Research Report

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Combating gender-based violence in conflict and Humanitarian Settings.

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Introduction

When thinking about armed conflict around the world, the first thoughts are often about the hardships faced by displaced populations searching for safety and stability. However, beyond the immediate challenges of securing basic human needs, such as food, water and shelter, many women and girls face an increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV). This is a very serious problem in conflict and humanitarian settings. Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender and includes sexual violence, forced marriage, trafficking and other forms of physical, psychological and even economic abuse. Many people are forced to leave their homes and live in unstable conditions during wartime, which makes them all the more vulnerable to violence and abuse. The most affected groups are women and girls, but men and boys can most definitely also be victims. During these difficult times, access to healthcare, protection and justice is often limited, making it harder for the survivors of gender-based violence to receive the support they undoubtedly need. Combating gender-based violence will require cooperation between governments, humanitarian organisations and local communities. Important actions include protecting survivors, holding perpetrators responsible, providing support services and preventing more violence.

General Overview

Gender-based violence is a criminal offence that happens both in peaceful settings, but also in conflicts and humanitarian crises, where it is even more likely to occur. GBV is often linked to unequal power relations, gender discrimination, harmful social norms, and impunity. It may be used strategically in warfare or as a disruptive matter during and after conflict. Besides physical, bodily harm, GBV is known to cause trauma, social disintegration, and may lead to isolation, self-harm and suicide. Victims of this type of violence may also face stigma, a fear of retaliation, inadequate provision of health, limited access to justice, and many more obstacles when looking for support. In order to combat gender-based violence in both conflict and Humanitarian settings,

numerous resolvements are needed. So far, resolvements consist of international regulations such as those under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), countless policy suggestions from the UN and its sub-organisations, and activist movements from mostly Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs). However, these international regulations, recommendations, and activism remain insufficient. Gender-based violence requires the actual enforcement of these undertakings, which cannot simply be obtained by further strengthening these regulations. Additionally, fighting GBV lacks funding, accountability, accessible services, and cooperation between governments and humanitarian organisations. Therefore, new resolutions are crucial to the solution.

Major Parties Involved

1. United Nation Population Fund

The United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) promotes health, dignity and rights of women and girls around the world. It was founded in 1967 under the name of United Nations Fund for Population Activities, keeping the acronym when they changed it to United Nation Population Fund in 1987. It is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency. They wish to promote reproductive rights, support voluntary family planning, ensure safe childbirth and end gender-based violence. To achieve the end of gender-based violence, they provide counseling, safe shelters and medical care to survivors of domestic violence and abuse.

2. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) protects and assists refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons (IDP's) and stateless people. The UNHCR provides emergency shelter, essential relief items and support services to help displaced populations meet their basic needs and rebuild their lives. Furthermore, they offer legal support and protection and prevention programmes to help reduce vulnerabilities and support survivors of gender-based violence.

3. UN Women

The UN Women is the agency that is dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment. They work to prevent violence against women and girls and support survivors of gender-based violence. Moreover, the UN Women advocates for stronger laws and policies and is helping to ensure that the needs of women and children are considered in humanitarian responses.

4. United Nations Children's Fund

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), originally the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund until 1953, protects children from violence, exploitation and abuse.

In conflict settings, UNICEF works hard to prevent child marriage, sexual exploitation, trafficking and other forms of violence against girls and boys.

5. United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has adopted multiple resolutions on women, peace and security. In particular resolution 1325, which calls for the protection of women and girls during conflict and greater participation of women in peacebuilding.

6. International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is one of the world's leading organizations which addresses gender-based violence in humanitarian crises through protection programs, survivor services and prevention initiatives.

7. Countries where the issue is most severe

Gender-based violence is more common in some countries than in others. In some of those countries it has been a quite recent development, but for others it has been around for decades.

- Sudan → Sudan is currently experiencing one of the world's largest humanitarian and displacement crises. Millions of people have been displaced. Humanitarian organizations report heightened risks of sexual violence, child marriage and other forms of gender-based violence.
- Ukraine →Since the start of the war, UN agencies have reported increased protection risks, among them gender-based violence, psychosocial distress and barriers to accessing support services. What has contributed to these vulnerabilities are large-scale displacement and damage to civilian infrastructure.
- Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) → Since long ongoing armed conflict and displacement continue to place women and girls at particular risk, the DRC has long been associated with high levels of conflict-related sexual violence.
- Afghanistan → Humanitarian organizations identify Afghanistan as a country where women and girls face heightened risks due to conflict, displacement and restrictions on access to services and protection mechanisms.
- Yemen → Because of years of conflict, healthcare and protection systems have weakened, increasing the vulnerability of women and girls to violence, exploitation and forced marriage.
- Syria → After more than a decade of conflict, many Syrians remain displaced, and humanitarian agencies continue to address gender-based violence among refugees and internally displaced populations.

Possible Solutions

- Proposing Humanitarian organizations establish safe spaces, shelters and support centres where survivors of gender-based violence can access medical care, psychological support, legal assistance and reporting mechanisms,
- Suggesting improving camp and shelter safety by:
    - Installing adequate lighting;
    - Providing secure sanitation facilities;
    - Separating sleeping areas when appropriate;
    - Increasing security patrols;
    - Involving women in camp design and management;
- Requesting community education programmes, to help challenge harmful gender norms and raise awareness about gender-based violence,
- Recommending governments and international organizations enforce laws against gender-based violence and ensure perpetrators are held accountable,
- Encouraging women involvement in humanitarian planning, peace negotiations and community leadership,
- Considering providing cash assistance, livelihood opportunities, vocational training and education to help reduce vulnerability to exploitation, trafficking and forced marriage.