in the Gaza Strip were highlighted as examples of recent, major contributions WROs/WLOs have made. One interviewee underscored that 'women's and gender issues required time to see the results' and encouraged multi-year investments. They stated that unsuccessful initiatives were ones that were driven by donors' agendas and ended up proceeding 'with no strategy' and in some cases being 'active only seasonally'.

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Box 6:

Partnerships: CERF (and related) global best practices

- CERF should not 'signal a specific amount to GBV but rather make it clear that an amount is expected—leaving the decision about the amount in the hands of HC and HCT, with explicit input from GBV technical advisors. This preference links in part to concerns that setting an earmark may be interpreted as a cap rather than floor for GBV funding—despite all CERF OCHA and agency efforts to communicate otherwise'.[VI]

- CERF could consider requiring 'funds be earmarked for GBV, but offer several options from which country offices might determine or rationalize the amount—for example, by setting a percentage at which GBV should be funded compared to funding for the overall HRP; reviewing the level of gaps in life-saving services in the setting and setting funding expectations based on those gaps; looking at the overall trends in funding for GBV to identify significant shortfalls from the previous year and base funding on these shortfalls; etc. Providing some suggestions about how to analyze need for GBV funding at the country level might have the added value of engaging the RC/HC and HCT in discussions of GBV funding deficits'.[VI]

- 'CERF's further flexibility in the block grant regarding the application of the life-saving criteria to programming (as well as the extended time frame for the funding) has allowed CERF funding to better meet the needs as they have been identified by the technical experts on the ground'.[VII]

- 'The specific requirement of 30 percent of funding being passed on to women-led organizations as implementing partners for the block grant was considered by many to be innovative and motivating and should be considered (to some extent) for all GBV-specific allocations'.

- 'The ability to identify and partner with new organizations is a challenge given CERF timeframes. The short turnaround time for both the Under-Funded Emergencies (UFE) and block grant meant that agencies did not have time to identify, assess and contract new women's organizations'.[VIII]

VI   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 3.

VII   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 4.

VIII Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 5.

CAPACITY

Recent literature assessing humanitarian capacity related to gender-responsiveness have revealed nuanced findings. The oPt Humanitarian Fund (which lists 90 national partners) includes five WRO/WLO groups. An interviewee indicated that two of these groups are classified as having 'medium risk' capacity and three 'high risk' capacity (high risk being the lowest capacity classification).

A 2021 evaluation highlighted that in a self-assessment by humanitarian actors, their ability to pass on the knowledge they have acquired on gender to others was not uniform. Some respondents felt confident of their ability to do so, while others did not'.[33] These findings can be further parsed by cluster where 'some clusters, such as the health cluster benefited from targeted and concentrated support from UN Women... Other clusters and cluster members did not build on the groundwork that was done (e.g., by carrying out

further capacity-building exercises themselves). Where additional gender-responsive initiatives were taken by clusters and cluster members – both national and international- further achievements were possible'.

Gender focal points' capacity to provide gender responsive programming support and technical support to cluster members appeared 'to have generally improved, though it remained varied due to many factors, including the openness of cluster members and cluster leads to give prominence to gender-related issues'.[39] This analysis provides a useful lens into the current situation in the oPt. It underscores that while efforts to foster capacity and technical expertise are underway, there remains a need for further support to both increase capacity as well as provide an ecosystem that is conducive to giving greater prominence to gender-related issues.

Box 7:
Survey findings: Capacity

Presented below are survey results related to the topic of WROs/WLOs and their capacity in the oPt context.

- When asked 'what support have you received from your partners/donors in humanitarian action, processes, and planning?', survey participants responded as follows: eight respondents (50 per cent) stated that they had received funding, eight respondents (50 per cent) stated that they had received training (either online or in person), two respondents (12.5 per cent) stated that they had received technology/equipment, one respondent (6.3 per cent) stated they had received other support and three respondents (18.8 per cent) stated they had received none of these supports. These results demonstrate that a vast majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey had received some type (funding, training, equipment or other) of support from partners and donors in humanitarian action while only 18.8 per cent reported not receiving such support.

- When asked who defines the capacity needs of their organization, survey participants responded as follows: 37.5 per cent (six of 16) that their own organization did so, 6.3 per cent (one respondent) that international partners determined them and 56.3 per cent (nine of 16) responded that a combination of their own organization and international partners did so. One respondent answered that none of these options applied to their situation. These results demonstrate that a majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey worked with international partners to define capacity needs while a large portion (37.5 per cent) did so internally.

- When asked if the above was sufficient, survey participants responded as follows: 50 per cent stated that this was not, 37 per cent that it was sufficient and 13 per cent (two respondents) that they did not know. This data demonstrates that half of respondents (50 per cent) did not believe the status quo was sufficient. Since two respondents stated they did not know the answer to this question, it may be the case that the question itself was unclear.

- When asked if donors/international partners have focused on the areas of capacity (related to humanitarian action) that WLOs and WROs have prioritized, survey participants responded as follows: 75 per cent stated 'not much', 13 per cent (two respondents) stated 'to a large extent', one respondent (6.3 per cent) stated 'completely' and one respondent (6.3 per cent) did not know. These results present a clear picture that the majority of WROs/WLOs participating in the survey (12 of 16) did not believe that donors/international partners have focused on the areas of capacity that WROs/WLOs have prioritized.

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Interview and focus group findings

Interviews and focus group discussions concentrated on issues of capacity for WROs/WLOs in the humanitarian space in the oPt. Due to very limited participation from WROs/WLOs in the oPt who do not currently participate in the humanitarian system, focus group findings primarily reflect the perspectives of WROs/WLOs that currently participate in humanitarian processes.[40] Participants from some of the larger WROs/WLOs described well-developed systems for addressing capacity development. One participant from an organization that is supported by an international network conveyed that they assessed capacity building needs annually; developed and implemented plans to address these needs; received funds from international partners and local partners for these plans; and regularly had staff participating in international training. This organization was said to receive in-kind support as well (i.e., equipment) and 'financial and procurement manuals'. The above support was greatly appreciated, however, this perspective was an outlier in discussions.

Another focus group participant highlighted that the humanitarian processes' structural requirements were demanding for CSOs and that English language requirements remained a significant barrier. This participant emphasized that 'staff members who speak English are in high demand and that humanitarian systems often required participation on short notice, requesting that 'invitations be shared earlier' to provide enough time in advance for planning purposes.

This sentiment was echoed powerfully by another participant, who said so despite stating that their organization had received capacity funding for needs related to proposals put forward by their organization in the past. The participant described a dynamic that appeared to cross the threshold of 'doing no harm'; they stated that they felt enormous pressure from international partners' demands which were 'very stressful', 'devastating' and created 'panic' as they feared 'they may lose funding'. They further explained that donors and

UN agencies were sending 'so many emails' about 'so many events [that demanded participation]' especially near the end of the year. This pressure was felt by those WROs/WLO staff members who speak English in particular, given capacity constraints to 'make it convenient for the donor' who, the participant highlighted were much better equipped to 'bear the burden of the language barrier'.

Semi-structured interviews with international partners echoed similar concerns. One interviewee highlighted that most WRO/WLOs were underfunded and 'faced technical and labour rights issues' (e.g., not providing annual leave, maternity leave, etc.). Moreover, they stated that most WROs/WLOs had 'very few fixed-term staff', were mostly run by volunteers and suffered from a high turnover rate. As a result, even when a staff member could participate in humanitarian processes (e.g., cluster meetings), the high-turnover rate often meant a staff member would often leave the organization before attending multiple meetings, leaving multiple months' gap in participation before a new staff member arrived. In addition to capacity constraints resulting from turnover, the interviewee described staff at WROs/WLOs as not having the capacity, training or equipment (a dearth of laptops/printers and quality office space in Gaza was one example cited) to engage effectively in humanitarian systems. Staffing constraints were linked to humanitarian programmatic funding which were described as short-term. All of these dynamics were mentioned as issues that hindered the impact and participation of WROs/WLOs in humanitarian systems.

In regards to emergency preparedness, interviewees believed capacity to be higher for larger organizations and less well developed in smaller WROs/WLOs. One initiative that was valued by an interviewee at an international organization was the ICGG's efforts to make field visits to both Gaza and the West Bank as part of inter-agency contingency planning processes. This was identified as an entry point for WROs/WLOs to build capacity in participating in humanitarian processes.

Additionally, the oPt Humanitarian Fund was singled out as a tool that could be used to improve the emergency preparedness of WROs/WLOs. The Women's Affairs Center's (WAC) rapid assessment of vulnerable women's and girl's needs after the May 2021 escalation in Gaza was described as a successful and significant contribution by a WRO/WLO in humanitarian action.

Box 8:

Capacity: CERF (and related) global best practices

- 'The GBV-specific UFE allocation was important to improving attention to GBV and was recognized as good practice by a large majority of key informants'.[IX]

- 'Reviews of the CERF applications by Regional Emergency GBV Advisors (REGAs) in at least two UFE countries helped further clarify aspects of the application process'.[IX]

- 'When the GBV Subcluster was involved in the planning process, key informants noted increased inclusion of local women's organizations'.[IX]

- 'CERF funding for GBV influenced country-level humanitarian leadership and governments regarding the importance of addressing GBV'.[IX]

- 'The two-year grant period was important for project planning and implementation; some key respondents suggested that three years would be ideal'.[X]

- 'For the UFE, where the GBV Subcluster was responsible for decision-making about priorities in project allocation and design, local women's organizations were more likely to be included'.[XI]

- 'For the block grant, setting a benchmark for funding directed towards local women's organizations represent a major step forward'.[XII]

- 'CERF reporting on the UFE is fairly light-touch, which on the one hand is appreciated insofar as it does not create undue burden on grant recipients'.[XIII]

- 'Where CERF focal points are trained and available at the country level to support report preparation, information is often more substantial and consistent, suggesting that there may be value in CERF providing specific training to CERF focal points to facilitate reporting if there is an effort to build out several indicators or data points related to value for investment in GBV programmes'.[XIV]

IX   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 1.

X   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 22.

XI   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 20.

XII   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 2.

XIII   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 4.

XIV   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 5.

FUNDING

At the global level, UN Women has noted that the humanitarian system supports gender-responsive localized responses only partially and in a fragmented fashion. As a result, this can present 'systemic barriers to access to WLOs and WROs that are structural, operational and financial'. Given that WROs are 'smaller than mainstream organizations and have fewer existing networks and less influence with international actors' they often have 'less authority and access to funding mechanisms at the national level'.[41] Despite this global trend, recent assessments in the oPt have demonstrated that the number of women's organizations participating in humanitarian response has increased as well as the number of women organizations that have received funding.[42] Furthermore, as women's organizations have become increasingly active within the humanitarian architecture and response, they have been credited with 'transforming humanitarian action in the oPt at large to become more gender responsive and inclusive'. Despite these contributions, local women's organizations have been identified as being at a disadvantage in accessing humanitarian financing.[43]

Box 9:

Survey findings: Funding

Presented below are survey results related to the topic of funding and WROs/WLOs in the oPt context.

- Asked 'how has your funding been affected by COVID-19?', survey participants responded as follows: 56 per cent stated they had received less funding, 31 per cent reported no changes in funding and 13 per cent reported receiving more funding. These results indicate that a majority of WROs/WLOs (56 per cent) participating in this survey have received less funding than the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Asked 'have you received financing for humanitarian projects you have applied for?', survey participants responded as follows: 50 per cent reported not receiving financing, 44 per cent reported receiving financing and one response (6.3 per cent) reported having not applied for financing. These results that over half of the WROs/WLOs participating in this survey (56 per cent) have not been able to obtain financing for humanitarian projects.

Interview and focus group findings

A significant number of issues related to funding for WROs/WLOs in the humanitarian space in the oPt were raised in interviews and focus group discussions.

Interviewees focused on the difference between humanitarian funding and developmental funding. Humanitarian funding was described as demanding more paperwork than developmental funding (due to the fact that humanitarian funding tended to be larger in size) despite being usually shorter in length than development programmes. This dynamic was linked to different areas of the oPt, with the West Bank/East Jerusalem said to receive more developmental funding (less overall but longer and more secure) and the Gaza Strip receiving more humanitarian funding (larger but shorter and more difficult to access for smaller organizations). One interviewee stated that humanitarian funding 'is the shortest, most demanding funding' which was 'heavy' due to the demanding administrative procedures required to go through in order to access it (including addressing accountability to affected populations, due diligence exercises, gender age marker, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse as well as other dimensions). Moreover, the interviewee stated that systems appeared to be set up 'as if it is a competition'. Given the structural requirements of humanitarian processes, one interviewee said that smaller organizations face major barriers to participating as they 'don't have resource mobilization consultants to assist' with the aforementioned additional dimensions. As a result, the system was described as 'exclusionary' with only larger WROs/WLOs being financed well enough to compete to access funding. The objectives of the oPt Humanitarian Fund was described as being somewhat paradoxical, as it prioritized funding local initiatives but also required a financing application that was described as too 'heavy and complicated' for smaller scale organizations. One interviewee asked why smaller WROs/WLOs would spend five or more days to apply (or pay someone to apply) for

humanitarian funding that was very competitive to obtain and often too small to be worth the time invested.

These views were echoed in focus group discussions. In a focus group with WROs/WLOs who do currently participate in the humanitarian system, participants described a system where WROs/WLOs often competed with government, international organizations and NGOs for humanitarian funding. Moreover, participants disagreed with a system where they felt exacerbated competition amongst organizations, pointing to an unspecified new project OCHA would fund. One participant said this project would only fund one organization which was 'not a good approach'. Instead, the focus group participant suggested that OCHA 'encourage more partnerships with experts in different geographic and thematic areas'. Additionally, OCHA was perceived to 'select the same beneficiaries every year' including 'the same groups since 2019'.

On a similar theme, another focus group participant suggested that humanitarian funders should seek to increase coordination between coalitions operating in Gaza and the West Bank and demanded an increase in funds for women's services including GBV response.

Box 10:

Funding: CERF (and related) global best practices

- 'OCHA (in its management of the CERF) as well as HCs and HCTs (in their management of Country-Based Pooled Funds) should support the development of response-specific guidelines for prioritizing the funding of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian response.'[XV]

- 'In 2020, CERF continued to promote positive system change by strengthening its focus on four important but consistently underfunded areas of humanitarian response: support for women and girls, including tackling gender-based violence, reproductive health and empowerment; programmes targeting people with disabilities; education in protracted crises; and other aspects of protection. In addition to mainstreaming the four areas into CERF allocations, in 2020 CERF gave special focus to the issue of GBV, making two innovative allocations to support prevention and response to the increasing prevalence of GBV due to the global pandemic. This included a dedicated GBV envelope of $5.5 million, made under a $100 million UFE allocation to 10 countries. The allocation had an important catalytic effect, with country teams across recipient countries prioritizing $22 million for programmes with GBV outcomes (including in the health sector). Towards the end of 2020, CERF provided $25 million to UNFPA and UN Women in the form of a unique global multi-year grant to support women-led and women's rights organizations working on GBV in 11 priority countries. At least 30 per cent of funding [was allocated] to local WLOs in these countries'.[XVI]

- 'Recognizing the different needs, challenges and opportunities faced by women, men, girls and boys is central to CERF-funded humanitarian action. Gender is integrated in CERF's programme cycle in a number of ways. CERF has made the use of the IASC Gender with Age Marker (GAM) mandatory in funding applications and is promoting the use of gender advisers or other experts in in-country project reviews. CERF is also tracking sex- and age-disaggregated data and has recently revised its templates and processes to ensure that United Nations country Team (UNCT)/ HCTs and agencies explain, at both strategic and project levels, how gender equality has been considered in the prioritization of CERF funds'.[XVII]

Another focus group participant described a situation where WROs/WLOs spent two to three weeks applying' for humanitarian funding but did not manage to get it. Despite this, they opined that they did not 'receive a response about why we do not receive funding' suggesting that the opaque system was discouraging and did not help WROs/WLOs improve in future applications.

The findings from interviews and focus groups align with recent findings published in the OCHA-UN Women Joint Action Plan evaluation, which

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XV   IASC, Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls Management Response Plan (MRP), 2021, p. 3.
XVI UN OCHA and UN CERF, CERF Annual Results Report, 2020, p. 52.
XVII UN OCHA and UN CERF, CERF Annual Results Report, 2020, p. 53.

evaluation highlighted that 'smaller grassroot community-based organizations felt that they could get better feedback from both UN Women and OCHA on the quality of their submissions for funding, even if they did not make it, to improve for the future'. Additionally, while the evaluation lauded OCHA and UN Women for increasing 'access of local organizations, including women organizations to sources of humanitarian funds', it raised concerns that funding 'continued to be largely concentrated in the hands of larger civil society organizations and women groups that have been traditional partners of [the] UN'.[44]

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Global research has recognized that women who 'speak out and take up leadership positions are often seen to challenge established cultural norms around women's roles'.[45] To support women's ability to speak out, take up leadership positions and challenge entrenched gender dynamics, UN Women has adopted the Leadership, Empowerment, Access, and Protection in Crisis Response (LEAP) framework as its worldwide flagship initiative for humanitarian action and crisis response. The LEAP framework seeks to enhance gender equality, empower women, promote resilience and provide sustainable solutions for refugees, displaced women, girls, their families and host communities.[46] This section seeks to gauge how WROs/WLOs, in the context of the oPt have been able to lead and participate in decision-making. The following sections share survey results as well as findings from interviews and focus group discussions on this topic.

Box 11:

Survey findings: Transformative Leadership

Presented below are survey results related to the topic of leadership and decision-making by WROs/WLOs. Survey participants were asked to rate multiple statements to describe how WROs and WLOs have influenced key humanitarian decision-making in the oPt context.

- Asked about input into humanitarian planning processes and planning cycles, survey participants responded as follows: 56 per cent expressed having more influence, 38 per cent expressed having less influence and one response (6.3 per cent) expressed having the least influence. These results indicate that WROs/WLOs participating in this survey expressed feeling slightly more (12 per cent more) influence on this topic than not.

- Asked about advocating for stronger gender mainstreaming, inclusion and targeted activities in humanitarian action and activities, survey participants responded as follows: 19 per cent expressed having the most influence, 56 per cent expressed having more influence, 19 per cent expressed having less influence and one response (6.3 per cent) expressed having the least influence. These results indicate that a vast majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey (75 per cent) expressed feeling influence on this topic, demonstrating a feeling of leadership on this topic.

- Asked about promoting the engagement of diverse women in humanitarian responses, survey participants responded as follows: one respondent of 16 (6.3 per cent) expressed having the most influence, 56 per cent expressed having more influence, 31 per cent expressed having less influence and one respondent (6.3 percent) expressed having the least influence. These results reveal that a majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey (62 per cent) expressed feeling influence in regards to promoting the engagement of diverse women in humanitarian responses.

- Asked to rate influence related to supporting the visibility of the impact of humanitarian planning processes and planning cycles on diverse women, survey participants responded as follows: one respondent of 16 (6.3 per cent) expressed having the most influence, 38 per cent expressed having more influence, 50 per cent expressed having less influence, and one respondent (6.3 percent) expressed having the least influence. These results demonstrate that a majority of WROs/WLOs participating in this survey (56 per cent) expressed feeling less able to influence the visibility of the impact of humanitarian planning processes and planning cycles on diverse women.

Interview findings

Findings from interviews touched on important dimensions related to the transformative leadership of WROs/WLOs in the humanitarian space in the oPt. To understand women's abilities to lead and make decisions in the oPt, one interviewee highlighted the circumstances within which WROs/WLOs operate today. The interviewee described the significant, daily and intersecting threats that WROs/WLOs face in the Palestinian context

(including political, societal and military threats) as well as threats from a shrinking civil society space, the Israeli occupation, Palestinian authorities and entrenched cultural norms.

In regards to this difficult context, one interviewee underscored how gender-responsive humanitarian action can work to empower WROs/WLOs to lead within an increasingly conscribed space. More specifically the interview emphasized the need to ensure WROs/WLOs seats at the table in humanitarian action, rather than replacing them with non-WRO/WLO service providers who may happen to serve women and girls. In such instances the replacement of WROs/WLOs would in fact significantly reduce WROs'/WLOs' ability to lead or make decisions as well as their ability to initiate gender transformative programming in humanitarian action. As Oxfam has recognized, 'The lack of recognition of women's rights actors is in part due to patriarchal notions of leadership that see women as in need of protection, rather than as

active leaders with agency and unique capabilities and access in their communities' [47]

Speaking of this topic, another interviewee reported that the WROs/WLOs indeed did add such value through their participation in the cluster system. The interviewee ,highlighting the importance of WROs/WLOs contribution in particular in the GBV Sub-Cluster and Protection Cluster, where they were said to have improved their contributions significantly over the years, providing 'good analysis' and 'good data'.

Interviewees did stress on the issue of WROs/WLOs' capacity. One interview recognized WROs/WLOs' importance and also stated that their participation would be more effective if they were better equipped to participate thematically or in an advisory role on gender issues. Another interviewee pointed to the weakness of the humanitarian systems, stating that the clusters, which work in English, needed to be able to provide Arabic language translation.

Box 12:

Transformative leadership: CERF (and related) global best practices

- 'CERF was agile and innovative... [in responding] to the evolving impacts of the pandemic, CERF provided flexible funding at scale to the UN system when needed the most, funded NGOs directly and allocated money specifically for local women-led organizations to combat gender-based violence'.[XVIII]

- In support of local women's organizations 'as is relevant and possible within the grant modality (e.g., UFE, rapid response, block grant), continue to require a percentage of funding being passed on to women-led organizations as implementing partners as part of CERF funding to GBV programming'.[XIX]

- 'The specific requirement of 30 percent of funding being passed on to women-led organizations as implementing partners for the block grant was considered by many to be innovative and motivating and should be considered (to some extent) for all GBV-specific allocations'.[XX]

- 'For the UFE, where the GBV Subcluster was responsible for decision-making about priorities in project allocation and design, local women's organizations were more likely to be included'.[XXI]

XVIII   UN OCHA and UN CERF, CERF Annual Results Report, 2020, p. v.

XIX   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 7.

XX   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 5.

XXI   Jeanne Ward, OCHA Support to Gender and Gender-Based Violence Programming: Rapid Review of Recent Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Allocations Targeting GBV Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Action, 2021, p. 2.

Women-led organizations and Women's Rights Organizations ROLE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN PALESTINE:
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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CASE STUDIES

Photo: UN Women Palestine/ Eunjin Jeong

The ongoing military occupation (since 1967) and the continuing strict closure regime of Gaza (since 2007) have systematically exposed Palestinians in the oPt to conflict, land annexation, restrictions in accessing natural resources, forced displacement, segregation, imprisonment, restricted mobility, and other challenges. This generations-long protracted conflict, punctuated by violent escalation, place the oPt's in a unique position in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; indeed, research has found that women and girls' groups in the oPt have singular needs compared to others in the Arab region as a result.[48] This context has led in part to women, including adolescent girls, being identified as the most structurally-disadvantaged group in the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development's (MOSD) 2021 to 2024 strategy.[49]

This context can perplex international partners who are often conditioned to view operating environments along a very traditional humanitarian-development-peace spectrum. The reality in the oPt, however, cannot be clearly delineated into one stage in this spectrum given the nature of the occupation, complex dynamics at play and different contexts in different parts of the oPt (e.g., Gaza versus the West Bank versus East Jerusalem versus H2, etc.).

As a result, existing international approaches used elsewhere in the world, including humanitarian planning and development processes, do not neatly apply in the oPt. Interviewees in this study highlighted this point as relates to supporting WROs/WLOs in humanitarian action. One stated that 'donors think there should be a difference in a humanitarian response versus development response, however, women's needs are more important than the location or the type of intervention–humanitarian versus development'. The interviewee suggested that WRO/WLO 'needs should be harmonized between UN/Donors and local organizations' and gave the example of the May 2021 escalation in Gaza stating that 'responding to the needs of people and women required economic empowerment which was 'a basic need, not necessarily a humanitarian or development need'.

Discussions with focus groups and other interviewees revealed how the context, broadly delineated as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, affected how WROs/WLOs were supported and what issues they focused on. A focus group participant underscored the differences between the West Bank and Gaza, opining that while the population was larger in the West Bank, 'the issues are more

severe in Gaza' as relates to military conflict, poverty, GBV, and unemployment. Regarding the context, international partners stated that WROs/WLOs in the West Bank were able to work on: the 'legislative/legal side' (for example advocating to 'ensure non-discrimination against women with the Palestinian government'); advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda; and political participation in municipal elections—all things that are not possible in Gaza where the de facto authorities are in power. Interviewees pointed out that WROs/WLOs in the West Bank therefore had greater access to developmental funding to work in these areas.

At the same time, interviewees highlighted that the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza (typified by the May 2021 escalation) has led to donors providing less developmental funding to WROs/WLOs in Gaza and a greater amount of humanitarian funding to these organizations. It was also mentioned that while humanitarian funding can often be larger in size, it is usually more complex administratively and must be implemented in a shorter amount of time, leading to a greater burden on WROs/WLOs as well as less funding stability.

Included here are two case studies that highlight WLOs'/WROs' efforts to provide gender responsive humanitarian programming and multisectoral service delivery to affected populations of women and girls. One case study is focused on the West Bank/East Jerusalem and one on the Gaza Strip.

West Bank/East Jerusalem

The case study reviewed here is the project entitled 'Strengthening the Role of Women's Protection Committees as Advocates of Peace and Security in Priority Communities in Hebron through Response to Humanitarian Needs and Prevent Conflict' implemented by Roles for Social Change Association (ADWAR).

Context

There are approximately 60,000 Palestinian residents living in Area C of the Jordan Valley, however, there is no Palestinian jurisdiction over Area C [XXII] and the continuous threat of forcible transfer has systematically eroded the resilience of local Palestinians, particularly women and youth.[50] A range of longstanding Israeli policies and practices in Area C, East Jerusalem and the H2 area of Hebron city leave Palestinian households and communities facing a coercive environment. A restrictive and discriminatory planning regime in Area C and in East Jerusalem prevents Palestinians from addressing basic housing, livelihood and service needs. Israeli authorities regularly demolish homes, seize homes or force Palestinians from their homes (and other structures) for not having building permits (which are often impossible to obtain). Attacks and intimidation by Israeli settlers, along with the Israeli authorities' lack of adequate law enforcement, and movement restrictions all exacerbate this coercive environment in Area C, East Jerusalem and the H2 area of Hebron city. Restrictions foster the growth of Israeli settlements and gradual annexation; in Area C this is de facto in contravention of international law.[51] Many health and protection cluster partners deliver essential healthcare and psychosocial support services through mobile clinics in remote areas of Area C in the West Bank.[52] In this area, women are often left with limited economic prospects and as a result often work unpaid on family farms in agricultural labour and/or animal herding.[53] All of this has led to a deterioration of human rights and increased humanitarian needs.[54]

Within this context ADWAR has established women's protection committees to lead in gender-responsive humanitarian planning, crisis response, peace building and conflict prevention.[55] Women members of the ADWAR-supported women's protection committees currently play a distinguished role in advocating for women rights and responding to humanitarian needs.[56]

Description of intervention

In partnership with local Women's Protection Committees and local councils, supported by the Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), ADWAR had three objectives for this project scheduled for May 2020 to April 2022. These three objectives were:

XXII   From the CCA: Area A, Area B, Area C: The 1995 Interim Agreement ("Oslo II") divided the West Bank into three administrative areas—Area A, Area B, and Area C—in an arrangement that was intended to last until 1999, by which time a final status agreement was supposed to have been reached. The Interim Agreement granted the Palestinian Authority (PA) full jurisdiction over civil affairs in Areas A and B comprising about 40 percent of the territory and 90 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank). The PA also assumed full responsibility for "internal security and public order" in Area A, while n Area B it is responsible only for public order, with Israel maintaining the "overriding responsibility or security for the purpose of protecting Israelis and confronting the threat of terrorism." According o the Agreement, Area C (60 percent of the territory in the West Bank, containing all the Israeli settlements) is under full Israeli jurisdiction for civil and security matters apart from issues for which powers and responsibility have been transferred to the PA by agreement, for example, in education nd health services. The Agreement also stipulated that despite the redeployment of its forces, "Israel hall continue to carry the responsibility for external security, as well as the responsibility for overall security of Israelis for the purpose of safeguarding their internal security and public order."

1. To empower women's protection committees and 'activate their real participation through equipping them with knowledge and skills in accountability mechanisms, dialogue, peaceful participation, national and international conventions';

2. To effectively plan and respond to humanitarian crises in order 'to ensure that the specific women and girls' needs in conflict and post-conflict situations are met';

3. To protect less fortunate women and girls as well as 'strengthen the accountability mechanisms to decision-makers by ensuring safety and women human rights respect'.

For the intervention ADWAR sought to support women and girls in Hebron Governorate. 160 individuals (including 38 men) were targeted for support in the following priority communities: Masafer Bani Naem (46 individuals), Masafer Yatta (42 individuals), Almofakrah (32 individuals) and the Old City of Jerusalem (40 individuals).[57] Beneficiaries' ages ranged between 17 and 62 years old, and 'they showed 100 per cent commitment to attend needs and effective planning meeting... whether they were influencers or social activists'.[58]

Outcomes

After undertaking needs-assessment meetings and planning sessions with beneficiaries, ADWAR documented the following results:

• Beneficiaries identified their most urgent humanitarian needs as the provision of 'electricity, water, food and health needs';

• Beneficiaries identified their most urgent gender-based humanitarian needs as 'electricity, transportation, sanitation and health services';

• Beneficiaries identified their most important gender-based strategic needs and were ranked in the following order: economic services, social services and political needs;

• Beneficiaries identified their highest individual needs as follows: 'home rooms renovation, washing machines, churns, medicines, university

fees, refrigerators, kitchen utensils, water filter, fan, and gas oven'.[59]

Furthermore, ADWAR found that women put their social needs (e.g., gender-based violence protection, education and health) second to their needs for basic necessities (e.g., electricity, water and sanitation services) due to the fact that they did not believe they could access social needs assistance or funding to obtaining them and instead decided to focus on 'basic human needs'. This, ADWAR underscored, would on the whole have a negative impact on women, young women and girls' lives in the long run.[60]

Throughout the process of this project, a significant outcome was ADWAR's ability to produce original data, advocating for the humanitarian needs of women and girls in support of the broader humanitarian process, in this case supported by the WPHF. Given ADWAR's nuanced understanding of the Palestinian context as well as its gender-responsive approach, this project was able to examine the interrelatedness of gender equality agenda along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Challenges

One massive challenge faced by ADWAR through the course of this study was the COVID-19 pandemic which began to affect the local context in March 2020. While the pandemic had an enormous impact on the implementation of the project, it compelled ADWAR to develop an emergency plan in order to respond to women's needs in light of the crisis 'based on its work in the field of gender and humanitarian work, especially within the Security, Peace and Resolution program 1325'.[61] As a result, ADWAR reports being 'able to touch the women needs, and activat[ing] the roles of the Women's Protection Committees to be able to provide the humanitarian needs for women, young women and girls affected by Corona crisis'.The project's evolution and ADWAR's ability to pivot quickly in the midst of a global, humanitarian crisis provide an excellent example of how empowering a local WRO in humanitarian action prepared it to contribute to the active, gender-responsive localization of humanitarian action in the oPt.

Lessons learned and conclusions

ADWAR's intervention revealed a number of important lessons as well as conclusions regarding WROs/WLOs participation in humanitarian processes. These include:

- Strengthening the technical capacity of WRO/WLO staff in order to improve their ability to implement projects to address humanitarian and gender-based needs in order to make the 'change from humanitarian relief to [a] developmental' operating environment;

- The importance of working 'with groups for [the] long term in order to bring about this transformation' as well as working with 'diversified partners';

- Using technology can provide training for women 'to ensure their participation and reach them quickly and in large numbers' to help enable them to express their needs through using technology;[62]

- Seeking to support gender transformative programming by focusing on providing 'collective empowerment and psychological support' for women so women 'express their needs, especially strategic ones, in a way that... [addresses] long-term needs that contribute to improving their status, changing gender relations, and bridging the gaps in the participation rates in different genders and all fields';[57]

- 'Raising women's awareness about how to identify and demand human gender needs... as a human right, not a favor, pity or sympathy' with an emphasis on treating women as 'partners, actors and beneficiaries' in order to 'make women leaders in the participation process... not just passive beneficiaries, but rather partners for construction, struggle and development'.[57]

- ADWAR also recognized the empowerment dimensions of their own staff participating in the process of carrying out this project as the 'experience empowered [ADWAR staff] on how to collect information, unpack it quantitatively and qualitatively, and analyze it from a gender perspective'. It was detailed that as a result 'the skills of the technical staff increased... [in] identifying needs and linking them in holding activities'.[63]

The substantive findings highlighted present an excellent case study for how empowering and supporting WROs/WLOs in humanitarian processes can impact their engagement, resilience, recovery, and development as well as peace programming.

Gaza Strip

Context

Facing regular violent escalations (including one in May 2021) and a 15-year Israeli government strict closure regime, Gaza experiences serious limitations on energy, safe drinking water, medical supplies, agricultural tools and supplies as well as import/export opportunities.[64] The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 recently described Gaza's economy as 'flat on its back' with 'an export sector that has nearly expired as a result of the closure and severe restrictions'.[65]

Of the 2.45 million people that require humanitarian assistance in the oPt, 36 per cent live in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and 64 per cent in the Gaza Strip. The substantial needs in Gaza have only been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the existing political divide which continues to fragment how humanitarian assistance, development assistance, and social protection services can be provided.[66] The UN Country Team in the oPt has adopted a nexus approach to its humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts, emphasizing 'an increased support for basic incomes' with the understanding that 'Palestine is well-placed to roll out a universal basic income support scheme'.

Palestinian women and girls have faced challenges placing multi-dimensional limitations on their security, livelihoods, resilience and potential for generations.[67] These have been heightened by COVID-19 which has been demonstrated to have a gendered impact on women and girls around the world and in the oPt.[68]

Description of intervention

This case study will assess two coordinated cash for work (CFW) projects supported by UN Women. One, entitled 'Women's Leadership, Empowerment, Access & Protection in Crisis Response (LEAP)', was

implemented in partnership with the Women's Affairs Center (WAC) from April 2019 to March 2020 and supported by the Government of Japan. The second, entitled 'Multisectoral Responses to Women Victims and Survivors of Gender Based Violence in the Gaza Strip', was implemented by AISHA Association for Woman and Child Protection and the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) from May 2019 to May 2020, and funded by the oPt Humanitarian Fund.[69] Through these interventions, UN Women offered 250 vulnerable women in Gaza (50 through WAC, 100 through AISHA and 100 through CFTA) job opportunities for a duration of 3 months at a pay of 300 USD per month. Beneficiaries also received 'training on gender equality, GBV incidence and services, teamwork and leadership skills, communication, time management skills and labour rights as per the Palestinian labour law'.[70]

Outcomes

Women participants voiced their opinions on the intervention and survey results showed that 36.4 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed and 57.7 per cent agreed that the CFW opportunity improved their life conditions'. The interventions increased beneficiaries' 'feelings of dignity, self-worth, self-confidence, self-perception, and autonomy' as 61.5 per cent of respondents strongly agreed and 36.4 per cent agreed that CFW financial support enhanced their self-esteem.[71] Assessments have demonstrated how cash-based programming with empowerment-related interventions can 'help create an enabling environment for social and political empowerment while supporting asset replenishment and financial security'.

Challenges

While a number of very positive outcomes were documented by the intervention, a few challenges were as well. For example, '35 per cent of the targeted beneficiaries... confirmed that, in some cases, women increased their time spent on domestic work'. Such a result highlighted that the intervention increased demands for one-third of beneficiaries.[73]

Another challenge for the interventions were their short-term nature. As a result, exit strategies would ideally include follow up work options as well as integration with multi-sectoral programming (e.g., education and livelihoods support).[74] Ensuring continued donor support for cash-based interventions has been documented as another challenge globally.[75]

Lessons learned and conclusions

Lessons learned from the intervention in Gaza included:

- Choosing one WRO/WLO partner to undertake the intervention could have improved project delivery as well as better supported 'building and accumulating experiences' for WRO/WLO implementing partners.

- Given the promising results related to women's empowerment and the gender transformative elements of the project, it was recommended that WROs/WLOs working in the field of women's empowerment continue to be selected as partners for CFW programming. UN Women was identified as an anchor organization to lead future gender-transformative CFW work.[76]

- Additional research was recommended, including 1) comparing different CFW modalities and their impact on gender outcomes; 2) analyzing the impact on gender outcomes of combining CFW with complementary services; and 3) the longer-term impact of CFW on gender outcomes.[77]

Better understanding these and related dynamics will help policymakers partner more effectively with WROs/WLOs while crafting more effective, gender-responsive, cash-based assistance projects in the oPt.[78]

CONCLUSION

As expressed in 2021 by the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 to the General Assembly, a new 'imaginative and brave' playbook is required to achieve the 'globally agreed goal to end the 54-year-old Israeli occupation and secure Palestine's self-determination'.[79] As research continues to demonstrate how women can positively contribute in peacemaking and peacebuilding (including the recent finding that 'in cases where women were able to exercise a strong influence on the negotiation process, there was a much higher chance that an agreement would be reached than when women's groups exercised weak or no influence'), it seems that women may present the best opportunity for ending the humanitarian crisis facing the oPt.[80]

Significant progress has been made in recent years in increasing the involvement and empowering women's organizations. WROs/WLOs have improved their participation in humanitarian response processes in part due to the efforts of HCT members to create space for their participation. However, humanitarian processes in the oPt must continue to evolve in order to ensure more effective, gender-responsive humanitarian mechanisms that better incorporate women and WROs/WLOs.

Based on this study the following practical recommendations are proposed to the following actors:

Actionable recommendations to:

The humanitarian architecture (HCT, ICCG, cluster system/working groups)

1. Develop a national database of WLOs/ WROs (including small- and medium-sized organizations) that can be used to identify partners for service delivery to affected women and girls. Use the database as a way to reach out to WROs/WLOs and share funding opportunities/ calls for proposals. As part of this process, map partners' gender competencies and skills and promote strengthening capacity as needed related to gender-responsive and gender-transformative programming.

2. Adopt a financial tracking system (FTS) to track humanitarian resource allocations to WROs/ WLOs by donors, UN agencies and international NGOs.

3. Engage WROs/WLOs more effectively, particularly in sectors where women's organizations are less present including for example, cash, livelihoods and food security or infrastructure. Recognize when existing coordination systems do not adequately involve WROs/WLOs (particularly small- to medium-sized organizations) and find alternative methods of engaging.

4. Adopt multi-year approaches to supporting institutional capacity for small to medium-sized WROs/WLOs, focusing on their needs and priorities. Capacity-strengthening plans should be contextualized, mutually agreed to, and long term. It should also take a range of training and mentoring approaches (e.g., secondments, shadowing, peer exchanges, on-the-job training, follow-up monitoring). Consider supporting humanitarian networks and consortia of WROs/ WLOs to enable the exchange of information, access to resources and knowledge building.

5. Consider supporting humanitarian networks and consortia of WLOs/ WROs to enable an exchange of information, access to resources and knowledge building.

6. Conduct joint monitoring visits with WLOs and WLOs to crisis-affected communities, providing opportunities for joint reflection on progress, obstacles and required modifications in relation to programmatic interventions on GEEWG in humanitarian settings.

7. Facilitate regular opportunities for donors to meet and engage with WROs/WLOs (particularly small to medium-sized ones) in order to learn more

about women's programming in the oPt.

8. Ensure that all humanitarian meetings offer Arabic translation to better enable participation for WROs/WLOs staff members.

9. Introduce a standing agenda item for WROs/WLOs to present in key humanitarian meetings, including clusters, to ensure necessary space exists.

10. Consider focusing the oPt Humanitarian Fund on improving the capacity and emergency preparedness of small to medium-sized WROs/WLOs.

11. Consider establishing a WRO/WLO advisory board to the HCT, which would allow WROs/WLOs to provide direct feedback on critical processes (such as the HNO, HRP and thematic discussions) to the HCT on a quarterly basis.

12. Reserve a minimum number of seats for WROs/WLOs to participate in advisory boards, strategic review committees and strategic advisory groups (e.g., the oPt Humanitarian Fund Advisory Board, HRP project vetting panels),which will allow them to inform discussions related to funding priorities, resource allocations, selection criteria and determining strategic priorities in alignment with the priorities, needs and rights of crisis-affected women and girls.[81]

Member States

1. Consider multi-year funding approaches as well as funding quotas in support of WROs/WLOs that can increase access to humanitarian funding and encourage sustainability. Such funding should consider increasing unearmarked/core funding to WROs/WLOs and/or developing dedicated funding streams in support of WRO/WLO institutional capacity strengthening in order to sustain the organizations in the long term. Donors should allow WROs/WLOs to define their internal, organizational priorities.

2. Allocate funding to document WROs'/WLOs' good practices related to financing, organizational structure, emergency preparedness and growth from a small to medium-sized organization. Relatedly, develop monitoring tools in order to support establishing an evidence base around funding and partnerships with WROs/WLOs related to what constitutes 'quality funding' for WROs/WLOs. Donors must recognize that success for supporting WROs/WLOs means more than just financing, it requires supporting their decision-making authority and transformation.

3. Consider establishing funding quotas for first-level recipients of pass-through grants (which have been considered by UN agencies/development partners) in order to promote direct funding support for local WROs/WLOs.

4. Dedicate specific funding for self-organized organizations, organizations that represent crisis-affected women's and girls' priorities and needs, as well as small to medium-sized WROs/WLOs. Ensure outreach to underserved and underrepresented geographies in the oPt as well to make sure WROs/WLOs from these areas are engaged and participating in humanitarian action.

5. Improve transparency around funding applications and ensure all applicants (including those not selected for funding) receive a response about why they were not selected. Strengthen dialogue (using available technologies) to support transparent and appropriately secure feedback. Make efforts to link feedback to corrective action in adjusting humanitarian programming.

6. Examine legal or policy barriers that may complicate funding for local WROs/WLOs (e.g., rules related to sanctions on banking, counter-terrorism, nationality preferences, currency rules, etc.) and make efforts to make adjustments, exceptions or reforms in order to support WROs/WLOs.[82]

International organizations/UN agencies

1. Support the systematic capacity building of WROs/WLOs including in terms of medium- and long-term programme and financial management. Consider coordination hubs, consortia development and peer support in

order to strengthen WROs/WLOs capacities and increase their decision-making abilities.

2. Establish gender-responsiveness as a collective outcome for humanitarian strategic planning exercises (such as the Cooperation Framework and the HRP) and increase monitoring of the HCT's gender-related commitments. Use anonymous, joint reciprocal evaluations and monitoring in MOUs to genuinely assess the relations between international actors and WROs/WLOs.

3. Engage WROs/WLOs more effectively, particularly in sectors where women's organizations are less present, with the understanding that the participation of WROs/WLOs can increase the gender responsiveness of humanitarian programming. Recognize when existing coordination systems do not adequately involve WROs/WLOs (particularly small- to medium-sized organizations) and find alternative methods of engaging.

4. HCT should strengthen the localized approach to gender-responsiveness in the oPt, better reflecting the priorities of national stakeholders in particular WROs/WLOs. Such efforts should emphasize the empowerment of women and their resilience as much as they emphasize on their need for protection.

5. Simplify and streamline funding application procedures taking into consideration challenges and capacity gaps faced by WROs/ WLOs (particularly small- to medium-sized organizations).

6. Support the capacities of vulnerable categories of women and girls (including those with disabilities, the LGBTI community, and beyond) as well as their representative organizations to participate in decision-making processes. Set targets and monitor achievements regarding their participation in activities, programmes, community and humanitarian coordination structures.[83]
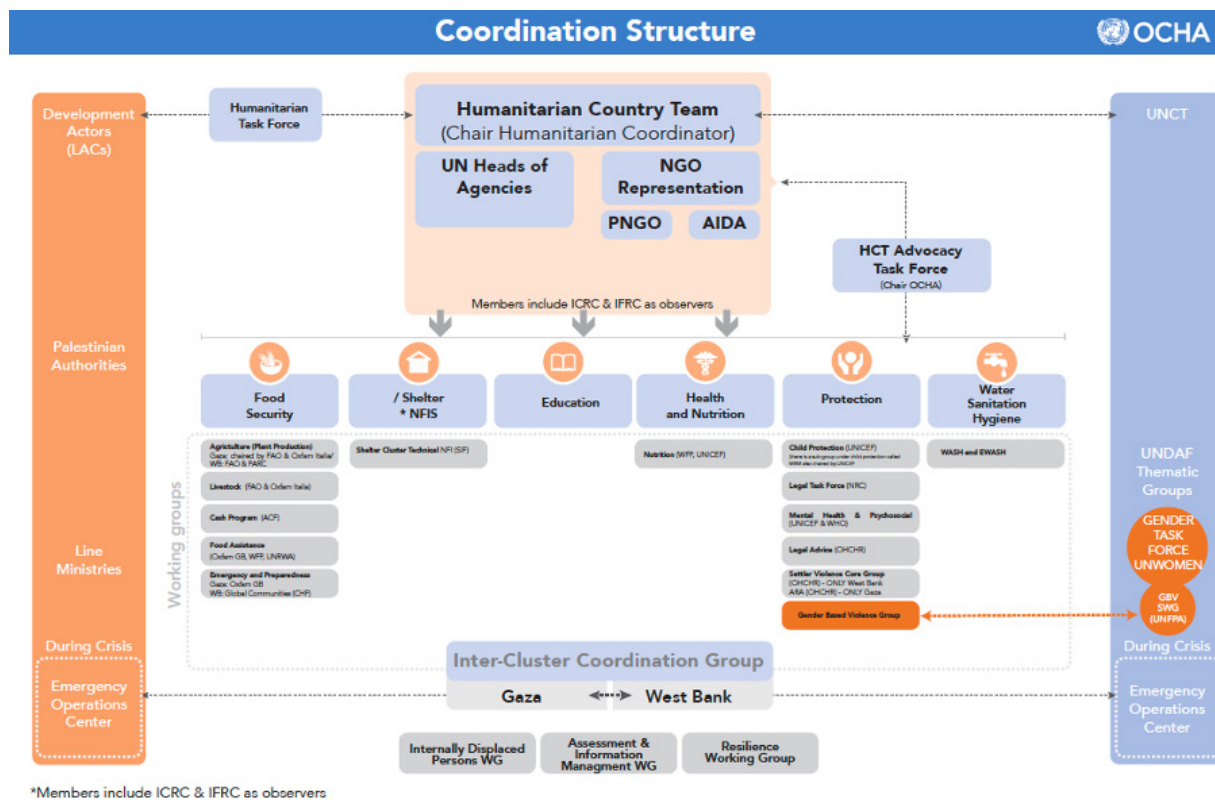
WROs/WLOs and civil society

1. Prioritize partnerships with international partners in order to engage with reciprocal capacity strengthening.

2. Partner with international actors that take an advisory/backstopping role while supporting local WROs/WLOs' capacity development.

3. Conduct an internal, organizational capacity self-assessment to identify strengths, needs and gaps in order to better request tailored support from international partners.

4. Support the development of humanitarian networks/consortia of WROs/WLOs to foster the exchange of information, access to resources, knowledge sharing and skills development.[84]
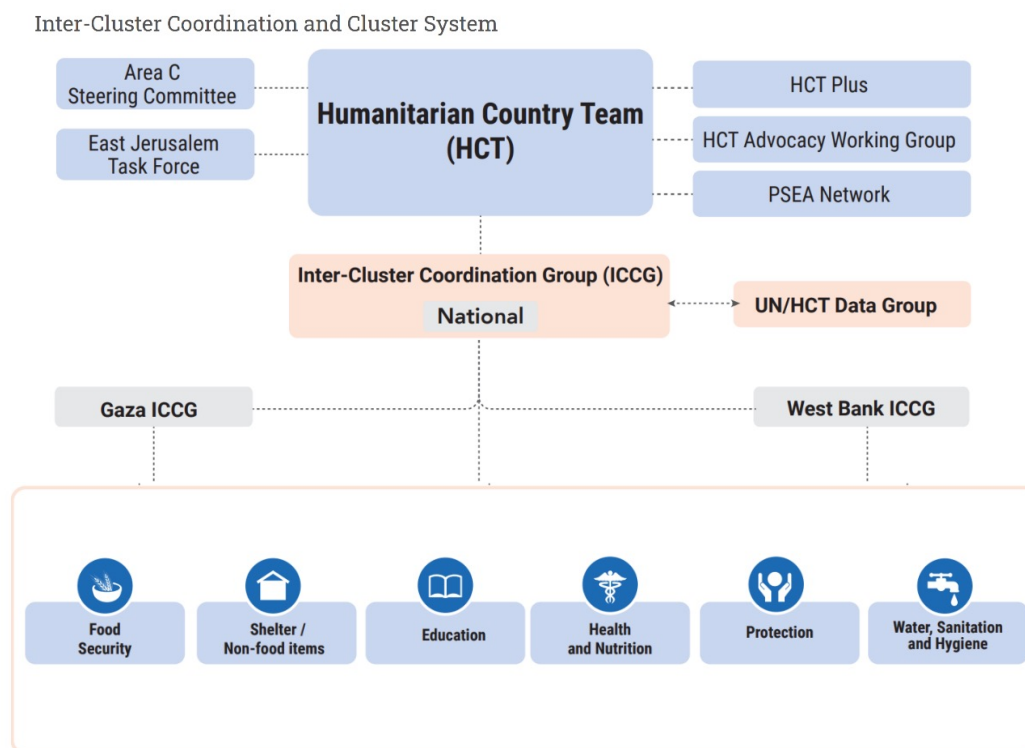
Government

1. Ensure women's ownership and participation during the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases of humanitarian planning and implementation processes.

2. Create an enabling environment for the participation and engagement of local WLOs/ WROs and women's networks.

3. Allocate resources and dedicate spaces for WRO/ WLO participation in national/ local government structures related to gender/women's affairs in the needs assessment cycle across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

4. Support individual women leaders from affected communities as part of comprehensive leadership programmes to support women's leadership in communities as well as WROs/WLOs ability to effectively dialogue with humanitarian actors.

5. Promote progressive social norms regarding women's leadership, inclusion as well as gender equality in addition to addressing overlapping women's marginalization through advocacy and programmatic interventions.[85]

ANNEX

Stakeholder map of women organizations involved in humanitarian action in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza[86]

Women-led organizations and Women's Rights Organizations ROLE IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN PALESTINE:
BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Inter-Cluster Coordination and Cluster System

Clusters, the oPt Humanitarian fund and other entry points to humanitarian action

In 2015, WROs'/WLOs' involvement in humanitarian response was concentrated in the Protection Cluster.[88] Today, more than 20 WROs/WLOs are participating in the cluster system (including four in food security and seven in education).[89] Additionally, more than 20 WROs/WLOs participate in the protection cluster (in the GBV Sub-Cluster), others participate in the Child Protection Sub-Cluster and others in the MHPSS Sub-Cluster. Concerns about WRO/WLO participation in the WASH Cluster remain, however. It should be noted, however, that the COVID-19 pandemic and recent adoption of online platforms for cluster meetings has complicated the tracking and monitoring of which organizations continue to regularly attend cluster meetings.[90] Interviews also revealed that ten WROs/WLOs are involved in implementation of the CERF.

oPt Humanitarian Fund

A list of WROs/WLOs participating in the oPt Humanitarian Fund

Partner Name
Association for Women and Child Protection (AISHA)
Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development (PWWSD)
Psycho Social Counseling Center for Women (PSCCW)
Rural Women's development Society (RWDS)
Society of Women Graduates (SWG)
Center for Women's Legal Research and Consulting (CWLRC)
Palestinian Developmental Women Studies Association (PDWSA)
Women`s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC)
Wifaq Society for the care of women and children (WSWCC)
Women's Affairs Center (WAC)
Zakher Association for Development of Women Capacity (Zakher)

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In 2015, one women's organization received funds from the HPF (an amount of USD $108,139).[91] In 2015, one women's organization received funds from the HPF (an amount of USD $108,139).[92]

Measurement framework[93]

RESULTS DOMAIN 1: SAFE AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

Result indicator: WLOs and WROs participate actively and safely in decision-making processes and can influence outcomes

1. **Progress indicator:** Diverse women and national and local WLOs and WROs are represented and engage actively in humanitarian coordination and decision-making forums

   Means of verification or evidence:
   A. WLOs and WROs are present and participate at key humanitarian coordination and planning processes platforms and forums

   B. Perception that WLOs and WROs can meaningfully and safely participate in key humanitarian forums and information is made accessible

2. **Progress indicator:** Coordination and consultation in humanitarian forums address access and safety considerations for WLOs and WROs

   Means of verification or evidence:
   Evidence that security risks, physical access, transport requirements and internet/technology access have been addressed.

RESULTS DOMAIN 2: COLLECTIVE INFLUENCING AND ADVOCACY

Result indicator: Humanitarian action is influenced by the priorities of national and local groups and movements that advocate for women's leadership and gender inclusion

1. **Progress indicator:** National and local WLOs and WROs and grassroots networks are able to successfully advocate for the development of policies and standards in relation to humanitarian action

    Means of verification or evidence:
    A. National and local WLOs and WROs and networks are able to advocate for the development of humanitarian policies and standards that align with their priorities

    B. Perception that advocacy by national and local WLOs and WROs and networks has influenced policy development

    C. Policies and standards reflect priorities of national and local WLOs and WROs, and support women's leadership

2. **Progress indicator:** International partners/donors amplify the voice of national and local WLOs and WROs during humanitarian coordination and planning processes

    Means of verification or evidence:
    A. Perception that donors have amplified the voices of WLOs and WROs during humanitarian coordination and planning processes

    B. Evidence of investment of resources to support advocacy

RESULTS DOMAIN 3: PARTNERSHIP, CAPACITY AND FUNDING

Result indicator: WLOs and WROs have targeted and relevant support through partnership, capacity building and funding to help them respond effectively and efficiently in humanitarian action

1. **Progress indicator:** Equitable and complementary partnerships between local and national WLOs and WROs and other responding actors are upheld

    Means of verification or evidence: Evidence that projects are co-designed, implemented and evaluated in partnership

2. **Progress indicator:** WLOs and WROs have targeted and relevant support from donors and partners to help them respond effectively and efficiently in the humanitarian coordination and planning processes

    Means of verification or evidence:
    A. WLOs and WROs define their own capacity-strengthening priorities in relation to the humanitarian coordination and planning processes

    B. WLOs and WROs are supported by partners to undertake capacity-building activities in humanitarian coordination and planning processes

3. **Progress indicator:** WLOs and WROs have sufficient financial support and autonomy that enable them to respond effectively and efficiently in humanitarian action

    Means of verification or evidence:
    A. WLOs and WROs have direct access to funding related to humanitarian actions

    B. Perception that WLOs and WROs have increased control over humanitarian action-related funding decisions

IMPACT DOMAIN: TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Result indicator: WLOs and WROs have a transformative leadership role in humanitarian action

1. **Progress indicator:** Women and diverse women's groups are present in the forums where key decisions are made on humanitarian action

   Means of verification or evidence: Proportion of leadership positions occupied by diverse women

2. **Progress indicator:** Women and diverse women's groups are listened to and their opinions are respected
   Means of verification or evidence:
   A. Perception that women and local and national WLOs and WROs influence key decisions in humanitarian action

   B. Gender perspectives, goals and desired impacts are included in humanitarian planning processes and reporting

WLOs/WROs survey tool

Purpose of the research
While humanitarian crises disproportionately affect women and girls and can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt) also presents opportunities for local women-led organizations (WLOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs). UN Women has engaged a researcher to conduct a research project aimed at exploring WLOs' and WROs' participation in humanitarian action in the oPt.

Purpose of the survey
This short survey is intended to capture the perceptions and experiences of local and national WLOs and WROs involved in humanitarian action within the oPt. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The data will be used to help UN Women and OCHA assess WLOs' and WROs' role in humanitarian action, humanitarian processes and planning cycles; entry points for WLOs' and WROs' participation in humanitarian clusters and activities; and WLOs' and WROs' capacity including the gender with age marker. We appreciate your time in lending your voice to inform our work.

Confidentiality
No names or other identifying data are needed or requested. No information will be attributed to individuals or organizations. Data will be aggregated and reported as "X per cent of respondents" (etc.). If you have any queries or concerns about the survey and how the data will be used, please get in touch with the research team (contact information below).

Please place an 'X' on the line below to acknowledge that you consent to your information being used in the ways outlined above.____ OK

Survey questions
1. Who is the focus of your organization's work?
   o Women
   o Persons with disabilities
   o LGBTQI+ people
   o Refugee women
   o Other _____

2. The following statements are about the participation of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian action in the oPt. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
The needs of diverse women have been addressed adequately in humanitarian processes and planning cycles.					
Humanitarian processes and planning adequately address gender-based issues					
The appropriate organizations are receiving support to address gender-based issues					

Leadership and decision-making

3. Please rank the statements from 1 to 4 (1 = least influence; 4 = most influence) that best describes how WROs and WLOs have influenced key humanitarian decision-making:

- Input into humanitarian planning processes and planning cycles;
- Advocating for stronger gender mainstreaming, inclusion and targeted activities in humanitarian action and activities;
- Promoted engagement of diverse women in humanitarian responses;
- Supported the visibility of the impact of humanitarian planning processes and planning cycles on diverse women.

4. How else have WROs and WLOs influenced key decision-making related to humanitarian planning processes and planning cycles?

Safe and meaningful participation

5. Which coordination/decision-making platforms and/or processes has your organization participated in (please mark all applicable)?

- Cluster meetings
- Inter-cluster coordination group (ICCG)
- Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)
- Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)
- Humanitarian Gender Group (HGG)
- Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)
- Other (please specify here:)

6. The following statements are about humanitarian coordination in the OPT. Please rate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
WLOs and WROs can actively participate and engage in relevant forums.					
Key humanitarian forums/meetings are conducted in the local language.					
It is safe for our organization to participate in humanitarian coordination forums and meetings.					
Barriers to attending coordination forums and meetings are actively are addressed (e.g. transportation, internet, location).					

Leadership and decision-making

7. The following questions are about advocacy. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
Advocacy by WLOs and WROs have influenced the development of humanitarian policies and standards.					
International partners and donors have adequately supported my organization to advocate for the participation of diverse women in humanitarian action.					
Humanitarian action policies and standards reflect the priorities of my organization.					
Donors have amplified the voices of WLOs and WROs in humanitarian action.					
Donors have invested resources to support advocacy by my organization/other WLOs/WROs.					

Partnerships

8. The following statements are about partnerships with international partners. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't know
My organization is involved in decisions guiding humanitarian coordination and planning processes.					
My organization is involved in funding decisions related to humanitarian action.					

Funding

9. How has your funding been affected by COVID-19? (Please mark one.)
- We have received less funding
- We have received more funding
- Our funding has stopped completely
- There have been no changes to our funding

10. Have you received financing for humanitarian projects you have applied for? (Please mark one.)
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say
- Have not applied

Capacity

11. What support have you received from your partners/donors in humanitarian action, processes, and planning?
- Training (online or in person)
- Technology/equipment
- Funding
- None of the above
- Other (please specify:) _____

12. Who defines the capacity needs of your organization?
- International partners
- Our own organisation
- A combination of both
- Other (please specify:) _____
- None of the above

13. Is this sufficient?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

14. Have donors/international partners focused on the areas of capacity (related to humanitarian action) that WLOs and WROs have prioritized?
- Completely
- To a large extent
- Not much
- Not at all
- I don't know

Capacity

11. What support have you received from your partners/donors in humanitarian action, processes, and planning?
- Training (online or in person)
- Technology/equipment
- Funding
- None of the above
- Other (please specify:) _____

12. Who defines the capacity needs of your organization?
- International partners
- Our own organisation
- A combination of both
- Other (please specify:) _____
- None of the above

13. Is this sufficient?
- Yes
- No
- I don't know

14. Have donors/international partners focused on the areas of capacity (related to humanitarian action) that WLOs and WROs have prioritized?
- Completely
- To a large extent
- Not much
- Not at all
- I don't know

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UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.