

Gender dimensions of displacement

by Srilakshmi Gururaja

This article focuses on how gender awareness is essential for addressing the protection and participation rights of displaced women and girls, with a discussion of the role and results of the Beijing conferences.

When displacement occurs, far more damage results than simply the loss and destruction of goods and property. People's lives and their social fabric are left in tatters; new, often unfamiliar, living environments affect the social roles and responsibilities of men and women; former support structures break down; and families may face poverty for the first time.

Both men and women are forced into restricted mobility, living with new regulations and entering new social relationships which may challenge old ties and kinships. With few or no opportunities for continuing their livelihoods and often in the absence of male family members, women have no access to remunerative work yet are expected to provide for their families. The lack of access to information about the situation of their family members adds to the trauma and overwhelming sense of uncertainty.

Displacement has different consequences for women and girls than for men and boys. There is often a dramatic increase in the number of women heads of households, and they bear additional responsibilities for meeting the needs of children and ageing relatives, since the male family members have either joined the warring groups or been captured. Women face new demands in providing for themselves and their children, with increased workloads and limited access to and control over the benefits of goods and services. Furthermore, as a result of conflict and the breakdown in law and order, women and girls face increased risks of sexual violence and abuse. In some situations, they become targets for deliberate attacks by the opposing factions for purposes of revenge.

Strategies for action

Although we know how war affects women and children and what to provide as emergency relief, we are only just beginning to understand how to address the gender dimension within the humanitarian principles framework. When we discuss the gender dimensions of displacement, we are including a vast range of different effects of armed conflict on women and men, including how it affects power relations between them, their rights and their differential access to and benefits from services. In 1999, UNICEF and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children organized an Expert Meeting on Gender Dimensions of Internal Displacement to develop strategies to address the gender dimension of internal displacement. Two areas were highlighted for action for women and girls: a) protection - safeguarding women and girls from rape, abduction, forced sexual slavery, torture and murder, and b) the realization of their rights to equal access and full participation in the management of the camps. In developing programmes to address these areas for action, UNICEF has a number of priorities, five of which are outlined below:

i. Breaking barriers

Entrenched discriminatory attitudes are evident where women and girls are denied their rights to survival, development, participation and protection. UNICEF's programmes for IDPs in Sudan have set clear goals for the enrolment and retention of girls in educational facilities. The social mobilization of communities in order to change attitudes is given importance in the setting up and management of such facilities. Human rights education, through trans-

lation of the appropriate legal instruments and awareness campaigns for both men and women, has focused on women's and children's rights, including public education on the elimination of female genital mutilation.

ii. Seeing women as survivors, not victims

In setting up humanitarian services, women's participation should be planned in a visible manner: firstly, by identifying women frontline workers - nurses, teachers, communicators - and, secondly, by actively involving them in the delivery of services. This mobilization can also be used to facilitate a systematic consultative process with women in the day-to-day management of the camps and membership in camp committees.

These first two priorities in approach can be seen in the context of UNICEF's work in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Men have traditionally run the 'popular committees' responsible for formulating local camp policy but UNICEF has encouraged them to accept female representation. Seminars were initially held with members of women's associations to plan a strategy to influence the popular committees to achieve this. One woman from each group was selected to act as their preferred representative and each group's members then lobbied for the appointment of this woman to the decision-making board of their popular committee. During the seminars, women also learned how an association functions, the principles of democratic cooperation, information skills and lobbying techniques. Meetings were also held with heads of the popular committees to discuss the importance of female representation. As a result, four popular committees now include women.

iii. Involving men and women from the beginning in peace building and conflict resolution activities

This was the main message of the recent Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, of October 2000. Experience of Mozambique,



UNICEF/HO99-0048/Roger Lemoyne

Food distribution at refugee camp near Brazda, FYR Macedonia, 1999.

Guatemala, Burundi and Somalia indicates that, despite cultural restrictions and expectations, women are willing to cross boundaries to resolve conflict and live in harmony with people of opposing warring groups. In Somalia, UNICEF and UNIFEM jointly organized training workshops in 1997 on 'Women's Role in Conflict Resolution', enabling a group of Somali women to advocate for peace and act as social change agents in their communities. This laid the foundation for bringing women into the public sphere and has resulted in promoting women's participation in civil governance.

iv. Raising gender awareness for protection

Most protection efforts have focused on education programmes for women on how to seek recourse or how to secure access to rehabilitation services. While these are important, they may not be really effective in protecting women and preventing violence against women. Sensitization of camp leaders and workers to gender issues is essential. There is now a certain level of awareness of sexual violence against women and girls

and, in many camps, precautions are being taken to provide lighting in secluded areas and along routes to water points and fuel wood collection. The Sphere project¹ has developed minimum standards in particular areas of disaster response and encourages the participation of women in identifying their special needs. It places emphasis on preventing gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, through improved lighting and security patrols in the camps. It also encourages the identification of persons and groups who present a threat to women (whether from the displaced themselves or from the host communities) and supports the displaced persons in taking action to protect themselves.

v. Reaching adolescents and youth

Boredom, absence of goals and loss of direction affect the self-confidence of young people in camps. However, although their lives may have been badly disrupted, they have energy and enthusiasm which can be channelled effectively. In November 2000, UNICEF organized a

meeting in Entebbe with key NGOs and other UN agencies to exchange information on existing interventions and to develop strategies for this age group. The meeting's recommendations focused on assessment methods for use in emergencies and strategies emphasizing participation and close involvement of adolescents in planning and implementation of interventions. In the refugee camps in Kukes, Albania, for example, UNICEF initiated a 'peer-to-peer' approach which encouraged 15,000 young Kosovans (male and female between the ages of 15 and 30) to get engaged in conflict resolution.

The Beijing Conferences

The Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995, sought to galvanize women's movements and international organizations to review progress made in achieving the goals of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies of Equality, Development and Peace and to identify the emerging areas for action in fulfilling the human rights of women. Its outcome was a 'Platform for Action' (PFA)

covering 12 critical areas of concern including the human rights of women, violence against women and girls, and women in armed conflict. It called on the international community to protect the rights and address the needs of refugees and IDPs in line with international covenants and treaties.

Since the adoption of the Beijing PFA in 1995, some progress has been made in protecting the rights of women and girls in conflict zones and in addressing their unique concerns. These achievements include:

- Initiatives to ratify and implement the Statute of the International Criminal Court which considers gender-related crimes and crimes of sexual violence. An achievement is the Statute itself, which includes under the definition of crimes against humanity: “rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity”; and, under the definition of war crimes, “committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, or any other form of sexual violence also constituting a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions”.
- The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998).
- UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women and its African Women in Crisis programme - AFWIC.²
- International Criminal Tribunal on Yugoslavia (ICTY) ruling that rape is a weapon of war and a crime against humanity (1996) and International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR) subsequent ruling that rape can be legally interpreted as a weapon or tool or genocide.
- UN Security Council Resolution 1265 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict and Resolution 261 (1999) and resolution 1314 (2000) on the Protection of Children in Armed Conflict and the deployment of UN Child Protection Advisors and Gender Advisors (1999).

The five year review (Beijing +5) of the

implementation of the Beijing PFA, undertaken during a Special Session of the UN General Assembly in New York, in June 2000, focused on Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century and gave special attention to the needs and rights of war-affected populations, particularly women. The resulting document, entitled ‘Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action’, recognizes that some positive developments have taken place but also acknowledges that several barriers have prevented the full implementation of the Beijing goals and commitments.

The document calls upon governments to incorporate a gender perspective in budgetary processes to lessen the economic inequality between men and women. In an effort to overcome the effects of globalization, governments also agreed to take measures that would guarantee the equal participation of women in macroeconomic decision making. To achieve full participation of women at all levels of decision making, the document calls for the creation of ‘favourable conditions’ to encourage women’s participation in politics. In addition, governments accepted that any type of violence against women is a human rights violation and agreed to take all steps necessary to ensure that women are protected and have access to justice.

The document recommended that actions need to be taken at both national and international levels to ensure and support the full participation of women at all levels of decision making and implementation of development activities and peace processes, including conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict reconstruction, peace making, peace keeping and peace building in line with existing principles and guidelines. In this regard, efforts should also be made to support the involvement of women’s organizations, community-based organizations and NGOs, and to ensure the application of international conventions including CEDAW and CRC to these processes.

Areas for action

In the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the challenge for governments, the UN, NGOs and others is to understand and respond to gender issues through analysis and comprehensive

programme initiatives. These initiatives should effectively build on the capacity of women affected by armed conflict, support internally displaced women and children as they push for return to their homes and reconstruction, and encourage women’s participation and protection in building a life of peace and dignity.

Drawing upon recent international commitments and conference outcomes, as outlined above, the following emerge as areas for immediate actions for advancing the rights of displaced women and children:

- Effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions, ensuring the protection of children and women in armed conflict.
- More effective warning systems for preventing violence against women and girls, and in making the perpetrators accountable for violations. The ratification and implementation of the Statute on the International Criminal Court needs to be complemented by community-based reconciliation and judicial procedures. More efforts must be made to end sexual and gender-based violence through allocating more programme budget to education for prevention.
- Prioritization by humanitarian relief workers of HIV/AIDS activities, including awareness campaigns aimed at multi-sectoral protection, education, community services, health, nutrition and economic programmes, addressing prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, improving the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, and implementing voluntary counselling and testing as appropriate for internally displaced women and adolescent girls.
- Implementation of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Statement on the Integration of a Gender Perspective in Humanitarian Assistance and the agreed conclusions of the Humanitarian Segment of UN Economic and Social Council of 1999. This would ensure that gender issues are brought into the mainstream of humanitarian assistance activities following a gender-impact analysis. This would also pave the way for measures to promote the

positive role that women can play in post-conflict peace building, reconstruction and reconciliation.

In addition, the recent progress report of the Graça Machel study, used as the background document at the September 2000 International Conference on War-Affected Children in Winnipeg, reiterated that the mandates of preventive peace missions, peace keeping operations and peace building need to include provisions for women's protection as well as to respond to gender issues. Such missions and operational activities should include appropriately staffed and integrated gender units and gender advisors, and give priority to the verification of gender-based violations and the protection of women's human rights. Field operations should protect and support the delivery of humanitarian assistance for affected women and girls, and in particular for refugee and displaced women from a gender perspective.

Conclusions

How do we make it happen? There are two overwhelming prerequisites:

Firstly, we need global application of international norms, including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, using rights-based approaches based on equality, accountability, participation and protection.

Secondly, we need an informed understanding and analysis of the social structures of displaced populations that determine the relationships, behaviour, coping mechanisms and capacity for adjustment. Disaggregation and analysis of information by sex, age, ethnicity and religion are essential for the planning and implementation of effective humanitarian assistance services.

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1 www.sphereproject.org

2 AFWIC (African Women in Crisis) enables UNIFEM to support quick responses and immediate assistance to women in crisis, and to place women at the centre of the search for solutions. AFWIC aims to build the capacity of selected women's rights organizations and relief organizations in East, West and Central Africa to expand their work to include advocacy on behalf of refugee, displaced and returnee women.

Resources: gender issues in armed conflict

1. Ongoing initiatives to improve response to IDPs:

- *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (Representative of the UN Secretary-General on IDPs /UNHCHR, 1998). See p45 for list of translations. Available at: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/idp_gp/idp.html.
- *Manual on Field Practice in Internal Displacement: Examples from UN Agencies and Partner Organisations of Field-based Initiatives Supporting IDPs* (IASC Policy Paper, 1999). Available at: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/IDPManual.pdf
- *Handbook for Applying the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (The Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, 1999). Available at: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/IDPprinciples.PDF

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- Global Database on IDPs (Norwegian Refugee Council): www.idpproject.org

2. Documentation on post-conflict reintegration (UNDP, Brookings Institution, UNICEF, etc). For example, IASC (Inter-Agency Standing Committee) Reference Group process on this issue (disbanding end 2000) will produce a report on its findings; see www.reliefweb.int/iasc/

3. UNICEF: *Humanitarian Principles Training: A Child Rights Protection Approach to Complex Emergencies* (UNICEF). Available on CD-Rom and at: coe-dmha.org/unicef/unicef2fs.htm. French and Spanish versions available. Trilingual CD-Rom being printed. *The Gender Dimensions of Internal Displacement: Concept Paper and Annotated Bibliography*, Working Paper Series, Nov 1998, 73pp. Contact: Office of Emergency Programmes, UNICEF House, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. Tel: +1 212 326 7000. Fax: +1 212 887 7465. Email: emops@unicef.org

4. Protection of IDPs - *Protection strategies for women, children and other vulnerable groups* (IASC Policy Paper 1999).

5. Policy Statement for the Integration of a Gender Perspective in Humanitarian Assistance (IASC/ECOSOC, May 1998). Available at: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/iasc/IASC%20gender%20policy.htm plus Background Paper 'Mainstreaming Gender in the Humanitarian Response to Emergencies' (March 1999). Available at: www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/iasc/IASC%20gender.htm

6. NGOs resources such as the Sphere Project. See: www.sphereproject.org Contact: Sphere Project, PO Box 372, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland. Tel. +41 22 730 49 75. Fax: +41 22 730 49 05. Email: sphere@ifrc.org

7. *Training of Peacekeeping Forces* focusing on gender aspects produced by the Lester Pearson Peacekeeping Institute, Canada and UNICEF. Available on CD-Rom. Contact: Carmen Sorger, Peace-building and Human Security Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0G2. Tel: +1 613 944 1171. Email: carmen.sorger@dfait-maeci.gc.ca

8. Refugee Studies Centre: *The Refugee Experience* psychosocial training module includes section on gender and forced migration. Contact Maryanne Loughry at the RSC (address p2). Email: refexp@qeh.ox.ac.uk. Doreen Indra *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice*, 1998, Berghahn Books (in association with the RSC). 390pp. ISBN 1 57181 134 6. Contact Berghahn Books at: 55 John Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10038, USA or: 3 New Tec Place, Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RE, UK.

9. Guidance for policy implementation developed by UN agencies and specialized agencies: eg UNICEF's *Programmer's Guide to Gender Mainstreaming* (email: emops@unicef.org); UNHCR's *People Oriented Planning Guide* (email: hqrd00@unhcr.ch).