

Gender, Disaster Management and the Private Sector

– Advancing the theme through a multi-stakeholder approach

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Session summary

Executive summary

The importance of gender in disaster management and disaster risk reduction has been recognized by many actors. However, at the intersection of gender, private sector engagement and disaster management – there has been a gap. The OCHA-UNDP Connecting Business initiative (CBI) explored this space to better understand challenges and opportunities to integrate the gender lens into the work of the private sector disaster management, particularly what has been done so far and where the process is at. The session presented the result of this process, the CBI’s recent [publication on Gender, Disaster Management and the Private Sector](#). The session offered an overview; a starting point for what is hoped to be an on-going conversation among several actors and stakeholder groups to bring the theme forward also in the future.

Key achievements/outcomes

- The session raised awareness of the importance of the interconnection between gender, private sector and disaster management.
- The participants received information of the content of the publication and have access to it, in order to use the information in moving forward in the topic, as well as to contribute to the development of the topic through their own actions;
- The session enabled exchange of knowledge and insights on key priorities among different actors, as well as what would be the key questions and interests in moving forward.

Follow-up activities/next steps

- CBI to continue developing the field through their work and in cooperation with key partners, by translating the research into concrete guidance tools and piloting gender actions with selected CBI private sector Member Networks.
- Private sector to collect sex, age and disability disaggregated data through their operations and partner with the local women’s organizations, to understand the gender situation and needs in their region, to guide actions and operations.
- All actors to continue the dialogue on the interconnections of gender, private sector and disaster management, internally in their operations as well as with other partners.

Number of participants

	Number of participants in Zoom	Twitter views	Watched the recording after
Gender session	72	59	144

Link to the recording:

Speakers

- **Welcome:** Ms. Karen Smith, CBI Programme Coordinator
- **Moderator:** Ms. Edem Wosornu, Chief Response Support Branch, OCHA
- **Presenter:** Ms. Maria Kontro, CBI Gender Specialist
- **Panelist:** Mr. Simon Peter Opolot, Senior Advisor, Gender Standby Capacity Project (GenCap/OCHA)
- **Panelist:** Mr. Mike Spencer, Chair, Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council (CBI Member Network)

Summary of the discussion

Edem Wosornu opens the session by highlighting the importance of gender in disaster management, and the opportunity to do things differently by understanding and reacting to women's needs. She highlights that the private sector is an important part of local communities as first responders. While limited work has been done in integrating gender in private sector disaster management, the topic opens opportunities and has potential to truly make a difference.

Maria Kontro presents the CBI Gender publication starting with on why there was a need for the research when identifying the importance of the topic but finding limited resources combining the three topics together. CBI decided to take action to understand how collective private sector action can contribute to gender equality in disaster management, and undertook a study, which included mapping and analyzing almost 200 resources as well as interviewing key experts and private sector actors. However, the research is only a first step in what is wished to be a continuous process. The link to the publication was shared with the participants.

Statistics from the research are presented to show the impact of gender in disaster management and highlights that the private sector can have a significant impact to the topic, improving the results of what they are already doing. This can be done for the benefit of business itself, for human rights and for the results of disaster management. It is essential to recognize, for example, that women are overrepresented in hardest hit economic sectors in disasters, as well as in the micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) characterized by informality, which makes them particularly vulnerable to disasters. Women-led MSMEs face multiple barriers to access financing in their recovery from a disaster. Also, the responsibility of unpaid care work increases in disasters and it falls mostly to women, hindering their abilities as workers and as business owners. The security concerns connected to disasters, and particularly to conflicts, may also restrict women's ability to work and run their businesses. Gender aspects also have a direct connection to the business continuity of the company itself; the business sector continues to be male dominated and many of the realities affecting women are not considered in business continuity planning, contributing to the resilience (or the lack of it) of the company itself.

The topic is also very timely as it is important to recognize that the impact of COVID-19 is deeply gendered: the pandemic has hit particularly strongly to women and the situation has already reversed decades of progress on gender equality.

The research includes case study section, of which the case study on data and technology is presented, focusing on how the digital gender divide influences to women's abilities to access humanitarian



assistance and run their businesses in pandemics and heightened security concerns of disasters and conflicts. However, the private sector focused on communications and cellphones can provide solutions and this has already been successfully done in many contexts.

Overall, these matters can find their solutions. The research also addresses the topic from the perspective of a window of opportunity. It means that while crises often have devastating impacts, they can also provide an opportunity for a positive change. Maria highlights that CBI will continue to support the private sector through guidance materials and piloting to see, together with the private sector, what works best.

Edem highlights that gender can truly be a gamechanger in private sector disaster management. When actions are good for business, advance human rights and improve the results of disaster management, they clearly deserve further attention. She highlights that the time to act on gender is now and that we should leave this crisis with good practices to ensure gender is better integrated on disaster management, in the case of COVID-19 and beyond. The private sector, in close cooperation with humanitarian community, is in a perfect position to make a difference.

Simon Peter Opolot explains some background factors: for example, less than 1 percent of landholders in Yemen are women, despite women making up 60 percent of the labor force for crop farming. As men in Yemen join the fighting, women are increasingly left to manage households on their own. These women are so impoverished by war and often struggle to access basic services and to protect themselves and their children. In Zimbabwe, Covid-19 is already having a disproportionate impact on women's economic and productive lives compared to men, as women have less access to decent work, which also means low job security and over-representation, 65%, in the informal sector. Simon Peter encourages actors to ask, can there truly be effective disaster management without gender.

The private sector has an important role. To narrow the gender gap in education in Yemen's heightened security situation, the locally-based private sector transport operators' project has recently made gender friendly and affordable transport options available for school age children. It particularly considers the protection needs of the girls. In Zimbabwe, women's economic empowerment measures have included several important actions led or cooperated with the private sector. These include a variety of economic empowerment loan facilities with flexible credit terms, targeted support and training of women-owned or women operated enterprises.

Mike Spencer describes the very different context of Fiji in comparison to the earlier examples, in which the gender matter is relevant all the same. The business structure consists mainly of MSMEs. Many of the economic sectors have been heavily influenced by the movement restrictions, and the economic sectors in which women work were hit hardest also in Fiji. In addition to tourism as an affected sector, women work as farmers, workers on farms and as market vendors, often forming part of the informal economy. These professions are not covered by income protection, and their access to finance is limited.

According to an assessment that was conducted in Fiji, the majority of the women and girls were expected to do more housework than their male family members during the lockdown period, causing challenges to women while trying to study or work from home. How these realities of women translate into business continuity plans is an essential question for women owned businesses, for the economic sectors hit hardest by disasters and for the entire value chains structures.

For the private sector actors that want to make a difference, particularly the chambers and the networks, need to collect sex, disability and age disaggregated data within their business operations, to understand what is happening on gender. It is also important to ensure that women are included



in the recovery actions, as well as targeting recovery funding to women and women owned businesses. It is important to partner with women's organizations because those are the ones that have context specific information on the situation and on women entrepreneurs needs and realities.

Private sector's cooperation with the UN and the humanitarian partners is also needed. With the CBI Secretariat Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council has jointly identified a need for capacity strengthening on these themes for understanding the importance and extend of this, as well as on how to mainstream gender into the private sector disaster management operations.

A member from the audience asks to share case studies on how the private sector partners have been engaged for the gender agenda? Maria replies that the CBI gender publication has a specific section on case studies, where there is more information on the topic, also highlighting the importance of case studies in this topic and the importance of collecting and systematizing more case studies and data.

A member from the audience asks if there are any examples of cash-based assistances where the private sector was involved? Simon Peter replies that there are. He shares an example from his work in Bangladesh with the Rohingya refugees. These projects showed one very important aspect: when supporting women in cash-based interventions, it should always be a transparent process and men need to be included in this. Only then can these interventions be successful.

Edem asks Simon Peter if there any experiences from conflict and/or fragile states. Simon Peter says that there are, and one example is also from Bangladesh, where the situation was a very desperate one at the time. A project worked with the private sector to support refugees by providing manufacturing training for women in different industries. Further, they supported women through credits and by handing out banking cards.

In relation to Mike's earlier comments, Edem asks Mike how can private sector partners successfully partner with women's organizations. Mike replies that in Fiji Women in Business Forum showed that disasters impact women more than men, in many ways. Luckily, in Fiji, several women organisations are already set up to work together to enhance impact of private sector interventions.

A member from the audience refers to a GSMA research, stating that 300 million fewer women use the internet compared to men, pre-COVID. The participant asks how can CBI facilitate concrete support for connectivity infrastructure and digital literacy to small business entrepreneurs in remote and fragile/ conflict emergency settings? Maria replies that the key issue is that all actors, humanitarian and private sector, should start with ensuring that they are collecting data that is sex, age and disability disaggregated. This data is not yet widely available in the private sector and it is needed as the topic is still quite new. What is most important is to have a dialogue and conversations with all actors to get different perspectives to identify best ways to target actions. CBI collaborated with GSMA on the case study that was developed, and GSMA actions have shown the importance of the topic in the field of communications. CBI is starting to develop guidance tools to translate research into action, in cooperation with CBI member networks and the private sector.

Contact details

For further information on the session and the topic, please contact Ms. Maria Kontro, CBI Gender Specialist: maria.kontro@undp.org