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Standing in the Gap: Achieving Gender Equality and Celebrating #WomenHumanitarians



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The 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) seeks to attain gender equality and empower women and girls. It recognises that the inclusion and participation of women are central to the achievement of all 17 SDGs. The biggest barrier to progress in this area is that women around the world continue to suffer from various forms of violence, harassment, and discrimination. The UN Women estimates that 1 in 5 women have experienced physical and / or sexual violence. Women also tend to bear the brunt of unpaid work, and remain underrepresented in the formal workforce and decision-making positions. These issues are pervasive not only in “peace time” but especially during times of emergencies and calamities.

Women tend to be disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises and natural disasters. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that women and their children account for more than 75 per cent of displaced persons. This usually results to loss of livelihoods and lack of access to basic support services making them more vulnerable. And women that stay behind to care for family members are

further exposed to harm and hunger as they are left to fend for themselves and their dependents in increasingly dangerous and unstable situations.

UN records show that women, together with children, are 14 times more likely to die or get injured than men in natural disasters. UN figures also indicate that women are at greater risk than male counterparts from post-disaster abuse and exploitation. The chaos that ensues after a disaster makes it difficult to provide sufficient protection while existing mechanisms and people affected are under additional pressure.

The critical role of women in humanitarian action and disaster management are often overlooked. But women are rather familiar with their neighbourhood and household. Their local knowledge of community needs and vulnerable groups, and access to social networks are central to disaster preparedness and emergency response planning.

At the on-set of an emergency or disaster, women secure aid to meet to the immediate life-saving needs of family members. Their traditional responsibilities as primary care

takers are often expanded and amplified while grappling with considerably less resources and support. Women also assume roles of first responders, both informally and formally as part of organised humanitarian efforts. This includes rapid assessment of needs, passing around information, and other functions essential to the path to recovery such as managing the family's relocation.

This year's World Humanitarian Day (WHD) theme is #WomenHumanitarians, an acknowledgement of the important contribution of courageous women in times of crisis. On 19 August 2019, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) showcased the experiences of women humanitarians around the globe to honor their dedication in making the world a better place. How else can we encourage more participation from #WomenHumanitarians? Here are two main challenges that must be kept in mind as we move forward:

First, there appears to be an urgent need to significantly improve aid worker secu-

rity. Last year's WHD theme #NotATarget highlights this issue and the trend seems to continue. According to a Humanitarian Outcomes report, last year was the second worst year on record for aid worker security. 399 aid workers, including women, were either killed, wounded, or kidnapped in 221 separate incidents. Humanitarian Outcome notes that differentiated data on sexual violence, misconduct, and abuse is still weak across the sector. This suggests that numbers are likely underreported including incidents in Asia-Pacific. This also indicates that current gender-based risk management lacks an evidence base which in turn limits our efforts to better understand and proactively deal with the problems female aid workers face.

The UN OCHA Ending Sexual and Gender Based Violence Conference outlines steps to address gender-based violence in humanitarian affairs: (i) do more gender analysis in programming, (ii) prioritise funding for gender-equality programmes, and (iii) further promote women's leadership and participation in decision-making.

Second, while humanitarian and disaster management activities have been more gender-sensitive and inclusive, more needs to be done. According to the UN Women, efforts to engage women in the Asia-Pacific often focus on consultation rather than representation because of lack of legal protections and prevailing gender inequalities. Aid and relief should not only be informed by the people most affected but also led by it such as women. We must remember that women are not only affected, they are also the integral part of the solution. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief will be more effective when women are empowered to define their roles, their own needs, and the protection they need during the response.

Suggested Readings

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CLIMATE SECURITY

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Matthew Mohan,
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Jaime Ho,
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Climate change: Current warming 'unparalleled' in 2,000

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Matt McGrath,
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Global climate crisis: Ambitious goals, modest policies

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Asia-Pacific Climate Week 2019

2–6 September 2019
Bangkok, Thailand

Pro-active Management of Forests to Combat Climate Change Driven Risks

3–4 September 2019
Istanbul, Turkey



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Will Singapore warm up to nuclear energy to combat climate change?

Samantha Boh,
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Singapore well-positioned to build a sustainable, smart-energy future

Toh Seong Wah and Zhang
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The Business Times

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Chinese renewable energy investment abroad soars – but coal still dominant

Reuters,
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International Atomic Energy Agency, Vienna: IAEA
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International Energy Agency, Paris: IEA
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Call for Papers: The 2020 IAEA International Essay Competition on Nuclear Security for Students and Early Career Professionals

6 September 2019
Vienna, Austria

The 17th International Conference on Clean Energy (ICCE-2019)

9–12 August 2019
Jiangsu, China

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Forty Sixth Session of the Committee on World Food Security

14–18 October 2019
Rome, Italy

Rural Development and Food Security Forum 2019

28–30 October 2019
Manila, the Philippines



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HEALTH SECURITY



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BRTMA-Malaysia International Congress on Tropical Medicine (BMICTM)
13–15 November 2019
Sarawak, Malaysia

6th International Conference on Biomedical and Bioinformatics Engineering 2019
13–15 November 2019
Shanghai, China



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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

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South Asia monsoon leaves thousands in need
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ADB introduces contingent disaster financing for natural disasters
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Courtesy of Flickr account of US Army and used under a creative commons license.

Hugo Slim: ICRC partnerships, today and tomorrow, in conflict and disaster (Singapore Red Cross 70th Anniversary)

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Study highlights need to rethink emergency responses for children in humanitarian settings

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Télécoms Sans Frontières
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28–30 August 2019
Singapore

Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2019

28–29 August 2019
Melbourne, Australia

MIGRATION



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ASEAN's Safe Migration Campaign comes up short

Tommy Koh,

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Singapore back in play as more Hongkongers consider migrating due to deepening political crisis

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Quarterly Mixed Migration Update

Mixed Migration Centre
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Climate Change and Migration

20–21 October 2019
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Migration and Development in the 'Global South': Research Challenges and Policy Implications

24–25 October 2019
Istanbul, Turkey