



Leave no one behind in humanitarian programming

Lessons from five countries: Learning brief 2018

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Acronyms

FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GBV	gender-based violence
HQ	headquarters
IRW	Islamic Relief Worldwide
IR	Islamic Relief
SADDD	sex, age and disability disaggregated data
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene

Overview

Development efforts must leave no one behind, including in humanitarian crises. This powerful commitment lies at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and is the cornerstone of the World Humanitarian Summit's call to better address the needs of people caught in humanitarian crises. Leaving no one behind means that efforts to end poverty – including during crises – must not neglect fundamental inequalities and discriminatory barriers relating to income, gender, ethnicity, disability, age, geographic location or any other excluding factors.

The diverse contexts in which Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) operates mean it must adopt an inclusive approach to designing, implementing, monitoring and funding its programmes so it can respond to vulnerability in all its forms. To this end, IRW has actively endorsed and supported the development of the Inclusion Charter¹, encouraging the delivery of impartial and appropriate assistance to the most marginalised people.

IRW also understands that an integrated approach to humanitarian programming – one that simultaneously addresses issues of disability inclusion, gender, conflict sensitivity and child protection in all contexts – improves its impact.

To measure the organisation's progress towards an integrated approach, IRW's Programme Quality department has developed a unified 'intersectionality framework', enabling progress towards inclusive and sensitive humanitarian programming to be measured and scored with the support of SIDA. It is piloted in six country offices (Ethiopia, Gaza, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen). In January 2018, Programme Quality held a regional roundtable in Istanbul, Turkey, with country office staff from all implementing offices, except Yemen. This brief summarises learning from implementing the framework and provides recommendations to improve IRW's approach to inclusive and sensitive humanitarian programming.

¹ <http://www.inclusioncharter.org/>

Leave no one behind: transforming humanitarian responses

Unprecedented social progress and national and international efforts to address inequalities have brought the world closer to becoming more just and egalitarian. There have also been considerable advances towards greater gender and disability inclusion, child protection and conflict sensitivity in the humanitarian sector. These advances are being made through initiatives such as:

- the Inclusion Charter – co-created by IRW – which seeks to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches the most at-risk groups;
- the Age and Disability Capacity Programme – piloted by IRW – which has improved understanding of the needs of older people, and people with disabilities;
- a charter on the “inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action,” launched at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit to drive the shift toward inclusivity.

Crucially, the ‘leave no one behind’ imperative spans SDGs, with specific targets for inclusion addressing poverty as multi-dimensional, and addressing numerous inequalities.

However, deep-rooted inequalities are exacerbated in times of crisis, and addressing these inequalities means they

must be understood. This imperative – and the Islamic teachings that guide IRW and compel it to tackle social injustice and offer powerful perspectives on gender equity and equality – have led IRW to invest much in analysing how factors such as gender, age, and disability intersect and interact to produce qualitatively distinct experiences for different vulnerable groups. This is particularly the case in humanitarian emergencies where women, children, and people with disabilities are at greatest risk.

As IRW’s understanding of the root causes of exclusion and vulnerability (particularly in conflict settings) has deepened, the organisation has increasingly mainstreamed protection and inclusion into its programmatic work – especially in relation to gender, child protection and conflict sensitivity – and has continued to strengthen the inclusivity and sensitivity of its humanitarian work in some of the world’s most fragile regions. This holistic approach aims to meet the humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities, and for child protection in humanitarian action; and also the requirements of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) GBV guidelines and the Gender Age Marker by IASC and European Commission of Humanitarian Aid (ECHO).

Integrating protection and inclusion in humanitarian crises

IRW's Global Strategy is moving the organisation closer to mainstreaming protection and inclusion into all its humanitarian programmes, which typically take a rights-based, community-based and survivor-centred approach, and adhere to the core humanitarian standard. IRW's Programme Quality team supports these values and programmes, which aim to provide relief and development in a dignified way regardless of gender, age, disability, race, or religion, and empowering marginalised people.

IRW already has a multidimensional understanding of the root causes of poverty, inequality and marginalisation – for example it has integrated gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection considerations into humanitarian programmes in Mali, Niger and Pakistan. In relation to conflict sensitivity, IRW has also trained country office staff across Asia, the Middle East and Africa to minimise the potential impact of conflict situations on its programmes. Further to this, discourse on gender, child protection and conflict sensitivity has also been bolstered by IRW policy and research.

Recognising that to be effective, protection and inclusion must be built into wider

sectoral interventions and coordinated with other programme components, IRW has developed a unified intersectionality framework, accompanied by a scoring system. This enables offices to assess and develop their approach to conflict sensitivity, child protection, gender, and age and disability inclusion within particular interventions. It also allows Programme Quality to monitor this. The tool has been applied in six projects by six country offices. During the roundtable event in Istanbul, four country offices demonstrated how an inclusive and sensitive approach was interwoven through the project lifecycle, and across four thematic areas:

- Protection risks, including GBV
- Intersectionality
- Sex, age and disability disaggregated data (SADDD)
- Accountability

This brief examines learning relating to the themes, alongside lessons learned, recommendations, innovations and challenges.

Putting protection and inclusion into action: five country experiences

Pakistan: Brighter futures for returnees

An IRW Pakistan project in the country's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) supported returnees with inclusive interventions in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), disaster risk reduction, and cash-for-work activities. It strengthened coping mechanisms and infrastructural rehabilitation through forming social networks and social mobilisation. A culturally sensitive approach – for example, employing female trainers – ensured that women and people with disabilities participated alongside men in forming sub-committees.

Ethiopia: Relief for drought-affected communities

Inclusivity and sensitivity were mainstreamed into a project serving drought-affected communities in two districts of Somali Regional State, Ethiopia, which treated access to food, health, WASH, and livelihoods as inter-related. The systematic approach to protection and inclusion saw community committees set up, and women, men and children of all ages and abilities encouraged to participate. Women were also specifically targeted by livelihood interventions.

Syria: Life-saving healthcare

In conflict-torn northern Syria, a project provided medical supplies and set up emergency mobile units. In the context of conflict, it was critical to ensure that interventions guaranteed age, disability and gender inclusion. Staff and partners received strategic guidance on protection mainstreaming and inclusion – including efforts to be conflict-sensitive (and to adhere to humanitarian principles).

Iraq: Safe and accessible learning spaces

In two Iraqi governorates the project boosted access to education and psychosocial support for children of all ages and abilities. The project also trained 26 teachers to provide psychosocial care, special needs education and inclusive child protection – contributing to safe and accessible learning environments.

Gaza: Work and better food security for all

Vulnerable families in Gaza were helped by a short-term cash-for-work project, improving their food security. The project met the different needs of women, men, girls and boys of all abilities and ages – and remained conflict-sensitive by adhering to core humanitarian standard (nine commitments that organisations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide) GBV awareness sessions were delivered, and orientation sessions informed beneficiaries of feedback and complaints mechanisms with a sign-language interpreter, ensuring people with hearing impairments were included. The project helped women and people with disabilities into work through local institutions.

Thematic areas: protection and GBV, intersectionality, SADDD, accountability

Protection risks, including GBV: promoting inclusion in FATA, Pakistan



Women and girls' gender roles are defined by and deeply rooted in discriminative patriarchal practices – discrimination that is made worse by factors such as disability, age, conflict, or where individuals lack identity documents.

Women and girls in tribal society usually undertake unpaid care work, livestock rearing and small-scale agricultural activities. They have no basic rights to land, healthcare or education, and also lack rights to money, credit and to decision-making power, both in the home and in the community. This situation is compounded by the lack of formal judiciary systems and by non-negotiable tribal rules.

This unequal distribution of power and resources means women and girls cannot

play an equal role in their communities' development. For children and young people, these circumstances fuel crime, drug abuse, child labour and early and forced child marriages.

IRW's project for returnees to the region's Khyber agency aimed to address these risks and others, including through:

- empowering women and young girls through vocational skills, business development grants, and grants to enable them to rear livestock and poultry;
- minimising the risks for people with disabilities, elderly people, women and young girls through providing clean drinking water very close to their homes, accessible latrines, and assistive devices for people with disabilities;
- pioneering the establishment of female community organizations, providing safe places for women to get their voices heard and their issues understood by the wider community;
- communal cash-for-work interventions, tailored to the needs of women-headed households, girls, elderly people and people with disabilities. These opportunities not only ensured inclusion but also minimised potential protection risks associated with exclusion, creating acceptance of women's and girls' roles in community development.

Learning points

Drive social mobilisation: Involving affected communities and building their capacity to push forward their own development embeds sustainability – and potentially drives behavioural changes to reduce protection risks.

Design accessible feedback mechanisms for women: Understanding the context in which IRW operates leads to better outcomes. Cultural factors may prevent women from leaving the house to access a complaints box, and profound barriers exist where female illiteracy is high. To ensure everyone is heard, IRW intends to develop informal, women-friendly groups (comprised of trusted, local elderly women, including a few educated women to help with communication). These groups will be trained (including in how to use IRW's complaint mechanism) and linked with health staff and other relevant service providers to confidentially highlight protection issues, thereby minimising further risks.

Intersectionality: making the connections in Gaza

Identities such as gender and disability are not homogenous categories. Social categories may interact with other identities to produce distinctive forms of exclusion and marginalisation. In Gaza, women are particularly at risk of chronic poverty and social exclusion, which must be considered in relation to other vulnerabilities such as disability and age. People with disabilities, particularly children, may be exploited by relatives seeking humanitarian support. Adding to an already vulnerable social identity, another dimension of vulnerability – such as whether the individual is believed to work with the State of Israel –heightens the risks they face.

IR Gaza's inclusive livelihoods project included temporary employment for women, older people and people with disabilities, and also collaborated closely with local

work-hosting institutions to extend their humanitarian outreach, and prioritise women. It also consulted beneficiaries on safe and dignified access, as some groups are likely to experience barriers to accessing work. All meetings and workshops were designed to be inclusive and sensitive.



Learning points

Collect sex, age, disability disaggregated data (SADDD): There is an urgent need to improve the quality and availability of disaggregated data, which can make needs assessments more inclusive and enable practitioners to collect more intersectional data.

Support access for people with disabilities: Hosting institutions may not adapt the work environment to the needs of people with disabilities, which could discourage participation. IRW must consider challenges that service providers may face, such as lack of expertise or resources, and train local staff to raise awareness of the importance of providing safe and dignified access for people with disabilities.

Build local capacity to use the 'gender, age and diversity' tool: IRW must address gaps in training, time and resources that hamper use of the tool within local teams.

Acknowledge the structural underpinnings of gendered relations: Including women in cash-for-work programmes may not eliminate socially and culturally sanctioned ideas about gender. Programming must avoid potentially 'overburdening' vulnerable women.

Improve dialogue on how the community receives 'minority groups': Targeting specific groups, particularly families of those working with the State of Israel, was extremely challenging due to the stigma attached to these families. IRW must facilitate dialogue and attitudinal change.

SADDD: boosting impact through better data in Iraq

Accurate monitoring and assessments of the situation of vulnerable groups and the effectiveness of subsequent programming is restricted by scarcity of data disaggregated by sex, age and disability. In response, IRW collected SADDD through its education project in Iraq.



Learning points

Develop a uniform data collection format: Cumbersome, inconsistent tools meant regular data collection was labour-intensive and costly for country offices. A simple, consistent format for SADDD collection is needed.

Address the integrity of data: Contextual factors may impact the integrity of data, particularly in environments with poor security or conflict. There is a lack of primary and secondary data from local authorities, and collecting such data is difficult if the target group is illiterate, or lacks identity or health-related documents.

Train local staff on SADDD: Many country office staff were inadequately trained in collecting and analysing SADDD, inhibiting its mainstreaming. It is crucial to build staff capacity on sensitively collecting data.

Engage systematically with social mapping: IRW has not engaged systematically with social mapping – a means to identify households using pre-determined indicators based on intersectional factors.



Accountability: improving engagement in Ethiopia

To implement its project in Somali Regional State, IRW trained field staff on protection and inclusion and ensured that such learning could be cascaded to other staff. It also consulted with beneficiaries to investigate their preferences for agricultural tools and assistance. To encourage accountability, the country office erected billboards in local languages that outlined the project, and established accountability groups comprising men and women of all ages and abilities – ensuring beneficiaries were informed about the project, their entitlements, and feedback and complaints mechanisms. A suggestions box in a public space was used by those who could read and write, and the country office was easily accessible to beneficiaries preferring to speak to staff. However, people with disabilities may have struggled to access these mechanisms.

Learning points

Systematise complaints and feedback mechanisms: In a culture of accountability and transparency, staff must address complaints in an appropriate and timely way. It is essential that IRW builds trust among communities so they are confident that all complaints will be handled in a confidential and dignified manner. IRW must build upon existing processes – for example, showing communities how complaints will be handled and introducing logframes indicators of community participation to improve effectiveness of complaints and feedback mechanisms.

Develop best practice for complaints: Complaints boxes may be problematic where there is stigma around complaining, or fear of losing humanitarian support. They may not be accessible to those with disabilities, those unable to read or write, and to women for whom safe spaces or women-friendly centres may be more effective at encouraging feedback. IRW must develop best practice to suit the context in which it works.

Engage with faith and traditional leaders: Social mobilisation is key to successful project delivery, and working with individuals who are influential in community affairs can help enormously. Beneficiaries could be encouraged to pass feedback and complaints to faith and traditional leaders, who would be a point of contact for IRW staff. IRW must also consider as focal points other influential individuals such as teachers or female community workers, particularly in contexts where faith leaders could perpetuate inequalities or barriers facing vulnerable groups.

Key findings to shape fundamental change

IRW frequently serves populations with specific needs and operates in complex environments. This means it needs an inclusive approach if it is to 'do no harm' and deliver the best outcomes possible, IRW's ambition, therefore, is to structurally internalise protection and inclusion – integral elements of the SIDA-funded interventions.

As a faith-based organisation driven by Islamic values, IRW is determined that the goal of 'leaving no one behind' is central to all activities – assessment, design, implementation, monitoring, research, advocacy/dialogue and beyond. Key learning, recommendations, challenges and innovations to shape future programming were explored at IRW's regional learning workshop, and are outlined here.

Learning

Mobilise communities to secure real change

The participation of strong community groups and networks boosts the impact and sustainability of work to protect and assure the rights of marginalised groups. Local people want an active role. Engaging with a wide range of traditional, community and religious leaders, as well as civil society organisations and women's rights groups, mobilises everyone around a common issue. IR Pakistan's experience, for example, shows how social mobilisation ensured appropriate targeting of marginalised groups. Engaging with the community at the grassroots also promotes sustainable social and behavioural change, particularly for challenging issues such as gender justice, GBV and child abuse.

Social mobilisation fosters trust between NGOs and the communities they serve. Rather than being seen as an external force challenging local culture and tradition, an inclusive, sensitive and dignified approach to dealing with challenging issues can help NGOs facilitate vital community engagement.

Coordinate with other humanitarian actors

IRW can capitalise on knowledge and learning from other organisations to fill in gaps and minimise overlap in the area of protection and inclusion, and needs dialogue and engagement with other organisations to further improve its awareness of sectoral practices and to actively broker collaboration and coordination.

Commit to protection and inclusion

IRW must embed protection and inclusion into its organisational culture. To do so, staff at all levels must be involved, lessons learned and shared broadly, and protection and inclusion reflected in IRW's Global Strategy.

Take an integrated approach but be aware of possible unintended negative impacts

It is important to integrate thematic areas, and to recognise the intersectional identity of communities. However, an integrated approach also requires understanding that certain factors – such as being female or having a disability – may profoundly influence protection risks, and that social identities such as gender must be analysed in relation to other forms of inequalities and marginalisation. For example, empowering women to develop livelihoods could pose child protection risks – so the potential for negative impacts such as this must be investigated.

Mobilise community and faith leaders

Faith and traditional leaders have significant influence on people's lives, particularly in Muslim communities in the Global South. Engaging them as advocates could dismantle myths, as well as religious and cultural misinterpretations that perpetuate exclusion and inequalities. IRW's experience with Community Hope Action Teams demonstrates that bringing key community partners together to address protection issues fosters more effective change. In traditional communities, faith-based approaches can be more effective than secular strategies, which may be seen as authoritarian.

Build staff capacity

Local staff can be strong community advocates for inclusion and protection, but they would need more support on 'intersectionality' and 'inclusion'. Existing training packages may be too complex and wide-ranging, or field staff unavailable to attend. IRW must improve its approach to training – particularly practical rather than theory-based teaching, and short e-learning modules instead of lengthy training sessions.

Remain inclusive throughout the project life cycle

Remaining truly 'inclusive' and 'sensitive' requires country offices to consult with beneficiaries throughout the project life-cycle – not just at the beginning or the end (which can limit the inclusion of older people and people with disabilities). IRW's accountability mechanisms and effectiveness would be enhanced by staff remaining in frequent contact with beneficiaries.



Innovations

Participatory marketing and campaigning

Greater transformation could be achieved by marketing the impact of programmes to the affected communities, particularly when coupled with participatory methodologies for engaging with marginalised groups.

Using peer-to-peer contacts

Reaching the most marginalised groups is challenging. For example, in FATA, Pakistan, a disproportionate number of women are illiterate and unable to leave their homes unsupervised. Establishing a peer-to-peer network with members who are trained and able to conduct household visits can help reach the most marginalised groups.

Applying an 'intersectional' approach

Recognising the inseparability of social categories of difference, such as gender and disability, is transforming IRW's approach to thinking about groups as 'heterogeneous' and enabling it to reach the most marginalised communities. IRW must understand that marginalised people are likely experiencing multiple layers of discrimination.

Innovation based on experience

Work to mainstream protection and inclusion – particularly in emergency responses where the most vulnerable communities are often neglected – would benefit from evaluating and adding to existing projects such as 'Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence' (STRIDE). It aims to enhance emergency preparedness at country and regional level through comprehensive capacity building, organisational development of local partners, and links with regional bodies and specialised institutes. Integrating protection and inclusion could be an important key deliverable.



Challenges

Time restrictions

The one-year length of the Sida-funded programmes was severely constraining. A truly transformative programme requires time, as well as capacity, to ensure that all stakeholders mobilise for greater protection and inclusion, and have internalised IRW's mission and goals. IRW may also be restricted by internal processes relating to finance and necessary approvals, which can delay project delivery, and therefore impact sustainability.

Contextual barriers

Practical barriers to delivering humanitarian aid may impinge upon IRW's ability to mainstream protection and inclusion considerations throughout the project lifecycle. IR Syria reported that the lack of security on the ground was the greatest barrier to sustainably achieving protection and inclusion. Indeed, the extremely complex, volatile and ever-evolving security situation frequently curtails IR Syria's aid efforts and forces humanitarian programmes to be continually re-started.

Team composition

Lack of diversity within country offices is a challenge, and IRW recognises that it is important to have a team composition that represents as wide a perspective as possible.

Limited roll-out of training

The extent to which training on protection and inclusion issues is cascaded down to 'front-line' staff is cause for concern. While providing lengthy training to all country office staff would be challenging, other training (such as concise e-learning tools) would help address this.

Power relations within communities

Existing power relations and cultural barriers could be a challenge in ensuring protection and inclusion throughout IRW's programmes. IRW should consider the unintended negative consequences arising from its work – for example, a rapid alteration in power relations between men and women. IRW may not be in a position to advocate against the ideological underpinnings of culturally mandated gender roles, but it must also continue to advocate for gender justice, exploring creative and sensitive ways to tackle inequalities within communities, and coordinate with community leaders and other stakeholders.

Weak referral pathways

As IR works to address multiple needs arising from poverty and inequality and is not a specialist organisation, it must establish referral pathways to service providers for specific issues, such as care for people with severe learning difficulties. Where service providers are scarce, the organisation faces a challenge in responding to any such issues emerging in IRW's sphere of influence. For example, whilst autism is prevalent within Iraq, there are no specialised treatment centres and very little government interest in the issue.

Recommendations

1. Review internal communication channels

Internal communication channels can hinder country office staff from progressing tasks relating to protection and inclusion. IRW should review existing policies relating to communications channels, so country offices can liaise directly with technical experts in HQ.

2. Increase local inclusion and protection capacity

To ensure that country offices are systematically engaged throughout the project life cycle, they should recruit staff with expertise in integrating protection and inclusion in humanitarian projects.

3. Improve tools and measurements

Better tools, relevant time-based measurements and indicators would ensure more nuanced and inclusive project planning and consistent improvement in the quality of IRW's programming. Country offices and HQ must be able to allocate sufficient time to develop these tools, or amend existing tools and measurements to make them context-appropriate.

4. Develop a protection and inclusion policy

Protection and inclusion is a shared responsibility. A policy that demonstrates IRW's commitment to prioritising protection and inclusion issues and concerns would accelerate the mainstreaming of protection, inclusion and sensitivity.

5. Mobilise the communities IRW serves

The humanitarian sector is fundamentally results-orientated. However, process-orientated approaches such as community engagement and mobilisation facilitate meaningful positive change and reduce negative, unintended consequences. Committing to mobilising communities would support IRW's goal to empower communities.

6. Increase staff retention

Staff turnover can hinder the effective implementation of protection and inclusion throughout the project life cycle, particularly when staff leave during project delivery. A robust examination of the underlying reasons for staff leaving the organisation would support efforts to increase staff retention.

7. Build local capacity

To systematise protection and inclusion, all staff must receive training – particularly front-line staff who engage directly with affected communities and are therefore more likely to identify specific cases for protection, conflict sensitivity and inclusion. This includes offering training in local languages wherever possible.

8. Ensure adequate budgeting

Country offices should ensure adequate budget for protection and inclusion work throughout their project. This will increase understanding and uptake, as well as the institutionalisation of protection and inclusion.

9. Adopt an innovative approach to feedback

IRW must encourage country offices to adopt innovative approaches to collecting feedback and welcoming complaints, relative to the contexts in which it operates. This will help ensure that all interventions are safe, transparent and equitable, and empower beneficiaries.

10. Harness the power of advocacy

IRW's advocacy department should consistently and meaningfully engage with protection and inclusion issues, to communicate its commitments to all stakeholders, including the general public.