Women responders

Placing local action at the centre of humanitarian protection programming

Acknowledgements

Author	**Helen Lindley-Jones** Gender and Protection Researcher
Technical expert and oversight	**Toral Pattni** Senior Humanitarian Advisor (Gender and Protection)
Gender expert – Malawi	**Billy Molosoni** Gender Equity and Diversity Advisor
Gender experts –Vanuatu	**Brigitte Laboukly** Gender and Protection Project Manager **Tegan Molony** Gender Equality Program Manager
Research reference group	**Tam O'Neil** (CARE), **Howard Mollett** (CARE), **Frederique Lehoux** (CARE), **Isadora Quay** (CARE), **Siobhan Foran** (CARE), **Veronique Barbelet** (Overseas Development Institute)
Desk research assistance	**Nyima Keita** Gender and Protection Intern

ACRONYMS

CAVAW	Committee Against Violence Against Women (Vanuatu)
CBO	community-based organisation
CDCCC	Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (Vanuatu)
CSO	civil society organisation
DPO	disabled people's organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGM	female genital mutilation
GBV	gender-based violence
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LGBTIQ	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SGM	sexual and gender minorities
SOFEPADI	*Solidarité Féminine pour le Paix et le Développement Intégral*
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene

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Executive summary

In light of commitments to localisation in 'The Grand Bargain' in 2016, recent years have seen increasing discourse on how the aid community can transform the humanitarian system and shift towards preparedness and response that are driven by local actors. In parallel, rather than simply viewing women and girls as passive beneficiaries of assistance, there has been growing recognition of the role women and girls play in actively responding to crises.

However, the extent to which the discourse on both women's leadership and localisation has been translated into more meaningful collaboration between international actors and national and local women responding to crises varies considerably.

Within this context, this global research study aims to answer a key question:

'How is the humanitarian protection sector ensuring the participation and leadership of women responders?'

'Women responders' refers to individual women volunteers, activists, leaders, women-led groups, organisations* and networks.

Summary of recommendations

Based on the research findings, this paper recommends the following to not only increase the participation and leadership of women responders, but to improve humanitarian response overall:

- *Humanitarian actors should support protection strategies by recognising and engaging with women's experiences and priorities*
  The term 'protection' is an often-misunderstood term which doesn't necessarily translate well into the complex realities of people's lives. Women's own understandings of protection are strongly gendered, context-specific and deeply personal. Women responders act upon their own understanding and meaning of protection, which may differ to standard humanitarian definitions – humanitarian actors should recognise this and engage with women and women responders accordingly.

- *Humanitarian actors should collaborate with women responders to make humanitarian responses more effective*
  Collaboration with women responders is not a panacea for humanitarian protection programming and brings with it complexity. Yet failing to collaborate with women responders represents a significant missed opportunity to make humanitarian response more contextualised and effective. The value of collaborating with women responders not only on longer-term programming but also humanitarian protection needs to be recognised.

- *Agencies should formally engage with women responders to emphasise the value of their contribution*
  There are perceptions across international humanitarian response that senior management seldom values the contribution of women-led organisations. This highlights the importance of formalising this type of engagement through partnerships and regional and country strategies while clearly communicating to staff the value of collaboration with women responders.

- *Agencies should learn from existing good practice*
  Promising practices of collaboration do exist and should be built upon, including supporting links between women responders from the grassroots to the international levels, and investing in emergency preparedness. Many examples of good practice are outlined in this report. There is significant learning for the sector in the approaches of partnership-focused international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

- *Barriers to women responders' participation should be removed*
  Women responders face significant barriers in collaborating with humanitarian actors. Actions should be taken to remove barriers to participation in coordination and decision-making spaces. Humanitarian actors should change policies, procedures and ways of working to enable forms of partnership that put women responders at the centre of humanitarian protection programming.

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* A women-led organisation was understood to be an organisation which is led by a woman and/or women make up the majority of leadership positions, and which is working to support the practical and/or strategic needs of women and girls.

Key findings

HOW ARE WOMEN RESPONDERS MITIGATING AND RESPONDING TO PROTECTION RISKS?

Self-protection

Women are active in responding to the protection risks they and others face in crises in diverse ways, whether as individual volunteers, leaders and activists, or in women-led groups, organisations or networks. Self-protection strategies are often a first action, drawing on resources that a woman has available.

Organising collectively

Women often organise collectively in informal groups: CARE's mapping of women's groups in Syria found cases of women in blocks of flats grouping together so that some could take care of the children in the daytime, enabling others to look for work or collect food distributions.

Identifying and meeting needs on the ground

Women-led organisations include those established in response to crises in contexts such as Syria and Yemen, and those that normally carry out longer-term work, but which respond to emerging or recurring crises in the contexts in which they operate. The actions of women-led organisations in crises often both meet women's practical needs and target the root causes of gender inequality. This may be in parallel, for example, by providing material support and supporting women's leadership training. These activities can also shift over time according to needs and opportunities. In doing so, they may span across traditional agency classifications.

HOW DO WOMEN RESPONDERS CONTRIBUTE TO MORE CONTEXTUALISED AND EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE?*

Collaboration with women-led groups and organisations is often seen to take place when a crisis is over and development work starts. This research shows that women responders also make diverse contributions to humanitarian programming, extending beyond protection outcomes to contribute to a more contextualised and effective humanitarian response overall.

Six core contributions of women responders

The research identifies six core ways in which women responders are able to contribute to more contextualised and effective humanitarian protection interventions.

Six core contributions of women responders

1. The **access** women responders may have, permitting them not only to act as first responders, but also support more marginalised populations.

2. The contextual **understanding** women responders bring to the needs and realities of different groups, of how to engage with key stakeholders and their ability to respond creatively to barriers.

3. Their ability to use social capital and networks to **reach** other women.

4. Being able to provide a space for and **raise women's voices** and support women's **leadership**.

5. Being able to provide **solidarity** to other women and girls in day-to-day spaces and activism.

6. Contributing to interventions being gender **transformative** and potentially more **sustainable**.

Improving protection for all – avoiding missed opportunities

The contributions of different women responders vary, with grassroots women leaders, groups and organisations able to support and respond in ways distinct from larger national women-led organisations and movements. Women responders can also represent or collaborate with local organisations and movements of persons with disabilities or sexual and gender minorities. Failing to collaborate with women responders in humanitarian preparedness and response represents a significant missed opportunity in achieving protection for all communities affected by crises.

HOW ARE HUMANITARIAN ACTORS ENGAGING WITH AND ENSURING THE PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN RESPONDERS?

For many international humanitarian actors, the extent to which they engage with and ensure the participation and leadership of women responders is unclear. This research identified seven ways in which humanitarian actors collaborated with women responders in protection programming. These ranged from training and support for grassroots women's groups; through collaboration in emergency preparedness; to partnership with women-led organisations in direct service provision.

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* In the report, CARE grappled with the implications of asking this question, as it implies we are questioning women's added value. In this study, we recognise that there is an inherent value in collaborating with and supporting women responders. As 50 per cent of the population, and those affected by humanitarian crises, women should be supported to equally participate in decision making and lead interventions which affect their lives. At the same time, we recognise that there is value in documenting and synthesising evidence of how collaborating with and supporting women responders can strengthen humanitarian preparedness and response, as this value is not yet recognised by all humanitarian actors.

No single approach to partnership

INGOs did not share a single approach to partnership in humanitarian response, undertaking a mixture of direct service delivery and implementation via partnerships. Collaboration with women-led organisations therefore also varied. When partnerships were formed, the structure of approaches largely depended on the organisation's approach to partnership; for example, whether partnerships were based on a project-based sub-granting model or organisations developed longer-term relationships.

Valuing women's contribution and reconsidering partnership selection criteria

Where partnerships occurred, they were often facilitated by the advocacy of individuals within INGOs who valued the specific contributions of women responders. Conversely, partnerships have not been developed, or there has been resistance, in instances where senior staff did not value collaboration with women-led organisations. This is influenced by the context of a humanitarian system, which values reaching a large number of beneficiaries in the most cost-effective way. This often translates to signing a smaller number of agreements with larger civil society organisation (CSO) partners, which are less likely to be women-led organisations. Similarly, partnership selection criteria used by INGOs may favour organisations which are able to comply with due diligence and grant requirements over technical experience and expertise.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO WOMEN RESPONDERS FACE IN ENGAGING WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS?

Although promising practices exist, women responders face significant challenges in engaging with humanitarian actors. These include barriers that limit women's participation in decision making more widely, such as restrictions on women's mobility, harassment and social norms which assert that women are not capable to be leaders. These challenges are amplified for more marginalised individuals, such as women's disabled people's organisations and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer groups.

Practical barriers

There is often a lack of consideration for the practical barriers that women responders face. Women are rarely compensated for their time and when engagement does happen, it can be tokenistic.

Threats or violence

Women responders are also often at greater risk of threats or violence, as they may be challenging gender norms. This research wasn't able to identify examples where international actors had budgeted for contingency funds to support partners to cover emergency costs in case of threats.

Sub-granting models

The predominance of sub-granting models undermines the quality of partnerships, with women-led organisations only being involved after a proposal has been developed. This challenge applies to CSOs more widely.

Key recommendations

WHAT HUMANITARIAN RESPONDERS SHOULD DO

Recommendations for humanitarian protection response (based on a CARE Guidance Note developed from findings of this research):

Principle One: See women as the experts in their situation

Recognise that women responders, whether individual leaders, grassroots groups or national organisations, have a nuanced and intimate understanding of their needs, including the protection risks that affect them and other women in their circumstances. This, and the actions women responders take to support themselves and others, may not always sit neatly with humanitarian and development divides or with sector definitions. Humanitarian actors should intentionally and systematically listen to and consider women's voices and be flexible in working outside sector definitions and divides when required.

Principle Two: Respect the priorities of women-led groups and organisations

Women-led organisations may wish to become involved in humanitarian response, but face barriers. Equally, as a women's rights organisation with a longer-term agenda in a country, an organisation may not wish to become involved for fear of it detracting from that work. At the grassroots level, women responders can face too many time pressures to take on additional roles. Collaborating with women responders necessitates asking about an individual, a group or an organisation's wishes and priorities for participation and then respecting these.

Principle Three: Compensate for women's time and remove barriers to access

Women responders are often highly motivated and give their time freely. Although the principle of volunteerism is important, it should be implemented realistically, with women compensated appropriately, recognising that they often have unpaid caring responsibilities. Actively consider barriers to access and participation for different women responders at all levels and actions

that can be taken to reduce these. Wherever possible, consult women-led organisations and groups on barriers, potential actions and the resources required.

WHAT DONORS SHOULD DO

Promote women-led partnerships

Donors can play a key role in communicating the value of women-led partnerships and pushing collaboration forward. They also need to hold international non-governmental organisations accountable for the quality of partnerships. Donors should therefore consider evaluating INGOs who partner with woman-led organisations on criteria such as:

- Whether core costs are reasonably shared with the women-led organisation;

- Whether capacity-building support is budgeted for;

- Whether the INGO has a strategy for meaningful capacity building, such as through accompaniment rather than one-off training;

- Whether the INGO budgets for contingency funds to support women-led organisations and their staff in event of an emergency; and

- Whether provision is included for staff care, to prevent and support those affected by secondary trauma and burn out.

Make deliberate efforts to reach women-led groups and organisations in humanitarian crises

Donors should take an intentional approach in how their funding mechanisms are structured and not assume that funding will reach women-led groups and organisations. Learning from research by the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality ('Donor support to Southern women's rights organisations: OECD findings', 2016), donors should:

- Ensure that women-led organisations are not competing with international humanitarian actors in the same funding windows;

- Earmark a percentage of funding for women-led organisations;

- Use a mix of funding mechanisms to reach different sized organisations, from grassroots groups to national and regional women-led organisations; and

- Strengthen internal monitoring systems to track the percentage and type of funding in crises reaching women-led groups and organisations.

Balance humanitarian response and social justice funding

- While recognising that humanitarian response needs to be prioritised in a crisis, donors should avoid putting women-led organisations in a position where they are unable to mobilise around the opportunities for positive social change that crises can provide.

- Donors should support women-led organisations to continue longer-term work according to their own priorities and adapt to the changing context, including by retaining funding pots for such work.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background: localisation and women's leadership

Following the commitments to localisation in the Grand Bargain in 2016,[1] there has been increasing discourse on how the aid community can transform the humanitarian system and shift towards preparedness and response which is driven by local actors. Although different interpretations of localisation exist, there is wide agreement that its long-term aim is to achieve the most effective and sustainable humanitarian response possible for those affected. There is a growing body of evidence on how locally-led responses can be more efficient and effective than internationally-led responses,[2] but also recognition that a spectrum of local, national and international responses may be required in different contexts to achieve this aim.[3]

In parallel, research and experience show that women bring invaluable capacities and experience to humanitarian action, and that supporting women's leadership in preparedness and response is critical to achieve effective humanitarian response and sustainable benefits.[4] Rather than simply viewing women and girls as passive beneficiaries of assistance, there has been mounting recognition of the role women and girls play in actively responding to crises.[5] This is reflected in the first gender commitment of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, which calls to: 'Empower Women and Girls as change agents and leaders, including by increasing support for local women's groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action'.

The extent to which the discourse on both women's leadership and localisation has been translated into more meaningful collaboration between international actors and national and local women responding to crises, however, varies considerably. Within this context, the present study was conceived after identifying a gap in learning around how the humanitarian protection sector specifically is engaging with and ensuring the participation and leadership of women responders, as individual volunteers, leaders, activists, groups, women-led organisations and networks, and how the sector can do better.

1.2 Purpose and scope

The aim of the study is to identify concrete ways in which humanitarian actors can strengthen collaboration with, and support to, women responders in the context of protection interventions. In doing so, it examines:

a) What 'protection' means to women and girls as individuals and those responding to protection risks;

b) The ways in which women responders are taking actions to mitigate and respond to protection risks;

c) How collaborating with women responders can ensure a contextualised and effective humanitarian response;

d) The extent to which international humanitarian actors collaborate with and support women responders in protection programming, and how they do this; and

e) Challenges that international humanitarian actors and women responders face in this collaboration and suggested ways forward.

While recognising the importance of engaging both male and female responders and sexual and gender minorities (SGM), for the purposes of this study it has been decided to focus on women as responders. This is because structural gender inequalities and unequal power relations further limit women's participation and leadership in humanitarian response. The study includes an explicit focus on the experiences of persons identifying as trans and lesbian women (discussed further in Section 1.3, below).

1.3 Terminology and definitions

This section outlines the rationale behind key terminology used in the report and definitions of specific terms.

Although no specific definition of **localisation** exists,[6] there is broad agreement around the following definition from Trocaire:

'Localisation of humanitarian aid is a collective process by the different stakeholders of the humanitarian system (donors, United Nations agencies, NGOs) which aims to return local actors (local authorities or civil society) to the centre of the response with a greater, more central role.'[7]

Our understanding of the term used in the report also recognises the shift in power relations required to make this change across a number of areas, including coordination, decision making and resources.

The report refers to both 'collaboration' and 'partnership'. **Collaboration** has been used as an umbrella term for the diverse ways in which international humanitarian actors and women responders engage. Partnership is used to refer to more formal partnership arrangements.

The term **women responders** has been used as a global term to refer to women volunteers, leaders, activists, groups, women-led organisations and networks. One aim of the research was to understand the ways in which different groups and organisations are supporting those affected by humanitarian crises, and hence understanding of the term evolved during the research. Based upon the research findings, a typology of women responders has been developed and is presented in Section 3.1.

The use of the term **women-led organisation** raised several issues during the research and was interpreted by different interviewees in different ways. Interpretations included organisations with only female staff, women's rights organisations and organisations in which a woman is in overall charge. For the purposes of the research, a women-led organisation is understood to be an organisation which is led by a woman and/or women make up the majority of leadership positions, and that is working to support the practical and/or strategic needs of women and girls.[8,9] The definition is not limited to organisations which define themselves as women's rights organisations, which support only women and girls, or which have only female staff.

The research grappled with how best to analyse and represent the viewpoints of sexual and gender minorities and the terminology to use. We recognise that the use of the category of SGM or lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) (or one of its variants) can be problematic, both because individuals with non-conforming sexual orientations and gender identities do not always identify with these categories, and because the use of such categories risks homogenising diverse identities and experiences.[10] The research has chosen to focus on the experiences and actions of persons who identify as being trans and lesbian women, and how sexual orientation and gender identity can intersect with other aspects of women's identity. We recognise, however, that of central importance in humanitarian response is listening to and collaborating with different persons identifying as SGM, including the terminology they wish to use.

Finally, the focus of the report is on the humanitarian protection sector. There is sometimes confusion around the term protection, and a full definition is outlined in Section 2. The study focuses on the whole of the protection sector, cutting across the sub-sectors[11] of:

- Protection coordination, advocacy and information;

- Psychosocial support;

- Child protection; and

- Prevention of and responses to gender-based violence.

While the report's focus is on the protection sector, this doesn't negate the importance of supporting women's participation and leadership across all sectors of humanitarian preparedness and response.

1.4 Methodology

The study is based on primary and secondary research, as follows:

1.4.1 GLOBAL RESEARCH

A literature review was carried out of published and grey literature across the research questions. In addition to research reports, this included websites and public documentation produced by international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and women-led organisations to identify examples of ways in which women are mitigating and responding to protection risks.

Interviews were conducted virtually between January and April 2018 by the lead researcher with women-led organisations and humanitarian actors, as outlined in the table below. Sampling was purposeful, with the aim of interviewing humanitarian actors who implemented a wide range of protection approaches across the different sub-sectors outlined above, and as many women-led organisations as we were able to reach in the timeframe. An online survey was developed in SurveyMonkey, with the aim of broadening the reach to women-led organisations across the globe participating in the research.

Interviews were semi-structured, guided by the key questions outlined in Annex 1. All data from the literature review, interviews and focus group discussions were thematically coded and analysed in Qualitative Data Analysis software. Data from the online survey were cleaned and analysed in Microsoft Excel.

Across all the interviews and focus groups, all opinions shared were anonymised and any identifying details removed, so that respondents would feel able to share critical feedback if they chose. All examples of collaboration included are drawn from published literature or have been developed and included in the report with the agreement of the organisation concerned.

1.4.2 RESEARCH IN MALAWI AND VANUATU

Primary research was carried out in Malawi and Vanuatu, selected due to the readiness and availability of CARE International and other Protection Cluster members to engage with the research in these locations. Interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted within three communities in Nsanje District in Malawi, and on the islands of Santo, Aniwa and Tana in Vanuatu in February and April 2018. The researcher and CARE team in-country posed the questions directly with the support of a female translator. The communities were selected to represent areas where CARE (and in Vanuatu, CARE's partner Save the Children) is currently or has previously supported humanitarian response, and which are located in varied geographical locations (for example, small versus large islands).

The findings from each set of country-level research were compiled into country-specific reports shared with CARE International and Protection Cluster members in each country, and are incorporated throughout this global research report.

1.4.3 LIMITATIONS

CARE would have preferred to have interviewed more women-led organisations for the global study from a wider range of countries, but was limited by available contacts. Except in Malawi and Vanuatu, interviews with women-led organisations were limited to organisations that had email access, to facilitate the initial contact, and Skype or telephone connectivity for the interview, which excluded smaller organisations and those based in more remote areas. Although it was possible to interview several LGBTIQ organisations in Malawi and Vanuatu, we were unable to contact LGBTIQ organisations at the global level for interview.

As is outlined in Section 2.2, 'protection' is a difficult concept to meaningfully translate into different languages and people's day-to-day realities. This led to some initial confusion during focus group discussions in Malawi and Vanuatu, and it was found that speaking about 'different types of problems' facilitated discussion. In general, women were very open in discussing protection risks; however, in one community in Vanuatu, the discussion was interrupted by male community members and this ended discussion of the topic. Ideally, in-country research would have been led by local researchers; however, time constraints meant this would have been challenging.

Global research	
Women-led organisations Organisations which are led by a woman and/or women make up the majority of leadership positions, and which are working to support the practical and/or strategic needs of women and girls. Contacts were identified via an online survey, via humanitarian actors and through snowball sampling.	16 interviews with organisations in 11 countries affected by conflict and natural disasters
Online survey of women-led organisations Open to all organisations which are women-led, and which have been involved at least once in a humanitarian response. The survey was not limited to organisations with a humanitarian mandate.	34 respondents from 14 countries
International humanitarian actors Gender and/or protection specialists within humanitarian agencies implementing a range of different protection approaches.	44 respondents
Research in Malawi and Vanuatu	
Women-led organisations Based in the capital, regional towns and rural areas. Contacts were established via the Protection Cluster, CARE's relationships with the organisations and internet searchers.	8 interviews in Malawi and 3 in Vanuatu
Humanitarian actors Members of the Protection Cluster, relevant UN agencies and government departments.	16 interviews in Malawi and 8 in Vanuatu
Grassroots women's groups and women identified as 'leaders' Women identified as being part of a community group, whether established independently or with support from an (I)NGO. This included mixed-sex groups. Women identified as 'leaders' by others, whether in formal leadership roles or because they are trusted members of the community.	6 FGDs in Malawi 1 FGD and 6 interviews in Vanuatu
Women community members Between 6 and 15 women (over the age of 18). The women were selected with support from different community leaders to represent different ages and were not members of community groups.	2 FGDS in Malawi 2 FGDs in Vanuatu

2. WHAT DOES PROTECTION MEAN TO WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Key findings

- 'Protection' is an often-misunderstood term in the humanitarian sector. It is interpreted in different ways by different actors and doesn't necessarily translate into the complex realities of people's lives.

- Women's own understandings of protection are strongly gendered; these understandings and the protection risks they face cannot be separated from the social norms which shape their lives prior to a crisis.

- Women's definitions and their priorities are, however, context specific and deeply personal. They range from understanding protection to be actions taken to protect their homes during a cyclone, to acting to protect others in need, and finding ways to maintain their dignity through taking care of their appearance.

- Humanitarian response needs to understand and engage with women's experiences and priorities. Due to gendered norms and unequal power relations, the opportunities women have to voice their experiences are often limited and risk becoming invisible.

- Engaging with women responders, as individuals, groups and organisations, who are rooted in the communities and countries in which they operate, is one key means to ensure women's voices are heard, and that analysis of protection risks is grounded in a context-specific understanding of gendered power relations.

This section examines 'protection'. It first defines protection according to international humanitarian actors, before outlining primary and secondary evidence on what protection means to women and girls affected by crises, and what consequences this has for how protection interventions are designed and delivered.

2.1 What does protection mean to humanitarian actors?

When a crisis occurs, individuals may become more vulnerable to harm. Protection refers to helping people stay safe – and recover – from harm others might do to them.[12]

Humanitarian actors have a responsibility to ensure that their actions do not expose civilians to additional harm by considering the possible consequences of taking different humanitarian action, or of not acting, and how this may expose people to threats.[13] Humanitarian actors can also contribute more widely to civilian protection when the state is unwilling or unable to fulfil its legal responsibility to protect people living inside its borders.

However, protection is often a misunderstood term in the humanitarian sector. How it is interpreted and realised by humanitarian actors varies considerably, ranging from protection mainstreaming to stand-alone programming. Humanitarian actors may also specialise in mitigating and responding to specific types of violence or discrimination, such as gender-based violence (GBV), focusing on groups of people who may be vulnerable in a crisis, such as children, older people or people with a disability, or taking actions to mitigate and respond to context-specific risks through coordination, information provision and advocacy.

The Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) definition of protection[14] is similarly broad, that is:

'All activities, aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights, humanitarian and refugee law). Human rights and humanitarian actors shall conduct these activities impartially and not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, language or gender.'

The 2015 'Whole System Review of Protection' found that this wasn't just a question of semantics, but that 'the diverse interpretations of what protection means, coupled with varied uses of this terminology by relief workers, has detrimental consequences for affected populations and the delivery of an effective response at the system level'.[15]

2.2 What does protection mean to women and girls?

In this context, therefore, it is particularly important to consider what protection means to women and girls, both as those affected by a crisis and those responding to it. The increasing use of community-based protection approaches by different humanitarian actors has facilitated learning on how different groups conceive of protection and the risks that affect them.[16]

Analysis by the Local to Global Protection initiative[17] has highlighted how translating 'international laws, rights-based approaches…. into protection activities in highly complex local realities does not always resonate with local realities'.[18] Research carried out in Timor-Leste and Kenya revealed the fundamental challenge of finding terminology to convey the concept of protection, or associated terms such as 'safety' and 'dignity', with there often being no direct translation.[19]

2.2.1 GENDER AND AGE-GROUP DIFFERENCES

The research also revealed strong gender and age group differences in perceptions of protection; in both Kenya and Timor-Leste, men perceived the most important protection risks as being related to loss of livelihood (such as through cattle raiding) or linking safety to freedom of movement, speech and issues of coercion. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to conceive of protection as related to their personal safety, particularly when carrying out household tasks. In Timor-Leste, women identified domestic violence as their key protection concern.[20]

Similar findings emerged in the occupied Palestinian territories from research which aimed to develop a deeper understanding of perceptions of protection threats.[21] While both men and women perceived unemployment to be the most important protection challenge – 'a daily threat, which prevents a dignified life' – women also emphasised the correlation between unemployment and domestic violence, in addition to speaking more widely of sexual harassment, restrictions on their movement, arbitrary divorce, polygamy and so-called 'honour killing'.[22]

Primary research in Malawi, where protection was directly translated as 'safety', also revealed the strong gendered dimensions of the term. When asked to explain 'what protection meant to them', several women explained how being protected from harm entailed conforming with certain societal expectations in order to reduce the risk of violence:

'To me it's to be in the family, that is when I am protected, having only one man, being faithful to your partner, that way I can say I am safe.'

In Vanuatu, similarly, one youth peer educator who shared information on sexual and reproductive health, defined protection in terms of being protected from what 'other people may say' about her when she walked through the community.

2.2.2 ACTIONS TO PROTECT OTHERS AND PHYSICAL PROTECTION

The research also revealed strong associations with actions taken to 'protect' others, with several respondents in Malawi associating protection with either providing someone with assistance or being provided with assistance:

'It's when you face a challenge, and someone protects you from danger.'

'It's helping someone with challenges in life... Taking care of someone to have a better life, such as if a child is mistreated, if you take care of the child, that is protection.'

In addition to the protection risks a woman may face as an individual, she might also be concerned about the risks others, such as her children and family, face. Learning from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has shown the importance of considering different aspects of women's lives and identity in conceptions of protection, with instances of women reporting the protection risks that their husbands, sons and brothers face as their main priority.[23]

In Vanuatu, women interviewed most commonly conceived of protection in terms of physical protection from cyclones, rather than harm from others, and how they could protect themselves and their families from this – for example, by weaving coconut leaves to protect the rooves of houses or moving to a 'safe house'.[24]

2.2.3 DIGNITY AND RIGHTS

Research in Sudan's South Kordofan and Blue Nile states with women affected by bombing since the outbreak of civil war in 2011, reveals the importance of not only conceiving protection in terms of physical safety, but also dignity. Nagwa Musa Konda,[25] who has supported the Nuba Women Mountain Association to provide self-protection guidance, explains:

'Even if …. you are forced to live in a cave, when you do not have enough food for your children or yourself, and you live in constant fear of the next bombardment – feeling clean, smelling nice and looking good actually becomes crucial to your self-respect and your ability to survive…. Despite all the challenges, despite all the suffering, I do not want to look messy or walk around smelling bad. I want to be

a normal Nuba woman and therefore I'll protect my dignity for as long as I'm alive.'[26]

The research in Timor-Leste revealed strong associations between the concept of dignity and those of 'respect' and 'culture'. Women described how the practice of bride-price compromises their dignity by turning them into possessions and exposing them to associated physical violence. One woman described the bride-price practice as 'human trafficking in the family that is covered up with culture'.[27]

The emphasis on dignity was echoed by several women-led organisations, who in addition to understanding protection in terms of safeguarding and protecting individuals from risks, also mentioned considering 'all spheres' of an individual, including spiritual wellbeing. Many women-led organisations interviewed also emphasised in their definitions of protection a rights-based approach. Although there is overlap, a rights-based approach moves beyond the IASC protection definition of 'full respect for rights' to 'furthering the realisation of rights',[28] i.e. working to protect the rights of individuals, particularly women and girls, from threats directly linked to a crisis and those which pre-date it.

2.2.4 GENDERED POWER RELATIONS

The specific protection risks women and girls face in a crisis are influenced by a complex interplay of the factors which shape vulnerability. These include age, marital status, political affiliation, whether a woman is living with a disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, and socio-economic status. Understanding these factors and the risks that women and girls face requires an in-depth understanding of the context and gendered power relations.

Early marriage, for example, is often targeted by humanitarian actors as a protection risk. Research on early marriage of displaced Syrian girls in Lebanon revealed important gender differences in understanding girls' risk of early marriage: men were more likely to describe early marriage as a financial coping strategy, while women and girls identified early marriage as a means to protect girls from GBV and harassment. Some girls also saw early marriage as a means to escape restrictions on their freedom of movement and social opportunities imposed by parents worried about their safety.[29]

In contrast, female genital mutilation (FGM) is not normally identified by humanitarian actors as a protection risk in crises. In Mali, however, it was discovered that that daughters of displaced families from the North, where FGM is not traditionally practised, were being ostracised among host communities in the South,

where it is practised; this led to families from the North feeling pressured to perform FGM.[30]

The difference in perceptions of protection risks between humanitarian and local actors, and between different local actors, does not mean that these protection risks should not be addressed in humanitarian crises. Rather, it underlines the importance of engaging with women affected by a crisis, and who are responding to it, in ensuring a nuanced contextualised understanding.

2.3 What does this mean for the protection sector?

In defining and integrating protection into humanitarian action in different ways, it is easy for international actors to lose sight of the complex realities of people's lives. Women's own understandings of protection, and their priorities, are both highly context specific and deeply personal, and do not always fit neatly with humanitarian actors' definitions and sectors. Structural gender inequality and unequal power relations mean that the risks women and girls face cannot be easily separated from the gendered norms which shaped their lives prior to a crisis.

It is therefore critical in designing protection interventions to engage with women and girls on what protection means to them and their priorities. Due to unequal power relations, however, the opportunities women have to voice their experiences are often more limited than those of men and risk becoming invisible.

Engaging with women responders, as individuals, groups and organisations, who are rooted in the communities and countries in which they operate, is one potential important means to ensure that women's voices are heard, and that analysis of these risks is grounded in a context-specific understanding of gendered power relations.

3. HOW ARE WOMEN RESPONDERS MITIGATING AND RESPONDING TO PROTECTION RISKS?

Key findings

- Women responders are active in taking actions to mitigate and respond to protection threats from the grassroots to the international levels.

- Individual women may be active in different ways, wearing several different 'hats': for example, providing informal advice to peers or younger women, acting as a leader of a women's group and/or engaging as a member of a mixed community group.

- 'Women-led' organisations do not equate to 'women only' organisations. However, in the majority of organisations surveyed, women occupied a higher number of leadership positions.

- The majority of women-led organisations involved in humanitarian crises have longer-term social justice aims. However, they are involved in humanitarian response out of necessity, due to the circumstances of the areas in which they operate. In certain contexts, such as Syria and Yemen, a number of new women-led organisations have emerged directly from the conflict and the needs it has created.

- Women responders adapt their approaches to context-specific needs and priorities, and frequently meet both women's practical and their strategic needs. Women responders often recognise the importance of material and economic support, alongside providing protection services or empowerment, advocacy and other activities that seek to challenge the root causes of gender inequality. At the same time, many women responders retain a focus on women's strategic needs in a crisis, which can help ensure that gains made are not lost.

- Collaborating with women responders underlines the importance of taking an approach which cuts across traditional humanitarian agency classifications, recognising that actions do not necessarily fall neatly into a particular phase of response or defined sectors.

This section outlines a brief typology of women responders based upon primary and secondary data collected, before analysing how, in these different roles, women as individuals, and women-led groups and organisations, are responding to different protection risks.

3.1 Who are women responders?

Women, far from only being beneficiaries of assistance or victims of violence, often take actions to mitigate and respond to protection risks and support others in need. The table below provides a summary typology of women responders.

Individuals
'Self-protection'
Individual volunteers
Women identified as leaders
Women supported by leadership training
Women as activists or women human rights defenders
Women trained to play a specific role, e.g. referral to services
Informal groups
Existing community and faith groups
Disaster risk reduction groups
Groups with a protection objective
Formal organisations
Women-led organisations
Networks and coalitions
Women's funds

3.1.1 INDIVIDUALS

Women mitigate and respond to protection risks first and foremost as individuals, using the resources they have at their disposal (whether economic, human, social or political capital) to prevent harm to themselves and others. In several areas in South Kivu in the DRC, for example, women make markings such as crosses on tree trunks to signal to others that an area is not safe.[31]

These strategies are often known as 'self-protection', detailed further in Section 3.2. Although they may on occasion be reinforced or supported by outside actors, these actions are normally self-initiated and led.

Women may also act as volunteer responders as part of crisis preparedness or response. This includes as part of mixed-sex groups, but also as individual volunteers, such as searching for survivors after an earthquake[32] alongside other local first responders, or during conflict, such as the female white helmets in Syria.[33]

Women responders also include women who are known and often identified by others as leaders. In both Malawi and Vanuatu, women leaders were identified as members of different community groups (such as village development committees), who may support others during a crisis in their individual capacity and/or take actions as part of the wider group. In Vanuatu, 'trusted women' were identified in each research site to whom other women and girls would go for advice; these women often had slightly higher levels of education or held another position in the community, such as president of a women's group. Frequently they held several roles, such as Coordinator of the Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (CDCCC) or member of the Committee against Violence against Women (CAVAW).

Non-governmental organisation (NGO) programmes often identify motivated women to participate in leadership training as part of wider programme activities; following this support, they may then move into different formal leadership roles. In the DRC, for example, one such woman activist went on to become head of one of the city districts and negotiated the demobilisation of local rebel groups.[34]

Women leaders also include women who have a history of activism and may identify as activists or women human rights defenders. The study of Syrian women's peace activism[35] revealed that many activists had personal experiences of discrimination, or witnessed it among others, and felt an obligation to act. Women activists may also go on to establish or participate in informal groups or registered organisations to further their activism. The Director of Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls with Disabilities, for instance, established the organisation after experiencing discrimination as a woman with a disability.[36]

Box 1: Spotlight on individual women responders

In the Central African Republic, 200 Christian and Muslim women came together in the town of Boda to convince militias to lay down their arms. They also accompanied women of the other religion when they crossed lines that separated Christians and Muslims.

Source: Ratcliffe, R (2017). 'The women who put their lives on the line for peace in Central African Republic'. The Guardian, 28 October.

Individual women may also be trained by humanitarian or development actors to act in a specific role to mitigate or respond to protection risks others face. Community members are often trained as 'information volunteers' to provide referral to different services in humanitarian crises. In Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and CARE International have trained refugee community workers in GBV case management as part of a task-sharing approach.[37]

3.1.2 INFORMAL GROUPS

Women frequently organise collectively in all circumstances, and in times of crisis respond to different needs, including but not limited to protection risks, as members of informal (unregistered) groups. Often these groups emerge independently; however, they may later receive support from development or humanitarian actors – for example, if they are identified through mapping exercises.

In Afghanistan, women's groups have helped to set up clandestine schools and other vital services for women.[38] In Vanuatu, meetings of women's 'Sel Sel' groups, twice a week, provide an opportunity for women leaders to support other women and girls with advice and encouragement. In one community on Tanna Island, Vanuatu, the community women's group weaves mats for a member to sell if she is having difficulties paying a child's school fees.

These groups may originate and mobilise around different aspects of a person's identity or experience of discrimination, such as age or sexual orientation. In Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border, LGBTIQ individuals set up a Rainbow Group, with seven members, the intention being to support acceptance of LGBTIQ individuals by becoming involved in social work.[39] However, the group specifically avoided

registering as a community-based organisation (CBO) out of fear of having too high a profile.

Women may be involved in mitigation and response actions as members of wider community groups, including those established by NGOs. Often these groups are faith groups, or they may be established with longer-term development objectives in mind, such as REFLECT circles,[40] but are involved in humanitarian response on their own initiative.

In areas affected regularly by natural disasters, these groups may be part of formal disaster preparedness and response structures. Members of Village Civil Protection Committees in Malawi and CDCCCs in Vanuatu are involved in emergency preparedness planning and early warning. Although these groups do not normally carry out protection-specific activities in Vanuatu, CARE is training CDCCC members in gender and protection inclusion.

Women may also respond as members of women only or mixed groups with a specific protection objective – for example, as members of Child Protection Committees or Women's Forums, working in parallel with Community Protection Committees in the DRC to ensure a safe space to discuss the protection risks that affect them.[41]

3.1.3 FORMAL ORGANISATIONS

Women-led organisations are enormously varied in their nature, from their size and proportion of women in leadership positions, to the type of activities and involvement in humanitarian response. For the purposes of the research, a women-led organisation was understood to be an organisation led by a woman and/or with women in the majority of leadership positions, and which works to support the practical and/or strategic needs of women and girls[42] (either alone or among other target groups).

Although many women-led organisations also identify as women's rights organisations, among survey respondents it was found that the organisations worked across a large number of sectors. On average, women-led organisations defined themselves as working across six sectors: for example, the same organisation working on women's economic empowerment, child protection, and GBV prevention and response.

This could be explained by the fact that the majority of organisations appeared to take a rights-based approach, working for the rights of women and/or children or specific marginalised groups, such as Dalit women. Two out of 25 organisations stated that they worked with women only, with the remainder identifying a range of target groups, including children, adolescent girls and boys, people with disabilities, and LGBTIQ individuals.

This was also reflected in the regularity with which the organisations were involved in humanitarian response, with 62 per cent stating that the crisis named in the survey was either the first they had responded to or that they had responded to previous crises, but it was not a core organisational activity. Of the three organisations that stated that humanitarian response was a core objective, two operated in the DRC, which is affected by protracted conflicts.

In Malawi, it was found that the majority of national women-led organisations had longer-term social justice aims, but the severity of a crisis (for example, severe flooding in 2015) meant that they may be involved in humanitarian activities. Interviews with several organisations in the Horn and East of Africa similarly revealed that women-led organisations were becoming involved in humanitarian response out of necessity due to the outbreak of conflict, the arrival of displaced persons, or climatic events in countries and areas where they operated.[43] In countries affected by conflict, such as Syria and Yemen, new women-led organisations have emerged specifically in response to circumstances.[44]

Nationally and internationally, women-led organisations may also be members of networks or coalitions. Most frequently, these organise around common women's rights advocacy objectives and provide representation and support to members; however, due to the contexts in which they operate, there is often significant overlap with activities which mitigate and respond to protection risks.

Finally, global and regional women's funds exist which may support the activities of women responding to crises. The majority of these funds focus on funding work with long-term social justice aims; however, they may also support emergency activities, whether in response to an emergency or, for example, due to the threats women human rights defenders face. The Global Fund for Women, for instance, has a crisis fund which supports women-led organisations responding to emergencies. Such funding is highly valued by women-led organisations due to its flexibility (and often the provision for core organisational support) and accessible application and reporting requirements.

3.2 How are women responders mitigating and responding to protection risks?

The different ways in which women responders mitigate and respond to protection risks are diverse, may change over time, and can fall outside formal sector definitions/conceptions of protection activities.

3.2.1 SELF-PROTECTION

Women and men affected by a crisis often have a 'detailed and sophisticated understanding of threats to safety, livelihood options and wellbeing',[45] and carry out a range of self-protection actions in order to guard themselves and their families. Research in Lebanon revealed that Syrian women refugees often hide the fact that their husband has been killed or kidnapped due to fears of violence and harassment – for example, by pretending to receive phone calls from a husband.[46] Frequently, however, self-protection actions have negative consequences and may result in choosing to be exposed to one form of harm over another. This includes 'harmful coping strategies', such as paying informal 'taxes' to armed groups and sexual exploitation in return for food, material goods or protection from others.

Box 4: Example: Self-protection

Self-protection activities may include active collaboration with local authorities. For example, in one community in South Kivu, DRC, authorities banned the sale of alcohol after midday when women denounced alcohol consumption as contributing to domestic violence and community conflict.

Source: Nunn, R (2016). 'Effective community-based protection programming: lessons from the Democratic Republic of Congo'. Forced Migration Review, Issue 53.

> **Box 5: Shifting activities**
>
> Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) is a Liberian women's rights organisation founded in 2003 which set up the first women-owned and -run radio station in the country.
>
> When the Ebola outbreak occurred, the committee trained their network of women's CBOs to share information on Ebola prevention and established radio listening clubs, where women could access information on their rights and up-to-date developments.
>
> In Loafa county, women's main income source was affected following the ban on the sale of dried meat. LIWOMAC supported women to diversify livelihood techniques. Given the influx of donor and NGO funds, LIWOMAC supported women's groups to hold meetings in communities to request how the money would be spent and materials distributed. The group also lobbied the government to provide accurate data to assess the impact of Ebola on women and girls.
>
> *Source:* Key Informant Interview #27.

3.2.2 WOMEN'S INFORMAL ORGANISING

Beyond self-protection, women may informally organise around specific activities or objectives. CARE's mapping of women's groups within Syria has revealed cases of women in blocks of two or three flats grouping together, with the older women taking care of children in the daytime, enabling the other women to go and look for work or attend food distributions. In Idlib, one group of women clubbed together to build a simple park for children to play in, as all the playgrounds had been destroyed.

In Malawi and Vanuatu, the research revealed actions taken by different women's groups to support others following natural disasters. In one community, the Women Farmers and Irrigation Group described how in the event of flooding, they would speak to the chief to seek places for people affected to stay, help elderly people with domestic tasks, and repair the rooves of houses for people who were unable to do so themselves.

3.2.3 MATERIAL SUPPORT

Immediately following a crisis, it is common for formal women-led organisations to provide some form of material support, recognising women's practical needs. Research has revealed that before the earthquake in Nepal, training and awareness-raising on trafficking and GBV were the most common work of women's rights organisations; yet following the disaster, work shifted to meeting immediate needs by delivering food and health kits and establishing women's safe spaces.[47] As hospitals quickly discharged women with newborn babies, grassroots groups mobilised to distribute health and lactation kits and build temporary shelters, which later served as counselling centres.[48]

Frequently, material support is provided as an additional component to other protection services, such as case management. For example, WomanKind Kenya and Zenab

for Women in Development prioritise nutrition and healthcare for pregnant and breastfeeding women, in addition to providing displaced Somalian women with counselling.[49]

3.2.4 SHIFTING ACTIVITIES

Analysis of the different examples has revealed that the types of support provided and different activities by women-led organisations and groups may shift over time, according to the type and stage of disaster. In responding to the West Africa Ebola outbreak, women-led organisations quickly mobilised, shifting activities to respond to the outbreak while using their grassroots connections (see Box 5).

3.2.5 GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

The largest number of examples identified were of women-led organisations leading GBV prevention and response. This most commonly involved providing holistic case management services, psychosocial support and, according to context, adapting support to respond to particular types of violence. Given that formal justice systems are often weak in situations affected by crises, and informal systems rarely take a survivor-centred approach, this may include a component of access to justice work.

In contexts affected by recurring natural disasters, GBV prevention and response activities may be directed by women-led organisations which provide ongoing, long-term services, but which then adapt activities or initiate them in a new location if a crisis emerges. In Malawi, this includes the Women's Legal Resource Centre which, following the floods in 2015, ran safe spaces in internally displaced person camps, and provided counselling and mobile legal clinics, as well as working with the protection cluster to establish referral pathways.

3.2.6 PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Outside of the psychosocial support provided to GBV survivors, few examples were found of women-led organisations and groups providing wider psychosocial support services to community members. This may be because psychosocial support is still an emerging sector in humanitarian response and is dominated by more specialist mental health and psychosocial support providers. It may also be that activities organised by women-led organisations and groups that have benefits for psychosocial wellbeing are not seen to fall within this sector. These include activities such as handicrafts and basic literacy, which can promote wellbeing through solidarity, but the benefits of which are hard to measure and may be classified under different sectors, such as economic empowerment.

Examples were found of mainstream national organisations providing psychosocial support in crisis settings – for example, TPO-Uganda, with which CARE partners to provide psychosocial support services to refugees. Most examples concerned the provision of 'psychosocial first aid'. In Vanuatu, for example, the National Youth Council trained a network of young volunteers to provide psychosocial first aid following Cyclone Pam in 2015. In Liberia, the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia provided counselling for Ebola survivors and family members.[50] Several examples of training for women-led organisations in the provision of more extensive mental health and psychosocial support by the War Trauma Foundation are outlined in Section 5.

3.2.7 CHILD PROTECTION

Limited examples were found of women-led specialist child protection organisations, with most local child protection organisations having a child-focused mandate and not being women-led. Where women-led organisations and groups did carry out child protection activities, these were often targeted at young and adolescent girls or run alongside wider GBV programmes. For example, the women-led organisation Saathi, established in 1992 in Nepal, has a dual mandate of addressing violence against women and violence against children.

3.2.8 ADVOCACY AND COORDINATION

Cutting across activities, there is often a strong advocacy and coordination component to the work. Most frequently this involves advocacy to ensure that humanitarian response meets the needs of women and girls and that they are actively involved in decision making. For instance, the organisation Save Somali Women and Children, founded in 1992 by a group of Somali women from six different clans and a member of the Humanitarian Country Team, made sure that protection was a key element of the humanitarian response as the drought escalated in 2016.[51]

Advocacy actions also include drawing attention to the impact of a disaster upon, and supporting the participation of, particular groups. In Nepal, the Feminist Dalit Organisation carried out research in six districts on the vulnerabilities of Dalit women in disasters, who are excluded from disaster preparedness and response activities and spaces.[52]

Advocacy activities of women-led organisations and groups may also be focused upon women mobilising around specific rights violations. In Uganda, the women's rights organisation ISIS-WICCE provided support to the organisation Teso Women to document women's stories around their experiences during the conflict. The founder of Teso Women, Alupo, is now leading a coalition of 14 women's groups advocating on women's land rights.

In conflict settings, extensive evidence was found of women's advocacy in peace activism. Research on women's peace activism in Syria found that many activists did not necessarily recognise their activities as peacebuilding, but rather as acting to support the reconstruction of their country.[53] Activities carried out by individual women activists included mediation efforts with armed actors, with several activists stating that this role was facilitated by the stereotype of women being peaceful and apolitical. The example of the mothers' movement was also documented in this research: a group of women activists who organised demonstrations demanding the release of their children, who had been seized by an armed group.[54]

Box 6: Advocacy

In Uganda, the National Union of Women with Disabilities (NUWODU) recognised that refugee women with different disabilities were largely excluded from their activities. They therefore consulted with refugee women on their needs, skills and capacities, and began group activities in several settlements – such as supporting self-advocacy skills and training service providers. The group's own advocacy has since expanded to include calling upon the Uganda government to ensure information is provided in accessible formats and in all languages, including refugee languages, and to include refugees in the implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan.

Source: Women's Refugee Commission and NUWODU (2016). 'Bridging the Gap Between Development and Humanitarian Action: The Role of Local Women's Organisations'.

The research on Syrian women's activism includes documentation on violence prevention efforts, such as revenge-deterring mechanisms. It describes how members of a women's group in Aleppo decided that they needed to act when they saw children under 18 carrying weapons and joining armed groups. The activists identified the potential to influence mothers to raise awareness of the consequences of joining armed groups and used the cover of a women's literacy workshop to conduct an awareness-raising programme.[55] In Pakistan, community peace groups, called Tolana Mothers, have worked to convince women stitching suicide bombers' jackets to stop, providing alternative sources of livelihood.[56]

3.3 What does this mean for the protection sector?

The research shows that women are active in mitigating and responding to protection threats from the grassroots to the international levels, in areas affected by both natural disasters and conflict (including both rapid onset and protracted conflicts). Individual women may be active in different ways, wearing several different 'hats': for example, providing informal advice to peers or younger women, acting as a leader of a women's group and/or engaging as a member of a mixed community group. Women may be motivated by the need for survival, to help others, to contribute to reconstruction of a community or country, or by more political feminist motives.

However, the actions women take do not necessarily correspond to formal sector definitions of what protection activities entail nor fall neatly within individual sub-sectors or categories. Women responders adapt their approaches to context-specific needs and priorities, and frequently meet both women's practical and strategic needs. They often recognise the importance of material and economic support, alongside providing protection services or empowerment, advocacy and other activities that seek to challenge the root causes of gender inequality. At the same time, many women responders retain a focus on women's strategic needs in a crisis, which can help ensure that gender equality gains made pre-crisis are not lost. Many of the protection risks women respond to are grounded in social norms which, although they may have been impacted by a crisis, pre-date it, and this is reflected in the activities of women responders being hard to classify as being solely *either* humanitarian response *or* longer-term development.

Collaborating with women responders underlines the importance of taking an approach that cuts across traditional humanitarian agency classifications, learning from emerging community-based protection approaches taken in the sector. As the Local to Global research found, 'many locally led protection efforts do not fit into externally defined categories or sectors... Nor do they fit nicely into a particular phase of emergency preparedness, response, recovery or development activities. A community perspective will naturally defy such aid industry classifications.'[57]

Section 4 presents a framework for how collaborating with women responders can contribute to a more contextualised and effective humanitarian response.

4. HOW CAN COLLABORATING WITH WOMEN RESPONDERS CONTRIBUTE TO HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE?

Key findings

- Women responders make diverse contributions to more effective protection programming, which extends beyond protection outcomes to contribute to a more effective, wider humanitarian response and longer-term women's rights and social justice aims, supporting and benefiting not only women and girls but different groups.

- These contributions can be classified across the six core areas of: access; understanding and responsiveness; reach; voice and leadership; solidarity; transformation and sustainability.

- In some areas, the contribution may not be unique to women-led organisations but shared with other local groups and organisations – for example, in terms of acting as first responders and gaining physical access to populations.

- Women responders are able to make specific contributions to more contextualised and effective humanitarian protection for reasons which include their understanding of women's realities and gendered power dynamics. Gaining this nuanced and context-based understanding is not possible through international response alone.

- The unique contributions of women responders should be recognised in the context of humanitarian preparedness and response and not only in longer-term women's rights programming.

- However, the contributions of different women responders are unlikely to be the same, with grassroots women leaders, groups and organisations being able to support and respond in distinct ways compared to larger national women-led organisations.

Building upon the analysis of the ways in which women responders mitigate and respond to protection risks, this section outlines a framework for understanding how women responders contribute to more contextualised and effective humanitarian protection programming. It first addresses the question of whether we should be examining the added value of women responders before presenting the six point framework.

4.1 Why women responders? Examining added value

Before considering how collaborating with women responders can add value to humanitarian response, it is important to reflect on the implications of asking this question. Examining how collaborating specifically with women responders can improve humanitarian effectiveness implies that we are questioning and examining their added value. In a 2012 review by Comic Relief of the added value of women-led organisations, several respondents queried why Comic Relief was asking this question, with one interviewee stating that women's organisations are challenged repeatedly, but not men's organisations: 'We need to defend ourselves again and again. We have to continually answer the question: why we're doing what we're doing?'[58]

4.1.1 INHERENT VALUE

In this study, we recognise that there is an inherent value in collaborating with and supporting women responders. As 50 per cent of the population, and those affected by humanitarian crises, women should be supported to participate equally in decision making and lead interventions which affect their lives; however, structural gender inequalities prevent this from being fully achieved. At the same time, we recognise that there is value in documenting and synthesising evidence of how collaborating with and supporting women responders can strengthen humanitarian preparedness and response, as their contribution is not always valued or recognised by humanitarian actors.

Although not yet fully recognised in the humanitarian sector, the achievements and value of women-led organisations and movements have been well documented in the social justice and development sectors. A large-scale quantitative survey covering four decades of data in 70 countries found that the presence of independent women's movements is the single most important factor in influencing progressive policy on violence against women.[59] The Global Study on the Implementation of UN Resolution 1325 similarly found that 'the participation of women at all levels is key to the operational effectiveness, success and sustainability of peace processes and peacebuilding efforts'.[60]

The Comic Relief study on the added value of women-led organisations found that this had much to do 'with the passion, courage and commitment with which they pursue their agenda'. It identified four key characteristics that most women-led organisations display which underpin this value: autonomy, agenda, authenticity and organisation (see Box 7).

4.1.2 CHALLENGES

Women-led organisations are not immune to the challenges faced by mainstream organisations. They are not inherently effective: some may be led by elite women not connected to women's lives at the grassroots, while some may be more conservative in their approach, focusing on an agenda which reinforces traditional gender roles.[61] Women's movements can also be characterised by conflict and division, and can exclude other minority groups, such as SGM.

Nonetheless, the Comic Relief study highlights that although there is no 'blueprint' for achieving gender equality, organising and mobilisation comes closest to achieving this and is a process that needs to be driven by local women and girls themselves. The role of women responders is therefore central as humanitarian actors, including CARE International, seek action that is gender transformative, rather than simply gender sensitive.[62]

Box 7: Key characteristics of women-led organisations

Autonomy: Determining and pursuing the organisation's own agenda, priorities and approaches.

Agenda: Looking at problems from the perspectives of women, based on understanding of how gendered power relations operate in a given context, and bringing previously invisible issues to the fore.

Authenticity: Seeing the whole reality of women's and girls' lives and keeping this focus at the core.

Organisation: Women and girls speaking for themselves, and the importance of organising and mobilising to articulate an agenda.

Source: O'Connell, H (2012). 'What added value do organisations that are led and managed by women and girls bring to work addressing the rights, needs and priorities of women and girls?'. Comic Relief.

4.2 Why women responders? A framework for humanitarian protection

The following section outlines a framework for understanding how the actions of women responders can contribute to more contextualised and effective humanitarian protection programming in the different stages of a response. Understanding of 'contextualised' and 'effective' is defined according to six key areas:

- access
- understanding and responsiveness
- reach
- voice and leadership
- solidarity
- transformation and sustainability.

The framework was developed based on an analysis of examples of what women responders, working from the grassroots to the international levels, have achieved in different humanitarian crises, and is conceived as a starting point, designed to be refined and expanded upon by other actors.

4.2.1 ACCESS

Physical access

Women as individuals, in groups and organisations are often the first responders and are able to obtain physical access to affected areas and populations, whether in the context of conflict or disaster response. Working alongside others, women are a significant resource that is overlooked in many emergencies. Following an earthquake in Mexico City in September 2017, partners of the Global Fund for Women described how young women mobilised in the Obrera neighbourhood to rescue those trapped at a collapsed textile factory.[63] Grassroots groups in Oaxaca, meanwhile, quickly responded to immediate material needs, travelling to Mexico City and back with supplies, as they shared fears that relief efforts would remain focused on the capital and not reach remote areas such as Oaxaca and Chiapas.[64]

Access to marginalised groups

Women may also be more able to access and help marginalised populations, whether they are marginalised due to location or social discrimination. Humanitarian actors have described challenges in supporting women and girls living with a disability, for example, stating that they are often hidden, and they and their families are fearful to open up to outsiders.[65]

Research suggests that refugee women and girls with disabilities are seldom connected with local mainstream disabled people's organisations (DPOs), which may be unaware of their unique vulnerabilities. Yet there are examples of women's DPOs engaging in successful advocacy to represent their needs.[66] In Malawi, Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls With Disabilities has been able to reach out through networks to mobilise groups of girls and young women with disabilities in communities who may be hidden.[67] Due to the threats of violence that LGBTIQ individuals face, LGBTIQ groups and associations play a unique role in providing support and advocating on behalf of these people in humanitarian response, serving as a 'de facto family for many of their constituents'.[68]

4.2.2 CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSIVENESS

Needs of women and girls

Evidence from a number of different crises suggests that women responders are better placed to identify the needs of other women and girls. Consultations with elderly women and women with disabilities in the Philippines revealed that they felt women were better able to address their needs, as they had a better understanding of the issues affecting them.[69]

Following the Nepal earthquakes, grassroots women's groups identified that taboos meant displaced women were hesitant to ask for feminine health supplies and so distributed culturally appropriate products.[70]

Specific barriers and creative problem solving

Understanding and responsiveness includes identifying and responding to specific barriers and challenges women and girls face. In Liberia, following a wave of

hate crimes against LGTBIQ individuals during the Ebola outbreak, Stop Aids Liberia trained 150 police officers in Monrovia on LGBTIQ rights, and the police have since established a hotline to call in case of attack.[71] Responding to challenges and barriers often includes creative problem solving.

Needs of different groups

Examples have also been increasingly documented of how women-led organisations respond not only to challenges they notice women and girls face, but also to the needs of different groups in their respective contexts. This includes providing services to male and LGBTIQ survivors of violence. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, LGBTIQ Syrians who had experienced sexual violence started coming forward to the women's rights organisation, Rasan, after it started engaging with men on issues of gender equality. Rasan in turn expanded and tailored its services to include these individuals.[72] Similarly, the Women's Rehabilitation Organisation has been encountering men and boys who have experienced sexual violence in Syria and so has adapted its services for them.

Engaging with key stakeholders

'Understanding' includes not only understanding the needs of different groups, but context-specific understanding of how to engage with key stakeholders. Vanuatu, for example, is an archipelago made up of 83 islands, each with a distinctive geography and culture. Staff from Tafea Counselling Centre, part of Vanuatu Women's Centre on Tanna Island, described how in engaging with local chiefs as male advocates for GBV survivors, it is crucial to 'speak in a sense that suits their culture'. Previously, the chiefs were resistant to the messages shared; however, when staff from Tanna itself spoke to them they received positive feedback that the chiefs understood, as it was clear the staff understood their customs.

Considering the vulnerable

While there is risk in stereotyping women to socially constructed gender 'caring' roles, there is some evidence to suggest that women affected by a crisis actively consider the needs of particularly vulnerable members

of their communities.[73] On Aniwa Island in Vanuatu, female CDCCC members described how they insisted upon dividing aid provided following Cyclone Pam according to the number of members of each household, to ensure that it was fairly distributed, and developed accurate household lists in opposition to the wishes of some men in the community.

4.2.3 REACH

Other women

During crises, individual women, groups and organisations are often well placed to reach out to and mobilise other women, using their networks and knowledge of the best ways to engage with different individuals. In Gaza, women initiated a campaign to recruit volunteers using Facebook and Twitter and went door to door speaking to parents explaining the importance of their daughters' contributions.[74]

Geographical reach

Women-led organisations can also be uniquely placed to make connections with other women responders working at different geographical levels. In Nepal, research revealed that women's rights organisations had strong links to local women's groups, which they were able to mobilise and support following the earthquake – for example, in the establishment of safe spaces to provide psychosocial support and referral services.[75] Through local networks, women's rights organisations were able to distribute food aid and dignity kits, which also provided a means for women to report incidents of violence against women and girls and access support.[76]

Disabled people's organisations

A global mapping of the role of women with disabilities in humanitarian response revealed how women's DPOs are working with women and girls with disabilities in different crisis-affected areas to form their own groups as forums for education, information sharing and advocacy.[77] Women's DPOs that have more experience are able to mentor and support these groups, which also contributes to strengthening the wider disability rights movement.

4.2.4 VOICE AND LEADERSHIP

Advocating on specific issues

Women's groups, organisations and networks can provide a space for women to come together and advocate on specific issues in a crisis, based on context-specific needs. At a national level, the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq is leading a coalition advocating for the central government to adopt a national framework allowing NGOs to run shelters. Currently, women's organisations in the country are forced to run clandestine safe houses, as central government policy does not authorise NGOs to run shelters, which are seen as 'encouraging women to disobey their husbands and daughters to disobey their parents'.[78] More locally, women in Taiz in Yemen described how they advocated for militia leaders to allow schools to be reopened, action that was successful in some locations.[79]

Supporting leadership potential

The spaces created, and support provided, by women's groups and organisations can also encourage the leadership potential of women and girls. Consultations led by ActionAid in four countries found that the existence of women's groups was a key enabling factor for women's leadership in humanitarian action. This may be through both the solidarity and encouragement provided by spaces established by women and specific support, such as leadership training. In the DRC, for example, following participation in leadership training by the women's rights organisation *Association des Femmes des Medias*, one woman activist went on to become head of a city district. Here she used creative strategies to persuade a female rebel leader to surrender herself, her militia and the group's weapons, which led to more groups doing the same.[80]

Advocating for marginalised groups

Women's groups and organisations can also provide a space to advocate on behalf of, and raise the voice of, other more marginalised women and girls in a crisis. In the DRC and occupied Palestinian territories, women's DPOs have developed communication strategies that have enabled them to collect and share personal stories of women and girls with disabilities in conflict-affected communities, in order to raise the profile of relevant issues.[81]

Wider decision-making

This also includes women advocating for the inclusion of women's voices, experiences and concerns in wider decision-making processes, whether through women-led organisations (see Box 10) or as individual leaders and through grassroots groups. Women's Forum members in the DRC have led advocacy with local powerholders on violations which impact upon women's practical needs, such as illegal 'taxation', and strategic interests which challenge gender inequality, such as inclusion in community meetings when decisions on household inheritance are made.[82]

4.2.5 SOLIDARITY

Solidarity and psychosocial support

Women's groups, organisations and networks are uniquely placed to provide solidarity to other women and girls. This may be an important component of psychosocial support: a study of women's perceptions of psychosocial wellbeing in three conflict-affected countries identified five domains of wellbeing common across the contexts, which included having 'friends and social support outside of the family'.[83] Being able to talk about problems with a solidarity group was particularly valued.[84] In the DRC, members of women's CBOs in North and South Kivu reported multiple benefits of membership, including creating solidarity and social cohesion, building mutual respect and trust, and supporting volunteerism and connection.[85]

In Sudan, Nagwa Musa Konda, former Director of the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation, when speaking about supporting Nuba women in self-protection strategies, described how in response to the psychological strain of living in a war zone, 'the women have come to realise and actively use small things like hair extensions, make-up or perfume to restore their dignity. When the women come together, sit and prepare the perfumes or do each other's hair, they get a chance to talk, to explain their situation, and that gives them a chance also to comfort and encourage one another'.[86]

Box 10: Example – Voice

femLINKpacific, as part of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict Pacific network, is working to bring attention to women's leadership and ensure their participation in disaster risk reduction and management. This includes through Women's Weather Watch, which combines providing real time information with campaigning on the importance of consulting women before, during and after disasters.

Source: femLINKpacific website. Women's Weather Watch. http://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/what-we-do/2015-01-20-00-16-09

Encouragement to other women activists

Solidarity extends beyond psychosocial support: women's groups, organisations and networks can also provide important encouragement to other women responders in their activism and advocacy and serve as the foundation for women's movements.[87] In turn, these – through mobilisation and collective action – have successfully challenged the policies, laws and underlying structures that underpin discrimination.[88] This includes solidarity across different divides, whether sectarian, class or identify based; experience suggests that women have been able to find common interests across divisions in a way that men have not always been able to.[89] Research conducted in Yemen documented examples of how 'women succeeded in mediation efforts where men couldn't'.[90] For example, a group of women in Ma'rib capitalised on customary tribal rules that dictate showing respect for women and successfully launched an initiative for a ceasefire agreement between al-Hada and another tribal group.[91]

4.2.6 TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Becoming gender transformative

The actions of women's groups, organisations and networks can result in a humanitarian response moving from being gender sensitive to gender transformative.[92] A review of CARE's approaches to gender-sensitive humanitarian partnerships found that if CARE, in one country office where there was a humanitarian response, had engaged women's rights organisations at the onset and as part of the response and recovery phase, then it would have realised more progress on gender-transformative outcomes.[93] Such transformation includes through positively challenging INGOs and other mainstream organisations on their commitments and approaches to gender equality.

The same review found that CARE staff in a number of humanitarian responses felt that 'women's rights organisations could positively challenge CARE's commitments, risk thresholds, attitudes and male dominated humanitarian structures, and push CARE outside of its comfort zones while helping CARE to better understand how to move from gender-responsive to gender-transformative emergency programming'.[94]

Strengthening links between immediate and longer-term responses

Through meeting both practical and strategic needs, women's groups, organisations and networks are able to strengthen links between immediate and longer-term responses, including development and social justice programming. The Global Fund for Women, in supporting its partners following the 2015 Nepal earthquakes, noted that the women's groups were 'rebuilding movements, not just communities', with the groups continuing their core work on advancing women's rights following the earthquake.[95] The provision of flexible support from the Global Fund for Women meant that grantees were able to simultaneously meet immediate material needs and carry out activities such as women's leadership training, so that 'women are able to get a seat at the table and be part of decision making when aid comes'.[96]

In Sudan, the work of the Women's Association in supporting self-protection strategies resulted in greater respect among religious and community leaders, providing them with the status and platform required to challenge more sensitive issues, such as GBV.[97] Local leaders realised that women needed to be involved during the training of police cadets, which eventually led to members of the Women's Association in some locations becoming members of customary courts when they make decisions on cases of GBV.[98]

Implementing a gender-transformative humanitarian response, however, is not without risks; challenging the root causes of gender inequality means challenging existing power relations and social norms, which can result in backlash. Due to their position, external actors place this risk on individual women. Engaging with women responders earlier in a crisis, and in a more meaningful way, may help the sector understand when it is or is not appropriate to pursue transformational change, and how to do so in a way that minimises risks. As those who are often at direct risk themselves, women responders should be supported to choose which and what level of risk they respond to.

'Transformation and sustainability' also involve actions that target the causes and factors which contribute to a crisis occurring, and the disproportionate effects crises have on more marginalised populations. This includes, for example, individual Libyan women counselling young men to prevent their entry into armed groups.[99]

4.3 What does this mean for the protection sector?

The contributions of women responders to humanitarian protection programming are diverse. Across several of the outcome areas, such contributions may not be unique to women-led organisations but shared with other local groups and organisations – for example, in acting as first responders and gaining physical access to populations. In other instances, contributions could equally apply to groups and organisations with different social justice aims, such as organisations and movements of persons with disabilities or SGM.

The research suggests, however, that women-led organisations are able to make specific contributions to more contextualised and effective humanitarian protection, due to:

- The **access** women responders may have, permitting them to act not only as first responders but also to support more marginalised populations;

- The **understanding** women responders bring to the needs and realities of different groups, of how to engage with key stakeholders, and their ability to **respond** creatively to barriers;

- Their ability to use social capital and networks to **reach** other women;

- Being able to provide a space for and **raise women's voices**, as well as supporting women's **leadership**;

- Being able to provide **solidarity** to other women and girls in day-to-day spaces and activism; and

- Contributing to interventions being gender **transformative** and potentially more **sustainable**.

The unique contributions of women responders should be recognised in the context of humanitarian preparedness and response and not only in longer-term women's rights programming. However, the contributions of different women are unlikely to be the same, with grassroots women leaders, groups and organisations being able to support and respond in distinct ways compared to larger national women-led organisations and movements.

5. COLLABORATION BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS AND WOMEN RESPONDERS

Key findings

- In the majority of cases examined, international humanitarian actors were not sure of the extent to which they collaborated with women responders.

- Seven types of collaboration were identified, which ranged from training and support for grassroots groups, to partnering in direct service provision, to collaboration in emergency preparedness.

- Many INGOs did not have a single approach to partnership in humanitarian response, undertaking a mixture of direct service delivery and implementation via partnerships. Collaboration with women-led organisations, therefore, also varied accordingly. The nature of partnership approaches with women-led organisations largely depended on an organisation's approach to partnership.

- Collaboration has most frequently been facilitated by advocacy of individuals within INGOs who value the specific contributions of women responders. Collaboration was constrained by not having relationships with women-led organisations pre-crisis, a lack of recognition of the value of partnering with women-led organisations, and partner selection criteria.

- This underlines the importance of formalising engagement with women responders in partnerships and regional and country strategies, and removing key barriers to partnership.

- Promising practices of collaboration exist, including supporting linkages between women responders at different levels and investing in emergency preparedness.

This section outlines research evidence from interviews and a review of literature on the extent of collaboration between humanitarian actors and women responders, what this collaboration entails and examples of promising practice.[100]

5.1 To what extent does collaboration take place?

In the majority of cases examined via interview, international humanitarian actors were not sure of the extent to which they collaborated with women responders. Examples identified were often drawn from the individual knowledge and experiences of an organisation's gender and/or protection advisor, and so collaboration may have been more extensive than described. This is likely reflective both of the challenges INGOs have in centralised knowledge management approaches, and that few organisations are asking themselves about the extent to which they collaborate and partner with women-led organisations. For example, a recent gender audit by an INGO country office did not include a question on this topic. In a number of cases, interviewees provided feedback that collaboration with women-led organisations was only considered for development and not humanitarian programming.

In several cases, INGOs were starting to look more systematically across their humanitarian response work at the extent of their collaboration and partnerships with women-led organisations. For example, as part of its Gender Policy, CARE has made a commitment to work with women's rights and LGBTIQ organisations, and monitors progress through indicators linked to the CARE Project Information and Impact Reporting System.[101]

5.1.1 NO SINGLE APPROACH

Many INGOs did not have a single approach to partnership in humanitarian response, undertaking a mixture of direct service delivery and implementation via partnerships according to the context and their own history of operation in that area. Collaboration with women-led organisations, therefore, also varied accordingly. This research found that such collaboration was more common among dual mandate development-humanitarian INGOs, such as CARE International, than for INGOs with a single humanitarian mandate, particularly in contexts affected by reoccurring crises or protracted conflict. Nonetheless, the Syria crisis response has forced most INGOs to carry out remote programming via partnerships. Indeed, several respondents from humanitarian INGOs reported that partnerships with national organisations had only really been developed in contexts where security and access were an issue.

Working in partnership with national NGOs has not automatically resulted in partnerships with women-led organisations, with decentralised and/or affiliate models in some INGOs meaning country and regional offices deciding whether such partnerships took place. In many cases, gender and/or protection advisors based in regional and country offices reported having to advocate strongly for collaboration with women-led organisations due to little 'buy-in' from senior management (detailed in Section 5.2).

Several INGOs included partnership with women-led organisations in country strategies: in the Middle East and North Africa region, CARE International has an explicit strategy whereby each country office should partner with one additional women-led organisation per year. Still, this does not define what proportion of funds women's rights organisations receive in relation to mainstream partners, or the nature of the partnership and support provided.

In other CARE country offices – for example, in South Sudan – although not outlined in a country strategy, there is wider organisational buy-in for the importance of supporting localisation and acknowledgement of the specific value of partnering with women-led organisations, particularly in protection programming.

> 'We said that if we were going to work in depth on gender and protection, then it was important to work with women's organisations…they were already there before us and will stay there.'
>
> *Source:* Key informant interview #53 (INGO).

5.1.2 PARTNERING BY CHANCE

Several INGOs reported partnering with women-led organisations and groups by chance, rather than as a deliberate strategy, according to which organisations and groups were operational in an area where the INGO was planning activities. In Nepal, for example, Tearfund provided support to mothers' groups upon observing how connected they were in communities (see Box 12, page 33). Among several INGO respondents, there was wariness of having a specific strategy to partner with national women-led organisations in protection programming, with their preference being to engage more with grassroots groups.

> 'It's really about doing everything together, we just don't design programmes without partners.'
>
> *Source:* Key informant interview #42 (INGO).

Among organisations that were able to identify collaboration with women-led organisations in protection programming, this approach tended to evolve over time, either at the sectoral, organisational or country office level and often in line with an organisation's wider partnership approach and the discourse surrounding localisation.

How INGOs structured partnerships with women-led organisations (for example, average length of partnerships, if organisational support was provided) was largely dependent on an organisation's overall partnership strategy. Trocaire, for example, defines itself as a partnership agency, with an organisational partnership approach in which its role is one of support and facilitation. Trocaire recognises that partners in emergencies often have challenges covering core costs and three- or four-month gaps between funding contracts, and so would advocate developing memoranda of understanding which go beyond the lifetime of a project contract, using their unrestricted funds to cover these gaps and provide support to specific areas. Support would normally come from the programme officer in-country, through different means such as a secondment, help with troubleshooting, or working out of their office and providing day-to-day support.

5.1.3 SPECTRUM OF APPROACHES

Among other INGOs, a spectrum of partnership approaches was described. This ranged from approaches such as that described above, to sub-contracting, in which a women-led organisation was contracted as a partner to implement a pre-defined set of activities. Across all the approaches, some organisational capacity-building support was often provided. This most frequently took the form of specific training workshops or requesting support from different teams within an INGO country office according to areas identified, such as finance, human resources or monitoring and evaluation (discussed further in Section 5.3).

5.2 What does collaboration entail?

The research uncovered evidence of seven broad types of collaboration between international humanitarian actors and women responders, ranging from training for grassroots groups to efforts to pilot more localised ways of working. These span across protection mainstreaming and specialised protection interventions. The table below lists each type of collaboration, against which examples of the activities this has entailed are outlined.

5.2.1 TRAINING AND SUPPORT TO GRASSROOTS GROUPS

The most frequent collaboration with women responders was in the form of training or support to grassroots groups, including informal groups and registered CBOs.

For example, in its GBV work, International Medical Corps (IMC) assesses what formal and informal structures exist, asking the question 'who do women look up to, who do they look to for support?' Collaboration may be different

Type of collaboration	Type of activity
Training and support to grassroots women's groups	• Support to lead specific activities • Actions to support women's voice and leadership • Integration of protection activities into existing groups • Community-based protection
Working with women-led organisations and groups at different geographic levels	• Working through national membership organisations • Facilitating collaboration between different groups and organisations
Partnerships with women-led organisations in direct service provision	• GBV prevention and response • Support for self-care of service providers • Psychosocial support • Child protection
Collaboration with women-led organisations and groups in advocacy and coordination	• Collaboration on specific advocacy actions and projects, such as collaboration in research
International actors playing a facilitating and convening role	• Supporting the formation of coalitions • Facilitating a space for minority voices • Working with women-led organisations as training co-facilitators
Emergency preparedness	• Inclusion in emergency preparedness processes
Localisation pilots	• Strengthening the emergency preparedness of women-led organisations • Piloting flexible support

in different contexts, and may include working with a women's association in organising a women's safe space and handing over the management of this to them. In Northern Nigeria, IMC identified the need to share protection information with women and girls in discreet ways, and so proactively identified and trained widows' associations, which would then refer individuals to IMC for further support.

In collaborating with women's groups in GBV response work, in most cases the groups were trained by an INGO to carry out basic awareness-raising activities and refer individual GBV survivors to an organisation or government structure for case management and psychosocial support. In North and South Kivu in the DRC, however, IRC has piloted the approach of training women's CBOs to lead on the provision of case management and psychosocial support.

In terms of community-based child protection activities, few examples were found of collaboration with women-led groups specifically; instead the focus was on establishment and support to child protection committees, which often included individual women leaders.[102]

Similarly, in relation to community-based psychosocial support, women's groups were not necessarily targeted explicitly. In Vanuatu, for example, the National Youth Council trained its network of male and female volunteers to provide psychosocial first aid, but did not engage with women's groups. The exception was found in Nepal, where Tearfund – upon seeing their community networks – trained mothers' groups to provide psychosocial first aid (see Box 12).

In terms of INGOs' collaboration with women responders, there was often a strong focus on supporting women's voice and leadership. In Haiti, one INGO worked with women's associations in Cite de Soleil, each of which had 20–50 members, after observing that no single CSO could bring women together, but that many small organisations 'had the ear' and confidence of women in communities. The INGO first encouraged participation of women's associations in local disaster reconstruction coordination, by supporting them to undertake a local protection analysis and then raise the issues identified. Second, the INGO supported the association members to be the first point of contact to refer individuals to different services and sources of support, often with a focus on GBV.

In environments affected by recurring natural disasters, support may be provided to women's associations, or individual women who are part of disaster risk reduction committees, for their equal involvement in disaster preparedness, response and reconstruction activities, ensuring that women's concerns and priorities are included. In Nepal, women from REFLECT circles were active in collecting and sharing information with NGOs, and so ActionAid organised a National Women's Forum to enable the women to meet and discuss their priorities to advocate with government and other partners.[103]

In West Africa, the wider social change impacts of village savings and loan association (VSLA) networks established as part of the CARE Women on the Move programme are well documented; research has revealed that involvement in the groups can serve as a platform for women's leadership and activism in different areas, including election to local government.[104] In piloting how the approach can be adapted to humanitarian response, CARE Niger is working with VSLAs in the recovery phase of a food insecurity response to facilitate community dialogue and provide some basic psychosocial support to GBV survivors. The next step will be to identify what may be possible during the emergency stage in both situations of displacement and non-displacement. There are also discussions concerning the potential to adapt the approach to internally displaced person camps in Nigeria, as a means to support women to organise themselves and create 'champions' who can continue this role when they return to communities.

In conflict-affected and refugee-host situations, collaboration with women's groups and networks may occur in the context of community-based protection interventions (see Box 13). Such approaches may include facilitating access to services for different groups that are more vulnerable in a crisis. In the Ukraine, HelpAge implemented a social support and rehabilitation programme for older persons via a network of 300 community volunteers, 90 per cent of whom were women. The volunteers supported the running of age-friendly spaces, where displaced or isolated older people could meet their peers, and provided home-based assistance to older people who were unable to access centralised services. Although the programme was not intended to work specifically with women actors, due to norms concerning caring responsibilities, women more often volunteered and indeed were often older women themselves.

5.2.2 WORKING WITH ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS FROM THE GRASSROOTS TO THE NATIONAL LEVELS

According to the geographical and administrative structures of a country, collaboration may involve working with women-led organisations and groups at different administrative levels in parallel, such as in communities and at the national level, or through national membership networks. In Chad, CARE collaborates with the *Cellule de Liaison et Information des Associations Féminines*, a national network of 200 organisations with a chapter in each region. Within the network, there are different specialist organisations – such as those working with women with disabilities or those focused on peace. At the community level, CARE has established *Comites des Femmes* and *Comites des Jeunes Filles* to lead gender awareness-raising work and income-generating activity. In South Sudan, CARE has established separate partnerships with women-led organisations, CBOs and groups at the grassroots, sub-national and national levels, and has tried to facilitate links between them (see Box 14).

5.2.3 PARTNERSHIPS WITH WOMEN-LED ORGANISATIONS IN SERVICE PROVISION

At the national level, partnerships with women-led organisations were most frequently identified in relation to GBV prevention and response programmes, with these organisations leading an aspect of direct service provision. In the DRC, for example, Trocaire has historically worked with church partners; however, these partners identified the need to also work with a specialised protection partner, to support cases of sexual violence affecting women and girls. Trocaire now partners with *Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral* (SOFEPADI), which provides holistic medical, psychosocial, legal and socio-economic reintegration assistance to GBV survivors, as part of a wider pool of partners including church and women-led organisations.

Box 14: Multi-layered collaboration between CARE and women-led organisations in South Sudan

In South Sudan, CARE has worked with women-led organisations and groups at different levels across its GBV prevention and response programmes.

At the **grassroots level**, this includes informal women's groups and networks, supporting advocacy and facilitating links with women-led CBOs at the county level. At the **sub-national level**, CARE has trained women-led CBOs to lead case management, psychosocial support and GBV awareness-raising activities. Some CBOs have been trained to support GBV survivors to seek redress in the traditional and formal court systems, and to run mobile courts. At the **national and sub-national levels**, CARE is planning to collaborate with women-led organisations in carrying out a joint gender analysis. CARE recognises that 'it's the CBOs who are implementing in the deep field locations' and wants to undertake an analysis together to 'put their experiences on the table' and provide them with the opportunity to learn by developing the tools and undertaking the process together.

Formal collaboration with the organisations through partnership agreements is often project based, involving the implementation of defined activities. However, CARE is currently seeking funding for a project to work with 10 to 15 women-led organisations, which would allow them to work on issues they are most passionate about. The organisations would propose activities, responding to the overall objective of 'increasing the enjoyment of the human rights of women in South Sudan'. The project includes an element of capacity-building support; CARE would help national women-led partners to provide this capacity building to sub-national partners.

A key motivation for developing these partnerships has been recognition that the organisations are operational in deep field locations, which are often difficult for INGOs to access, and continue to operate in emergencies:

> 'Even when INGOs evacuate the staff, the CSOs carry on responding: they will provide a minimum level of services. When staff themselves are displaced, they continue providing services such as psychosocial first aid in new locations.'

Source: Key informant interview #53.

Several examples were identified of INGO support to staff members within partner organisations that lead psychosocial support activities with GBV survivors. In Lebanon, Trocaire has carried out a specific strand of work in ensuring that all protection staff from partner organisations are provided with the support required to ensure both the quality of their work and their wellbeing in doing that work. This involves supporting staff to participate in individual and group-based support sessions, including monthly clinical supervision for frontline partner staff such as social workers and clinical psychologists. Trocaire has successfully included associated costs in donor proposals, arguing that it is essential for programme quality.

Although the majority of partnerships with women-led organisations around the provision of psychosocial support focused on GBV survivors, several examples were found of such support in a wider context. In several instances, the War Trauma Foundation has collaborated with women-led organisations in the provision of psychosocial support services. This includes in Sudan, where at the request of the Ahfad University for Women, the foundation trained local female psychologists and psychiatrists in trauma counselling to meet the high demand for psychosocial support from both the students of the university, many of whom have been affected by

war, and refugees living in Sudan.[105] Since 2015, the War Trauma Foundation has collaborated with the EMMA Foundation, a women-led organisation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, to train community workers providing psychosocial support to Yezidi women and girls.[106]

Across all GBV response and psychosocial support activities, children (most frequently girls, but often boys too) were normally included as a target group. However, in relation to more specific child protection interventions, feedback from humanitarian actors stated that collaboration tended to be with child-focused organisations, rather than those that were specifically women-led.

5.2.4 COLLABORATION WITH WOMEN-LED ORGANISATIONS AND GROUPS IN ADVOCACY AND COORDINATION

Collaboration in undertaking advocacy and coordination activities is often a strong focus of national and regional level partnerships, either as a component of a wider project or a standalone set of activities.

CARE Jordan's partnership with the Arab Women Organisation (AWO) of Jordan was driven by observations that local women-led organisations had been, to a large extent, excluded from the regional Syria response. In

> **Box 15: Psychosocial support through 'family conversation sessions', Marawi City, the Philippines**
>
> In May 2017, when the ISIS-associated Maute group attacked Marawi City, south Philippines, the resulting conflict with government forces led to significant displacement of citizens. In response to the crisis, CARE Philippines partnered with the women-led Al Mujadilah Development Foundation (AMDF) in Mindanao. The foundation's organisational focus was on women's rights and peacebuilding; however, following the crisis, it transitioned to the provision of psychosocial support and GBV response work. CARE supported AMDF in the delivery of 'family conversation sessions': a form of psychosocial therapy for displaced families which aims to provide a safe space to discuss mental, sexual and reproductive health and share plans and ideas for the recovery of Marawi City. Each one-day family conversation gathers 20 families, each with approximately six members, in evacuation centres or at their homes.
>
> On this occasion, CARE made a specific choice to partner with a local women-led organisation to lead this work:
>
> > *'They know the climate, colour and mood of the community…. They are also the relatives of the members they help, and they have been affected. They know the situation and mood better. We respect that they have this knowledge.'*
>
> *Source:* reliefweb website. 'Marawi Crisis Factsheet'. CARE Philippines. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ MarawiCrisisResponseFactsheet_final_Nov2017.pdf; Key informant interview #54.

developing the partnership, CARE and AWO identified research as a key area they would like to focus on. CARE and AWO are currently undertaking a joint project which will analyse the extent to which women-led organisations 'have a share' in crisis programming, especially around GBV prevention and response, developing together the terms of reference, methodology and tools, and producing policy papers to promote wider participation of local women-led organisations.

5.2.5 INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS PLAYING A FACILITATING AND CONVENING ROLE

In collaborating with women-led organisations, INGOs may also play a convening role: for example, involving excluded groups in conversations and processes, such as LGBTIQ organisations that may otherwise be excluded by mainstream groups and women's movements (see Box 16).

In Gaza, in the aftermath of the conflict in 2014, action researchers supported by Oxfam identified that the needs of women with disabilities were not being met. Oxfam supported the formation of a coalition of four women's sector organisations and four disabled people's organisations to assess gaps in services for women with disabilities and design an emergencies preparedness plan.[107] Through this collaboration, the coalition was able to create a database of women with disabilities in the Gaza Strip, which it shared with key stakeholders and linked SMS software to enable rapid information sharing with the women during emergencies. The lack of adequate support for women with hearing impairments was identified as a major gap, and sign language training was subsequently provided for staff working in emergency shelters.

5.2.6 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Collaboration with women-led organisations may include engagement as part of emergency preparedness and initial crisis assessments. CARE has partnered with national women-led organisations in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan since 2010. Even when there is no formal collaboration on a project, CARE maintains relationships by involving the organisations in annual emergency preparedness planning to identify potential risk scenarios and responses. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, CARE has no in-country presence, and so the partners are key in providing up-to-date, reliable information.

In response to the 7.5 magnitude earthquake that hit Papua New Guinea (PNG) in February 2018, CARE supported the PNG Assembly of Disabled People, the national NGO representing the disability sector, to complete assessments in Southern Highlands

> **Box 16: Supporting inclusion of LGBTIQ groups**
>
> In Fiji, UN Women has ongoing partnerships with the LGBTIQ network and partners such as Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. In a recent gender and protection training for humanitarian actors, UN Women was able to engage the LGBTIQ network to lead the session on LGBTIQ inclusion in humanitarian response.
>
> *Source:* Key informant interview #50.

Province. Although not a women-led organisation, this collaboration is a potential positive example to be drawn from as a way to support the participation of local organisations at an early stage of crisis response and strengthen the quality of assessments.

5.2.7 LOCALISATION PILOTS

Finally, in light of the push towards localisation, a number of INGO projects have been developed with the objective of strengthening meaningful collaboration and partnerships with national and local CSOs, including women-led organisations. A focus of several of these projects has been supporting organisations in emergency preparedness.

IRC, through the 'Building Local, Thinking Global' project, is supporting national organisations to become technical resources for GBV emergency preparedness and response. The project will engage a network of CSOs through regional networks, such as the GBV Prevention Network, and train them on emergency preparedness and response, recognising that although the organisations do not necessarily have a humanitarian mandate, they operate in countries that are often affected by emergencies, whether conflict or disasters.

The START Network 'Protection in Practice' project, led by Oxfam in association with IRC and World Vision, worked with 60 national CSOs between 2015 and 2018 with the aim of building their capacity to implement, coordinate and advocate for protection. The project provided an opportunity to deliver flexible support and trial non-conventional reporting mechanisms. In South Sudan, instead of requesting quarterly written reports, Oxfam trialled WhatsApp reporting to limit obstacles faced by

partner organisations reporting from the field. It was felt that this helped reduce connectivity issues and language barriers and provided real time information – rather than asking a partner to remember what it had done over the course of three months.

5.3 What facilitated or constrained collaboration with women responders?

This section outlines evidence collected on the different factors that have either facilitated or constrained collaboration with women-led organisations, and indeed whether this collaboration has taken place at all. These factors are summarised in the table overleaf (page 38).

5.3.1 FACILITATING FACTORS

Specialist expertise

In several cases, partnerships were developed in acknowledgement of the specialist expertise that women-led organisations can bring. In the DRC, for example, Trocaire developed a partnership with SOFEPADI after existing partners observed the need to offer support services to sexual violence survivors in Ituri. On occasions where this was cited as a motivation, however, it was only in relation to GBV prevention and response activities and not wider humanitarian response.

'Even in humanitarian response they've [the Country Office] decided to put GBV first, which forces them to engage with women's rights organisations. It was entirely down to Country Office leadership.'
Key informant interview #55 (INGO).

Facilitating factors
Recognition of women's specialist expertise
Donor requests
Recognition that collaboration can facilitate access and sustainability
Country government requirements
Motivation and advocacy of individuals within an organisation
Global localisation rhetoric
Constraining factors
The structure and short-term nature of surge deployments
Lack of pre-crisis gender programming
No pre-existing relationships with women-led organisations
Senior staff not recognising the value of collaboration
Criteria used for partner selection
Concerns over political alignment

Donor requests

In several cases, recognition of the value of partnerships with women-led organisations was not necessarily by INGOs themselves, but donor driven.

Access

Interviewees frequently cited 'access' as a reason for developing partnerships with women-led organisations. This sometimes referred to being able to provide support to female beneficiaries – for example, through women's centres – but most commonly it was understood in terms of access to geographic areas where access was limited due to the size of a country and security considerations. In South Sudan, for example, CARE recognised that partner staff had access to 'deep field' locations and could continue to provide basic services even during emergencies and displacement.

Government requirements

In several cases, INGOs were forced to implement programmes via partnerships with local organisations due to country government requirements, and because of a focus on GBV, they worked with women-led groups. For example, although it waived this requirement in the initial stage of the 2015 earthquake response, the Nepali government mandates working with local partners for all aid programming.

> 'It was very donor led. The project had a specific focus on GBV and they were keen that it would support partnerships, so the Country Director did an assessment of local organisations.'
> Key informant interview #10 (INGO).

> 'I could get internal buy-in [for working with women's rights organisations] because of legal restrictions. I wanted to do this anyway, but the fact that we had to work with local partners meant I could get buy-in.'
> Key informant interview #41 (INGO).

Advocacy of individuals

Overwhelmingly, however, the research revealed that partnerships with women-led organisations were developed and maintained in large part due to the motivation and advocacy of individuals within international humanitarian actors. These were frequently gender and/or protection staff, who recognise the value in such partnerships, invest in developing these relationships, and advocate internally to ensure that they are maintained, at times in the face of opposition from senior management. In several cases, these partnerships were facilitated by individual connections with the women's rights movement within a county of region.

> 'We need to give credit to the fact that there are strong feminist staff that believe in the importance of supporting women's activism.'
> Key informant interview #17 (INGO).

Global rhetoric

Global rhetoric on localisation in some instances supported this advocacy: as INGOs examined their approaches to localisation, staff and teams were able to make the connection with local women's activism.

5.3.2 CONSTRAINING FACTORS

> *'Where successful partnerships have been developed, it hasn't been in six months. The time you invest to get to know a partner is key.'*
>
> Key informant interview #14 (INGO).

Surge deployments

Several respondents felt that the default deployment of surge staff in emergency response constrained the extent to which partnerships were developed and the quality of these partnerships. Partnerships require ongoing relationship building and investment in organisational capacity; however, surge staff deployments are often not structured or incentivised to enable this type of engagement.

Pre-crisis gender programming / pre-existing relationships

The extent to which a country programme has pre-crisis gender-focused programming and relationships with women-led organisations may influence the ease with which partnerships are developed. Mapping CSOs, carrying out due diligence procedures and developing quality partnerships during an emergency response, are inevitably challenging for both parties, compared to supporting CSOs with whom relationships already exist to transition to emergency response.

> *'Senior staff see that they [the women-led CSO] only receive $100,000, it's so little, and say that we don't have time to invest in them...I really had to fight for this.'*
>
> Key informant interview #58 (INGO).

Lack of recognition of value

In developing partnerships with women-led CSOs, individual interviewees reported blockages from senior country office staff, who did not see the value in partnering with women-led organisations in the context of a humanitarian system that values reaching a large number of beneficiaries in the most cost-effective way. This often translates to an incentive to 'get the money out of the door quickly', signing a smaller number of agreements with larger CSO partners, rather than a larger number of agreements with small CSOs – which are more likely to be women-led organisations. Gender and protection programming are difficult to quantify, and less likely to reach a large number of beneficiaries or attract large amounts of project funding. Recent research by CARE revealed that staff still question whether it is possible for programming to be gender transformative in emergency response, seeing it as an externally imposed agenda that can be disrespectful of local culture, religion or norms.[109]

Criteria

This is often reflected in the criteria used for partnership assessment and selection. Women-led organisations are likely to be smaller and have weaker organisation systems and procedures in place. One INGO country office described how the criteria for assessing partners included the extent to which they participated in coordination spaces such as the cluster, which donors they had, capacity of staff, their portfolio and budget, all of which are skewed to larger, more established organisations.

> *'Even with the big money, and there is a lot in this region, you wouldn't see them built into these proposals. The feedback is that "we don't know the capacity of this organisation" or "they have low capacity".'*
>
> Key informant interview #47 (INGO).

CARE's research[110] found that CARE tends to select partners based on their emergency response experience and compliance capacity, rather than their expertise on women's empowerment, protection or gender equality. In the current funding climate, many INGOs have a 'risk averse' culture which is then reflected in choice of partners. As one interviewee noted, 'the [strength of] partner financial procedures always wins'. Where partnerships are developed, the strength of a CSO's organisational procedures – for example, in relation to procurement – may restrict the funding that an INGO provides. However, often there is little support to strengthen these procedures, whether due to restrictive budgets or otherwise, creating a vicious cycle.

> *'[INGO] staff hesitate to partner with women's rights organisations – they may be working on the cutting edge, they may be politically aligned – so we partner with male dominated humanitarian response type organisations. But if we can partner with very conservative male organisations, why not women's rights organisations?'*
>
> Key informant interview #58 (INGO).

Political alignment

Concerns over the political alignment of some women-led organisations, particularly women's rights organisations, were raised by several interviewees as justifications for limiting partnership. Upholding the humanitarian principle of neutrality, and how this is balanced with partnership, is a valid concern. In one country, an INGO shared that it did not partner with women's rights organisations at the national level as they tended to be politically left leaning, and the INGO was being careful in not being seen to be affiliated with a political party.

The extent to which it is possible for any CSO to remain truly neutral is questionable; indeed, many INGOs are considered to be biased due to their Western identity and reliance on institutional donors. As one respondent noted, 'they [women's rights organisations] are feminist, they need to be partial and take a position'. Yet this is not the same as being biased in the delivery of humanitarian services or aid to affected populations.

5.4 What does this mean for the protection sector?

5.4.1 FORMALISING ENGAGEMENT

The extent of collaboration between international humanitarian actors and women responders in protection programming varies considerably; where meaningful collaboration with women-led organisations and groups has taken place, this has often been facilitated by the motivation and advocacy of individuals within humanitarian actors. This, combined with the perception that senior management often does not value the specific contribution of women-led organisations, underlines the importance of formalising engagement with women responders in partnerships and regional and country strategies. At the same time, key barriers to partnerships with women-led organisations, such as certain criteria used for partnership selection, need to be identified and removed.

5.4.2 INVESTING IN RELATIONSHIPS

The structure of partnerships with women-led organisations appears largely driven by the overall partnership approach of an INGO and whether it has a dual development-humanitarian or a single humanitarian mandate. It is inevitably more difficult to establish meaningful partnerships for the first time during an emergency phase and international humanitarian actors should invest in developing relationships and partnership modalities in countries and regions affected by recurring crises and protracted conflict.

5.4.3 EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

There does appear to be increasing investment in the emergency preparedness of local CSOs, including of women-led organisations, which presents a key opportunity for investment, particularly given that women-led organisations may not have historically been involved in humanitarian response.

6. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN COLLABORATION

Key findings

- Women responders face a significant number of challenges in collaborating with humanitarian actors; these include barriers that limit women's participation in decision making more widely, which are amplified for more marginalised individuals. Women's DPOs and LGBTIQ organisations are often not included in either mainstream humanitarian coordination spaces or women's movements.

- Many of these challenges are linked to the partnership approaches of INGOs and the predominance of sub-granting models. There is significant historic and emerging learning for the sector in the approaches of partnership-focused INGOs and emerging localisation pilots.

- Other challenges relate to wider ways of working, for example, the importance of supporting women-led organisations to develop context-specific interventions which draw from international good practice, rather than being requested to adapt international models to a context.

- There is also a potential tension between delivering lifesaving services as quickly as possible and working in a way that facilitates collaboration with women-led organisations. This underlines the importance of investment in emergency preparedness, but also potential creative ways of working. These may involve not necessarily partnering with women-led organisations to deliver aid, but examining how they can support and hold accountable other stakeholders.

This section outlines key challenges faced by both international humanitarian actors in collaborating with women responders, and challenges women responders have in collaborating with humanitarian actors in protection programming. It also includes examples of promising practices that have been piloted to tackle some of these challenges, which although not specific to women-led CSOs, may still be relevant.

6.1 Challenges shared by international humanitarian actors

The majority of challenges identified were in collaboration with women-led organisations rather than CBOs and grassroots groups. Challenges of women's availability, competing caring responsibilities, and engaging with women in often-conservative and male-dominated contexts were noted, but seen as a normal part of programming.

6.1.1 PREVENTING BACKLASH

Several respondents cautioned about the need to balance engaging with women leaders and groups with a 'do no harm' analysis, engaging men alongside women to prevent any backlash (though it is rare to find programming that does not consider this). In Vanuatu, work with CAVAWs and women as members of CDCCCs has required consistent engagement with male leaders in order to both ensure support for the committee members – for example, protection from threats – and also maintain positive relations with CARE.

6.1.2 IDENTIFYING PARTNERS AND DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

In different contexts, INGOs reported having difficulties in identifying and developing initial partnerships with women-led organisations. This included navigating the dynamics and conflicts within a national women's movement, and the time and experience it can take to develop an understanding of the political alignment and history of women's activism.

One interviewee shared that in the country where they worked, although at the grassroots level the membership base of women-led organisations tended to be strong, at the national level, these organisations did not necessarily have a strong membership base of women or work for women's needs (although a woman would often be chair). In a different case, an interviewee shared the challenge of a national women's movement (comprising volunteers) not being able to find a qualified female candidate for the position of programme officer – the only paid member of staff; this resulted in them appointing a man.

As for all CSOs, women-led organisations may have particular affiliations with a particular ethnic or religious group or political party; analysing the risks to the humanitarian principle of neutrality in such cases can be challenging. More fundamentally, advocating for women's rights is a political (if not party political) activity, which different humanitarian actors will accept to different degrees.

In the Pacific, in many countries there are few women-led organisations, and those that do exist tend to focus on GBV and/or be service provision organisations. In Vanuatu, for example, only a handful were identified at the national level. In many contexts, including in Malawi, women-led organisations have historically not been involved in humanitarian response. Feedback from several respondents revealed that humanitarian response in these contexts was associated with direct provision of shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and food aid, rather than the type of work they carry out. In other circumstances, women-led organisations were reported to be involved in humanitarian response, but only on a small scale – in distributing food and non-food items – rather than participating in humanitarian decision making. In Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, one humanitarian actor reported that they had tried to reach out to the women's disaster management network; however, they are overwhelmed by different requests.

6.1.3 SHIFTING FROM DIRECT IMPLEMENTATION TO WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

In developing partnerships with women-led organisations, several interviewees described the experience of country office staff, noting that they were more used to direct implementation and that working in partnership required a shift in ways of working and in attributes valued in the workplace. Experience from joint implementation of a response in Fiji with Live and Learn led to surge advisors recommending that CARE make its rapid response team 'fit for partnering'; i.e. that it recruits staff on the basis of their commitment and aptitude to work in partnership, not just their technical skills.

Nonetheless, several interviewees felt there was a tension between responding in a way that provides lifesaving services as quickly as possible and one that engages and supports local women-led organisations. This also underlines the importance of investing in a partner's emergency preparedness and response capacity. In tackling this challenge, IRC has piloted the deployment of two programme coordinators in parallel, one focused on the quality of the overall GBV response and one on collaboration with CSOs, using core funding.

The nature of women-led organisations in some contexts, particularly women's rights organisations, may also constrain the access they have to particular areas, the scale with which they are able to operate and their ability to respond rapidly in different locations. This is seen in particular in Syria, where the research uncovered one women's rights organisation that had invested in developing local relationships and gaining acceptance to carry out women's empowerment and psychosocial support activities. The time taken to gain this acceptance meant they could not easily begin operations in new locations; yet the nature of humanitarian response and funding modalities often requires rapid deployment and intervention.

6.1.4 PARTNERSHIP MODELS

Partner management approaches and systems within INGOs, and the extent to which this takes a project-based sub-granting approach versus one geared more to collaboration, can be a major challenge for both developing and maintaining quality partnerships with all CSOs. The dominant culture of project sub-granting can impact upon INGO attempts to develop projects in a collaborative way. One respondent stated, for example, that in developing a project partnership the CSO 'got frustrated and kept saying "just tell us what you want us to do",' as they were used to being told what activities to implement.

Several interviewees described the challenges of maintaining partnerships with women-led organisations when changing security contexts meant a partner's planned activities were no longer possible. Interviewees described how on such occasions, the INGO should have developed an alternative strategy with the partner, including shifting the focus to work on alternative activities, such as capacity building. However, formal partnership approaches did not allow this.

6.1.5 COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

Additionally, a large point of conflict was noted between the push towards localisation and increasingly strict due diligence requirements. As one interviewee noted, the fact that there are 'stricter requirements in everything' resulted in instances of identifying good women-led organisations, but not being able to partner with them, or sub-granting rather than collaborating in a way that facilitated genuine partnership.

The extent to which INGOs were structured and had the funding required to provide capacity-building support varied widely. Several INGOs interviewed that had a humanitarian mandate noted that they did not have the internal capacity to provide organisational support, and so often contracted support via a consultant, with varying levels of quality. In attempting to provide capacity-building support to CSOs, programme managers often have to negotiate with internal human resources, monitoring and evaluation, and finance staff to provide training sessions and mentoring. A number of interviewees felt that not having an organisational or country-specific partnership strategy further confused and complicated partner relations, particularly in humanitarian contexts with high staff turnover.

In some cases, due diligence requirements presented barriers to all CSOs due to circumstances. In Syria, for example, the security situation often makes it impossible for CSOs to approach multiple suppliers, as is common in procurement assignments, while carrying documentation such as receipts risks individuals being arrested for illegally providing assistance. In such circumstances, CARE has agreed with ECHO the use of alternative procedures to address such challenges.

6.2 Challenges reported by women responders

The research uncovered widespread barriers to women responders' engagement in humanitarian action, and challenges in collaborating with humanitarian actors.

6.2.1 FACTORS THAT LIMIT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Many of these barriers were not specific to protection programming, but related more fundamentally to women's participation in decision making and leadership in humanitarian response. Consultations held by ActionAid with women affected by humanitarian crises in four countries identified various key interlinked factors which limit women's leadership.[111] As women are often excluded from formal decision-making structures, they have few opportunities to build their understanding of decision-making processes and strengthen their

leadership skills. Subsequently, this limits their confidence and capacity to engage. Gender norms further constrain participation by restricting women's mobility, exposing women to harassment and messages that they are not capable to be leaders. Time poverty, resulting from women's unequal share in unpaid care work, limits both the time and flexibility of women to engage, which is often exacerbated in emergencies and compounded by poverty. This in turn often necessities a focus on activities to ensure survival rather than wider community engagement.[112] Research in both Malawi and Vanuatu found evidence to support this; although women were active in supporting others as individuals or in groups, women clearly faced significant pressures on their time to meet basic day-to-day needs.

These barriers are often amplified for women of different ages, such as youth and older women, and women from different minorities, whether SGM, women with disabilities or women with a lower status, for example, due to caste. In Malawi and Vanuatu, interviewees described how stigmatisation and physical barriers combined to limit the mobility and self-confidence of women and girls with disabilities, who often remained absent from wider community activities.

The barriers that all women and girls face in being involved in humanitarian response can be reinforced by humanitarian actors if not considered beforehand – for example, by not bearing in mind community decision-making structures and gendered norms, or how physical access, time poverty and literacy may limit women's ability to attend activities.

These barriers not only exist at the community level, but limit women's participation and leadership across coordination and decision-making spaces. INGO respondents in different contexts reported women-led organisations struggled to have their voice heard in mainstream coordination spaces. In one context, an INGO interviewee working with women-led and mainstream partners reported cases of bullying of the women-led organisations, including allegations of 'bias' for only working with women, assertions that 'women don't need support' and being accused of 'following the foreigners' agenda'. Research in Yemen revealed women were still excluded from higher circles of decision making in humanitarian aid, with one Yemeni women's rights organisation noting how women would be silent in coordination meetings and cede the floor to male colleagues due to a lack of confidence.[113]

6.2.2 LACK OF CONSIDERATION FOR PRACTICAL BARRIERS

Interviews revealed a lack of consideration of the practical barriers that women's groups and organisations

face in accessing humanitarian coordination meetings, amplified by the fact that grassroots organisations are often led by volunteers and, even for larger women-led organisations, individual staff members may be fulfilling multiple roles. Women-led organisations reported that international actors often requested their technical expertise or participation through 'consultation'; however, compensation for this time was not considered. As one women activist noted:

'I want my work to contribute to something, but I want to be able to feed my children as well.... Men will sign a contract for their technical expertise, but women activists don't ask for this.' [Key informant interview #12 (women activist)]

'The time [of women-led organisations] is not taken into account. No-one even thinks of what locations for meetings would work, what the transport options are, or other commitments, such as caring responsibilities.'
Key informant interview #6 (INGO).

The experience of the Gender Action Peace and Security (GAPS) Network, which led consultations to inform the development of the 2018-2022 UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, revealed fatigue among women activists in conflict-affected countries from consultations where they were frequently asked to input, but never received any feedback. In one country, the women's rights organisations initially refused to take part, as historically there had not been any follow-up. GAPS and its members have therefore built in a feedback mechanism to the consultations.

The research revealed that engagement with women-led groups and organisations often risked being tokenistic, with examples of bad practice identified where 'staff would go out to speak to one organisation, or one person, and say that they have consulted'. GAPS is now leading a project to promote ongoing, inclusive dialogues, as opposed to one-off consultations, with women activists, and to develop key principles for how to engage – for example, considering issues of child care, duty of care and confidentiality.

6.2.3 KNOWLEDGE OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

The relative lack of engagement by women-led organisations in humanitarian action is a contributing factor to often-low levels of knowledge of the humanitarian system. This is reinforced by the language used: not only the predominance of English or French, but technical terminology and a predominance of jargon.

One respondent participating in a CSO capacity-building programme saw a key benefit to be learning how to use the language of the humanitarian system and 'play the game'.

6.2.4 INCLUSION OF WOMEN'S DPOs AND LGBTIQ ORGANISATIONS

Women's DPOs and LGBTIQ organisations are often not included in either mainstream humanitarian coordination spaces or women's movements. Respondents from women's DPOs in Malawi, and from a global study of the role of women's DPOs in humanitarian response,[114] reported that women's voices were often not heard within mainstream DPOs and the issues that concerned them not addressed.

This has a knock-on effect on the capacity of these organisations to engage in humanitarian spaces: a survey of nine women's DPOs globally showed that none were able to identify humanitarian coordination mechanisms or common protection mechanisms such as GBV referral pathways.[115]

At the same time, women's DPOs are often not included in wider women's movements. As one Malawian women's DPO leader noted, 'they have been busy with their own fight for women's rights'.

When speaking about women's activism, there is also the tendency to frame this from a perspective that does not include people who are gender non-conforming; this framing is then reflected in the actions and services provided by both humanitarian and women actors, who do not necessarily consider the priorities of SGM or even actively exclude them. Interviews with LGBTIQ actors also revealed the importance of not starting with assumptions about LGBTIQ people's priorities. For example, whereas a focus is often placed upon advocating against LGBTIQ criminalisation, other priorities may also exist – such as support for those experiencing intimate partner violence in a same sex relationship.

> '*Before we were members of DPOs, but they were always headed by men and the issues of women were not coming out, they weren't visible, women couldn't articulate their issues. So, in order that women could speak out on the different issues that affect them, we thought we should have an organisation for disabled women, not a male-dominated environment.*'
>
> Key informant interview (Malawi).

6.2.5 THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUB-GRANTING MODELS

INGO approaches towards partnerships can serve as both barriers to establishing collaboration with women-led organisations and also present particular challenges to those that do become partners. As noted previously, there is a spectrum of INGO approaches to partnership; however, in humanitarian response in particular, project-based sub-granting models tend to predominate. In developing a project, several interviewees described that this might involve the partner after, or towards the end, of proposal development, rather than them developing the project design together.

> '*The INGOs normally come with the project they want you to execute, but we're not invited for the analysis, the planning and the development of the project*'
>
> Key informant interview #12 (women-led CSO).

Approaches also included the dominant use of programme models, a set of activities focused on a specific thematic area. The research identified frustration in the predominance of international models being adapted to a context, rather than a process in which CSOs were supported themselves to develop context-specific interventions drawing from international good practice.

> '*There was meant to be mentoring and capacity building, but once in-country it was a case of "see you in six months when the report is due".*'
>
> Key informant interview #6 (INGO).

Partner assessments are normally a part of due diligence processes, and often the basis for identifying areas of capacity-building support. However, CSOs often complete different assessments for different partners, resulting in a single CSO having multiple capacity-building plans, each specific to a different INGO. Research on localisation in Somalia revealed that the lack of subsequent follow-up by international actors on capacity needs identified meant that the assessments became simply a contracting tool, rather than a means of organisational strengthening.[116]

'*Set up to fail*'

Interviews with both INGOs and women-led organisations revealed that levels of subsequent investment in capacity building were often then low, particularly if budget links were not specifically dedicated. In several cases, INGO respondents reported that women-led groups were being 'set up to fail' due to a lack of investment in their organisations and poor transition planning:

'After three years, very large programmes were then transferred over to women-led organisations, but there was no process of handing over programmes. They [the international actor] had three years to build their capacity to be ready to take over, but the decision was taken overnight. They then expect local NGOs to be able to maintain the same quality standards, whether in programming or financial reporting.... This then impacts how we perceive the added value of women's organisations: they are set up to fail.' [Key informant interview #6 (INGO)]

More common were reports of superficial levels of support being provided, such as sharing an organisational policy or invitation to a one-off training session. As one INGO respondent explained: 'We might say "they're so-so in this area" and share a policy, but not go beyond this.' [Key informant interview #10 (INGO)]

Experience from the Oxfam 'Protection in Practice' project revealed the value in supporting 'learning by doing'; for example, attaching cash grants to training to ensure that an organisation could apply what it learnt and supporting approaches that included mentoring and secondments wherever possible.

However, several research interviewees noted that capacity-building activities were often focused on ensuring that a partner could deliver a project and adhere to compliance standards, rather than wider organisational strengthening according to the partner's own priorities.

> *'We're really focused on sub-grants, we look at their [the partner's] financial system, are they able to report, we want them to have the capacity to deliver already.'*
>
> Key informant interview #14 (INGO).

Power imbalance

The sub-contracting nature of partnerships can similarly impact upon the quality of relationships between an international actor and a CSO. Feedback demonstrated that the less tangible aspects of collaboration, such as developing respectful working relationships and personal connections, and recognising the power imbalances in these relationships, were of significant value in facilitating productive collaboration. This can be hindered by the multi-layered nature of INGO organisational structures. Interviewees shared occasions in which high-level discussions would be held between an INGO project officer and the director of a partner CSO. Although this was necessary at times, interviewees felt that a lack of investment by senior INGO staff in relationships with partners actively damaged these relationships.

6.2.6 TRANSFER OF RISK

Research on partnerships in conflict-affected settings[117] revealed that international actors often transfer risk to their partners via practices such as remote programming, while at the same time providing different levels of security provision for international actors and CSO counterparts. Interviewees similarly identified such transfer of risk as a problem. They highlighted also that due to the sub-contractual nature of many partnerships, when a CSO decided that it was not willing to accept the risk of a particular intervention or location, the international actor's response might be to request the money back, rather than 'discuss what we can do together'.

6.2.7 SAFETY AND STAFF CARE

Although transfer of risk is not a challenge specific to women-led organisations, the research revealed that due to the nature of their work, women responders are often at greater risk of threats and violence due to them perhaps challenging gender norms, either directly through their work, or as a woman undertaking a role that does not conform with these norms. This applied to women responders operating at all levels; research in Vanuatu identified that members of CAVAW had been threatened by knives for supporting GBV survivors. Following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the women-led organisation KOFAVIV reported that an armed man stationed himself outside their centre and staff received threatening phone calls.[118] This research was not able to identify examples where international actors had budgeted for contingency funds to support partner CSOs to cover emergency costs for their safety, such as accommodation and transport or training on risk management.

Similarly, due to the nature of protection work and the fact that partner staff are often in frontline roles, they are at risk of secondary trauma and burn out, which can occur when an individual is exposed to people who have been traumatised themselves.[119] Several examples of support to partner staff in reducing the risk of secondary trauma were identified (as outlined in Section 5.2); however, this was not systematically provided by international actors.

6.2.8 ACCESS TO FUNDING

Underpinning many challenges is the issue of access to funding. Although the research showed that grassroots women were active in responding to humanitarian crises, the burden of unpaid care work can be a barrier to the participation of some women. Research in Nepal, for example, showed that lack of funds to cover loss of earnings during activities could make it difficult for women living in poverty to participate.[120]

Multiple analyses have shown the small proportion of funds that reach women-led organisations. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) review of support to Southern women's rights organisations showed that where resources did reach groups they were typically small scale and short term, not enabling expansion, scale-up or organisational strengthening. Additionally, interviewees reported this negatively impacted turnover of staff, limiting the impact of staff capacity-strengthening work.

In humanitarian response in particular, donors frequently prefer to fund local organisations through international agencies,[121] which often results in challenges concerning the use of sub-contracting models, as highlighted above. Direct in-country humanitarian funding facilities may still be out of reach. Country-based pooled funds (CBPFs), in which donors pool their contributions to a single fund, are often the most accessible humanitarian funding mechanism to national CSOs. Analysis of CBPF data in 2017 revealed that 24.5 per cent of funds allocated went to national NGOs, of which 14 per cent went to women-led organisations (53 per cent to mainstream organisations, with 32 per cent of cases unclear).[122]

Access to funding is a particular challenge for women-led organisations representing more marginalised groups. Women's DPOs, for example, are often smaller and reliant upon very specific pots of funding, making it more difficult to mobilise in crisis situations. Women's DPOs in Malawi reported that it was challenging to access information on donor priorities and funding opportunities.

Where funding is acquired, it is often restricted to specific sectors, sub-sectors and types of activities. Yet, as the research has shown, women-led organisations often provide support to interconnected protection risks, which do not necessarily sit within criteria for funding. In particular, women-led groups often aim to provide some material support or economic empowerment activity alongside protection services; funding is seldom sufficient to cover this, while project funding criteria may exclude this type of activity.

Although research has shown the potential that crises can present to transform gendered power relations, donor funding often prioritises shifting funds for humanitarian aid at the expense of longer-term gender justice work. Many women's rights organisations in Iraq and Yemen have put their gender justice work on hold while they transition to humanitarian programming, with Yemeni women activists repeatedly being told by donors that 'now is not the time' for strategic gender programmes, setting back progress.

6.2.9 PARTICIPATION IN THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

Finally, a number of challenges were identified which related to participation in national and sub-national protection clusters. These included being able to access meetings: common barriers were changing calendars, information not being shared with local CSOs and transport difficulties. One interviewee shared a case in which a cluster meeting was held in a location without women's toilets. The high number of meetings and the time commitment required were also often exclusionary, particularly for smaller CSOs that have fewer staff.

When CSOs did participate, the formal facilitation of cluster meetings was reported to be a barrier to meaningful participation. Nor did the protection cluster necessarily value the contributions of CSOs – which may not be able to speak extensively about activities, but can share valuable contextual information:

'Yes, we participate, but we don't have the opportunity to speak. Our activities are just considered as small activities, they go around the table and the INGOs they have these big projects and activities, they speak about these, but they don't really consider us and our small activities, it's discouraging. We realise it's important and we're looking to participate more, but we get the impression they are very selective of who participates. There are organisations led by people who think they know about the situation, the problems of women, but they don't know the specifics of the context here.' [Key informant interview #43 (women-led CSO)]

Feedback from CSOs that participated in cluster meetings was also that the coordination spaces were not always useful. Although one original aim of the 'Protection in Practice' project was to support CSOs' engagement in humanitarian protection coordination mechanisms, as Oxfam developed trust with partners they provided feedback across all four project countries that they didn't find these mechanisms useful and would rather establish their own local mechanisms.[123] Specific challenges reported included that the expertise of national CSOs was not valued and that those convening the mechanisms did not show awareness of local dynamics. In Myanmar, for example, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs civil–military liaison officer attended the meetings, yet this individual had been a member of the government military. For one CSO, which was associated with a particular ethnic group that was trying to gain access to new areas, they did not feel comfortable sharing information.[124]

Partner CSOs went on to establish their own coordination mechanisms. In Lebanon, the project supported the creation of a protection network to facilitate exchange of information between 28 national and international organisations and committees operating in the Palestinian camps.[125] In Myanmar, the organisation Kachin Baptist Convention coordinated with eight other local organisations to form a network dedicated to advocacy on humanitarian access and protection of civilians, including coordination with international humanitarian actors.[126]

More widely, the Child Protection Area of Responsibility is carrying out work on behalf of the Global Protection Cluster to understand and mitigate barriers to the meaningful participation of national and local actors in the cluster system. This includes work with specific country clusters to analyse barriers to access and develop action plans to mitigate these.

6.3 What does this mean for the protection sector?

A considerable number and range of challenges were reported by women responders in collaborating with international humanitarian actors. Many of these were linked to the partnership approaches of INGOs, which can be changed. Such change includes moving away from sub-granting models and supporting 'learning by doing'. There is also significant historic and emerging learning for the sector to draw from in the approaches of partnership-focused INGOs, including forthcoming research on good practice models for localisation[127] and from recent projects under the START Network.

Other challenges relate to wider ways of working – for example, the importance of supporting women-led organisations to develop context-specific interventions which draw from international good practice, rather than being requested to adapt international models to their circumstances.

Nonetheless, learning about the challenges that women responders face around collaboration can also be used to identify areas where there is potential added value in the role of international humanitarian actors. These areas include:

- Facilitating opportunities for engagement with minority groups such as women's DPOs and LGBTIQ groups;

- Actively supporting women-led organisations to navigate the complexities of compliance requirements;

- Budgeting contingency funds, for example, for the safety of women-led groups and organisations; and

- Investing in women-led organisations in order to strengthen the organisations as a whole, not only their capacity to implement a specific project.

The research did, however, reveal a potential tension between delivering lifesaving services as quickly as possible and working in a way that facilitates collaboration with women-led organisations. This underlines the importance of investment in emergency preparedness, but also of potential creative ways of working – for example, embedding surge staff in partner organisations.

It is also important to recognise the situations where the value of collaborating with women-led organisations may not be in delivering aid directly, but rather their engaging with other stakeholders to provide technical support and hold others accountable. As CARE's research on gender-sensitive partnerships found,

'women's rights organisations could positively challenge CARE's commitments, risk thresholds, attitudes and male-dominated humanitarian structures, and push CARE outside of its comfort zones, while helping CARE to better understand how to move from gender responsive to gender transformative emergency programming'.[128]

This is explored further in Section 7, which draws together conclusions from the research before outlining practical suggestions for how to strengthen collaboration with women responders in the context of protection interventions.

7. WAYS FORWARD

7.1 Conclusions

This research has drawn from primary and secondary data to fill a gap in learning around how the humanitarian protection sector is actively engaging with and ensuring the participation of women responders, as individual volunteers, leaders, activists, groups, women-led organisations and networks. In doing so, conclusions can be drawn in five key areas, outlined below. These are followed by recommendations on how the sector can strengthen this collaboration.

7.1.1 UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGING WITH LOCAL REALITIES – WHAT PROTECTION MEANS TO WOMEN AND GIRLS

Protection is an often-misunderstood term in the humanitarian sector, interpreted in different ways by different actors. Technical conceptions of the term don't necessarily translate into the complex realities of people's lives. Women's understandings of protection priorities are context-specific and deeply personal. They range from seeing it as actions taken to protect their homes during a cyclone, to acting to protect others in need and finding ways to maintain their dignity. Such understandings are also strongly gendered and cannot be separated from the social norms which shaped women's lives prior to a crisis. Due to these same gendered norms, however, the opportunities women have to voice what protection means to them, their needs and priorities, are often limited.

Humanitarian response needs to understand and engage with women's experiences and priorities, building on community-based protection approaches developed in recent years to ensure that interventions respond to these. Engaging with women responders, as individuals, groups and organisations, who are rooted in the communities and countries in which they operate, is one key means to ensure women's voices are heard and that analysis of protection risks is grounded in a context-specific understanding of gendered power relations.

7.1.2 'THERE IS ALWAYS A WOMEN'S GROUP' – HOW WOMEN RESPONDERS MITIGATE AND RESPOND TO PROTECTION RISKS

In rapid, slow onset and protracted crises, whether related to natural disasters or conflict, women are taking actions to mitigate and respond to protection risks that affect themselves and others. This includes as individuals, in informal groups, and as registered women-led organisations and networks. While women-led organisations are not necessarily 'women only' organisations, women often occupy most leadership positions in such groups.

The diverse ways in which women responders mitigate protection risks, grounded in understanding local women's priorities, often meet both women's practical needs and target the root causes of gender inequality. In doing so, they may cut across traditional agency classifications: not falling neatly into a particular phase

of response (initial response, recovery, development) or into individual sub-sectors, such as GBV response, or sectors such as protection.

7.1.3 FROM ACCESS TO SOLIDARITY AND SUSTAINABILITY – HOW WOMEN RESPONDERS CONTRIBUTE TO MORE CONTEXTUALISED AND EFFECTIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Women responders make diverse contributions to humanitarian response, which extend beyond protection programming to contribute widely to a more contextualised and effective humanitarian response. Women responders are able to make these contributions due to:

- The **access** they may have, permitting them to not only act as first responders, but also support more marginalised populations;

- The **understanding** women responders bring to the needs and realities of different groups, of how to engage with key stakeholders and their ability to respond creatively to barriers;

- Their ability to use social capital and networks to **reach** other women at different geographical levels;

- Being able to provide a space for and **raise women's voices**, as well as supporting women's **leadership** potential;

- Being able to provide **solidarity** to other women and girls in day-to-day spaces and activism; and

- Contributing to interventions being gender **transformative** and potentially more **sustainable**.

Yet the contributions of different women responders are unlikely to be the same, with grassroots women leaders, groups and organisations being able to support and respond in distinct ways compared to larger national women-led organisations and movements. In some cases, the contributions made by women responders may be shared with other local groups and organisations. Nonetheless, the understanding, experience and expertise that women responders can provide needs to be recognised in the context of humanitarian response – not just in longer-term social justice programming.

7.1.4 'THEY KNOW THE CLIMATE, COLOUR AND MOOD OF THE COMMUNITY' – COLLABORATION BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL ACTORS AND WOMEN RESPONDERS

In most cases, international humanitarian actors were not sure of the extent to which they collaborated with women responders. Seven types of collaboration were identified across both protection mainstreaming approaches and specialised protection interventions.

These ranged from training grassroots groups, to partnership in direct service provision, to collaboration in emergency preparedness.

At the organisational level, many INGOs did not have a single approach to partnership in humanitarian response, undertaking a mixture of direct service delivery and implementation via partnerships. Collaboration with women-led organisations therefore also varied accordingly. The structure of partnership with a women-led organisation, such as whether it was project based or involved longer-term collaboration, was largely dependent on the organisation's overall approach to working in partnership.

Where partnerships occurred, they were often facilitated by the advocacy of individuals within INGOs who valued the specific contributions of women responders, recognised that partnerships could enable access to certain areas, and promoted sustainability concerns. At times, they were as a result of donor requests to work in partnership. Conversely, partnerships were constrained in instances where senior staff did not value collaboration with women-led organisations or where selection criteria favoured organisations that were able to comply with due diligence and grant requirements over technical experience and expertise. This underlines the importance of formalising engagement with women responders in partnerships and regional and country strategies, and of removing key barriers to partnerships with women-led organisations.

7.1.5 'FINANCIAL PROCEDURES ALWAYS WIN' – CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN COLLABORATION

Women responders face significant challenges in collaborating with humanitarian actors; these include barriers that limit women's participation in decision making more widely, which are amplified for more marginalised individuals. Women's DPOs and LGBTIQ organisations are seldom included in either mainstream humanitarian coordination spaces or women's movements.

Many of these challenges are linked to the partnership approaches of INGOs and the predominance of sub-granting models in a humanitarian system that values reaching large numbers of beneficiaries in the most cost-effective way. This may translate into incentives to 'get the money out the door quickly', signing a smaller number of agreements with larger CSO partners, rather than a larger number of agreements with smaller CSOs – which are more likely to be women-led organisations.

There is also a potential tension between delivering lifesaving services as quickly as possible and working in a way that enables collaboration. This underlines the importance of investing in emergency preparedness,

developing relationships with organisations pre-crisis, but also exploring creative ways of working. These include embedding surge staff in partner organisations or engaging women-led organisations as technical leads rather than in direct service delivery.

Collaboration with women responders is not a panacea for humanitarian protection programming and brings with it complexity. However, the challenges are surmountable and there is significant learning for the sector to draw upon on how to mitigate these, in addition to the specific recommendations outlined below.

7.2 Recommendations

The Guidance Note (below) provides recommendations for international humanitarian actors to consider in collaborating with women responders – whether as women leaders, grassroots groups or national women-led organisations. The focus remains on protection programming; however, many of these recommendations apply outside of the protection sector to women's leadership in wider humanitarian response.

In developing the Guidance Note, we recognise that each humanitarian response is unique, in terms of the nature of the crisis, the speed of onset, its duration, existing national capacity and funding availability. Similarly, each humanitarian actor's mandate, history and structure is different. The note therefore first outlines three principles to guide collaboration in different contexts:

- See women as the experts in their situation;
- Respect the priorities of women-led groups and organisations;
- Compensate for women's time and remove barriers to access.

It is then structured to provide recommendations for different types of collaboration:

- Collaborating with grassroots women responders;
- Partnering with women-led organisations;
- Facilitating engagement with minority groups;
- Overall approaches to emergency response; and
- What donors should do.

Guidance Note – Recommendations for meaningful collaboration with women responders in protection programming

Guiding principles

Given the diversity in humanitarian response, the following principles are designed to guide approaches towards all different forms of engagement with women responders in protection programming

Principle One: See women as the experts in their situation	Recognise that women responders, whether individual leaders, grassroots groups or national organisations, have a nuanced and intimate understanding of their needs, including the protection risks that affect them and other women in their circumstances. This, and the actions women responders take to support themselves and others, may not always sit neatly with humanitarian and development divides or with sector definitions. Humanitarian actors should intentionally and systematically listen to and consider women's voices and be flexible in working outside sector definitions and divides when required.
Principle Two: Respect the priorities of women-led groups and organisations	Women-led organisations may wish to become involved in humanitarian response, but face barriers. Equally, as a women's rights organisation with a longer-term agenda in a country, an organisation may not wish to become involved for fear of it detracting from that work. At the grassroots level, women responders can face too many time pressures to take on additional roles. Collaborating with women responders necessitates asking about an individual, a group or an organisation's wishes and priorities for participation and then respecting these.
Principle Three: Compensate for women's time and remove barriers to access	Women responders are often highly motivated and give their time freely. Although the principle of volunteerism is important, it should be implemented realistically, with women compensated appropriately, recognising that they often have unpaid caring responsibilities. Actively consider barriers to access and participation for different women responders at all levels and actions that can be taken to reduce these. Wherever possible, consult women-led organisations and groups on barriers, potential actions and the resources required.

Collaborating with grassroots women responders

Ask 'How do women organise here?' and 'What do women do to protect themselves and others?' Whether in a camp, host community or other setting, in any assessment identify formal and informal women's groups. Often these will be involved in some basic income generating activity. Ask 'Who are the trusted women or women leaders' and 'How do women organise here?' Identify existing locally-led protection actions.	**Example:** CARE is piloting a process called 'Women Lead', which identifies the ways in which women are involved in humanitarian response and how their leadership can be supported. The pilot was developed in recognition of the fact that Rapid Gender Analyses undertaken by CARE in previous responses should have focused more on women's existing and potential participation.	**Assessment**
Consider how different protection interventions can engage with and support grassroots women responders This includes supporting safe spaces, where women can come together. Ensure that a risk analysis is incorporated into protection activities to mitigate and manage risks women may face in supporting others and challenging social norms.	**Example:** In the Democratic Republic of Congo, IRC trained women's community-based organisations (CBOs) to provide case management services. A 2017 assessment found that CBOs that had not received support from IRC since 2012 were still able to provide these services with no external support.	**Design**

Remove barriers to participation Ask the question 'What do we need to do to ensure women can participate meaningfully?' Consider: • *Practical barriers:* e.g. location, access, time (length of meeting, time of day), language (spoken language, use of jargon); • *Structural barriers:* e.g. social norms that limit women's attendance and participation; and • *Specific barriers* for marginalised individuals, including access for women and girls with disabilities.	**Example:** ActionAid's research in four countries identified recommendations from women to enable their participation in humanitarian leadership. These included building an enabling environment for lactating mothers to enable them to participate and providing functional literacy programmes alongside emergency relief efforts.[129]
Facilitate engagement with wider community members Collaborating with women responders not only entails engaging with women; indeed, there is the risk that women alone may be seen as 'responsible' for mitigating the protection risks women and girls face. Engage therefore with different groups and leaders, while ensuring that space is retained for women's voices and experiences.	**Example:** In the DRC, Oxfam establishes Women's Forums alongside Community Protection Committees to provide a separate space where women consider protection risks that affect them and identify actions they wish to take. These are then discussed with the mixed-sex Community Protection Committees and included in Community Protection Plans.[130]
Don't limit collaboration with women responders to focusing only on the protection risks women and girls face Recognise also that women responders may be taking actions on wider issues and protection risks that affect others.	**Example:** Members of the DRC's Women's Forums (outlined above) advocated with local authorities on protection risks affecting different groups, from arbitrary arrest to illegal taxation.[131] The women's rights organisations Rasan and Women's Rehabilitation Organisation have tailored their services to also support LGBTIQ and male survivors of violence.[132]
Facilitate connections Humanitarian actors can play a facilitating role in supporting sometimes challenging connections between women responders and others. This includes, for example, connections between grassroots women's groups and national women-led organisations, and with key stakeholders, such as authorities or other international actors.	**Example:** In Gaza, in the aftermath of the conflict in 2014, action researchers supported by Oxfam saw the needs of women with disabilities were not being met. Oxfam supported the formation of a coalition of four women's sector organisations and four disabled people's organisations to assess gaps in services and design an emergencies preparedness plan.[133]
Partnering with women-led organisations	
Recognising value Senior management should take the lead in recognising the value of collaborating with women-led organisations. They should communicate with staff, specifying that such partnerships be included in emergency response, not just in longer-term programmes. Formalise these commitments in partnership strategies (whether for a country/ regional office or an organisation's humanitarian strategy).	**Example:** As part of CARE's Regional Middle East and North Africa Road Map, each country office is required to partner with one new women-led organisation per year. This could be built upon to track key metrics – such as the amount of funding women-led organisations receive and length and quality of these partnerships.

Setup

Implementation

Strategies

Mapping and understanding the context Draw from different sources to informally identify different women-led organisations and find out about the dynamics of the women's movement in a country. Bring staff working in development into these conversations.	**Example:** In mapping organisations, it is important to consider: • Informal groupings and organisations; • The political affiliations of organisations; • Organisations that may be more conservative; • Alliances and divisions between organisations; • Urban versus rural organisations; and • Who may be excluded.	Ways of working
Selection criteria In deciding partner selection criteria, do not only consider organisational capacity to deliver and comply with project requirements, but also experience in gender and protection, contextual knowledge, and relationships with key stakeholders including community members.	**Example:** CARE's study on gender sensitive partnerships revealed that it tends to select partners for their emergency response experience and compliance capacity, rather than their expertise in protection or gender equality.[134]	Policies & Procedures
Invest in organisations Women-led organisations often have weaker organisational procedures and systems. Budget for organisational support, drawing on good practice such as mentoring and secondments, rather than one-off training sessions. Ensure an organisation's own priorities are the starting point for a two-way conversation. Coordinate with other organisations in the development of support plans and investment to avoid duplication.	**Example:** The START Network 'Shifting the Power' project developed the SHAPE Framework,[135] which aims to support organisations to assess their capacity to manage humanitarian programmes and influence response. The 'Protection in Practice' project provided flexible grants to organisations to strengthen protection capacity and trialled WhatsApp reporting to reduce the reporting burden.	Funding
Funding and projects Budget and share funding for core organisational costs fairly with partners. In developing a project, do not come with a pre-set agenda; rather, develop a plan jointly. Consider what emergency funding may be needed (e.g. for transport, accommodation for those at risk) and budget accordingly.	**Example:** CARE used a £20,000 corporate funding grant to develop a partnership with Lebanese women's rights organisation, RDFL. RDFL commented that the project was developed according to what it needed, eventually focusing on support for social workers in self-care techniques.	
Flexibility in partnership Retain flexibility in the partnership agreement. If the context changes, or a partner is not willing to take the risk of operating in a specific area, work together with the partner to develop a different strategy. This may include shifting a partnership from direct project implementation to focusing on skills strengthening for a period of time.	**Example:** Trocaire signs memoranda of understanding with organisations that go beyond the lifetime of a project. Core funding is used to support a partner's minimum operating costs between projects.	Policies & Procedures
Participation and visibility Actively support the participation of women-led organisations in decision making and coordination spaces, according to their priorities. Raise the visibility of these groups and support the development of their networks – for example, with donors.	**Example:** As part of the 'Safe from the Start' project,[136] CARE facilitated women-led organisations, including Hope Restoration South Sudan, to participate in a global UN High Commissioner for Refugees consultation meeting on localisation of gender-based violence interventions and the ECHO annual meeting of partners for the Call to Action on GBV in emergencies.	Ways of working

Facilitating engagement with minority groups	
Recognise that **LGBTIQ organisations and groups** may not be involved in humanitarian response, but are able to provide important input and recommendations on how to mitigate the risks LGBTIQ individuals face in crises. In engagement, prioritise the safety of such individuals and reach out to national organisations and networks for their advice before looking for or engaging any local groups. Consider what role an international actor can play in facilitating the wider engagement of LGBTIQ organisations in humanitarian preparedness.	**Example:** At the Pacific Humanitarian Partnership meeting in Fiji in October 2017, UN Women and Diverse Voices and Action for Equality led a session on local and diverse humanitarian actors, including speakers from the Rainbow Pride Foundation and Pacific Rainbows Advocacy Network, examining the specific needs of diverse groups and benefits of inclusion.[137]
Actively engage organisations and groups of **women and girls with disabilities** in preparedness and response, building upon existing activism.[138] Remove barriers to participation at all levels, considering both mental and physical disability. Recognise that barriers for women and girls are not only physical, but may include lack of confidence, stigmatisation and lower levels of education.	**Example:** The Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi is leading a project to identify innovative ways to involve persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response, tackling challenges such as how to ensure people who are visually impaired or have hearing difficulties can be alerted and supported if there is a risk of flooding. Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls with a Disability and Disabled Women in Development establish groups for women and girls with disabilities to facilitate local advocacy.

Overall approaches to emergency response		
Emergency preparedness Invest in the emergency preparedness of women-led organisations, so that they are positioned to respond in the event of a crisis. These groups may not identify as humanitarian organisations; this should not preclude collaboration if they are interested in humanitarian response.	**Example:** IRC is engaging with regional gender-based violence and women's rights networks to train a network of national women-led organisations in emergency GBV preparedness and response.	Preparedness
Surge support Consider how surge staff support can be better used and resourced to facilitate collaboration with women-led organisations. This may include allocating time to development of partnerships and considering during recruitment what qualities are needed in staff to facilitate these ways of working.	**Example:** In Fiji, CARE mounted a joint response to Cyclone Winston with Live and Learn, in which surge staff were embedded within their organisation. In Bangladesh, IRC piloted deploying two coordinators, one of whom focused on developing collaboration with CSOs.	Response
Alternative means of engagement Where full partnerships aren't possible, or in parallel, consider different means of collaboration. These could include inviting partners to co-facilitate staff training sessions, developing a consortium where a women-led organisation provides technical support to other mainstream partners, or fundraising from non-institutional donors to establish small, flexible pots of funding for specific initiatives.	**Example:** A Bangladeshi disability rights organisation saw that there were no facilities for persons with disabilities in the Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar camp. They received a small amount of funding from Mama Cash's Opportunity Fund to work with local authorities to improve disability access.	Ways of working

What donors should do

Promote women-led partnerships

Donors can play a key role in communicating the value of women-led partnerships and pushing collaboration forward. They also need to hold international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) accountable for the quality of partnerships. Donors should therefore consider evaluating INGOs who partner with woman-led organisations on criteria such as:

- Whether core costs are reasonably shared with the women-led organisation;
- Whether capacity-building support is budgeted for;
- Whether the INGO has a strategy for meaningful capacity building, such as through accompaniment rather than one-off training;
- Whether the INGO budgets for contingency funds to support women-led organisations and their staff in event of an emergency; and
- Whether provision is included for staff care, to prevent and support those affected by secondary trauma and burn out.

Make deliberate efforts to reach women-led groups and organisations in humanitarian crises

Donors should take an intentional approach in how their funding mechanisms are structured and not assume that funding will reach women-led groups and organisations. Learning from research by the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality,[139] donors should:

- Ensure that women-led organisations are not competing with international humanitarian actors in the same funding windows;
- Earmark a percentage of funding for women-led organisations;
- Use a mix of funding mechanisms to reach different sized organisations, from grassroots groups to national and regional women-led organisations; and
- Strengthen internal monitoring systems to track the percentage and type of funding in crises reaching women-led groups and organisations.

Balance humanitarian response and social justice funding

- While recognising that humanitarian response needs to be prioritised in a crisis, donors should avoid putting women-led organisations in a position where they are unable to mobilise around the opportunities for positive social change that crises can provide.
- Donors should support women-led organisations to continue longer-term work according to their own priorities and adapt to the changing context, including by retaining funding pots for such work.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Interview questions

Semi-structured interview questions – Women-led organisations

1) Organisation profile

    a.   Could you tell me about your organisation?

    -   How was it established? When founded?

    -   What are the objectives?

    b.   What are the different types of **activities or programme** approaches you implement?

2) Humanitarian response

    a.   What was the **most recent response** to a humanitarian crisis that you were involved in?

    b.   What were the **key activities** that you carried out?

    -   Why did you carry out these activities?

    -   To what extent did these change over time? (at different stages in the crisis)

    c.   Have you been involved **in other** humanitarian responses?

    -   Under what conditions does your organisation become involved in humanitarian response?

3) Protection risks

    a.   The study includes an analysis of different protection risks women and girls face in different crises – What are the **different protection risks** that women and girls face in this humanitarian crisis?

    b.   To what extent do you feel that other **international actors** identified and responded to these?

    c.   From your experience, do you feel that there are particular protection risks that are **over-looked** by other actors?

4) Partnership and collaboration

    a.   During the response to this humanitarian crisis, did you hold a partnership with one or more **INGO**?

    b.   Could you tell me about these partnerships?

    -   Length of partnership, funding models, how did the partnerships come about?

    c.   What were the **positive aspects** of the partnership?

    d.   What do you feel was the added value of the partnership – What did it **enable you to do**?

    e.   What were the **less positive aspects and the challenges** in the partnership? (re-iterate that we won't name INGOs in report)

5) Cluster and coordination mechanisms

    a.   Did you or do you participate in a **cluster** or other coordination mechanism?

    b.   What did/do you feel were/are the **positive aspects** of the cluster?

    c.   To what extent did/do you feel **supported** to participate?

    d.   What do you feel were the **barriers** that you, or other women-led organisations, had in participating in the cluster? (if any)

    e.   Were there barriers or challenges in engaging with **other aspects** of the humanitarian response?

6) Other comments

    a.   What **recommendations** would you make to INGOs working in humanitarian protection regarding collaborating with women actors?

    b.   What **recommendations** would you make to the cluster and wider humanitarian system?

    c.   Do you have any **final comments** or reflections?

Semi-structured interview questions – International humanitarian actors

1) Protection risks

   a. Does your organisation have a particular **definition or understanding** of protection as a sector?
   - How is this broadly structured within the organisation?

   b. What are the main programme and policy protection **approaches** that you implement?

   c. The study includes an analysis of different protection risks women and girls face in different crises – we are carrying out a literature review to analyse these. We'd be interested in hearing what **protection risks** that women and girls face which, from your experience, you feel are over-looked or hidden?

   d. To what extent do you feel that other **international actors identify** and respond to these?

2) Partnership and collaboration

   a. What is your organisation's overall **approach towards partnership**, particularly in relation to humanitarian response?
   - Partnership policy?
   - How has this changed over time?
   - How is this different in humanitarian response?

   b. To what extent do you **collaborate with women actors** in humanitarian response generally? (can include smaller groups and NGOs)
   - Is this something that has been discussed within your organisation?
   - To what extent does this vary sector to sector and region to region?

   c. Do you have examples of **activities of women-led CSOs**, in particular carrying out protection activities, that you could share?

   d. What do you see as the motivation and **value of working with women-actors**?
   - To what extent do you think this is shared and recognised across the organisation?

3) Examples of collaboration

   a. Do you have particular examples of **positive collaboration** with different types of women actors that you're able to share?
   - How did this collaboration come about?
   - What was particularly positive about the collaboration?

   b. What do you feel **facilitated this collaboration** or made it possible?

   c. What do you feel was the **impact of this collaboration?** What did it allow you to do, or do better, than if this collaboration didn't exist?

4) Challenges

   a. What **challenges** have you experienced in engaging with women actors?
   - e.g. can include identifying them, gaining buy-in or during actual collaboration

   b. Do you have **examples of collaboration** that didn't work as well as hoped?
   - e.g. where you tried to collaborate but weren't able to, or developed a partnership but there were particular challenges

   c. What were the **constraining factors** in these cases?

5) Other comments

   a. What would you say/**recommend to other INGOs** working in humanitarian protection regarding collaborating with women actors?

   b. What would you say/**recommend to women actors** when engaging with INGOs?

   c. Do you have any **final comments** or reflections?

Annex 2 – Online survey for women-led organisations

SURVEY FOR WOMEN-LED LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

This survey is for women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) which have previously, or are currently, carrying out activities in response to a humanitarian crisis. The crisis can be of any size or duration, and the CSO need not define itself as a 'humanitarian' organisation. Organisations eligible to participate should be women-led organisations, of any size; however, they can be working in any sector, not necessarily in the area of women's rights.

The survey should take 20 minutes. There is a separate survey for INGOs, which can be found here (link was provided for participants). For more information on the research, please see the summary here (link was provided for participants). Thank you in advance for your participation.

Question		Instruction	Response options	Type of response
Section one: Screening questions – If 'no' to either of these questions, the survey will terminate				
1.	Is your organisation women-led? *This refers to organisations which define themselves as having women in key leadership positions*		1. Yes 2. No	Single response
2.	Has your organisation ever carried out activities to support people affected by a humanitarian crisis? *This refers to any type of humanitarian crisis of any scale, including response to conflict, natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods or an epidemic* *Your organisation does not need to define itself as 'humanitarian' to participate in the research*		1. Yes 2. No	Single response
Section two: Profile of organisation				
3.	Name of organisation			Open
4a.	Type of organisation		1. Registered NGO 2. Unregistered NGO 3. Network 4. Other (specify)	Single response
4b.	If other, please specify:			Open
5.	Which country/countries do you operate in?			Open
6.	What date was the organisation established?			Open
7.	What was your organisational income in 2017?		1. < 25,000 USD 2. 25,000 – 50,000 USD 3. 51,000 – 100,000 USD 4. 101,000 – 250,000 USD 5. 251,000 – 500,000 USD 6. 501,000 – 1million USD 7. > 1million USD	Single response

8.	What proportion of leadership positions are occupied by women?		1. 0–25% 2. 26–50% 3. 51–75% 4. 76–100%	Single response
9.	What is your organisation's overall objective?			Open
10a.	What are the key sector(s) that your organisation works in? (Tick all that apply)		1. Child protection 2. Community protection 3. Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and/or response 4. Psychosocial support 5. Coordination and advocacy 6. Livelihoods 7. Education 8. Governance 9. Health 10. Women's economic empowerment 11. Women's political participation 12. Sexual and reproductive health 13. Other (specify)	Multiple responses
10b.	If 'other', please specify			Open
11a.	Who are the different groups of people your organisation aims primarily to support? (Tick all that apply)		1. Women 2. Men 3. Children 4. Adolescent girls 5. Adolescent boys 6. Individuals identifying as LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, intersex) 7. Individuals living with a disability 8. Older women 9. Older men 10. Other women-led organisations 11. Other (specify)	Multiple responses
11b.	If 'other', please specify			Open

Section three: Involvement in humanitarian response				
12	What was the most recent humanitarian crisis your organisation responded to, or is currently responding to? *Please enter a short description and the date*			Open
13a.	What were the key activities you carried out in response to this crisis? (Tick all that apply)		1. Child protection 2. Community protection 3. GBV prevention and/or response 4. Psychosocial support 5. Providing information (such as on services) 6. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) 7. Advocacy – Local or regional 8. Advocacy – National 9. Coordination with other responders 10. Livelihood support 11. Provision of emergency food and non-food items 12. Shelter 13. Other (specify)	Multiple responses
13b.	If 'other', please specify			Open
13c.	Please provide a brief description of your activities			Open
14a.	How regularly have you responded to humanitarian crises?		1. This is the first humanitarian crisis we have responded to 2. We have previously responded to a humanitarian crisis, but it is not a core organisational activity 3. We respond to humanitarian crises when they affect the area we operate in, or are of large scale 4. We have frequently responded to humanitarian crises 5. Other (specify)	Single response
14b.	If 'other', please specify			Open

	Section four: Protection risks faced by women and girls in humanitarian crises			
15.	Did you consult with women, girls or LGBTI individuals during the humanitarian crisis on their needs and/ or protection risks they faced?	If no, go to Q18	1. Yes 2. No	Single response
16.	If yes, what were the different needs and/or protection risks they identified?			Open
17.	To what extent do you feel these were responded to by humanitarian actors (including (I)NGOs and the government)?			Open
18.	This research focuses on protection activities in humanitarian crisis – What does 'protection' mean to your organisation?			Open
	Section five: Partnerships with INGOs			
19.	Had you developed a partnership with one or more International NGOs prior to or during the most recent humanitarian crisis you responded to?	If no, go to Q24	1. Yes – prior to the crisis 2. Yes – during the crisis 3. Yes – prior to and during the crisis 4. No	Single response
20.	If yes, how many INGOs did you partner with? (There is no need to name the INGO)			Open
21.	Could you identify the key positive aspects of the partnership(s)? What good practice do you want the INGO(s) to continue?			Open
22.	Could you identify key challenges in the partnership(s)? What do you want the INGO(s) to do differently or stop doing?			Open
23a.	Overall, how satisfied were you with the partnership? If you partnered with more than one INGO, please rate your most recent and longest standing partner Partner one:		1. Very satisfied 2. Satisfied 3. Dissatisfied 4. Very dissatisfied	Single response
23b.	Comments:			Open
23c.	Partner two:		1. Very satisfied 2. Satisfied 3. Dissatisfied 4. Very dissatisfied	Single response
23d.	Comments:			Open

24.	If you did not partner with an INGO, please specify the reason:		1. We chose not to partner with an INGO 2. No INGOs approached us 3. We wanted to partner with an INGO, but did not know how 4. We approached an INGO but were unsuccessful	Single response
Section six: Coordination mechanisms				
25.	During the most recent humanitarian crisis, did you or do you participate in any coordination mechanisms, such as the cluster system or other coordination space?	If no go to Q30	1. Yes 2. No	Single response
26a.	If yes, please tick all that you participated in:		1. Protection cluster 2. GBV sub-cluster 4. Child protection sub-cluster 5. WASH 6. Shelter 7. Nutrition 8. Health 9. Education 10. Food security 11. Camp coordination and management 12. Other coordination mechanism (specify)	Multiple responses
26b.	If 'other', please specify:			Open
27.	What was the cluster, sub-cluster or other coordination mechanism you most frequently participated in?		1. Protection cluster 2. GBV sub-cluster 3. Child protection sub-cluster 4. WASH 5. Shelter 6. Nutrition 7. Health 8. Education 9. Food security 10. Camp coordination and management 11. Other coordination mechanism	Single response

28a.	Please rate your experience of the leadership of this cluster in engaging with local women-led organisations:		1. Positive – The leadership supported the participation of local women-led organisations 2. Neutral – The leadership neither actively supported nor hindered local women-led organisations from participating 3. Negative – The leadership hindered or actively excluded local women-led organisations from participating	Single response
28b.	If possible, please give details on your response:			Open
29.	What recommendations would you make to the cluster?			Open
30a.	If you did not participate in a cluster or other coordination mechanism, could you explain why not?		1. No coordination mechanism was active where we operate 2. We did not have the time or resources 3. We were discouraged from participating due to previous experiences 4. We do not find the coordination mechanism(s) useful 5. Other	Single response
30b.	If 'other', please specify			Open
Next steps				
31.	Do you have any other comments you would like to share on collaboration with humanitarian actors?			Open
32a.	Would you be happy to be contacted by CARE International to participate in a Skype/telephone interview to discuss your experiences in more depth?		1. Yes 2. No	Single
32b.	If yes, please enter your name and email address:			Open
33.	If you would like to receive updates on the research and an electronic copy of the report, please enter your email here: (This will not be shared with anyone else)			Open

Annex 3 – List of research participants – Global

- Alex Kisumi, Programme Coordinator, CARE International DRC
- Alice Hawkes, VPRU Technical Advisor, IRC
- Alio Namata, Regional Emergency Response Coordinator-West Africa, CARE International
- Aneeta Williams, Head of Programme Quality, War Child UK
- Angele Mbombo, Director, Reseau du Developpment des Femmes Rurales, DRC
- Anna Stone, Protection Advisor, Norwegian Refugee Council
- Anthony Nolan, Child Protection Area of Responsibility Lead, Global Protection Cluster
- Ayesha Salma Kariapper, Country Director, CARE Pakistan
- Barbara Lotti, Grants Manager, Mama Cash
- Caroline Slaiby, Vice President, and Lama El-Awad, Head of Programmes, The Lebanese Democratic Women's Gathering (RDFL)
- Carron Mann, Head of Policy and Advocacy, Women for Women International UK
- Celine Nenodji, CARE Chad
- Christina Nisha, Protection Advisor, Tearfund
- Domenica Constantini, former Gender and Protection Advisor, CARE Northern Syria Hub
- Dorcas Acen, Gender and Protection Coordinator, CARE South Sudan
- Emanuela Rizzo, Humanitarian Protection Advisor, HelpAge International UK
- Faiza Jama, Director East Africa Branch, Equality Now
- Fatma Zennoy, CARE West Africa
- Fatouma Zara, Gender in Emergencies Specialist, CARE Canada
- Fiona Shanahan, Protection Advisor, Trocaire
- Gina Bramucci, VPRU Emergency Response Specialist, IRC
- Gurvinder Singh, Child Protection Advisor, International Federation of the Red Cross
- Hannah Bond, Director, Gender Action Peace and Security
- Hannah Koroma, Director, Women Against Violence Exploitation and Abuse (WAVES), Sierra Leone
- Iman Sandra Pertek, Gender Advisor, Islamic Relief Worldwide
- Jean Kemitare, GBV Prevention Network
- Julie Lafrenière, Gender Humanitarian Team Leader, Oxfam
- Kaisa Laitila, Gender and Diversity Officer, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
- Kelly Gannon, Director for Learning and Evaluation, Global Fund for Women
- Kerry Akers, Protection Project Manager, Oxfam
- Khatuna Madurashvili, Senior Manager Regional GBV Program, MCRD, CARE International
- Kit Dorey, International Policy Officer, Stonewall
- Kovo Ntenawam, International SGBV specialist/ Project manager, Plan International Cameroon
- Kristine Vicedo, Gender Advisor, CARE Philippines
- Lulu Mshana, Director, Women's Legal Aid Centre (WLAC), Tanzania
- Magda Rossmann, Global Advisor-Violence, Abuse and Neglect, Help Age International
- Maha Nimer, Senior Gender Advisor, Syria Resilience Consortium, CARE International
- Maisoun Badawi, Karama
- Marie Sophie Sandberg Pettersson, Humanitarian Action and Resilience Building Programme Specialist, UN Women
- Marie Soudaine Rivette, Programmes Director, Oxfam in Haiti
- Marie-Emilie Dozin, Protection Coordinator, IRC
- Micah Williams, Global GBV Advisor, International Medical Corps
- Natsnet Ghebrebrhan, GBV Prevention Network/ Raising Voices
- Nelly Mbangu, Founding Member, Sauti ya Mama Mukongomani, DRC
- Nizhan Zuber, Gender and Protection Officer, CARE Kurdistan Region of Iraq
- Nur Ahmed, Secretary, Adeegto, Somalia
- Pilar Duch, Protection Advisor, Oxfam
- Priyanka Bhalla, SGB Advisor – Asia and the Pacific, IFRC
- Renu Sijapati, Director, Feminist Dalit Organisation, Nepal
- Sandra Achom, GBV Specialist, CARE Uganda
- Sarah Masters, Director of Programmes, Policy and Advocacy, Womankind Worldwide
- Sarah Whitfield, Pacific Resilience and Gender Advisor, CARE International
- Sawsan Mohamed, Director, Sustainable Development Programme, CARE in Jordan
- Shukri Gessod, VPRU Emergency Preparedness Specialist, IRC
- Suha Bashren, Gender and Protection Focal Point, CARE Yemen
- Suvekchya Rana, Director, Saathi, Nepal
- Tanja Haque, Gender Advisor, CAFOD
- Tina Sandkvist, Syria Programme Representative, Kvinna til Kvinna
- Tom Colley, Policy, HelpAge International
- Varnetta Johnson, Broadcast Manager, Liberia Women Media Action Committee, Liberia
- Vittorio Infante, International Advocacy Advisor, ActionAid International

Annex 4 – List of participating organisations in Malawi and Vanuatu

MALAWI

- ActionAid (Nsanje)
- CARE International in Malawi
- Centre for Alternatives for Victimised Women and Children (CAVWOC)
- Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP)
- Department of Disability and Elderly Affairs
- Disabled Women in Development
- Disabled Women in Africa
- District Disability Forum Nsanje
- Eye of the Child
- Federation of Disability Organisations of Malawi (FEDOMA)
- Girls Empowerment Network (GENET)
- Kuchenwe Women's Forum Nsanje
- Malawi CARER
- Malawi Human Rights for Women and Girls with Disabilities
- Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Affairs
- NGO Gender Coordination Forum
- Nsanje District Disability Forum
- Nsanje Protection Cluster
- UN Population Fund (UNFPA)
- UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) – Protection Cluster Co-Chair
- UN Women
- Victim Support Unit (VSU) Nsanje
- World Food Programme (WFP)
- Women's Legal Resource Centre (WOLREC)
- Youth Net and Counselling (YONECO)

VANUATU

- CARE International in Vanuatu
- Department for Women's Affairs (National and Tanna)
- National Disaster Management Office Santo
- National Youth Council
- Save the Children (National and Santo)
- Sanma Counselling Centre
- Tafae Counselling Centre
- Vanuatu Christian Council
- Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPAA)
- Vanuatu Family Health Association (VFHA)
- VPride
- Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities (VSPD)
- Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC)
- Wan Smoll Bag

Notes

1   'The Grand Bargain' is an agreement between more than 30 donors and aid providers to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian aid. It includes specific commitments to increase support and funding to local and national responders. For more information, see IASC website (2017). 'The Grand Bargain'. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc

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24 A house identified as being more secure during a cyclone, for example, one made of concrete.

25 Former Executive Director of the Nuba Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Organisation.

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35 Ghazzawi, R, Mohammad, A and Ramadan, O (2015). '"Peacebuilding defines our future now": A study of women's peace activism in Syria'. Badael Foundation.

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42 This definition is adapted from the definition contained within O'Connell, H (2012). 'What added value do organisations that are led and managed by women and girls bring to work addressing the rights, needs and priorities of women and girls?'. Comic Relief.

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PHOTOS

p1,   Women at a CARE-run safe space at Potibonia camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh © Nancy Farese / CARE 2018

p8,   Relief supplies being distributed at a temporary settlement in Kathmandu following the 2015 earthquakes in Nepal
         © Prashanth Vishwanathan / CARE 2015

p12, Jeanette Vumulia, a refugee in Uganda, works as a volunteer with a CARE GBV-protection project
         © Thomas Markert / CARE 2018

p16, Refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo rehearsing a theatre play about GBV in CARE's psychosocial support
         centre at a refugee camp in Uganda © Thomas Markert / CARE 2018

p23, CARE Vanuatu's Vivienne Obed preparing for a distribution in Tafea, Vanuatu, following Cyclone Pam in 2015
         © Tom Perry / CARE 2015

p30, Distribution of non-food items to people affected by floods in Ntcheu district, Malawi, in 2017
         © Henry Mhango / CARE 2017

p41, Women help to unload and distribute relief supplies following floods in Nepal in 2017 © CARE 2017

p49, Community members in Leyte, Philippines, waiting to receive emergency food supplies following Typhoon Haiyan
         (Yolanda) in 2013 © Peter Caton / CARE 2013