

Gender and non-food items (NFIs) in emergencies

In situations of displacement, there is always loss of personal property. Very often people flee with little more than the clothes they are wearing. In addition to food, people affected by crisis need basic life saving non-food items for their survival including items such as blankets, sleeping mats and plastic sheeting to safe-guard them from rain, sun, wind and the cold weather and environmental conditions. Kitchen sets including pans, plates and spoons are essential items for every family. Soap and washing powder are necessary to ensure personal hygiene, while jerry cans are needed to collect drinking water and to keep it safe from contamination. Clothes or material for making clothes and shoes may also be needed. In addition, women and girls need sanitary supplies. Children too have specific needs especially those who may have been orphaned and require baby food, clothes, diapers etc. Discussions are on-going on the feasibility of distributing energy saving stoves and fuel wood/alternatively other sources of fuel energy for cooking purposes.

Non-food items vary according to culture and context and should correspond to the needs of the population and the climate. The non-food items packages differ from provider to provider, and the assortment has changed over time and between agencies. For example, in regions where malaria is prevalent, impregnated mosquito nets have been added to the list of necessary items. Sanitary towels and/or women's hygiene kits should be standard parts of NFI packages but the type of items included may vary across regions. Thus before packs are put together it is important to identify what the needs are, and which types of feminine hygiene materials are most appropriate. Consult with the women to find out their current practices and preferences.

Don't make assumptions about family size or structure: NFIs are often calculated per household with the assumption that a traditional family is made up of two parents and several children. However average family size and composition of the families may vary especially for families affected by crisis. Often households are headed by one parent or a grandparent with children and cousins. In many instances they might not have lived together previously. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the distribution of NFIs does not exclude or put any members of the new family unit at additional risk.

Equal participation of women in distribution is often more efficient: The logistics of NFI distribution can also make a big difference. Who receives the NFI or when the NFIs are distributed are important issues to consider ensuring that the population benefits equally from the commodity. In polygamous societies distribution of NFIs should preferably be made to women. Discussions should be held with community members in order to receive feedback on the distribution mechanism put in place and modifications should be made wherever feasible so that women and children have access to distribution points and are also able to receive the NFIs for their use.

What do we need to know from the community to plan and implement gender-responsive distribution of NFIs?

What are the population demographics?

- Number of households and average size of households.
- Number of women, men, girls and boys.
- Numbers of girls and women in the age group 13 – 49 for the purpose of sanitary and hygiene kits distribution.
- Number of female, male, child & older person-headed households.

Different Needs – Equal Opportunities

- Number of persons by age and sex with specific needs (unaccompanied children, persons with disabilities, seriously injured, chronically ill and older persons).
- Number of pregnant and lactating women.

What are the community practices, cultural and social roles and responsibilities?

- Gender division of labour within and outside the household and approximate time taken for undertaking various tasks.
- Who takes responsibility for fetching water?
- What are the cultural practices in relation to women addressing their hygiene and sanitary needs especially during the monthly period of menstruation?
- What are the firewood collection practices, type of cooking stoves used and are there local practices of energy saving while cooking?
- What are the sleeping practices and bedding arrangements used (including use of mattresses and blankets)?
- What are the different NFI needs of men and women by age and different ethnic background?

What did people have before the crisis?

- What did the population use before the displacement e.g. cooking practices – what fuel source was used?
- What type of clothes did men and women wear? Are there any specific clothing items that are essential for their daily needs?
- What hygiene products do they use/need?
- What were the distribution mechanisms instituted for life sustaining items distribution before the crisis?

Actions to ensure gender equality programming in NFI distribution**Equal participation**

- Ensure that men and women are involved in planning and implementation of the NFI distribution. Meet with them separately to ensure that power dynamics aren't silencing women.
- Make sure that both men and women know the quantity and variety of items they should receive by public information and notice/information boards clearly indicating entitlements of NFIs and distribution sites, dates and time.
- Ensure that the design of the distribution system is based on a thorough understanding of the social structure of the affected population including the information on groups that could be marginalized and neglected in distribution.
- Agree on the system of distribution, namely; through group leadership - male and female leaders or through groups of heads of family or through individual heads of family and that the affected population is continuously informed on any changes in the system.
- Make sure that distribution sites are easily accessible and safe and the times are convenient for men and women of different age groups and backgrounds.
- Ensure that specific needs of older persons, persons with disabilities and chronically ill are addressed through community support and targeted distribution systems.
- Make sure crowd controllers monitor queues, and provide a separate queue for specific persons and groups (such as those not able to stand in line for various reasons such as older persons, persons with disabilities or pregnant women and other specific groups requiring assistance).
- Ensure monitoring of distribution of NFIs is done both by the agency staff and the refugee community representatives.

Different Needs – Equal Opportunities

- Ensure mechanisms are instituted for men and women to file complaints regarding the non-receipt and unmet needs of NFIs.
- Ensure that men and women are consulted as to what NFIs are culturally appropriate and familiar.

Meeting specific community practices and cultural differences

- Distribute appropriate sanitary and hygiene supplies for women and girls, boys and men.
- Ensure that clothing is appropriate to climatic conditions and cultural practices, suitable for men, women, girls and boys, and sized according to age.
- Make sure that bedding materials reflect cultural practices and are sufficient in quantity to enable separate sleeping arrangements as required amongst the members of individual households.
- Ensure that cooking items provided are culturally appropriate and enable safe practices.
- Ensure that existing local practices are taken into account in the specification of stove and fuel solutions.

Meeting the needs of specific groups and persons

- Ensure that there is no discrimination or restricted access to NFI based on sex, age or abilities.
- Ensure that distribution sites are in a secure area that is accessible to men, women, unaccompanied children, elderly, sick and disabled.
- Conduct regular consultations with women, girls, boys, older persons, chronically ill, persons with disabilities and groups with specific needs on NFI issues to address protection concerns.
- Ensure that women are consulted about the location and means of collecting fuel for cooking and heating.
- Ensure that the demands of collecting fuel on vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households and households caring for people living With HIV/AIDS, are addressed and that special provisions (such as the choice of less labour-intensive fuels, the use of fuel-efficient stoves and accessible fuel sources) are made available.

Checklist to assess gender equality programming in NFI distribution

The checklist below is derived from the action section in this chapter, and provides a useful tool to remind sector actors of key issues to ensure gender equality programming. In addition, the checklist, together with the sample indicators in the Basics Chapter, serve as a basis for project staff to develop context-specific indicators to measure progress in the incorporation of gender issues into humanitarian action.

NFI Distribution – Gender Checklist	
Analysis of gender differences	
1.	Information is gathered from women, girls, boys and men about family structures and NFI needs based on age and sex, and the distribution system is set up accordingly.
Design	
1.	Women, girls, men and boys have at least two sets of clothing in the correct size, appropriate to the culture, season and climate.
2.	People have access to a combination of blankets, bedding or sleeping mats to provide thermal comfort and to enable separate sleeping arrangements as required.
3.	Women and girls have sanitary materials and hygiene kits including soap.
4.	Training or guidance in the use of NFIs is provided where necessary.
Access	

1. The programme is routinely monitored to ensure that women and men benefit equally if there is payment for NFI distribution, including a gender balance in employment.
2. Obstacles to equal access and benefit are promptly addressed.

Participation

1. Men and women are involved in planning and implementation of NFIs selection and distribution.
2. Displaced have knowledge of quantity and variety of items they should receive and the place, day and time for distribution.

Training/ Capacity building

1. An equal number of women and men are employed in NFI distribution programmes and have equal access to trainings.

Actions to address GBV

1. Both women and men participate in the identification of safe and accessible distribution sites.
2. Distribution points are monitored to ensure they are safe and accessible.

Monitoring and evaluation based on sex-and age-disaggregated data

1. Sex- and age disaggregated data on programme coverage is collected, analyzed and routinely reported on.
2. Plans are developed and implemented to address any inequalities and ensure access and safety for all of the target population.

Coordinate actions with all partners

1. Number of sector actors who participate in or contribute to inter-agency coordination efforts on gender equality programming, including regular meetings of the gender network.
2. The sector/cluster has a gender action plan, has developed and routinely measures project-specific indicators based on the checklist provided in the IASC Gender Handbook.