



## Gender dimension: Horn of Africa humanitarian crisis, 2011

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Women and children are often disproportionately affected by humanitarian emergencies. In 2011, drought and conflict caused a devastating famine in the Horn of Africa. Somalia was the most affected, along with neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia.

Gender and socioeconomic inequality are major issues across the region. The crisis compounded this inequality, making women and children particularly vulnerable. Large groups mostly made up of women and children were displaced from their homelands and forced to travel vast distances in search of assistance.

This gender and socioeconomic inequality required the humanitarian response to be highly sensitive to

the needs, coping mechanisms and vulnerabilities of different groups.

Australia was one of the leading donors to the Horn of Africa crisis. The main priority for the Australian aid program was to deliver food assistance to affected people in Somalia and to provide assistance for refugees.

Australia has a clear policy on both gender and gender equality in humanitarian action. The 2011 Humanitarian Action Policy commits Australian aid to promoting gender equality in humanitarian emergencies through the active participation of women, girls, boys and men. It also commits Australia to the collection of better disaggregated data so that the impact of gender aid programming can be more clearly understood.

### HORN OF AFRICA HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

- » The devastating famine in the Horn of Africa killed an estimated 257 500 people, about half of whom were under five years old.
- » The impact of the famine was greatest in Somalia, where it is estimated there were about 1.5 million internally displaced people and 4 million people in need of assistance.
- » Neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia were also affected by drought and had to cope with food shortages as well as almost a million refugees from Somalia.
- » It was estimated that, in 2011, about 13.3 million people across the Horn of Africa needed help. As well as food and water, they needed shelter, protection, livelihood support and cash.
- » Australia contributed \$112 million to the international humanitarian effort in 2011. At the time, this made it Australia's largest-ever international disaster relief operation in financial terms.
- » The Australian public also contributed an additional \$13.6 million to the crisis through the innovative 'Dollar for Dollar Initiative' in which the government matched donations.
- » Australian assistance was delivered through partners. UN agencies, particularly the World Food Programme, received most of the funding. The remainder went to the Red Cross/Crescent movement and 19 Australian-based non-government organisations.
- » Australia's home-based non-government organisation partnerships worked rapidly to mobilise assistance.
- » The exact number of lives saved by Australian assistance is hard to estimate, but it is clear that millions of people received much-needed assistance.



Access to clean water, sanitation facilities and hygiene was an urgent priority during the drought across East Africa. Photo: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

## Gender in humanitarian crises and care

The evaluation of Australia's response to the Horn of Africa humanitarian crisis commissioned a specific field study to look at how gender was being considered in the response. This field study took place in the Wajir district of northern Kenya, and involved interviews with Australian aid partners (UN World Food Programme, Save the Children and Oxfam) and groups of women and men who had been affected by the crisis. The evaluation also reviewed secondary data from partners and other researchers looking at gender.

### Aid programming often targeted women

The evaluation found that programming succeeded in targeting women.

Australian-funded projects in Wajir used consultation to assess needs so that women and those most vulnerable could be targeted. Priority was given to female-headed households, the elderly, people with disabilities and orphaned children.

The accuracy of targeting was checked through various means, including a public 'baraza' (meeting) organised by local leaders, forums (including some only for women) and a door-to-door verification process.

About 80 per cent of the recipients of food distributed by the UN World Food Programme were women, because they were the food managers at the household level. Women beneficiaries interviewed said that the food helped them because they did not have enough money to purchase food for their families.

*Local involvement was a key factor in achieving inclusive participation of women, men, boys and girls throughout the project cycles, strengthening community ownership and sustainability of initiatives after the emergency response.*

Implementing agency staff

An important aspect of the Horn of Africa response was the distribution of cash to help people buy food (see Box 1). This made a critical difference in Somalia where it was very difficult to get food in any other way, but cash was also distributed in northern Kenya and Ethiopia. About 90 per cent of the beneficiaries of cash transfers in Wajir, Kenya were women.

*Investing in community complaints mechanisms, post-project community feedback and review meetings, and enhancement of accountability to beneficiaries created space for women to articulate their needs, changes in their status and also in gender relations.*

Implementing agency staff

### Box 1 Gender in water, sanitation and hygiene

Gender issues were specifically addressed in a water, sanitation and hygiene program in Wajir, implemented by Oxfam.

Separate latrines for boys and girls were built to promote privacy for the girls during their menstrual cycle. Previously, the girls had to go home at this time, sometimes missing school or even dropping out of school completely. Additional bathing areas were constructed for girls to use during their monthly menstrual periods, as water was scarce in their homes.

Hygiene awareness campaigns were accompanied by the provision of sanitary towels.

*Previously, boys would tease the girls..., when they suspected that it was 'that time of the month', causing girls to opt to abscond from school until their periods were over.*

Woman beneficiary

*Women increasingly raised voices about special needs such as sanitary materials, compared to the past when this was taboo.*

Save the Children staff



In camps such as the Tarwakaal camp in Bosasso, Somalia displaced people tried to find much-needed shelter. Photo: Ed Ou, Getty Images for Save the Children.



## Women were included in planning and delivery

The use of participatory and inclusive approaches and practices in line with Australia's Humanitarian Action Policy appeared to be standard among partner agencies and their implementing partners.

The agencies made sure that there were both men and women on key committees for targeting aid. Typically, relief committees set up to target the most vulnerable were required to have at least 50 per cent women.

Agencies also set up separate discussion forums for men and women to enable people to speak about sensitive issues, such as constructing separate bathing areas for teenage girls at school so they did not have to drop out during menstrual cycles (see Box 2).

Beneficiaries including women were also involved in distribution processes, teaching their acquired skills to others, handling complaints and providing feedback. Women felt that their food management skills had improved through their work in measuring food rations during the food collection and distribution process.



Many women, like this woman in Dadaab Camp in Kenya, had heavy workloads in the crisis. Photo: Evelyn Hockstein, CARE Australia.

### Box 2 Gender in cash programming

Providing cash relief in emergencies is increasingly used as an alternative to in-kind humanitarian aid (such as food, shelter, medicine, household items).

Cash is usually delivered either through direct cash grants or by giving vouchers. In humanitarian situations, cash transfers are usually unconditional and are used by beneficiaries to address food security and nutrition issues.

The advantages of cash transfers include:

- » They offer freedom of choice for beneficiaries as they can choose the commodities they want to consume.
- » They are generally less visible, have lower operational costs and are quicker to deploy than in-kind assistance.
- » If markets are already functioning, cash transfers can stimulate markets rather than inflate prices.

Cash relief is often of particular assistance to women. In the Horn of Africa, women beneficiaries expressed their satisfaction with cash transfers, citing increased independence on a wide range of household expenditure decisions, expanded income generation options, ability to obtain credit, and increased asset ownership in non-traditional areas, particularly livestock. Beneficiaries also reported that the cash transfers provided flexibility to choose food items, especially food suitable for children and the elderly.

*Coming from a culture where women are looked down upon, this (the cash relief) greatly boosted the morale of the women and gave them a sense of self-worth and dignity.*

Implementing agency staff

*Women did not have enough change of clothes and were able to buy some for themselves through the cash relief.*

Woman beneficiary

*The elderly beneficiaries who were mostly women were happy because they were able to buy easily chewable food such as liver.*

Woman beneficiary

A few negative gender impacts of cash transfers were also noted. Some interviewees commented that not all men were happy that their wives were in control of the cash. The cash collection process required identity cards which many women did not have. A trusted person or relative was required to sign on behalf of the target beneficiary but some interviewees indicated that they did not receive all of the money as the signatory asked for a share of the cash.

## Gender lessons from the Horn of Africa

The evaluation found good examples of best practice from partners with regard to gender. The Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) is a group of pre-selected Australian non-government agencies that were given quick funding for the crisis response. Within the partnership, Oxfam promoted the use of 'gender action plans'. This meant that all six HPA agencies were proactive in thinking about gender, which in turn translated into more thoughtful programs.

### Women's workloads can increase

There were also, inevitably, some things that could have been done better.

There was not a great deal of thought about how partner commitment to including women in relief activities can add to women's pre-existing workloads and burdens. In organising themselves to take on the responsibilities of humanitarian projects in addition to their everyday household tasks, beneficiary women described a range of negative coping methods including increased work for daughters and elderly women, or extended workdays for themselves.

### Better gender monitoring is needed

There could also have been better monitoring of the outcomes for women, girls, boys and men.

While partners noted that the Australian project proposal template requiring disaggregation by age, gender and disability was an effective planning tool, the same attention was not given to disaggregation of results.

Data is routinely sex disaggregated at project level, but most agencies subsequently aggregate this information at higher levels, precluding or removing any gender analysis.

Australian aid policy has recognised that such reporting is essential in planning and understanding the impacts of humanitarian assistance. Australia's 2012 Humanitarian Action Policy Implementation Plan addresses

this by committing to disaggregation of results by sex and age. This should add to practical knowledge about how humanitarian aid can best help women, girls, boys and men.

### Conclusions

- Appropriate consideration of gender appeared to be standard among partner agencies and their implementing partners.
- Australia's partners employed gender-equity practices, for example by targeting women for food vouchers and cash transfers.
- There were inadequate strategies for monitoring outcomes in terms of gender, nor is beneficiary disaggregated data used analytically.

#### OFFICE OF DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) monitors the performance of the Australian aid program, evaluates its impact and contributes to international evidence and debate about aid and development effectiveness.

The full report, including a management response from DFAT, can be accessed at [www.ode.dfat.gov.au](http://www.ode.dfat.gov.au)



Provision of food for refugees in Dadaab Camp in Kenya was prioritised. Photo: Kate Holt, CARE Australia.