EMPOWERING LOCAL WOMEN AND YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND CRISIS RECOVERY TO BUILD MORE PEACEFUL AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES
Conflicts cause and fuel the majority of humanitarian emergencies, in combination with other drivers such as natural disasters, climate change, economic stress, and global health crises. Current humanitarian emergencies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central Sahel, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Lake Chad Basin, Syria, and Yemen are a result of protracted armed conflicts. Conflict also exacerbates other ongoing humanitarian emergencies, such as the locust infestation in the Greater Horn of Africa, malnutrition and hunger in Haiti, and economic and food insecurity in Southern Africa. With the global spread of COVID-19, conflicts worldwide are intensifying, and human security continues to deteriorate.

Although women make up 67 million of the 136 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the world,[1] humanitarian assistance does not recognize their agency, nor does it prioritize their specific needs. Women also face heightened sexual and gender-based violence, and at the same time, they take on a heavier burden in caring for the injured and sick.

Even though women and young women are among first responders and play a central role in the survival and resilience of communities experiencing crisis, they continue to be excluded from decision-making on peacebuilding and humanitarian action. Without their unique perspectives, efforts to build peace and address humanitarian crises cannot lead to long-term peace, development and stability. Therefore, humanitarian interventions that promote gender equality and prioritize the agency and needs of local women and girls are not only necessary—they are urgent and critical.

The Women, and Peace and Security (WPS) agenda brings both a gender and a conflict lens to humanitarian action. The agenda’s relief and recovery pillar calls to “fully engage women” and identify their specific needs in the design of interventions to address humanitarian needs of diverse populations.[2] Recently, the nexus between peacebuilding, sustainable development, and humanitarian action has received greater attention from donors and humanitarian actors worldwide.[3] The importance of a gender perspective and a feminist approach is also increasingly recognized.[4] The Generation Equality Compact on WPS and Humanitarian Action is one of the mechanisms intended to improve outcomes for conflict and crisis affected women and girls globally.

"Too few humanitarian operations fully recognize or respond to the specific needs and voices of women. And too little funding is provided to advance this work."
– Ursula Mueller, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Relief Coordinator

[3] An agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations launched during the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. These actors have committed to get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action. See https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/about-the-grand-bargain on June 19, 2020.
In spite of this recognition, gaps persist in humanitarian action that hinder long-term peace, development and stability:

- **Humanitarian response and recovery efforts do not respond to women and girls’ specific needs.** The specific and urgent needs of women and girls in humanitarian emergencies, including life-saving sexual health and reproductive services, psycho-social counseling and trauma healing for survivors of sexual violence, and education are not prioritized in emergency response and recovery efforts. For example, in 2018, only 28 percent of humanitarian needs overviews articulated the differentiated impact faced by women and girls in crises and its underlying causes. In 2015, under 0.5 percent of funding for humanitarian aid went to gender-based violence support.

- **Humanitarian action is not sufficiently localized.** Even though local women are first responders to humanitarian emergencies, as evidenced in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there are no formal mechanisms and accessible opportunities for them to meaningfully participate in decision-making. Local women continue to be regarded as passive victims and mere beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. As a result, humanitarian action fails to build on existing local capacities and does not incorporate local context, gender and power relations.

- **Humanitarian action lacks a transformative outlook.** Humanitarian programs focus on the basic needs of communities affected by conflict, natural disasters, and other crises, without fostering a transition to self-reliance. They do not promote long-term peace and stability to prevent protracted crises.

To address these gaps, GNWP builds on its WPS expertise, profound knowledge of humanitarian contexts, and strong partnerships with local women and youth peacebuilders, community leaders, government actors, the UN and regional organizations. Ensuring synergies between the WPS resolutions and humanitarian action leads to more inclusive, gender-responsive, and transformative crisis response and recovery, which builds community resilience, and prevents further outbreaks of conflict. These synergies are particularly important given the intersecting impacts of humanitarian crises, natural disasters and armed conflict on the lives of women and girls, and the critical roles women and young women play as both peacebuilders and first responders during crises.
OUR SOLUTIONS

GNWP responds to immediate crises, while helping to shape sustainable recovery for communities affected by conflict, humanitarian emergencies, pandemic, and natural disasters. We do so through a three-pronged strategy:

1. Elevating women and youth peacebuilders as decision-makers in humanitarian action
2. Building local women’s and communities’ resilience to threats and violence
3. Advocating for gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive humanitarian action and crisis recovery
Elevating women and youth peacebuilders as decision-makers in humanitarian action

WHAT WE DO

GNWP is a pioneer in localizing national and global policies on Women, Peace, and Security and humanitarian action to ensure that they are context-specific and locally-led. Through context-specific trainings on leadership, peacebuilding, economic empowerment, and use of media for advocacy with local women and young women in host communities, refugees, and internally displaced persons, we enhance their capacities to advocate for their rights and meaningfully participate in decision-making on humanitarian action, peace and security processes, and COVID-19 response and recovery. We have a strong track-record in investing in women in their roles as first responders.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

・ Over 5,000 mayors, councilors, and other local authorities and leaders in 18 countries that GNWP trained on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 have integrated women, peace, and security commitments in their local development plans. This has led to reduced number of cases in gender-based violence in certain local districts in Uganda; increased livelihood sources for local women in Sierra Leone; and increased participation in decision making in indigenous communities in the Philippines[7]. As a result, the women trained by GNWP have the means and opportunities to be involved in humanitarian action and post-conflict recovery in their countries.

・ Since 2014, we have trained more than 7,000 young women on leadership and peacebuilding to meaningfully contribute to political and humanitarian decision-making in their communities. Thanks to their training, they were able to quickly mobilize when crises hit, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

・ With technical and financial support from GNWP, young women peacebuilders organized relief missions in Central Sulawesi in Indonesia following the 2018 earthquake and in North and South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo to meet urgent needs of survivors of sexual violence in 2014.

・ Our local women partners in Cauca and Tolima, Colombia distributed 10,000 face masks, over 1,100 condoms, and 30 pregnancy tests to vulnerable women and girls since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

・ In the Philippines, local women and youth peacebuilders in Mindanao distributed nearly 700 hygiene and dignity kits to internally displaced women in IDP shelters. They also distributed food packs and posters on the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 in local languages to counter misinformation and disinformation on the pandemic.

・ In South Sudan, GNWP and its local partner are fighting disinformation on COVID-19 by disseminating information in local languages on how to prevent the spread of the virus. To date, they distributed 1,000 face masks and 200 COVID-19 posters in local markets in Juba.

Highlight: Locally-led feminist response to COVID-19

Working with our partners—local women and youth peacebuilders around the world—we have quickly mobilized to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working together to monitor ceasefire agreements, deliver relief goods, distribute dignity and hygiene packs to women, and lead advocacy for gender-responsive support to local communities. We raise awareness of COVID-19 preventative measures, and counter fake news.

Women-led and feminist emergency response to the pandemic ensures that the urgent needs of women and girls, including access to sexual health and reproductive hygiene products, are met. So far, the volume of relief goods and hygiene products distributed is modest. However, they directly reach local populations who are caught between conflict and the pandemic. They reduce vulnerability and build community resilience because they are locally-owned and locally-led.

With increased financial support, we are ready to upscale our gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive pandemic response.

To further highlight local women’s responses to the pandemic, GNWP developed a global database on COVID-19 and women and peace and security. The database is an evidence-based resource that promotes and informs gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive humanitarian action.

GNWP’s Young Women Leaders for Peace program enhances the resilience of women, young women, and girls living in humanitarian emergencies and conflict-affected environments using three unique methodologies: gender-sensitive and age-appropriate literacy and numeracy education; leadership and peacebuilding training; and economic empowerment. This program raises young women and girls’ awareness of their rights. Not only are they empowered to prevent and respond to violence and emergencies in their communities, they also have the tools to hold decision-makers accountable to their obligations under the law. Young women and girls report feeling less vulnerable and better equipped to protect themselves from sexual and gender-based violence during humanitarian emergencies as a result of GNWP trainings.

WHAT WE DO

We provided 390 young women and girls with literacy and numeracy classes in refugee camps and host communities in Cox’s Bazaar, Bangladesh and Rhino, Uganda. As a result, they have been empowered to read and write, sign their names on legal documents, read important signs within refugee camps, access information and services, and further pursue their rights. This is critical as only 1 percent of all refugees above 18 have access to education.[8]

60 young women, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected regions in the DRC, started their own businesses with GNWP’s support in the form of economic empowerment training and seed funds. As a result, they report increased decision-making power in their families and more confidence to stand up for their rights and challenge the stigma surrounding sexual and gender-based violence. From their earnings, the young women have conducted literacy and numeracy classes for more than 4,000 women and girls in local communities in Eastern DRC—evidence of the tremendous multiplier effect of GNWP’s trainings.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

In Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, GNWP trained young women and girls living in host communities to lead initiatives to improve the gender and conflict sensitivity of humanitarian response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis. Young Women Leaders for Peace members conducted gender-sensitive, age-appropriate fundamental literacy and numeracy classes for 180 Rohingya refugee and host community women and girls in Cox’s Bazar. The classes provided a safe space for refugee women and girls to discuss sexual violence, child marriage, and insecurity.

Another important achievement for GNWP and its local partners is the reduced tension between the host population and the Rohingya refugees in Balukhali Refugee Camp. In addition to literacy and numeracy education, the young women leaders participated in discussions of the socio-political context behind the Rohingya Refugee Crisis. This encouraged the young women to contribute to dispelling anti-Rohingya rhetoric and negative perceptions within host communities. By breaking silos between humanitarian action, peacebuilding, and gender equality, the young women strengthened resilience and contributed to the prevention of conflict in their community.

Highlight: Young Bangladeshi and Rohingya Women Read, Lead, and Build Peace

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Meaningful participation of local women and youth peacebuilders and frontline responders in decision-making at all levels of humanitarian action, crisis prevention, and management.

Collection, analysis, and publication of disaggregated data on COVID-19 cases and their socio-economic impact.

Bridging the digital divide and the gender gap within this divide by improving local access to the internet.

WHAT WE DO

GNWP trains local women and youth peacebuilders, including refugees, internally displaced, and host community women and girls, how to effectively communicate their views and needs to humanitarian actors and policymakers. This helps facilitate improvements in humanitarian interventions and promotes a shift from reactive crisis response efforts to prevention-based strategies grounded in a human rights framework.

In order to address the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, GNWP supports the development of gender-responsive, inclusive, and sustainable pandemic response and recovery plans. Our work promotes synergies between the WPS agenda and humanitarian action to advocate for a feminist COVID-19 recovery. This centers around:

- Meaningful participation of local women and youth peacebuilders and frontline responders in decision-making at all levels of humanitarian action, crisis prevention, and management.
- Collection, analysis, and publication of disaggregated data on COVID-19 cases and their socio-economic impact.
- Bridging the digital divide and the gender gap within this divide by improving local access to the internet.
- Promoting and protecting women’s rights, including access to sexual health and reproductive services, particularly in host communities, refugee camps, and internally displaced camps.
- Integrating efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence in local, national, and multilateral COVID-19 response and recovery plans.
- Developing feminist local COVID-19 response and recovery plans through multi-sectoral consultations.
- Promoting economic empowerment and financial independence for host community women, refugee women, and young women as a pre-requisite for long-term crisis recovery.
- Advocating for reduced weapons spending and reallocating national budgets to healthcare, education, and peacebuilding.
- Ensuring effective implementation of the Compact on Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action in the Generation Equality Forum.

Highlight: Global Women’s Forum for Peace and Humanitarian Action

In February 2020, GNWP co-organized the Global Women’s Forum for Peace and Humanitarian Action with the Austrian Development Agency and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund. Bringing together over 170 women and youth peacebuilders, humanitarian actors, and policymakers from around the world, the event facilitated dialogue between peace activists and humanitarian actors. The Forum’s outcome document—the Vienna 2020 Declaration—contains critical recommendations for feminist and localized humanitarian action. It is an important resource on the nexus of peacebuilding and humanitarian action and informs global discussions such as the UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review, the Generation Equality Forum, and the 20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325.
Our Continuing Advocacy

GNWP promotes synergies between the WPS agenda and humanitarian action through:
- meaningful participation of local women and youth in the design and implementation and overall decision-making in humanitarian action;
- integration of efforts to combat sexual and gender-based violence in the UN’s COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan, along with local and national COVID-19 response and recovery plans;
- engagement with key global humanitarian coordination mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action and the Global Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action;
- ensuring effective implementation of the Compact on Women, Peace, and Security and Humanitarian Action in the Generation Equality Forum; and

GNWP advocates for a shift from remedial, reactive crisis response approaches and recovery efforts to prevention-based strategies grounded in a human rights framework and developed in equal partnership with local women and youth peacebuilders.
**A THEORY OF CHANGE**

**EMPOWERING LOCAL WOMEN AND YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND CRISIS RECOVERY TO BUILD MORE PEACEFUL AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES**

Humanitarian action and crisis-recovery are gender- and conflict responsive. They address the root causes of crises, and facilitate sustainable recovery that build community resilience, and prevents further outbreaks of conflict.

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<td>Women and youth peacebuilders in humanitarian emergencies have the tools to influence and participate in decision-making on peace, security, and humanitarian response and recovery. They have enhanced capacities to hold decision-makers accountable.</td>
<td>Women, young women and adolescent girls in refugee and IDP camps and host communities reduce of tensions between refugees and host communities and promote social cohesion overall. Remedial, reactive crisis responses become inclusive, participatory and sustainable prevention-based strategies.</td>
<td>The specific needs of women and girls are adequately addressed in humanitarian response and recovery efforts.</td>
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<td>Women and youth peacebuilders in humanitarian emergencies acquire leadership, advocacy, literacy, economic, and peacebuilding skills. They understand, and assert their rights and are empowered to be resilient.</td>
<td>Women, young women and girls in refugee and IDP camps and host communities develop mutual understanding, trust, empathy and common goals of sustainable and inclusive peace. There is better coordination to implement WPS Agenda and humanitarian action at national and local levels.</td>
<td>Refugee, internally displaced, and host community women, young women, and girls have regular channels of communication with local, national, regional, and global humanitarian actors and decision-making structures.</td>
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**GAPS AND CHALLENGES**

- Local women and young women are excluded from decision-making on the design and implementation of humanitarian programs.
- Humanitarian action lacks a transformative outlook. It does not promote long-term peace and stability - leading to protracted crises.
- Humanitarian response and recovery efforts do not adequately respond to women and girls’ specific needs.