



DEMANDS OF THE FEMINIST HUMANITARIAN NETWORK

INVISIBLE & IGNORED NO MORE

How women and girls in humanitarian contexts must be at the forefront of Beijing+25

Beijing+25

The time for a feminist humanitarian system is now



Local women leading the sorting and distribution of donated clothes following the 7.5 earthquake that struck Indonesia in 2018.

The Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN) is a global network of women leaders committed to a transformed humanitarian system that promotes a feminist agenda. Its membership is comprised of women's rights organisations and networks driving change in humanitarian contexts in the global South, INGOs, and individuals.

Through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), the international community pledged to advance women and girls' rights and achieve true gender equality. The BDPfA seeks to inspire a transformation within the systems of power that prohibit women and girls from realising their social, political, cultural, and economic rights. Many members of the Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN) have lobbied passionately behind the BDPfA since its inception in 1995. Yet, 25 years on, despite its multitude of national, regional, and global reviews, insufficient attention has been paid to the heightened inequalities experienced by women and girls living in humanitarian settings – a reality that members of the FHN experience in their everyday lives.

During humanitarian crises, women and girls are often at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV), economic insecurity increases, and access to services – including critical sexual and reproductive health care services – is impeded. Existing inequalities can deepen significantly. However, by disrupting existing systems of power and prevailing social norms, crises have the potential to catalyse gender equality. The humanitarian sector plays a critical role in determining which of these outcomes emergencies will have. It is therefore critical that the humanitarian system is transformed into one that is guided by feminist values and principles.

Beijing+25 is a critical time to demand accountability to all women and girls, including those living in crisis and fragile settings. This means including their specific needs and rights in resulting commitments and outcomes. This also means calling for the feminist humanitarian system that we need to ensure that women and girls' rights are upheld during crises, and to turn crises into catalysts for change. To this end, all humanitarian actors, including UNOCHA, UNHCR and representatives of the humanitarian coordination system, must engage in Beijing+25 discussions, and use this platform to make and uphold ambitious feminist commitments.

In this light, the Feminist Humanitarian Network identifies four areas of progress that should be prioritised in Beijing+25 spaces and beyond, to support a truly feminist humanitarian agenda:

- **Decolonisation and decoloniality:**
Models of humanitarian and development governance are built on a “Global North”/“Global South” power imbalance with the balance of power lying with actors headquartered in the Global North, who define existing dominant narratives and logic. This power imbalance must be actively dismantled.
- **Ensuring equitable access to resources:**
Despite Grand Bargain commitments to “localising” aid, women-led organisations still face significant barriers to accessing the direct funding crucial to leading humanitarian efforts. Commitments must be kept.
- **Recognising and supporting women’s leadership:**
Women are still not recognised or supported as decision-makers and leaders at all levels of the humanitarian system. The “localisation” agenda remains largely gender blind, further excluding women-led organisations from decision making processes and entrenching patriarchal leadership at “local” levels. Women are the experts on their lives and experiences; make space for them to lead.
- **Promoting diversity and inclusion:**
Women, girls, and individuals with diverse sexual orientation, gender identities/expressions and sexual characteristics have diverse experiences and needs which must be recognised and responded to by the humanitarian system. Those experiencing unique risks because of their gender, “women and girls” are not a monolith; don’t treat them as such.

For some, addressing these challenges means relinquishing power. For others, seizing power and being heard. For all of us, it means taking bold action to turn commitments into equal rights and voice for everyone – including women and girls in crisis settings.



Zynab Kamara speaks at distributions during the 2017 landslide response in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

A Feminist Humanitarian System

- ✓ Is collectively and unwaveringly committed to achieving gender equality, recognising and responding to the systemic drivers of inequality, and using emergencies as catalysts to advance women and girls’ rights
- ✓ Acknowledges the patriarchal and colonial dynamics within itself, that often exclude or downplay the contribution of those identifying as women and minorities, particularly those from the Global South
- ✓ Takes responsibility for identifying unjust formal and informal power relations within itself by regularly critiquing the extent to which its structures and processes reinforce patriarchal power relations through humanitarian action
- ✓ Actively shifts power to women-led organisations working in humanitarian contexts in the Global South by ensuring that they are resourced and consistently included, and that their leadership is recognised and made central in shaping the humanitarian system
- ✓ Facilitates safe spaces through its coordination mechanisms, wherein actors working at all levels can be heard, and the expertise of diverse responders, including those identifying as women, is looked up to
- ✓ Recognises that there is no one-size-fits-all approach, thereby ensuring that nobody is left behind.



Women lead emergency distribution of food and dignity kits in Somaliland in 2017.

Our Asks

Beyond reaffirming the urgency of delivering on previously made commitments, we, the Feminist Humanitarian Network, demand that specific actions are taken and specific commitments made in Beijing+25 spaces, to make a feminist humanitarian agenda a reality.

As well as calling on humanitarian actors to engage in Beijing+25, we demand that:

To ensure the alignment of humanitarian and feminist agendas in Beijing+25 spaces

- All Generation Equality Action Coalitions robustly consider women and girls living in humanitarian contexts in their discussions, commitments and planning;
- At least one priority commitment of each Action Coalition specifically relates to humanitarian contexts;
- All Action Coalitions, and not just the coalition on “feminist leadership and movements”, use an explicitly feminist lens in considering women and girls’ vulnerabilities and in devising actions to dismantle patriarchal systems that contribute to those vulnerabilities

To decolonise the humanitarian and aid system:

- Commitment-making governments reflect on their role in creating and sustaining crises, through socio-economic, trade and security policies. Without this, humanitarian and aid policies will be little more than a band-aid with no lasting effect on systemic inequalities;
- Commitment-making governments commit to reversing the current trend of militarisation and funding for the global military industrial complex, as it perpetuates and increases crises as well as violence against women, girls and minorities;
- Bilateral and multilateral donors channel at least 30% of gender-focused aid through national and community-based women-led organisations to achieve true localisation;
- INGOs and UN agencies build partnerships with national and community-based organisations that are based on mutual benefit, devolution of power, and capacity-sharing. This includes prioritising consortium-building in humanitarian response, bringing together national and community-based organisations as leads and INGOs as support;
- INGOs and UN agencies encourage reflectiveness on power and privilege amongst their staff, building on existing tools on decolonising humanitarian and aid work.

Our Asks



In Vanuatu Melina David chants for women's voice to be heard. (Photo credit: ActionAid Australia)



Mimidoo Achakpa speaking at the Women in Humanitarian Response in Nigeria Initiative Network launch in 2019.



Women in Liberia at the national launch of the Feminist Humanitarian Network in August 2019.

To take steps towards equitable access to resources:

- Bilateral and multilateral donors and other relevant humanitarian donors simplify funding guidelines and requirements so that national, community-based and women-led organisations can access direct and sustainable funding, including in crisis settings;
- Bilateral and multilateral donors and other relevant humanitarian donors guarantee core funding to support organizational strengthening and to ensure that women-led organisations are able to meaningfully engage in humanitarian policy fora;
- Bilateral and multilateral donors and other relevant humanitarian donors invest explicitly in and prioritise gender-transformative humanitarian projects, and call for the use of feminist analyses in funded projects, including those working towards the humanitarian-development-peace nexus;
- INGOs and UN agencies address their role in perpetuating labour market inequalities during and after crises, as efforts to increase staffing during crises can significantly distort local labour markets and divert human resources away from local organisations.

To affirm and support women's leadership:

- Commitment-making governments from crisis-affected countries take concrete steps so that more women access and hold leadership positions at all levels of government;
- Governments at the forefront of feminist international diplomacy, allied donors, INGOs and UN agencies work together to counter the backlash on sexual and reproductive rights, as it impacts humanitarian actors' capacity to deliver critical sexual and reproductive health services in crisis settings;
- Commitment-making governments strengthen and deliver on commitments to prevent and respond to GBV, which prevents women from participating in humanitarian response, accessing services and taking up leadership roles;
- INGOs and UN agencies shift their role from direct implementation to support based on national, community-based and women-led organisations' demands and needs;
- INGOs and UN agencies ensure that more women, in particular from the Global South, access and hold leadership positions at all levels in their organisations.

To ensure and promote diversity and inclusion:

- Donors, INGOs and UN agencies clearly champion intersectionality in all gender-transformative work, whether it be in their policies, funding models and programming, or internally;
- Donors, INGOs and UN agencies use their privileges to support the participation of women activists and leaders living in crisis settings in global decision-making spaces;
- Humanitarian actors recognise and build on diverse approaches to and standards of humanitarian assistance, even if those may not fit into traditional sectors or modes of operation;
- Humanitarian actors prioritise the wellbeing and safety of activists, staff and partners involved in humanitarian programs, and strive to challenge patriarchal values in the workplace through feminist HR, security, and health and wellbeing policies.



**THE FEMINIST
HUMANITARIAN
NETWORK**

This paper articulates the collective asks of the Feminist Humanitarian Network, voiced by our members from the Global South working on the frontlines of emergencies, and echoed by the INGOs that stand behind them, to commitment-making governments, donors, INGOs and UN agencies, on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.