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MAKING THE LOCAL GLOBAL:

A guidance note on supporting local women leaders' participation in global humanitarian spaces

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1. Introduction: Our belief in the value of women's leadership and participation

Our core belief is that local women leaders must be present and active in spaces that design, decide and coordinate humanitarian efforts, programmes and policies at local, national and global levels. Local women leaders are commonly the first responders in any emergency and are most active in prevention and rebuilding after disasters. They should therefore be directly involved in shaping the programmes and policies that affect their lives, families and communities. Enabling local women's leadership of humanitarian action also prevents costly mistakes that put women's and girls' directly in harm's way. In this way, the humanitarian community can begin to rectify the continuing injustices experienced by women in gender-blind humanitarian actions. Simply put, local women leaders must be participants in these spaces at local, national and global levels. This is the starting point of this guidance note.

ActionAid International (AAI) has long advocated for women's leadership of humanitarian actions. Women's actions and leadership are often unrecognised by institutions – whether local, national or international. They and their organisations play minimal roles in coordination mechanisms set up to respond to emergencies, if they are even invited to participate. As one of the women leaders interviewed for this guidance note stated, “We might be invited to speak at the big meetings. But when it comes to actual decision-making and translating things into action, we're not invited to those spaces at all.”

Why we have invested in this guidance note

This guidance note is a contribution towards changing gender-blindness in global humanitarian spaces. It seeks to respond to recent international commitments to shift the balance of power in humanitarian action, from being dominated by international actors to being led by local actors. It seeks to boost the momentum behind steps to ensure gender-responsiveness, not only in ensuring women fairly benefit from humanitarian assistance and are safe from gender-based violence, but also that their leadership is

strengthened and their priorities translated into decisions on actions and investments. Given the opportunities opening up in these policy spaces for greater local participation, we hope improvements can be made following recommendations from this guidance note.

The guidance is based on interviews conducted by ActionAid with local women leaders and with international humanitarian organisations. It draws on the experiences, insights and recommendations of local women leaders¹ who have been directly affected by and led humanitarian response and recovery in communities or who lead organisations involved in building resilience and providing direct services to disaster-affected populations. Most have attended global meetings in the humanitarian field including the World Humanitarian Summit and other spaces created by processes of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, Global Protection Cluster and the Grand Bargain. The women leaders interviewed come from Bangladesh, Haiti, Gaza, Kenya, Lebanon, Liberia, Philippines, Syria, and Vanuatu. In addition, interviews were conducted with representatives of international humanitarian organisations involved directly in creating spaces for participation and in supporting women leaders attending these events and meetings.

Who it is for and how to use it

This guidance is aimed at local women's organisations who are already involved in humanitarian action and disaster prevention or those who wish to be involved. They include women-led community-based organisations (CBOs), women's movements working for gender equality and women's rights and women-led non-governmental organisations operating at local district and national levels.

It is also aimed at international organisations (INGOs, UN agencies and other inter-governmental agencies) wishing to promote and support local women leaders' meaningful participation at

There are few existing policies or practice guidance on supporting local participation in global processes. It appears that staff of international organisations mostly follow their instincts on promoting local participation. They rely on INGOs to have the right ethos and the local partners to get it right.

However, a number of agencies and networks are active in this area including:

- UNICEF, which has policies and guidance on child and youth participation and in relation to the participation of young people with disabilities.
- The International Disability Alliance, a global network of disabled people's organisations (DPOs), which is currently developing its policies on 'reasonable accommodation' to enable effective participation, and will follow this with relevant guidelines. Their draft checklist for inclusive workshops was used as the template for the checklist at the end of this document.
- The Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, which has guidance on mainstreaming gender and strengthening women's participation in the 2019 Platform sessions. See box on page 17.
- See also the UK Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) box on page 13.
- The Global Protection Cluster's Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility task team, which is in the process of publishing guidance on localisation and participation.

meetings. These include conferences and other consultative, decision-making, planning and coordination spaces on humanitarian action, resilience-building and disaster reduction. They may be meetings at global, national or local level organised by governments, donors, UN agencies, INGOs, national NGOs and the private sector. Increasingly, some networks of local organisations are beginning to create spaces for coordination and capacity strengthening too, such as the Women's Emergency Network in the Philippines set up by 30 rural women's organisations and led by the Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (National Coalition of Rural Women) and the Women Wetem Weta (WWW)

or Women's Weather Watch, set up by the Women I Tok Tok Tugetha forum in Vanuatu.

Although the experiences on which the guidance is based come mainly from the humanitarian sector, the guidance is also useful whenever local leaders – women and men – are supported and sponsored to attend events, meetings and conferences within and beyond the countries where they live in any humanitarian or development context.

Overview of the guidance note

Section 1 provides an introduction to the guidance note.

Section 2 outlines the reasons and motivations local women leaders name for participating in meetings and events and then lists the barriers they face in doing so.

Section 3 explores five key themes underpinning the participation of local women leaders in global spaces.

Section 4 maps recent global efforts in reforming humanitarian response, especially in terms of gender mainstreaming and localisation.

Section 5 lists ten key practice points to promote the meaningful participation of local women leaders in global spaces. This includes aspects related to the support women may expect both from their own organisations and from the inviting or sponsoring organisation.

Section 6 sets out five recommendations for organisers to increase local women leaders' access and participation in global spaces.

The annex features a checklist for supporting local women's meaningful participation in global spaces. It is aimed at organisations wishing to sponsor local women leaders' participation and for organisers of global spaces.

2. Yes, Women DO want to participate!

During the interviews, representatives of international agencies leading humanitarian responses often asked the question: "Do women really want to participate in these global events?" The reasons behind the question are varied and perhaps convoluted. They range from concerns that participation is in many ways tokenistic and it may be too difficult and complex to change that; through to thinking that local women leaders are too busy and have more added value on the ground than speaking at a global event. A few also expressed doubts about the women leaders' agency and were concerned sponsoring organisations used them for their own agendas or as 'stunts'.

The local women leaders were asked the same question. These are the reasons they gave as to why their participation is important:

Confidence building: "On a personal level, since 2014 – I'm completely a different person, I feel like a leader, I'm courageous and can be at any place, even with politicians and ask them questions. I've become a strong person. I've acquired new info and experiences and have learned how to apply them in my work and life. I'm more capable and anxious to help others. If someone attends a conference, I guide them and tell them what to search for." – Roula Zaieter, Lebanon

International activism: "I did not expect that I would go to a foreign country. I was more motivated to work due to having this opportunity. Bangladesh is a poor country, but it is being affected by the rich countries' industrial pollution. I expected to be able to express the injustice that Bangladesh suffered from at the conference (on climate change)." – Haoa Begum, Bangladesh

Transforming gender norms: "I was very happy to receive the invitation. But I had to get the permission of my family and my husband. It is traditional for Syrian women to ask permission from their families and husbands before going anywhere. We were all sitting together. They saw how motivated and excited I was for this trip. I told them the conference will help me gain more experience to achieve my future goals, offer me a lot of future opportunities, be more fearless and be confident since I was in a different community. I told them to keep the customs aside and get over the traditions since I will be doing something that would benefit the community..."

(After), my family witnessed a difference – they saw how I changed a lot." – Goufran el Chaib, young Syrian refugee in Lebanon.

Access to information: "As a community leader, I always want to have new information, to be updated and to come back to share info – I also want to be involved in decision making. My main goal at the meeting was to be involved in decisions around humanitarian aid. Many people in the community have no confidence in NGOs who were doing things on behalf of the community especially in terms of humanitarian aid." – Jacqueline Morette, Haiti

Affecting change: "My group chose me to go. They wanted me to represent their voices, tell the rest of the world our experience (of the drought) and to come back and share what I got from the meeting... I have a small shop to sell vegetables, fruits and potatoes, but I had to close it because no one could take care of it. I did not mind (lost income) because the assignment was greater – I was taking care of a whole community's plight, which I was part of. There was no other option because change has to happen. For the change to be there, it was inevitable for me to go to that meeting. And to get out of the cocoon, to get out of our holes. I wanted my community members to be free. We need to be freed from lack of knowledge and get skills to handle our situations." – Joyce Chepkoech, Kenya

Changing the narrative: "When you have more local voices at international meetings, you have a different perspective to the space... Donors and other actors get to see that when there are more women responding, the approach is different. How effective our responses are – it's not documented. So being in those spaces, we change the narrative: this is what we've done, what we're doing, what we intend to do... When we have more collaboration – donors, INGOs, communities, we get to see more effective changes at the community. This is the main thing." – Naomi Tulay-Solanke, Liberia

Recognition: "I wanted to get recognition and exposure for ourselves as rural women in geographically isolated areas. We have difficulties in getting space at national level to get our voices heard. So it was a big opportunity to raise our profile at a global space – for them to know that there are rural women who act even though we are belittled. Even with Magna Carta on Women in the Philippines, we experience discrimination due to being rural women. People think, 'They're just

people from the mountains.' (We are) small women farmers, small fisherfolk, indigenous people, women in informal sector, small retailers, so we don't get enough attention. Through our coalition, we want to take out the discrimination, also patriarchal and anti-feminist attitudes. We want to be recognised for our contributions to food production, and women-led DRR." – Luz Bador, Philippines

Making connections: "On a personal level, I've learned a lot to be part of other GBV platforms, networking, getting to know other actors that fund us later. Gave us good visibility – they know us from the Call to Action. But it comes at a cost – we don't have team members dedicated to this. This is a luxury for (our organisation)." – Saja Michael, Lebanon

Barriers to participation

Both sets of interviewees (those working in international humanitarian organisations and local women leaders) agreed that the odds are stacked against women leaders' participation at local, national and global levels. There seem to be a number of reasons why women leaders may find participation challenging. They are summarised here in terms of the barriers that operate before, during and after meetings:

"This last trip, I said my request – they accommodated me with my ticket. But I didn't ask them for anything else. I did not ask them to connect me with any organisations. Because there is cost attached to it, people are there for a reason, and I didn't want to inconvenience people and most are already busy.

Saying no doesn't go down well with any donor. This is why we don't want to ask for any extras."
– Brenda Moore, Liberia

"They sent the itinerary – they were going for the cheapest flight. There was no choice really. The Air Maroc route was the cheapest route, the lay over time was very long, like 10 hours. I did not complain about that because that was the route they could pay for, I did not have a choice."
– Joyce Kilikpo, Liberia

Before the event or meeting

- **Not understanding the whole picture:** it is often difficult for women leaders to understand and contextualise what is being discussed and to have an overview of the processes operating in global spaces. This would be difficult even if they had time for or were inclined to do their own online research on it (where they had the means to do so). Without additional support and assistance in understanding the context and background of such events, they feel what they have to say would not influence the discussions.
- **Not having adequate preparation time:** women leaders often are not given adequate time to prepare for participation (for reasons they could not understand). The requirements and length of time needed to organise travel are substantial, especially if participants are first-time travellers, come from low-income backgrounds, live in conflict areas or are refugees. Interviewees reported that so much of the preparation happens a day before the meeting is due to happen in a frenzy of meetings with their sponsoring organisations, when they have barely recovered from their travel.
- **Lacking support from sponsors for women's own objectives:** the women are acutely aware of who holds the power in enabling them to participate, especially at global meetings. They feel they could not ask for more support from the sponsoring organisation, don't want to be thought of as too pushy and don't want to risk disappointment when support is not given. Many are also unsure whether it is legitimate for them to set their own personal or organisational objectives. Often, there is no discussion about their own objectives in participation, nor the opportunities presented at the event that their organisations could explore. This causes awkwardness and hesitance. It emphasises for them the power imbalance with the sponsoring organisation.

During the event or meeting

- **Having limited time:** all the local women interviewed had previously spoken at global meetings – usually in side events, some in plenary assemblies. All knew beforehand that there was very limited time to say what they want to share – in part due to time also allocated to interpreting presentations and discussions. All the women interviewed wished they could be given more time, and those more experienced now question the format of such events, seeing this

time pressure as a hindrance to their participation. This makes other activities outside of the sessions where women are speaking even more vital.

- **Not understanding the language and/or jargon used at the meeting:** the language and jargon used in these meetings may create barriers for women in contributing to discussions outside of their set speeches and the Q&A sessions that follow, where translation is often supplied. Not speaking the language used at the meeting is a major hindrance in engaging and networking with other participants outside of sessions. This can be tackled by providing translation support throughout the course of the event. The jargon used can also be exclusionary and not allow local women leaders to share their first-hand and valuable information.

After the event or meeting

- **Feeling excluded from the follow-up:** even if they are asked to contribute to discussions, women feel they are not asked to participate in follow-up meetings. These meetings are where decisions are actually taken. Women therefore remain unclear as to how they, their organisations and communities will benefit from their participation.

3. Why is local women leaders' participation important in global spaces?

There were five themes indicated by the interviews which are highlighted here to explain why local women leaders' participation is so important.

It's a matter of getting it right: "Our proximity with the issues make us more qualified to respond – knowing the context, social, traditional, how we shape response." Naomi Tulay-Solanke, Liberia.

Local women and women leaders are the experts in understanding the needs and priorities of their families and communities – it is their lived experiences. They are the first to respond and set up strategies so their families and communities can cope with emergencies and are among the first to experience the impact of poorly designed and implemented humanitarian action. This field-level expertise needs to be brought into discussions and decisions on designs, plans, funds, coordination and evaluation of humanitarian efforts. One of the international humanitarian leaders interviewed said that local women leaders' participation prevents "us from getting it wrong" and engaging in "nonsense debates." Effectiveness of humanitarian response depends on the active involvement of local women in informing data and analysis; establishing what works and what does not and the priorities for action. Limiting their participation to only the local level makes national and global decision-making not only prone to mistakes but also to creating and embedding ineffectiveness.

It's a matter of holding people accountable: "When I talked about our experiences, they saw for the first time, what localisation was about." Luz Bador, Philippines.

A long line of global summits has acknowledged the value of women's leadership in humanitarian action. In the last four years alone, the Sendai Framework for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015, the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and the reform processes instigated by it in the form of the Grand Bargain, along with the work of the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC)² over many, many years, have repeated commitments to local participation, local leadership and gender equity in participation and humanitarian action.

However, many humanitarian leaders admit that the

humanitarian sector continues to be male-dominated and gender-blind. Many humanitarian actors misuse the imperative of timeliness and urgency ('we'll look at women and gender issues later' is a common impulse) when responding to emergencies. Other interviewees also reported on attitudes in the field, for example: "Staff claim they have no time to think and they think paying attention to women and gender issues is too complicated." So when agency staff convene meetings with local leaders, most do not ensure equal gender representation, and are willing to proceed without the inclusion of local women leaders.

Some are concerned about challenging gender roles in a misplaced sensitivity to patriarchal culture and tradition. International actors continue to be dominant and capture the bulk of resources spent on humanitarian efforts. Insisting on local women leaders' participation in local, national and especially global spaces is about shifting existing norms, changing behaviours³ and business-as-usual attitudes. Supporting local women leaders' participation in global spaces chips away at male domination of the sector. It can lead to more spaces for more local women leaders to participate in the future. It can help ensure that women's humanitarian expertise and action is increasingly visible and required, and that in turn can enable more resources to be allocated towards supporting growth in women-led expertise. Global commitments then begin to be delivered.

"We've learned the spaces are very limited, not available for everybody. Let's make sure we're really sitting with the women... There are different frameworks, community consultations, community-based approaches (that can be used). Before a global meeting, a month before, a community-based intervention to hear from communities what they really want, ideally we have monitoring in place to get this info."
– Saja Michael, Lebanon

It's a matter of building power: "I had a lot more understanding of the issues, of localisation, the global conversations... I had a better understanding of the dynamics of the UN system and adjusted my expectations." Saja Michael, Lebanon.

From a young Syrian refugee learning to convince her family and husband to defy tradition, to a seasoned community leader mastering how to speak to international audiences, the effort in participating in global conferences is itself a journey of empowerment, of expanding knowledge, of strengthening confidence and self-belief and skill-building for the women involved. The experience also builds influencing power and the capability to act on the ground. One of the leaders spoke of being asked more for her opinion by local officials, which is a huge change in perception, enabling her voice to be heard more prominently in local matters. Participation in global meetings, as in the experience of this woman leader, could lead to long-term effects and changes in the local community afterward.

It's a matter of rights: "Participation - it's a right, full stop." Masumi Yamashina, UNICEF.

Everyone has the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives – in informing those decisions and in making them. This right is recognised under international human rights laws, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁴ and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁵, which both recognise, "All peoples have the right of self-determination... and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development". The preamble to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women⁶ states, "that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields."

Subsequent declarations and frameworks for action have created international norms. These include the Declaration on the Right to Development⁷ which states "The human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development." This Declaration and more recent frameworks for action negotiated at summits from 2015 onwards, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action on Financing for Development post-2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the 2016 Agenda for Humanity from the World Humanitarian Summit, restate and re-emphasise the priority for women's participation in decision-making and leadership of every aspect of economic, political, social and cultural life.

"From that experience of standing in front of so many people from different cultures representing the plight of my community - I found a greater courage that I did not think I had before. I'm no longer scared of any small meetings because I have conquered a bigger giant."
– Amina Labarakwe, Kenya

"After coming back from conference, I got a new platform - I felt I had more value in my community, people respect me more, I have the scope to express myself more, the local officials ask for my opinion more... I got myself into a better place. I am now creating more opportunities for women - I'm giving opportunities to girls who can't go to schools. I'm now working on preventing early marriage."
– Haoa Begum, Bangladesh

"In Bangkok, I saw that there was a disaster fund set up in some countries. I shared this with the organisation members; we created a bank account and created a disaster fund. The money comes from community people and group members, who contribute to the fund Tk 200 a month, every month. One year ago, we used Tk 30,000 from our fund for a rehabilitation programme."
– Haoa Begum, Bangladesh

In addition, discrimination on the basis of sex or gender, age, disability and other vulnerabilities is prohibited by international human rights laws, to which most countries are signatories and have embedded in their own laws and constitutions. Governments as duty bearers must ensure that no one is discriminated against on the basis of their sex or gender in respect of their participation in political, social, economic and cultural life. They are also duty-bound to promote, protect and progressively achieve gender equality and non-discriminatory participation. They must actively prevent anyone or any institution from violating this right by denying participation of women through omission or in error. On the basis of both international and national laws

and international norms and internationally agreed frameworks for action, women community members and leaders have entitlements to participate in development activities and in shaping, implementing and learning from humanitarian actions. This right is inalienable and indivisible and applies to whatever spaces for participation exists – local, national or global/international.

It's a matter of justice: “We want to be in the environment, the room where decisions are being made. We don't want them to make decisions on our behalf.” Jacqueline Morette, Haiti.

Discrimination against women and other vulnerable groups which is entrenched in many societies leads to more women than men being harmed, maimed or killed when disaster strikes. In addition, in these vulnerable situations the risks of sexual violence carried out against women and girls multiply, even from some humanitarian actors with responsibilities to assist and protect them, as recent disclosures have shown. It could be said that, as a result, male-dominated humanitarian efforts actively put women and girls in dangerous or risky situations. Women's knowledge of the risks they face and their active efforts to keep themselves and their families safe from these risks need to be better understood, adopted, built upon and strengthened. This requires their participation in shaping humanitarian response and disaster prevention. Their participation is absolutely required to ensure that justice is served and gender-based violence against women and girls in emergencies are prevented in the future.

4. Opportunities for global participation in reforming the humanitarian community and mechanisms

This section describes the significant opportunities for global participation which have arisen recently. It highlights international processes and platforms in which women could operate to improve humanitarian response.

Opportunities for global participation

After almost three years of extensive consultations, the Agenda for Humanity set out in 2016 the major areas for action and transformation needed by global leaders and the humanitarian community to address and reduce need, risk and vulnerability. The World Humanitarian Summit (Istanbul, May 2016) was a pivotal moment to translate these areas into concrete changes in the way the humanitarian system operates. Two changes have particularly generated momentum and enthusiasm among humanitarian actors: the empowerment and protection of women and girls and the reinforcement of local systems.

Several UN agencies, national and international NGO and donors strongly support these two changes promoting women and girls' and local women-led organisations' participation in preparedness and response work. There is growing evidence that local women responders' actions lead to more contextualised and effective humanitarian action. A few organisations also believe that their actions contribute in the long run to make gender relations in crisis-affected communities fairer and transform the humanitarian system. This group, which includes ActionAid, perceives women-led localisation as a key part of a feminist approach to humanitarian action. They are calling for a radical shift in power relations and resources to ensure that women's leadership and agency is at the centre of humanitarian work.

The Grand Bargain and the Global Protection Cluster are two international processes and platforms where this discourse on women's leadership and localisation is progressing, despite barriers and difficulties, and becoming a reality through concrete actions:

- The commitments to localisation in the Grand Bargain document are coupled with proposals from several signatories to mainstream gender into the agreement. UN Women coordinates this gender mainstreaming work among the 59 signatories, which include NGO networks such as the NEAR Network and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).
- The Global Protection Cluster also intersects gender and shifting power to local organisations via a localisation task team in the Gender Based Violence area of responsibility. This work is coordinated by CARE and ActionAid.

Creating more space at the table

A greater participation of local women leaders in these two processes and platforms would support better and more realistic policy decisions and cascade them to the operational level. This participation needs to be sustained and linked with national level processes to be meaningful. This requires that disaster management agencies from crisis-affected countries and their international counterparts open humanitarian coordination mechanisms to local women leaders and their women-led organisations. National humanitarian coordination bodies and their leadership must be reminded of gender and localisation commitments made at international level, such as those set out in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Accountability Framework.

Women's participation at country level in Humanitarian Country Teams, UN Humanitarian Response Plans and Clusters will make the response more effective. It will also enrich the participation of those local women leaders and their organisations in global humanitarian spaces. They will be able to make valuable contributions in meetings discussing the transformation of the humanitarian system, as well as in events in which the international community gathers to find solutions and funding for a specific humanitarian crisis.

The national women's humanitarian networks that exist in Bangladesh, Philippines, Liberia and Vanuatu could call for the greater participation of women and their organisations in national coordination and decision-making humanitarian and development spaces. They could also join forces across the country networks and seek a place at the table in global humanitarian spaces. International NGO and UN agencies could support this ask and invite these networks to their annual meetings. This would provide a platform for all parties to learn from each other and to plan together the urgent changes required in the humanitarian system to make it more open, fair and inclusive.

5. What is effective and meaningful participation?

Based on the interviews conducted, women leaders and those leading international agencies' humanitarian work agree that meaningful participation has to be measured against the actions and outputs that follow from participation. International agencies asked in the interviews, "What's the follow-up action from the women's participation?" A few were worried there would be little to show for the investment in getting the women leaders to the conference. In a world of finite resources, some were concerned they could not justify spending on women leaders' participation at global meetings when faced with more pressing needs of survival in humanitarian settings.

Making the most of their opportunities for participation is a common concern for the women leaders interviewed. For them, however, there is no doubt that their participation will be put to good use when they return to their communities. It is outside the remit of this guidance note to track the cumulative effects and changes linked with women leaders' participation at the various global events over time. However, the women leaders interviewed referred to a range of follow-up actions taken when they returned home to their communities, including:

- Instigating the formation of a national network or coalition of women leaders in humanitarian actions
- Putting in place project ideas they learned from other participants, such as creating a disaster fund from monthly contributions from a group of community members
- Reporting back to their organisations on what they learned at the meetings and considering what their organisations can act on
- Sharing information with the local government leaders and area chiefs that they had gathered at the conference
- Sharing their experiences and advising other women who are about to go to conferences
- Keeping in touch with some of the women leaders they met, continuing the sharing of experiences and problems/solutions.

Indeed, the immediate and medium-term utility of the global conferences to their organisations

The UK Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) network defines meaningful participation in the following ways:

Such participation:

1. will influence decision-making (i.e. is not tokenistic);
2. is open to women's own responses (i.e. is not directive);
3. ensures women are fully informed and consent to engaging;
4. provides capacity building support to facilitate their engagement if needed (i.e. it is accessible);
5. is part of an ongoing process (i.e. is not a one-off exercise);
6. is inclusive of marginalised and disadvantaged women;
7. includes women in sufficient numbers that they can visibly contribute.

"Beyond Consultations: A tool to promote more meaningful engagement of women in fragile and conflict-affected states" can be consulted at: <https://www.beyondconsultations.org/>.

and communities are foremost in the leaders' minds when they consider how meaningful or effective their participation is or could be at any global meeting. For the women leaders, the clearer their own personal and community/organisational objectives are for participation, the more meaningful and effective they view their participation to be. Put in another way, 'purposeful' participation in global spaces results in 'meaningful' participation and leads to real world actions and changes on the ground.

Recommendations for women leaders and sponsoring organisations

To ensure 'purposeful' participation, the women leaders recommend ten actions for themselves and the organisations that invite them or sponsor them to attend meetings in global spaces. These are:

1. Understand the context of the meeting as fully as possible.

Ask the inviting or sponsoring organisation for the agenda and programme of the meeting to be sent at least a month in advance. Ask also why the meeting is being held, what discussions are going to take place, what or when decisions will be taken, who is going to attend, who are the important organisations they need to meet, how would the outputs of the meeting link to anything they are involved in on the ground. Ask also to have a clear point of contact to raise questions about the event or meeting. This information is best shared through discussions rather than only through email since language and ways of learning play a part in capacities to comprehend specialist information. Also, in some places there is no access to the internet. Ask for agenda and programme materials to be translated and presented in easy-to-read format⁸.

2. Discuss organisational/community objectives at the global event with their organisations and with the sponsoring organisation.

Ask their organisation for support in setting objectives for their participation. Ask the sponsoring organisation to share and support women's objectives, just as women participants are assisting the sponsoring organisation to achieve its own objectives with and through their involvement.

3. Understand what opportunities are available for sharing their experiences and what additional opportunities can be created at the meeting for sharing problems and/or solutions and learning from other countries' experiences.

Ask the inviting or sponsoring organisation what speaking slots are going to be made available

"When we go on our own, we advocate for our own country's needs. How do we make sure that national actors can come together and find the similarities (in their situations)?... The people we're addressing all have global perspectives. They've been talking to each other for the last 10 years. When we come together despite our differences and create our common messages of what we want global actors to do, then there's strength in that. We're more impactful."
– Saja Michael, Lebanon

and the time allocated for their slots, what other discussions are happening where they can attend and contribute, and what influencing and networking opportunities can be created together at the conference. Ask the sponsoring organisation for assistance in creating these additional learning, influencing and networking opportunities to enable women to fulfil their personal and organisational objectives. If necessary, ask for support from another trusted leader or organisation to communicate these points to the sponsoring organisation.

4. Develop and practise speeches with their organisation.

Ask members of their organisation to contribute ideas, stories, examples, images for their speeches. Consult the community or the organisation about the key messages they need to deliver at the conference, and practise the speech in front of members of their organisation. This is so that organisation and community members know what is being said on their behalf. It also helps to engage the members and makes them more curious, expectant of and hopefully receptive to the information their leader will come back with from the meeting.

5. Prepare and bring information materials from their community and organisation to share at the conference.

Materials such as photographs, drawings, posters, video, information leaflets, evaluation reports help deliver messages about the work of

their community and help raise the profile of their work and approaches to other participants at the conference. Ask the sponsoring organisation for assistance with creating spaces and opportunities for displaying or distributing these materials.

6. Understand the terminology that will be used at the conference.

Ask the sponsoring organisation to discuss the key concepts and words that will be used at the global event as this helps to improve understanding of the context. This 'language training' can be done in pre-meeting preparations a day or two before the start of conference. When needed, ensure that professional translation support is available throughout the conference, when women leaders are speaking, contributing from the floor, and to support their networking efforts.

7. Develop common key messages with other women leaders being sponsored and with the sponsoring organisation.

Ask the sponsoring organisation to bring together all the women leaders in a pre-meeting so they can understand the diversity of their situations and find common messages to deliver at every opportunity they have during the event.

8. Develop a joint 'influencing' plan with the sponsoring organisation and decide how to put it into action across different global spaces.

Changes in humanitarian policy and practice do not happen through discussions and agreements in one conference, as past experience has shown. Ask the sponsoring organisation to co-develop an 'influencing' action plan and map out the national and global spaces where local leaders' efforts are needed to advance the influencing agenda. Ask donor organisations to invest in this action plan.

As one leader suggests, "I would rather do six or seven trips for one thematic area, and I will be part of the decision-making and I will feel I have accomplished something, contributed to something, instead of being tokenised to attend several different conferences on different themes. My personal opinion, I'd rather do it on one thematic cause, handle it from A-Z and be part of the decision-making. Might as well see the fruit of the efforts I am contributing."

9. Network with other leaders, meet with donors and other decision-makers.

Much of what will make the experience of participating in global spaces memorable and directly useful are the one-to-one conversations that happen at the sides of the formal sessions. If language is a barrier (as many of the women leaders say it is), ask the translator to accompany them in approaching anyone they wish to speak to. Ask the sponsoring organisation to set up informal and formal networking opportunities, like a joint lunch, coffee break or dinner. This will provide opportunities for closer interaction with other participants doing similar work, and with other international agencies and donors, or with government delegations of the women's countries. Many of these government officials may not be familiar with the work happening in their country's communities.

10. Enjoy yourself!

Travelling to another country to participate in discussions is also an opportunity to open the senses to other stimuli, expand the mind and feed the soul. If there are any organised tours of parks, museums, etc. offered by the event organisers, take advantage of these. If there are no organised tours, ask the sponsoring organisation to assist with setting one up.

Recommendations regarding practical assistance to enable women leaders to attend global events

The ten recommendations above assume that the sponsoring organisations will provide adequate and appropriate types and levels of practical assistance to the women leaders. This would enable them to leave their communities and participate at a global event, secure in the feeling that they will not be worse off when they do.

This depends in part on women leaders being confident to discuss with their sponsoring organisations the practical assistance they need in order to attend the global event. They may call on the support of other leaders in their organisation to do this.

Practical assistance includes the following:

- Practical and financial assistance in getting travel documents on time, such as passport, visas, and any other supporting documents
- Financial assistance for the family if the woman is the main bread-winner for their household and they are a daily wage earner, or income is dependent on daily work/production/sale of service or product – especially when they will be away for a length of time.
- Assistance in arranging for the care of their children and whether there will be costs to be covered for childcare.

Recommendations for organisers of global spaces

The women leaders and interviewees from international agencies have the following recommendations for organisers of global spaces to promote and support the meaningful participation of women leaders:

1. Invest in local participation in global spaces.

From the outset, planning and budgeting for the global spaces must include mechanisms for local engagement with women and for women leaders

to be invited to participate in the global platforms. Organisers should make clear their reasons for involving local women leaders, and how they expect women leaders to contribute to deliberations and decision-making in the spaces they create. Most importantly, the costs associated with local meaningful participation should be included as a regular budgetary item in any global event being planned. This includes costs for translation, materials such as programmes and agendas in easy-to-read and other formats, practical assistance and financial support (such as reimbursement of loss of income due to attendance at meetings).

2. Move beyond a tick-box exercise on inclusion.

It is recommended that organisers reach out directly to local and national women-led organisations active in humanitarian efforts, to women's organisations and to international NGOs active in supporting women's leadership in humanitarian action for assistance with shaping formats that enable better participation. Inviting local voices into spaces and not giving them adequate time and appropriate platforms from which to communicate their messages and share their approaches is ineffective for all participants. Organisations that support local actors to participate in these global spaces must advocate for and help devise new formats to make the contribution from and participation of local actors more effective.

Invite local/national actors into global working groups and task teams. Make sure there is enough preparation for the local/national actors so they can perform their global role adequately. Local actor preparation includes making sure they grasp the full context of their global role and the concepts/key words/jargon that will be used. It should also include helping local actors appreciate where their local/national knowledge of context and approaches can contribute to the work of the group. Make sure also that meeting times are not detrimental to the effective participation of the local/national actor. The simple action of not making the local actor the last to speak at a session also signals the value being given to their contributions.

3. Invest in expanding the pool of local actors engaged in global spaces and the range of global spaces local actors can participate in.

Many interviewees from international agencies are concerned that they work with a relatively small pool of local/global actors, especially women leaders,

who can be 'nominated' to participate in global events in the humanitarian field. Increasing the number of women leaders needs to be done in a concerted way, beginning with creating programmes that build women's leadership in humanitarian action at local and national levels. For example, the Women's Environment Network of local women leaders in humanitarian action instigated by PKKK in the Philippines, the Women-Led Organisations Humanitarian Network in Liberia, the Women's Humanitarian Platform in Bangladesh, and Women I Tok Tok Tugetha (WITTT Forum) in Vanuatu⁹ need to be supported and emulated in other countries. Programmes being rolled out by UN agencies on supporting women's leadership in humanitarian action – whether with government, parliament or civil society, will also help to expand the pool of leaders.

A coordinated effort is necessary from international organisations, national women-led organisations, international NGOs who work directly with local and national organisations to identify local women leaders who are active and connected to their local constituencies or communities and who can be supported with training and mentoring for participation in humanitarian global spaces.

This type of training could begin by enabling women to participate in national level humanitarian mechanisms, involving them in the preparation of national humanitarian response plans, for example. Local women leaders could also be invited to participate in national level and regional level fora, training and learning exchanges to help further develop global perspectives.

4. Provide preparatory meetings where local women leaders gain a fuller understanding of the context of the global event.

A day or two before the official start of the global event/meeting, organisers of the event should organise a preparatory meeting to orient local women leaders to the global event. This orientation needs to include what issues will be discussed, who will be attending, whether decisions will be made at the meeting and if not, where decisions will eventually be taken.

Organisers need to be mindful of the power imbalances that exist between international actors and local actors. The orientation should therefore also include input on terminology to be used at the meeting including jargon and acronyms. International actors can provide this type of information, acting as a bridge for understanding so that local actors can comprehend what is happening and contribute

The UN's Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has produced a quick guide on fostering women's participation in the 2019 Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, including:

Promoting Gender Parity Panels

Gender Parity Panels during Global Platform sessions are expected to lead to an equal representation between men and women in functions as varied as sessions chairs, panellists and moderators.

Giving a voice to women in Global Platform discussions

Women will be encouraged to take active leading and speaking roles throughout the 2019 Global Platform discussions - in formal sessions as a (co)chair, (keynote) speaker, moderator, facilitator or discussant from the floor. Women have been invited to join the Organizing Teams of the 2019 Global Platform substantive sessions (High level Dialogues, Plenaries, Special Sessions) to help shape these discussions and to promote gender-sensitive discussions to take place throughout the organisation process. There will also be a Special Session on Women Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction on Day 1 of the formal programme of the Global Platform.

Building informal women's group discussions and consultations

These include:

- Preparatory days for informal discussions and consultations among women and women's groups so they can position and prepare themselves for discussions during the formal programme.
- Side events to promote gender equality, parity, women empowerment and leadership in DRR. The outcomes of the side events will be reflected in the Global Platform proceedings.
- Interactive sessions to showcase women's work and achievements in DRR and learning labs for peer-to-peer learning.

as much as they can to building new humanitarian policies and practices. This briefing process mirrors the way that international agencies arrange to get briefings from a number of local/national actors, often visiting them at their offices, when they want to understand a specific national or local context.

These preparatory meeting schedules should be included in the programme information for the main event.

5. Train coordinators of global spaces such as working groups, task teams or chairs of sessions in inclusive practices.

Not all international actors currently leading or coordinating global spaces have experience of field-level work or actively engage with local/national actors. Coordinating international working groups that involve local actors and chairing meetings involving local actors require additional skill sets, sensitivity and responsiveness to what is and is not happening at the group space or in a session. The need for training is stronger especially where coordinators/organisers use virtual spaces such as e-conferencing, webinars to conduct business. They need to learn how to chair effectively to ensure that everyone is able to contribute and not prevented by technology to participate fully.

6. Sustaining local capabilities, strengthening global actors

All the women leaders interviewed are involved in local mechanisms set up by their governments to coordinate humanitarian response during emergencies, such as local cluster meetings, village administration-level disaster preparedness councils and municipal disaster risk reduction and management committees. However, none are involved at the national-level humanitarian response coordination mechanisms. The organisations they represent have been involved in disaster-related needs assessments and analyses and some are especially active in establishing GBV-related responses and prevention during emergencies. Depending on where they are from, they are experienced in responding to and reducing risks to natural disasters caused by earthquakes, hurricanes/typhoons, climate change effects or navigating in situations of persistent crisis due to conflicts.

Their involvement in global spaces is intermittent and peripheral to their daily lives and work. And depending on how much exposure they have had to the international system and its actors, their knowledge of issues, agenda for reform and roles they play in reforming the humanitarian system is patchy.

As the preceding sections show, it does not have to be this way.

It is useful to be reminded of what an international agency interviewee said, “We need to be careful about the dichotomy of local and global. We are all local. Global does not exist – it is one point in one place. The tendency to make this dichotomy undermines the power of local. Because we are saying you will be successful if you are global. The most local voice gets an impact more at the global level. Global is a congregation of local. Let’s re-state international solidarity. The reason I do this work is because I want to be in solidarity with my brothers and sisters who are suffering. This is a chain of solidarity, the global chain of individuals – why you need local voices in the global. They are part of the chain of solidarity. The global is formed from that.”

Two recommendations bear restating from both women leaders and international agency

interviewees to sustain local capabilities for global engagement. These are:

1. Invest in mentoring and skills training for women leadership in humanitarian action.

The women leaders do not underestimate the amount of knowledge they want to build to enable them to participate meaningfully in global spaces. Apart from training, many want to be mentored on the global humanitarian system and the needs for reform. More often than not, what the women want are a series of conversations and a mapping out of the processes for them.

They also want specific skills training and guidance, especially around communications such as public speaking and speaking to media. They want facilitation and guidance so they can deliver their messages with impact.

2. Involve local women leaders in systematic and planned influencing efforts to boost momentum for reforms to the global humanitarian system.

Women leaders want to play their part in reforming the humanitarian system but are critical of the practice where they are engaged in what appears to be separate or disconnected attendance at global events.

Many are interested in more systematic and planned influencing action, which they know need to build on past actions. They cannot plan global actions at present, but in partnership with international organisations willing to work with them in these ways, they are ready to participate and play their parts.

A final word

Local women leaders and the international actors interviewed are passionate and brimming with energy to contribute to reforming an international humanitarian system where ineffectiveness is

embedded. There is more than enough energy out there to address systematically the barriers that prevent meaningful participation from local actors, particularly local women leaders in global decision-making and leadership of humanitarian action. The recommendations from local women leaders in this guidance note is a collective contribution to creating a better humanitarian system.

Annex

A checklist for staff of international organisations for supporting local women's meaningful participation in global spaces

This checklist is for use by staff of sponsoring organisations who want to support local women leaders' meaningful participation in global humanitarian (and development) spaces¹⁰.

Questions for supporting organisation	Yes/No	Comments	Actions to be taken by sponsor
General questions			
1. Have speaking slots and other forms of participation been secured for women leaders?		This will require advocacy with the organisers of the event/meeting. Check if budgets were allocated to support local participation.	
2. Are the speaking slots at a suitable time for participants?		Last speakers often get bumped off due to sessions over-running.	
3. Is there a budget for supporting local women leaders' participation at the event?		Where will the budget come from?	
4. What is the balance of participation between the local women's organisation, the local ActionAid partner and ActionAid at the event?			
Pre-travel practical/logistical arrangements			
5. Is the participant a first-time traveller requiring a passport?		Days needed for passport processing Types of documents needed for passport processing Passport processing fees and local travel costs needed for passport application Other support needed by participant to get their passport in time.	

6. Can visa requirements for the participant be expedited?		Days needed for visa processing Types of documents needed for visa applications Facilitation from official bodies to fast track visa applications Bank requirements to support visa applications may require a temporary loan to show a healthy bank balance Visa processing fees and local/international travel costs ¹¹ needed for visa processing	
7. Is the participant a daily, low income earner or sole breadwinner in family, for whom participation at the event will result in loss of income?		Sensitive discussion may be required to understand impact of loss of income on her family.	
8. Has the participant been given choices on flight options to take and the pros/cons of the flight options?			
9. Is there any part of the participant's travel plans that may present a safeguarding issue for the organisation?		Cheapest flights come with long stop-overs (over 5 hours) at an airport or arrival times very late at night/very early in the morning when most offices are closed.	
10. Is the participant travelling alone or with a companion?		It's not advisable for first-time travellers to travel alone. Some cultures require women to be accompanied. It may be necessary to discuss the woman's situation and how it will be addressed.	
11. Has the participant money to cover costs in advance (travel to get visa in capital, arranging for childcare, etc)? Has a travel per diem been arranged for any expenses in transit?		In case of delays, per diem can pay for buying a local SIM, or buying food.	

12. Has the participant been given travel information (including weather, what to wear, time zone differences, airport information on connections and destination airports, destination hotel address and how to travel there, whether they will be picked up at hotel, local contact details)?		Participants may not have travelled alone before. They may feel safer if they have someone waiting for them at the airport to take them to their hotel.	
13. Has the participant's hotel been booked and paid for in full?		It is rare for local participants to have credit cards which hotels require for check in if booking is not yet paid.	
Pre-travel preparation			
14. Has the invitation been sent to the organisation and/or the individual?		Some organisations have their own policies on selecting attendees to global events.	
15. Does the participant have the name and contact details of the host/receiving organisation?			
16. Has there been a discussion with the participant on the agenda, programme and context of the event?			
17. Has there been a discussion with the organisation and participant to establish the objectives of participation?			
18. Has there been a discussion with the participant about how they may want to use the opportunities available at the event?		Opportunities include the sessions where they will speak, government officials, donors and other decision-makers who are attending, other women and organisations they may want to meet, etc.	
19. Has there been a discussion with the participant and her organisation on how she will report back on the event?			
20. Has there been a discussion on being photographed and videoed?			

21. Has there been a discussion on using social media to report on the event?		Check if participants use social media, such as Facebook, etc.	
22. Has there been a discussion on expectations regarding confidentiality (relating to the event, to private conversations, etc.)?			
23. Have the event programme and agenda been translated and/or produced in easy-to-read format, as required?			
24. Has the participant requested assistance in creating additional spaces for their participation?		Additional spaces may include formal/informal networking meetings, exhibits of their information materials, sessions they want to attend and contribute to or topics/approaches they want to learn more about.	
25. Has the participant had a discussion with their organisation to get inputs into their presentations and other information to bring to the event?			
26. Has the participant had a chance to practise her speech in front of the organisation/community members?			
27. Is the participant bringing their own information materials to the event for display or distribution and do they know where to put it or who to give it to?		Materials could include photos, drawings, video material, leaflets, reports, etc.	
28. Has professional translation support been arranged for the participant?		Clarify with participant and translator how they are to work together during the event.	
29. Has a 'language training' session and orientation meeting been scheduled for participants?			
30. If bringing several participants from different countries to the event, has a pre-meeting to discuss common messages been scheduled?			

At the event			
31. Has the participant been given their per diem (partly) in advance?		Make clear whether participants need to keep receipts and what expenses have been pre-paid (such as hotel breakfast, conference lunches, etc)	
32. Does the participant have an information pack with all the key documents included?			
33. Have daily briefings and updates been scheduled? Does the participant have details of the people and venues for these meetings?		Daily sessions are an opportunity to discuss participants' movements for the day and insights from sessions attended, and to get feedback on anything that they may be confused by or did not understand fully.	
34. Have any concerns and causes for discomfort been identified and addressed? Identify any special needs with disabled participants.		These may be taken up with the organisers of the meeting or session chairs after the event.	
35. Does the participant need additional support to fulfil their personal/organisational objectives at the event?		Participants may experience some difficulties in making progress on their own objectives, and may need additional support.	
36. Does the participant have any opportunities to do any cultural activities?			
37. Have any additional opportunities for speaking, networking, or other engagements opened up for the participant?		It is useful to capture these additional opportunities for purposes of M&E.	
38. Has an end-of-meeting feedback and evaluation session been arranged with participant/s to discuss insights and follow-up actions?		Take detailed minutes from this meeting to provide a record that can later be used for monitoring and evaluation	
39. Does the participant have contact details for people they want to follow up with, and know how they can continue to be involved in the issues/programmes if they want to?			

Post-event			
40. Check if person has arrived back home safely.			
41. Ask for feedback on this checklist.			
42. Ask for suggestions on how to improve participation next time.			

References

1. Those interviewed are either local partners of ActionAid or involved in projects run by local partners.
2. Most recently, IASC Policy (and Accountability Framework) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, 2017.
3. ActionAid Ireland Women's Rights Programme (WRP), funded by Irish Aid, is being implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya and Nepal with a public engagement component in Ireland, and has been running since January 2017. The programme has adopted a new Behaviour Change (BC) approach to tackle the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV): <https://actionaid.ie/actionaid-shortlisted-dochas-innovation-award/>
4. ICCPR, 1966, Art. 1
5. ICESCR, 1966, Art 1
6. CEDAW, 1981, Par. 12
7. 1986, Art 2(1)
8. Easy-to-read format is used often in the disability community to ensure there is an even playing field for those who have learning or intellectual disabilities. A woman leader from the community may have had limited education in her early life or her present daily existence does not put her in regular contact with written and specialist information. Easy-to-read format makes use of simple words and illustrations/photos to convey concepts and information.
9. Formed in 2015 after Cyclone Pam.
10. The format for this checklist is based on the draft inclusion checklist produced by the International Disability Alliance.
11. Some countries have limited consular services so visa applicants may need to travel to another country for their visa.



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Cover photo:
Rohingya Refugees crisis in Bangladesh

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