

Preventing violence against women and girls in emergencies



Above Dollo Relief Camp, Horn of Africa Drought 2011 drought response. © 2011 Stephen Matthews / World Vision

I. The problem

Violence against women and girls is all too prevalent across the globe – crossing cultures, economic status and ethnicity. Studies show that in emergencies, violence increases and it is often women and girls who are particularly vulnerable. The risk of violence is often further increased with the worsening of physical conditions such as cramped quarters, lack of privacy and/or inadequate shelter. Often victims are too afraid to report the violence, rooted in structural and uneven power dynamics, or do not know how to do so.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) deprives them of the equal enjoyment and exercise of their fundamental human rights. A growing body of evidence identifies the considerable negative health and development consequences of violence, highlighting that violence has significant ripple effects into families, communities and nations. These effects are multiplied by the fact that women and girls may have limited - or no - access to basic services or justice systems during emergencies.

KEY FACTS

- In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo at least 200,000 cases of sexual violence have been documented since 1996, with an alarming increase in reported cases following the upsurge in violence in the eastern province of North Kivu since April 2012¹.
- In the weeks following the 2010 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, reports to police of domestic violence increased by 20%. Similar increases in domestic abuse were recorded in New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina².
- In Syria respondents reported an increase in girls marrying before the age of 18 since the start of the conflict. In Homs (63%) and Rural Damascus (56%) of respondents raised this. 4% of respondents even listed marriage as a possible response to sexual violence against children³.

¹ High-Level Event on Violence Against Women and Girls in Emergencies concept note, DfID 2013

² Ibid

³ Syria: Child Protection Assessment 2013, Child Protection Working Group, 2013



2. How World Vision tackles the problem: prevention is better than cure

World Vision emphasises that prevention is more effective than focusing on the response. Prevention of violence against women and girls in emergencies needs to start before a crisis. Violence does not begin with conflict or political instability, but is often exacerbated in conflict, post conflict and humanitarian crisis settings.

World Vision implements the following preventative measures to tackle the problem:

- i. Empowering girls, boys, women and men with skills and knowledge to protect themselves, through life skills and vocational trainings
- ii. Providing safe spaces for children and women, including through child friendly spaces during emergencies
- iii. Providing economic support for families to prevent negative coping mechanisms such as early and forced marriage
- iv. Strengthening community based child protection mechanisms, including community watch groups and child protection committees and mobilising the community and faith leaders to promote the rights of women and girls
- v. Ensuring gender and protection mainstreaming in all sectors and humanitarian action to promote minimum standards, including prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers
- vi. Vigorous and continuous advocacy at local and national levels to ensure law enforcement related to VAWG.

S.L, 18 years old, lived in Gerald Batille Camp near Mais Gâté 88 in Haiti. While taking out the trash, she found herself surrounded by six men. They dragged her to a nearby house where they raped her, while covering her mouth and threatening her with a gun to make her stay silent. She went alone to see a doctor two days later, because she had felt too ashamed to tell anyone in her family what had happened. Although she has since told her aunt and mother about the rape, she begged them not to make a fuss about it. S.L. never reported the rape to the police because she doesn't think they will do anything.



Above Mother, Roselyn was forced to leave her home with her two babies in Zamboanga City, Philippines, when their house burnt down because of the conflict. She now attends a World Vision Women and Children Friendly Space which provides a safe and comfortable environment for children and women to interact with peers and receive support. © 2013 Crislyn Joy A. Felisilda/World Vision

3. World Vision UK's approach: delivering through our programmes

In working towards the elimination of violence against women and girls, World Vision UK focuses on four key themes which address the root causes of violence. These are:

- a. **Strengthening Child Protection Systems and Child Friendly Spaces:** We provide technical support to help strengthen child protection mechanisms, such as community child protection committees, to identify child protection issues and children at risk, providing effective prevention, referral and response services, and contributing to a safer environment for all.
- b. **Engaging Faith and Community Leaders:** We engage various faith and community leaders who have the ability to influence and challenge mindsets and behaviours to promote the human rights of women and girls. We promote attitude changes in the community with support from religious leaders through community conversations, dissemination of information and creating awareness.
- c. **Engaging Men and Boys:** Men and boys can play a significant role in ending violence against women and girls and promoting gender equality during emergencies. We engage men and boys as allies to make sure they recognise and act on their obligation to prevent and end violence against women. This includes not engaging in violence themselves, discouraging others from perpetrating it, as well as sharing responsibilities in areas related to child rearing, parenting, domestic work and care giving.
- d. **Advocating for Child Protection Advisors in Peacekeeping Missions:** World Vision continues to engage through the protection cluster, and the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Area of Responsibility which is the global level forum for coordinating prevention and response to GBV in humanitarian settings. The group brings together NGOs, UN agencies, academics and others under the shared objectives of ensuring more predictable, accountable and effective approaches to GBV prevention and response during and out of emergencies.



Above Woman, 25 from DRC. During the conflict, her husband was killed and she was raped. She was 8 months pregnant at the time. As a result, she lost the baby and was left in a coma. She is now recovering at a World Vision supported 'Stand Up Together' shelter in northeast DRC near Goma. © 2011 Jon Warren/World Vision

An evaluation of Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) in Ethiopia set up for Somali refugees found that the key concerns identified by children and their caregivers in the camp included unmet basic needs such as food, shelter and education as well as protection risks such as forced recruitment, attacks, abduction, and sexual violence and rape. Reporting of these concerns increased over time only for those not attending CFS. Similarly, the stresses that such concerns placed on caregivers also increased over time only for those who did not have children attending CFS. These findings suggest that attending CFS provided a buffer for children and their caregivers alike in the context of growing frustrations at camp conditions.

4. Recommendations for action

Tackling VAWG is now on the international agenda with significant progress being made towards operationalising guidelines and standards and increasing awareness among donors, affected countries and key partners. However, there are still significant gaps that remain to be addressed in the delivery of services. We also recognise and acknowledge that VAWG occurs prior to, during and following crises. We highlight the need for prevention and response efforts to change social norms by building positive gender norms and attitudes towards VAWG in the longer term.

In addition to implementing the four actions outlined earlier, World Vision UK recommends that the international community does the following:

Increases availability of protection funding to tackle VAWG

Funding to VAWG has been significantly low in emergency response. According to a recent study,⁴ “the big picture of trends in protection funding is mixed. On the plus side, the total amount of funding to protection has remained fairly steady, despite a decline in overall humanitarian funding since 2010. However, when we examine the extent to which protection is funded in appeals, it is always funded to a lesser extent than the sectors perceived to be more life-saving (food, shelter, WASH, health)”.

Addresses Early and Forced Marriage in Emergencies

This harmful traditional practice is the cover behind which violence against girls takes place and is itself a form of violence. World Vision UK calls on the international community to further champion an end to early and forced marriage and recognise it as a growing form of violence against women and girls in emergencies, by promoting implementation of existing laws (where appropriate and addressing the underlying risk factors (such as fear and extreme poverty) that are enhanced in emergencies.

Our research “*Untying the Knot: why early marriage should be seen as violence against women*” identified a link between emergencies and increase in child marriages. Amira, a mother of five and seven months pregnant, is facing the prospect of marrying off her 12-year-old daughter due to the conflict in Syria. Amira thinks it is the only way for her 12-year-old Sheereen to have a decent life. While carrying similar hopes of millions of parents, 13.5 million girls around the world were married before their 18th birthday last year.

Ensures commitments and principles are delivered

Commitments to do more to address violence against women and girls in emergencies, and agreeing global principles for action, are only the first steps. These commitments and principles must become a reality, leading to real change on the ground for women and girls. The changes needed are systemic and will require cross-agency and cross-donor collaboration. The next step therefore must be to agree and implement an accountability framework in the coming months. Building on existing tools and frameworks, the ‘new’ framework must have a clear structure, reporting mechanism and tools, indicators and coordination. The focus must remain on the impact – and therefore include mechanisms for the active participation and feedback from beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the process. This process must start now – with the identification of key stakeholders and existing mechanisms – and lead to an agreed framework early in 2014.

Deploys right people and promotes effective co-ordination

Commit to deploy Gender and Child Protection expertise within 48 hours of a declaration of emergency, and their inclusion in assessing needs and risks, and design and monitoring programmes. Promote coordination among different service providers to ensure multi-sectoral support to the girls and women who experienced violence and ensure mainstreaming of gender and protection in all humanitarian actions to minimize the risk of VAWG in emergency response.

⁴ Placing protection at the centre of humanitarian action, Study on Protection Funding in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies, Julian Murray & Joseph Landry, 2013

World Vision UK

World Vision House, Opal Drive Fox Milne, Milton Keynes, MK15 0ZR

World Vision UK – London office

11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB

www.worldvision.org.uk

World Vision is a registered charity no. 285908, a company limited by guarantee and registered in England no. 1675552. Registered office as above